Embodiment and AI - Susan Hrach

Susan Hrach: [00:00:00] There were a number of students who had over the years stopped raising their hands ever.

And that was a form of silencing. It's a gestural silence, you're let alone speaking in class. You never even raised your hand because think about it. Raising your hand is a pretty bold gesture.

And so if you have spent years and years in a classroom and have gotten into the comfort level of never raising your hand. You've resigned yourself to being a spectator. It's like you're not really there.

Lindsay Doukopoulos: Welcome to Centering Centers, a Pod Network podcast. I'm Lindsay Ducopoulos, associate director for educational development in the Biggio Center at Auburn University.

Today, I'm speaking with Dr. Susan rock. She is the author of the [00:01:00] 2022 silver Nautilus award winning book, minding bodies. How physical space sensation and movement affect learning. In 20 22, she served us Fulbright, Canada, distinguished research chair in the scholarship of teaching and learning at Carleton university in Ottawa, currently director of the faculty center and professor of English at Columbus state university in Georgia. Dr.

Rock has been recognized by the university system of Georgia with a statewide scholarship of teaching and learning award. She has also served as a scholar for the U S G's executive leadership Institute. She is a member of the international coaching Federation and provides executive coaching within and outside of higher education, incorporating embodied strategies to support mental and physical wellbeing.

Lindsay Doukopoulos: Hi, Susan, it is such an honor to speak with you today. I wanted to start off by inviting you to tell us a little bit about yourself and about your center.

Susan Hrach: [00:02:00] Thanks, Lindsay. It's very exciting for me to be part of Centering Centers. I've been a listener for a long time, so thanks for the good work that you're doing.

My center is at Columbus State University in Georgia. And we're part of the university system of Georgia. We work with a consortium model and I get tons

of support and camaraderie from the other CTL directors in the state. Shout out to all of them. We have a great group that's been together For a pretty long time, I've had this role for about 10 years, and many of us in the system are also longstanding directors, and I think the support that we're able to give each other has been incredibly sustaining and allows those of us who are at regional institutions and may be only centers of one person, for example, to have, so much more resources [00:03:00] and opportunities to, steal good workshop ideas and models from others.

And so that's been huge for me. Just in the past year the solo center that I was directing for a long time was able to be combined with our online unit. So I now have two great instructional developers and also, or instructional designers and educational developers. They're really both. So that we can span the in person and online and hybrid environments.

And what kind of programs do you all offer?

Susan Hrach: My center has been doing a faculty learning community this spring using the Biggio Center's course on teaching with AI. And I've got to say it, it has been a fabulous activity for us. We not only feel so much more comfortable with the ways that AI will and, Won't [00:04:00] change the landscape of higher ed, but we are inspired by having learned so much from this course that, we're now thinking about ways we can share it with the larger community of our colleagues.

And so I highly recommend it. It is super well designed. Thumbs up to the instructional design on that, that Auburn course. And Thank you so much for creating it. You guys were way out ahead. It was, it's really impressive. And doing it as part of a shared experience allows us to call attention to the okay, look what they did here.

Look at how they're using the drop down feature or look at how they've embedded this video or also the tilt. The assignments are all tilted. So it's just like helping on so

Lindsay: many levels. And that, my team led the development of the content, which none of us, [00:05:00] nobody still probably is an AI expert, but where our expertise is in teaching.

So it gave us a chance to model what we know works and reconnect to what we know is true about teaching and learning. To handle what we don't know about,

how these will impact assessment and cheating and ethics and student future and all of those things. Thank you for that

Susan Hrach: plug. How big is your institution? What's

Lindsay: the kind of dynamic?

Susan Hrach: We have about 7, 000 students mostly undergrad, but we have graduate programs in business and in education and also in music. And I may be missing some areas. And so a lot of the, in particular, the business and education grad programs are online.

We have a really interesting challenge to be able to reach, grad level programs fully online and also, a really important mission [00:06:00] with the core courses, most of which are in person. And so it's a wide range of teaching challenges. And

Lindsay: you have been there for 10 years. What did you do before?

What's your disciplinary background?

Susan Hrach: Yeah, my disciplinary background is early modern British literature. And I also was recruited and always have taught the world lit survey, which has been really the source of a lot of intellectual stimulation and teaching innovation over many years because world literature is been really the source almost always in English translation.

