



Holding Space Episode 1 Transcript “Defining the Work” with Dr. Enobong (Anna) Branch

Dr. Joan Collier: Hey everyone. Thank you for joining us for the first episode of Holding Space. I'm your host, Dr. Joan Collier, Senior Director of Institutional Equity and Strategic Initiatives for University Equity and Inclusion here at Rutgers. What we hope to do with this podcast is provide a space for conversation and learning that covers all sorts of topics related to equity, diversity, and inclusion. Each episode, I'll speak with a different guest or guests from across the university about the specific work they do to advance equity within the broader Rutgers University community.

But for today's episode, we'll play a conversation I had with Dr. Enobong (Anna) Branch, AKA my boss. She's the Senior Vice President of Equity for Rutgers University. Dr. Branch oversees University Equity and Inclusion, as well as the Division of Diversity Inclusion and Community Engagement in Rutgers-New Brunswick. We talked about her journey, what beloved community really means, and how the institution and the individual play meaningful parts in the work of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Let's join the conversation.

Dr. Branch, it's so good to talk to you on here today. So, for those listening in, like I said, Dr. Branch is my boss. It's super fun. So, this episode is going to be cool, I think, for me and I think for her too, because we're both cool.

Dr. Enobong (Anna) Branch: Absolutely.

Dr. Joan: We just get to talk, and you all get to hear it. So, that's really fun. So, Dr. Branch, how did you arrive at this work? How will you define this work, and can you talk about your journey and why you pursued it?

Dr. Anna: Absolutely. I think that sometimes you set out to do work and other times work finds you.

Dr. Joan: Yes.

Dr. Anna: In this case, I was a faculty member. I'm a Sociologist at the University of Massachusetts Amherst, but I am a black college alum. I went to Howard U.

Dr. Joan: All right.

Dr. Anna: It wasn't until being a faculty member at a predominantly white university that I fully appreciated how different my undergraduate experience was and what that meant for me as a student, what it meant for how I supported my graduate students, what it meant for me as a faculty member. I got involved in institutional work to help support me, might I say, a faculty



member of color, and then my students and then both undergraduate and grad. In many ways, iterations and evolutions, that became my work.

Dr. Joan: Okay.

Dr. Anna: At each point, I would raise a question or a concern. The institution should actually be doing the work of retaining its faculty and not faculty members retaining themselves. Over the course of time, more and more, that became my work. So, that's really been the evolution. In many ways, I feel like my work [inaudible].

Dr. Joan: So Anna, you've told us how you got here on your journey. But you got here at Rutgers-New Brunswick, and you were Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement, which is DICE. That's not your title anymore. So, help us understand how you went from Vice-Chancellor of DICE to now Senior Vice President for Equity over University Equity and Inclusion, and still working with and through the division in New Brunswick. Help folks understand that.

Dr. Anna: So I told you my global journey, right?

Dr. Joan: Yes.

Dr. Anna: The why I do this work. But a bit about how I came to do this work at Rutgers and how that work has changed is worth some explanation too because I didn't start in the role that I'm in, right? So, I arrived, I was recruited to Rutgers as the Vice-Chancellor for the Division of Diversity, Inclusion, and Community Engagement. In my past role. I had built a similar office, the Office of Equity and Inclusion and the charge was to come here and do it again. I was really loving my work. The amazing staff that I've recruited there at the time that President Holloway came to campus. One of his early declarations was the work I had for Rutgers and for the nation was one of dealing with the racial reckoning and repair.

Part of that was what does that mean for the institution. So, his initial call was for a rapid equity audit. And that charge came to me — and me and you, Joan. And so, a lot of members of our team went to work with multiple members of the leadership to kind of pull together a story and understanding of where is the institution. Where are we sitting? What is the path forward? One of the running jokes is we thought we were just going to assess it and be done and go back to the good work awaiting [crosstalk] us in New Brunswick.

Dr. Joan: Yes.