And I, recognized early on that our students don't necessarily realize what a work in translation means or how to productively read one. [00:07:00] And so I also have a Undergraduate major in German, and I was always wanting to do comparative literature. And so WorldLit really gives me the chance to scratch that itch.

And I almost exclusively focus on the different English versions of each thing that we read so that they can understand, how no single translation is a perfect equivalent of the original, particularly with poetry. And I was surprised when I first started in that direction, how much students love passing judgment on which translations they liked or don't like.

That's a human thing, right? We like. Being able to rank order things and Who

Lindsay: was the best, James Bond? Exactly. Which Catwoman was

Susan Hrach: Exactly. That that's something that they liked a lot more than I thought. I was thinking, oh man, this is going to be way too boring and [00:08:00] And just abstract for them, but they get really into it.

And then you can press them on okay, that's all well and good. You like this version the best let's dig into what it's doing and why it produced that effect on you and what the other ones maybe are doing differently that you find not as effective. And so anyway, it's been

Lindsay: a lot of fun.

Do you think that comparative literary approaches might be, might become more in demand as more AI texts start to come out on the market, or are there ways of looking at AI generated texts through the lens of comparative literature? Yeah,

Susan Hrach: With teaching writing in particular, one of the first things that occurred to me when I was you know, introduced to this large language model generated text is that we can raise the bar so much higher now.

We can ask students to compare, just like you said, here's two [00:09:00] essays, which one's more effective to you and why and what exactly is going on there. And I think we can ask them to do a lot more sophisticated reading and recognizing of, why sentences

?: work,

Susan Hrach: More effectively in one way or another.

And so I, I'm excited about the possibility to move beyond the sort of lower order writing skills that maybe, had preoccupied us for a long time.

Lindsay: That is so interesting because if you have two things, you're differentiating. And if you can identify the patterns that make it similar and not similar, that's a much more sophisticated and much clearer learning activity in a lot of ways than generate an original argument.

There's a lot of thoughts on what does original even mean? Are there? SoTL.

Susan Hrach: You're so right. And the other thing that I realized about [00:10:00] learning theory or, learning science after I had started those trans comparative translation assignments, is that. They light up your receptors,

probably, I don't know if it's dopamine or something else because it's familiar when you read multiple versions of the same thing, it's familiar with a twist.

There's something novel, but you are, you're already, familiar with it. So you bring your pre existing prior knowledge to like, Oh yes, I know this passage. I know what it says. I understand it, but Ooh, there's something new about it. There's something different here. And so I, that, that accounts for why students found it more interesting than I thought they would.

Because after I show them like six or seven versions of the same poem that's slightly different each time, it's like they get more and more excited with every, new iteration of it because it's doing that [00:11:00] same move. It's showing them something that they already know something about. But here's a twist.

And so now let's evaluate what happened. What's different? What did the writer change? And you can do that with their own writing. I think, now that we have easier ways of feeding their writing into AI and asking AI to, to change it in some way. I think there's lots of creative assignments that could happen.

Lindsay: That is, yeah it's just, it's a lucky and a whole new approach to thinking about this for me, because you're building competence every time you reread the version and that competence is tied to, the self determination theory, you're more motivated if you see it. feel like you're getting better at something.

So the more you read it, the more familiar you are, the better you feel. But there's also that new introduction where you have the autonomy to choose which of these things. So you're asserting your identity. And if you're doing it in a class where you're [00:12:00] getting to argue and take sides, like it hits that relationship, like it's, that's it,

Susan Hrach: all three of the self determination aspects. Yeah, that's a, yeah,

Lindsay: that was not what I was originally going to ask you about, but I did want to talk to you about AI though, and through the lens of an area at which you have certainly emerged as an expert with your book Mining Bodies, which is about Let me tell you what your books have been.

For folks who haven't read it, it is absolutely amazing. We're doing a whole faculty learning community. We're bringing you in as a keynote speaker on it, but this idea of embodied cognition and thinking about the way that space and our senses and movement and things like that impact the way we learn, the way we teach and being intentional about designing that.

So I'm curious what your thoughts are about embodied learning with AI or through AI and how you think about it.

Susan Hrach: Yeah. Oh my gosh. AI is an [00:13:00] amplifier of our cognitive speed, right? It's, cranks out things much faster than we've been able to do in the past. And so it's exacerbating the sense that our cognitive processing is all you need to know about how our brains work, that okay that's what we are.

We, we are our brains. And what I learned in the process of doing the research for writing my book is that your brain is in fact, hugely informed by what's What else is going on in your animal body? Your sense, the available energy that you have to feed your brain is, as anybody who's been sleep deprived knows a big factor in your cognitive processes, but also, our internal sensations.

the [00:14:00] environments, the physical environments that are external or that we think of as external to our bodies are also constantly feeding your brain with input that it is also is processing with your prior experiences and that produces perception. And so perception is never as simple as there's a tree, my eyes are looking at it, my brain recognizes it's a tree.

Like it's so much more complicated than that in, in terms of things that you might even, this is, An example of why witness, eyewitness testimony is not always great. Your prior experiences can even make you think that you've seen things that you, that are not. There, because all of the contextual clues from your prior experience lead you to believe that this thing, that you saw this thing and it's not there, but [00:15:00] you're, that's not how our perception works.

We have really unreliable brains in that respect but what questions have been really interesting to me in the new age of AI, have to do with What about our animal bodies? AI is never going to be able to improve or do better or replace. Because AI is not going to have a human animal body.

It's a processor. It's a speedy processor, but it's not going to have skin. It's not going to have olfactory nerves. It's not going to have limbs. They can, there might be a way to build a robotic machine like body, but it's, what's the difference between the robot pet dog and an [00:16:00] act in a real dog?

A lot, like the robot dog is a fun toy, but is it a real dog? No. And AI is never going to be a real human animal. And so anyway, is

Lindsay: that significant? What aspects of our learning have to do with our animal body?

Susan Hrach: Yeah, so this is the thing that I just feel like because we're so tightly identified with our minds, we totally forget that we have bodies, right?

And yet think about all the things that we're so wired to recognize about other human beings. Eye contact physical proximity the way that being in the physical presence of another person is just, that is a huge piece of sensory and cognitive information that we, because we're animals, you, the eye contact that [00:17:00] takes place when you walk into a a room full of people.

is so subtle and so omnipresent. That is, we just are constantly scanning the environment to see what other humans are doing, what feedback we're getting from them about our presence. I think it's one of the reasons that Introverts get exhausted having lots of people around with relatively superficial conversation, social interactions, because introverts are a little bit more sensitive to all of those non verbal things that are going on.

And that all of that sensory input about whose posture is you know, communicating what and what's going on with that group over there. And it's just, [00:18:00] it's a lot. It's just, almost overwhelming. And that's why I think introverts are not anti social. In some ways, they're particularly sensitive to the, the person who they're talking to or the small group they're talking to and just need a little bit of, it takes them, it uses up extra energy for them to like process all of the signals that are going on there.

Lindsay: Yeah. As you were saying that I'm giving you my full eye contact and face. There's this great scholar on podcasting, Siobhan McHugh who talks about job of the interviewer in a podcast or any kind of interview. And she calls what they have to do aerobic listening and the way that you respond, your facial expressions, your sounds and things changes.

the connection and the trust and the willingness of the person you're talking to, to either continue to open up or [00:19:00] shut right down. And I think as faculty, we feel that when our students aren't giving us the facial data we expect or are used to, or, they're tough to warm up or interact with, it can really send us into the not best version of

Susan Hrach: our teaching selves.

Oh my gosh. This is such an interesting subject. I'm sure many listeners have been in the position where the students are, it's like hardly anyone is looking at you. They're not making any kind of facial expressions. They're not responding.

To anything that you say with any sort of a facial acknowledgement, non verbal acknowledgement, that is a super buzzkill right there.

I've been in that situation many times where I have to say, can we please nod? Can what's, what's going on out there? Yeah.

Lindsay: It's a, it feels hostile and it puts us in fight or flight and I always joke about my first time teaching. I write out [00:20:00] verbatim every word I plan to say.

I wouldn't read from it, but if I lost my place, I'd panic and be like, okay, that's it for today. See you tomorrow. 30 minutes early. Literal, the flight instinct kicked in and I run, get out of here, survive. Yes. Oh my gosh. It's yeah.