Dr. Anna: About halfway through completing that audit, the President said, "Well, actually there is going to be a change — I'd like to invite you to." So, that's kind of how my new role came to be as a part of his direction to appoint a three - I was one of three - new Senior Vice Presidents to advance the University's mission. Part of the aim of a Senior Vice President role and what has now become University Equity and Inclusion is to look across the university, to think about



comprehensively: How are we working toward our aim of being an inclusive campus to build out the aims of a beloved community? And we think about it in a cohesive and coherent way, aligned with strategic clarity and ambition so that it's not just about Rutgers Brunswick or Rutgers Newark or RBHS. But how are we together moving in that same direction? And I am personally committed through the office and others to seeing Rutgers-New Brunswick make progress. So, one thing I really like about my role is that I get both the global. How is the university doing, and the ability to work more deeply, and have the new Brunswick campus to see it the whole way?

Dr. Joan: Yeah. It's actually really fun to see the broader work happen. And then to be able to come home in New Brunswick and say, "All right, How does this show up on our campus? How are we tying the pieces back together so that it's all cohesive? It's aligned. It's congruent. Hectic but fun." Well, I just say, hectic and fun. Barely misunderstood, but it's working. So for people who have questions, that's one of your answers. There you go.

You brought up Beloved Community, which is a really fascinating concept.

Dr. Holloway talks about it as how he envisions the institution. And so, you have crafted out this poster series. You have helped to kind of usher that in and frame it. And of to some extent, I think to a great extent. It's still aspirational. And so, in doing the work of equity, diversity, and inclusion, sometimes folks have said to us directly, "How can this be a Beloved Community when there's all this stuff happening?" So for the folks who are like, I hear you, that's cute. But like, I don't know. How does EDI fit into that? And how can people think about Beloved Community in operational and actionable way that they can build toward as opposed to, we either have it, or we don't, which is pretty limiting [crosstalk] in terms of how we see ourselves as a community.

Dr. Anna: Absolutely. So, I'm going to try to keep my professorial note down. I'm going to work real hard at this, but I give you that as my intro. Because in the same way that democracy is aspiration.

Dr. Joan: Yes.

Dr. Anna: So none of us would ever say we've had a myriad of instances globally and nationally that have called into question the structural integrity of democracy.

Dr. Joan: Yeah.

Dr. Anna: We're not about to say, well, you know, either you have it or you don't. But it is an active pursuit of a thing that matters, Right? The work, the upholding. It is the aspiration that reminds you not to take that thing for granted. And so to go from the kind of global version of what does that mean for democracy and the realities we can see around us, the contested nature of it — bring that back to beloved community because the reality is we weren't talking about the Beloved Community as a notion or an aspiration before President Holloway came to campus. It was one of his gifts, the value propositions, what he brought with him to campus, to ask us to



think about, what does it mean to be this, right, to hold this ideal and this aspiration? It doesn't mean to take it for granted. Right? And so, if there's any instances of the language, one of the great projects that's going to be coming out this year with the Committee to Advance our Common Purpose is a project that's defining our Beloved Community in a shared way. What does it mean? Let's be concrete about this. But one of my favorite definitions of what does it mean for us to apply love or even think about the word love in terms of justice comes from Bernice King, and she says, love... Social justice, that's the quote. Social justice is love applied to systems. And so [crosstalk]

Dr. Joan: Wow, I like that.

Dr. Anna: It moves us from Beloved Community is soft and love is squishy to what does it actually mean for love to be applied to systems? What does it mean for us to be a community of people that understand the connectedness? The word "community" and to not take that for granted? But then not to mandate how we show up in here. Right? That we're not all going to agree. And the expectation isn't that we do. But if we are going to be a community that is beloved, what does that mean? The definition that we hold out is, it's a commitment to work together, right? To embody and reflect and respect our complexity. It doesn't mean you and me agree on everything. And there was an opening comment the president made that makes me laugh often because a Beloved Community is not necessarily a boring community. Doesn't mean we all think the same thing, but it actually means we hold that space like harkening back to the podcast name. And actually let's just own it. Holding space is hard.