Susan Hrach: I can't do that, but I want to. That's such a good example of the way we're wired to have these very like species specific human interactions.

I realized not too long ago why I have so much trouble rehearsing a talk because there's no audience there. And for me, the presence of the people who are listening, like I literally can't even practice without someone there to listen, because that's the whole, like back and forth of [00:21:00] the, occasion to me.

And I just always thought it was me being like hardheaded and resistant to this idea of practice. And then I realized, Oh, I know why I don't want to practice because just saying the words is not really what's important to me about what's going to happen at this occasion. The words are less important than what gets communicated through the nonverbal things that are going on.

Lindsay: I have absolutely had that experience as well where I really struggled to practice and then I realized I didn't need to because I had I knew the content, but I've also let that give me overconfidence having that work where I don't prepare enough. And then I get into a situation where I don't know my content well enough to go.

And then it's, those are bad. Those are tough. Yeah,

Susan Hrach: totally been there [00:22:00] too. Yep. And then you're fighting with your own panic about how you're forgetting what it was that you wanted to be able to say. So yeah, there's a lot, there's a lot going

Lindsay: on there. We're like, I'm boring these people to death, but I have to finish this point or otherwise logically there's no reason for me to be here, but they're boring.

Susan Hrach: Yeah.

Yeah. Yeah, so these issues about whether or not there are, not whether or not, there are things about our human presence that I just find super interesting to think about because AI seems. on the cusp of taking over all of our, I don't know, just things that aren't about our physical embodied selves.

Lindsay: We're reading this book with a cohort of faculty kind of meeting weekly, a lot of the times online. So [00:23:00] sometimes, I'll go for a walk as I'm Zooming with this group to talk about it's very fun to talk about minding bodies and thinking about our bodies within the scope of practice of teaching and educational development in my case.

But there was one of the chapters about going outside that created a really interesting conversation about. Laces to take our students on our campuses, the role of campuses within our educational systems, and also I think you say it's pedagogically risky to take your students outside. I'm just curious, what are your what's your advice for folks who maybe have never considered taking faculty development outside or taking their own classes outside?

What are the benefits? What are the risks?

Susan Hrach: Oh, that's a great question. And, the advantages to going outside are to wake up our, again, our built in, evolved instincts to be more alert in [00:24:00] natural light, to The fresh air, the, even if it's bad weather, a lot of times a super memorable experience happens because everybody's a little uncomfortable.

So You know, one thing about going outside is that you do not have to have the perfect Southern California day to do it. It can be really brief too. I've had a lot of success sending students in groups of two or three for a quick loop around the quad to discuss something and come back to the classroom.

And it doesn't take very that's a 15 minute exercise. They love it. The ways that it helps them to develop more interesting answers to the prompt that you give them is a reflection of the fact that they're in motion, and so they're likely to have more creative ideas, and [00:25:00] their, blood circulation in their brain is

helping to, make that a more successful Just opportunity to come up with creative ideas.

It's also good for them to be able to talk to each other while they're not staring in each other's faces. It's just like the conversation you can have with people when you're driving together, because everybody's eyes are not looking straight into each other's faces, and you can potentially discuss something that's a little bit more delicate or I a little bit more sensitive because you can take the opportunity to say something without needing to get that immediate, affirmation or recognition from somebody else's face.

And the other thing about going outside, I would say to, maybe this is the top recommendation is a don't, which is, Don't [00:26:00] take everybody outside and expect them in a large group to be quiet while they're listening to one voice. Even if it's not yours, even if you're saying, okay, let's hear from, Alicia about what she thinks about this.

It's too hard to focus on one voice in a large group of people when you're outside. And that's. Because we're our alertness is extra open, and so all of the distracting ambient noise makes it a little bit harder for you to focus on one voice at a time. So even though there's lovely pictures of people sitting around an amphitheater and, listening to a lecture outside, That is a practice I would not recommend.

It's just, I've collected data on it. The students will say it was great to be outside, [00:27:00] but I found it hard to pay attention. Oh yes, you did because you're human and that's not how we're, we're built to, to focus. So small group work, activities brief periods of time.

You don't have to spend the whole class period outside. Lots of ways to work it in.

Lindsay: That is so interesting. There's so many ideas now and so many things where I'm like, whoops, did that wrong. But one of the things that came out as you were speaking is the importance of voice and the way that voice becomes the way that our inner cognition is externalized through our breath and the mechanics of our mouth and all that kind of stuff.

And I'm wondering, are we we do a lot of active learning training and one of the definitions of Active learning, I give this big long workshop and at the end I'm like, okay, so we've talked about what active learning is. Here's your test. What's

the opposite of active learning? So somebody will always say oh, passive learning.

I'm like, is it though? You can't do a passive push up. Can you [00:28:00] learn passively? The opposite of active learning is active teaching where the teacher is doing all of the talking. And so one of the big, lessons, of course, and I'm not certainly the first to say this, is just getting the faculty member to be quiet so that the students can talk and the importance of voice itself to our learning, I think is, you may talk about this later in the book, I am not fully finished with Mindy Body is Me yet, but I'm curious what your thoughts are about that, or

Susan Hrach: is that your approach?

Absolutely, yeah, I mean I, there's that great tool and its name is escaping me right now, but it's based on a simple premise of recording the sound of a classroom in order to measure its level of active learning. And if it's completely silent, that's a good signal because there must be individual, reflection going on or some sort of writing task in which Everyone is individually focused on something.

And then [00:29:00] the other signal of active learning is that there's multiple voices going on at the same time, right? What you want to avoid is the one voice at a time. That's where someone's lecturing or there's just this sort of whole class discussion in which only one person can talk at a time. And some people are never going to talk and they won't have the opportunity in that class period to say anything at all.

But the advantage to getting everybody talking is that not only are they engaging in the learning every single person in the room, but they're getting the chance to speak through their own throats and teeth and lips and tongue. The vocabulary that you are trying to help them to feel more familiar with and comfortable with the vocabulary of your discipline [00:30:00] that it probably includes words that are new to them.

And so even if you do a think pair share in a lecture, if it gives the students a chance to use the, you could say, you have to use this phrase when you're talking to your think pair share partner so that you get practice, like having it feel like a natural concept that you are comfortable saying, using, there's a lot of, multi syllabic, Latinate words in, in sciences and in other disciplines where if the student doesn't have it practice saying it out of their own mouths, it will never be quite as familiar to them, even and I think we need lots of practice pronouncing things that are hard to pronounce. And it can make, be fun, right?

Because you can, I like to be able to laugh at our [00:31:00] struggle, when there's a word that I find hard or a concept that I'm like, okay, this is a real mouthful, but it's so fun.

Let's practice saying it. Let's all say it together, and I do think it, it lessens their feeling that difficult concept or that new vocabulary word is still not really part of their knowledge.

Lindsay: That is, it's making me think about especially the laughter piece, like how important it is for being in the same space with people to share laughter.

?: Yes.

Lindsay: You can watch a really skillful comedian, but Usually you're imagining yourself as part of the audience. There is something that is essentially embodied about sharing laughter and humor with people that Emma Mott was on a podcast recently, the Good Life Project, where she talks about laughter is carbonated holiness.

And so if you get a group laughing together, suddenly you're in church and it's, I think she was talking about David [00:32:00] Sedaris reading about these bodily functions in his life, say, and things that you wouldn't think of as, sacred and holy topics, but when you share laughter and that electricity of connection, you feel when people, where you're on, you're inside a joke with somebody else.

That's a super powerful experience that classrooms can create, which is great. Yes.

Susan Hrach: Yeah. I was just at the university system of Georgia's teaching and learning conference last week. And My colleague, Bethany Buck, who's at Fort Valley State University was leading a session and she announced at the beginning, all right, we need to laugh more than the people in the room next door.

That's our whole goal for this session.

Lindsay: And we did. I love that. If we start every class that way, we need to laugh more in this class than any other class in this building right now. Yeah. Yeah. engagement. The other thing when you're [00:33:00] talking about voice, usually I don't talk this much in podcast interviews, but this is so interesting.

I'm just like, whoa. But it made me think the person leading the event, the facilitator has all the power and privilege and their voice is the most privileged and powerful. And the next most privileged are the students with their hands up, eager to answer. And so our classrooms are set up to continue to privilege those who came in with the most to begin with, rather than those who have the most ground to cover.

And those are the ones who don't want to talk because they're ashamed they didn't do the reading, they're not fully prepared, they don't feel as smart, they don't feel like they're part of the community, of the class for whatever reason. And if we don't create structures to bring their voice out, They won't do it themselves because it's risky.

Susan Hrach: Yeah. And so here's a another embodied way of to illustrate that same principle. So I heard Kathy Davidson give this talk at the [00:34:00] AICNU a few years ago and she was relating, I put this in the book, she was relating this practice that she learned from Samuel Delaney, who's a science fiction writer.

And he made all of his students raised their hands like hot, put your hand way up. When he would ask a question and he would call on anybody, but they had the right to say, I'm interested in hearing what so and so has to say about it if they didn't want to answer at that moment. And the reason he did it was because he felt that there were a number of students who had over the years stopped raising their hands ever.

And that was a form of silencing. It's a gestural silence, right? You're let alone speaking in class. You never even raised your hand because think about it. Raising your hand is a pretty bold gesture. Like it has to [00:35:00] go in this place that is not natural. You have to, exert some. bold force to push your arm up into the air.

And so if you have spent years and years in a classroom and have never have gotten into the, just, comfort level of never raising your hand. It's like you're not really there. You've resigned yourself to being a spectator. And so I just thought that was really, that was a great idea and a great example of the way that it takes real intention to make sure everybody's involved.

Lindsay: I love that strategy. It's so empowering. It creates connection and relationships.

Susan Hrach: And you don't have to do it all the time, just as an occasional, or maybe at the beginning of the term, everyone is going to raise their hand. Here we go. It's

Fun.

Lindsay: I've got small children and they, [00:36:00] in their preschool they do these daily affirmations.

I am kind. I am brave. I am smart. And it's really amazing as an adult to say affirmations. Which I have never put any stock into and still I'm But when you say those words like there's energy your ears hear like it's different than thinking those words to yourself And the confidence, to boldly raise your hand or to boldly say words that you don't fully believe yourself yet I am a writer.

I am a math person, whatever the identity is that you're trying to claim to just claim it. It's really it's powerful.

Susan Hrach: It is powerful. And you know what it reminds me of, too. Here's another, Kind of fun thing to challenge students with, or maybe just ourselves. It's another strategy for creating a strong password.

You can come up with some affirmation that only you need to know about, right? Cause you're not supposed to share your password with [00:37:00] anyone else, but you'll be typing it in on a regular basis. And it's a little reminder to you like, Oh yeah, I did that when I was in graduate school. I think I gave myself the password of PHD2B or something, because it felt, when you're a grad student, there's no guarantee you're going to finish.

And especially, if you're writing a dissertation where you know that there's X number of people who never do finish them, and maybe you'll be one of the casualties and. And it meant a lot to me just to have that daily reminder of no, I'm going to do this. I will eventually become a PhD.

And so little ways that we can keep ourselves. Motivated.

Lindsay: I love that. I thought you meant password, like with your students or something like, this is the word I say when I don't wanna answer the question. Yeah, you could. That's You mean like a literal cybersecurity,

Susan Hrach: yep. Something you're gonna type in all the [00:38:00] time, but but yeah, you could make it a speakeasy password too,

Lindsay: I, this conversation went in a lot of areas I was not planning. Are there things that we were going to talk about or that you wanted to talk about that I didn't ask you about or we didn't get to?

Susan Hrach: Yeah, I can think of one thing that crossed my mind when you, it's come up several times. That I have been reading a lot about in the past year and it is really profoundly affecting the way I view so many things like grading, for example. And that is that so I've been reading these books about humans as animals by David Abram is one of the authors and Melanie Challenger.

They both have multiple books on this subject and One of the things about Homo sapiens as a species is that we know we're social and that we're built to live [00:39:00] in communities and that we evolved in these, social, small social groups. But the other thing that we have in common with other primates and mammals is that we are hierarchical.

So we're intensely aware of like where we are relative to anybody else at any point in time. And in fact, we k we kind it. This is almost the the commonality of greats. World religions and spiritual practices is to try to get away from that, to be like, Oh no, the last shall be first.

And the, or you should, serve others, treat others as you would be treated like, because that's so hard for us to do as a species, we are. Wired by evolution to be just very status conscious looking for the alpha. So we can super status conscious at all times. And so this is why it's obsessing me is that I feel like it [00:40:00] explains a ton of things about human society that suddenly now seem like They make sense.

All sports competition, the way that we are more interested in who's winning a political race than what the, real substance behind it might be our obsession with Great grading, right? Cause that's a way of being able to rank and sort the ways that we get very upset about, whether somebody's going to get credit for something they didn't do, the cheating with AI moral panic, is all about this kind of very species orientation of being status conscious of our status at all times. So I'm just finding that kind of mind blowing these days, and it fits with the earlier work that I, had really found so interesting about neuros, neuroscience, the neuroscience of [00:41:00] learning because it's a, inescapable way in which we're physiologically built, and I think there's obviously everything else, a diversity of, ways that people either lean into their obsession with status or they decide for one reason or another that they don't want to play that game and they, respond to any sort of competition by withdrawing.

But I even think of that as that's an acknowledgement that this is real. This is a real thing. We are just monitoring the social environment at all times for who's up, who's down, what's, that's what influencing is about and social media and why it's destructive for a lot of people.

Cause they it's just a signal of status and how are you doing and how are you doing vis a vis [00:42:00] other people? And I don't know, I find it a relief to just know that oh, and I know what the other thing I thought was, it explains why we have such a hard time getting kids to, to stop bullying.

We need to help them overcome the impulse to bully. But they're tiny humans. So that's what they do. Because they recognize that okay, here we are, we're in this status, we're jockeying for status. And so we're practicing what that looks like and whether I'm the alpha or you are or whatever.

And I don't know, I just, it's not that it relieves us of the responsibility to work really hard on creating compassionate, equitable, just societies. It just, for me, it helps explain why it's so damn hard to do that. [00:43:00] Because. Our animal selves are not wired to forget about status.

Lindsay: Blown my mind.

Susan Hrach: They

Lindsay: blew my mind. They blew, I'm just passing it along. I, that, and it's also framing it that way. We are hardwired for that comparison, that judgment, that Striving. Yep. It allows us to forgive ourselves that, but also hold ourselves to a different standard. . Yeah, exactly. This is built in, but it doesn't have to be the thing that we let drive our, exactly.

Our pedagogy at the level that makes the most relevance to us in our roles. But

Susan Hrach: yeah. Yeah. I haven't yet read. Kate, Denial's Pedagogy of Kindness, but I've got it on order. I'm excited to dig into that. I

Lindsay: It's still just pre ordered. Okay, good. I'm not behind. Yeah. The Bonnie Stachowiak's podcast, Teaching Higher Ed, she talks about that model.

And [00:44:00] we have a colleague here who's been doing workshops and it is amazing to see how people respond to that topic. Yeah,

?: I

Lindsay: bet. The key cornerstones are choosing to believe your students. To believe and to believe in. And does that mean they're going to take advantage? Yes, it does. That is a risk.

That is one of the things, but it also means all these other benefits that come with freeing yourself and the people that you lead from the hierarchy expectation, as if these things are tied to essential values instead of social constructs and things like that. I love the way you put that, Lindsay.

That's great. So do you have any advice for how we get out of these hierarchies or things that you're seeing? Alternative models. I've been reading a book called The Search for Mother Trees about

Susan Hrach: Oh, Suzanne Simard.

Lindsay: Yes.

Susan Hrach: Yes. Oh my gosh. We had her for one of our opening year events and [00:45:00] I love her.

It's fabulous that she discovered that trees are not always in competition with each other, but that in fact, they have all of these ways of communicating through the fungi and supporting and nurturing each other, even after they've died. So like the felled tree in the, in lying on the forest floor is still giving its life wisdom through its, decaying cells to the rest of the forest.

Oh my gosh. I love that book. It's great.

Lindsay: I haven't gotten to that part. That sounds powerful.

Susan Hrach: Yeah. Yeah. It's great. How do we get out of it? Awareness is the first step, right? If you just are under, able to understand how these structures got built and why, and then like you just so beautifully put it we can forgive [00:46:00] ourselves, but then also hold ourselves more accountable.

The ungrading movement fits right in here. Letting people take, letting students have agency over what they want out of the learning experience and whether they've met their own goals for it. I think as a way of stepping out of that, obsession with having power to rank and sort.

At the beginning, we

Lindsay: talked a little bit about that differentiation and I am not you is like the beginning of knowledge for babies or whatever, or identity creation. And in some ways like that differentiation means if I'm not you and you're not me, one of us must be better than the other or hold more value or have more of a resource.

And so that the wisdom itself, like knowledge itself is a form of separation, which can invite hierarchy and competition.

Susan Hrach: Yeah. Yeah. [00:47:00] This is the practice of self awareness. It's the practice of slowing down and, mindfulness is a great practice for trying to let go of this, nonstop chatter in our heads about who's up and who's down and what we did or didn't do or whatever.

So yeah I'm also part of the mindfulness and contemplative pedagogy SIG in POD. And Stephanie Bauer and Hema, whose last name I'm now forgetting, Kierwall, I think is her last name, are co chairing that SIG this year. And they just did the most beautiful practice last week. They invited everyone to a cake practice.

And they said if we were in person, of course, we'd eat cake as well, but it was virtual. And so cake stands for compassion, Oh boy, I'm going to forget the cake now. [00:48:00] It might've been acceptance, kindness, and empathy. And for each of those, letters, they led us through a very short contemplative reflection and we could close our eyes and think about it.

And one of them, I think it was the first one, Compassion, reminds me of something you said earlier about affirmations. They started with think about someone you really care about and how you talk to them. and what you, what's something that you frequently say to them to let them know how much you care about them and support.

Oh, I think the C is care. And so then we were all thinking about that and then they said, okay, now say that same thing to yourself. And how does it feel to have that said to you? And it's so powerful. And it was just such a lovely experience to spend an hour [00:49:00] guided by these, lovely colleagues who are trying to practice mindfulness, with their students and colleagues.

And so for anybody who's not in the mindfulness and contemplative pedagogy SIG, there's a plug. You should get involved. It's good for you.

Lindsay: I think I need to join that. That sounds amazing. And I love cake.

Susan Hrach: We could all eat cake on our own, in our own offices,

Lindsay: so we wanted to give you a chance at the end here to lead us in a mindful contemplative sort of activity.

This is something we're building in this little mini session chapter we're doing with embodied cognitive experts. And you have, is it a Face massage technique. Yes. Okay. I'm going to mute myself and just participate in case you need an audience member.

Susan Hrach: I

Lindsay: do. I do.

Susan Hrach: That would help. So this is a [00:50:00] practice that reminds us how important touch is.

It's so intimate and fundamental to our health. So You know, we know that infants who are deprived of touch can have lasting physical and emotional damage and So I want to offer listeners an experience of touch that does not require the presence of anyone else. So don't get too excited or anxious.

We're going to keep our hands to ourselves. But if you happen to be somewhere where you can stand, you're welcome to do that for a little stretch or remain seated if that's more comfortable for you. If you wear glasses, Feel free to take those off if you'd like, and you can close your eyes and just listen to my cues.

We're going to start with just a couple of fingers on each hand and make big circles on our temples. So first, just in one [00:51:00] direction, and then in the other. You can move around the area a little bit. And if there's a place that's particularly tight or tender, just hold there and breathe.

And you want to make your circles deep enough that you're moving the whole tissue, not just sliding over the skin.

And let's bring those circles to our forehead and along our hairline.

And now, just put out your thumb on each hand and press your thumbs on the spot right in between your eyes. Just give a nice firm pressure, close your eyes, breathe. Give your attention to just being here in the present moment.

And let's find our temporal mandibular joint, which is the hinge of our jaws. You can open and close your mouth to feel right where it is. Just let your jaw hang loose and give a nice [00:52:00] little circle massage to this jaw hinge. We often keep a lot of tension in our jaws.

And so from this point, let's just move to our ears. and finish off with some ear pulls. So give the tops of your ears a little pull. And then if you can grab the middle of your ear and pull it behind you, you might feel that stretching your jaw.

And then you can move to your ear lobes, pull those down, wiggle them out a little bit.

And if you have time, you can give your jawbone a little circular massage with your fingers. That can feel nice and also around your, under your ears, around your neck where your lymph nodes are. It's nice to be able to give those a little rub because lymph [00:53:00] nodes need to be manually stimulated in order to circulate the lymph glands.

And then I hope that just helps your face to feel a little bit more relaxed and maybe help to calm your whole body. So thank you for participating. Thank you, Susan.