Dr. Joan: Yes.

Dr. Anna: And so we really prefer...

Dr. Joan: Yes.

Dr. Anna: When we can use Beloved Community as a shorthand for people who think and look like us, and that's the reality of this, that's the opposite of what this call is. And so, from the patchwork quilts to the ways that we will be working with, to the Committee to Advance our Common Purpose on this broader notion. What does it mean for us to embrace the notion of our complexity and sit with that? That's actually inclusion project, right? It's not just a simple thing of us just coming being together.

Dr. Joan: That is the inclusion project. People who don't know me know my brain runs a whole lot all the time, and so I'm taking my little notes over here. Things that jump out that excite me are active pursuit, the notion that people have to be engaged in it. That is not something that just happens. That regardless of where you sit within the organization, you have something to do with it. Bernice King is an Atlanta favorite. I'm from Atlanta, so...Hashtag swoon.

Social justice is love applied to system. I know there are people probably listening back going, but systems gone system. People is me and still the idea of the fight...



Dr. Anna: Oh, the fight.

Dr. Joan: Between the concept of love and system, it is a constant battle. I mean, a legitimate battle for those who trusted [crosstalk] in conflict.

Dr. Anna: Precisely. Yeah. You all just get to sit in Joan and I's conversation. For real.

Dr. Joan: So, here's the thing that I appreciate so much, this language of an active pursuit and let me take you back to democracy.

Dr. Anna: Part of our founding documents was to form a more perfect union.

Dr. Joan: Come on Anna [crosstalk], come on Anna.

Dr. Anna: We have been on a project of forming a more perfect union for a long time.

Dr. Joan: Yes.

Dr. Anna: And if we started with version one, but didn't include me, or you, as a part of that union and stop there and didn't recognize the pursuit itself.

Dr. Joan: Yeah.

Dr. Anna: Is the work [crosstalk].

Dr. Joan: Yeah. We be in bad shape.

Dr. Anna: And so often, in the work of diversity and inclusion, people get frustrated with the pursuit. The pursuit is the work. It's not the place that we arrived at it. And so, yes, bring the critique. I welcome the critique. The critique means we're doing the work.

Dr. Joan: That's right.

Dr. Anna: It's not an arrival. It's not a simple starting point. It's not that the president arrived, or I showed up, and then all the problems go away. Absolutely not. It's holding the space, putting out the aspiration of saying, "this is the pursuit." And so the point you're making about engagement. There is no inclusion without resistance.

Dr. Joan: Period.

Dr. Anna: Here was no, there was no, embrace some, the woman's right to vote and the [crosstalk]. The process of inclusion in democracy required resistance.

Dr. Joan: Yeah.

Dr. Anna: The process of moving us to inclusion within the academy is going and is requiring resistance. It's requiring the voices of those within the academy who are saying, "I wasn't in that



room. I wasn't in the conversation. That part of the curriculum doesn't include me." I'd like us to have a different kind of conversation. Our aim, our work is in part to hold that space and say, "Let's talk about it. Let's create some spaces. Let's think about what the work ahead is." But it's not to sit on the sidelines and say the institution hasn't done it yet.

Dr. Joan: Yes.

Dr. Anna: It's actually to engage to step in and for our office to think about how we're creating spaces and places for people to step in and say, "I want to do this better. I want to work at it." But it's not just the kind of it should happen, or it's done, or we have a black president now, and so, that means we're finished. It's not [crosstalk] No, no.

Dr. Joan: Again Anna, just always come with all the things. This is why I just love it. It's so much fun. So wait, let me, let me just go back because we talked about active pursuit, talking about working together, and not taking it for granted. And so, one of the problems that I had for later that I'll just pull to right now is having a conversation about work collectively, but the different pieces. There's institutional work that institution has to do. Then, there's work that individual people do that comes up as a more interpersonal pieces. So is the, you know, there are ways I should be engaging in my workplace and my classroom, my learning space and my insert space that is not whatever, that actually matters for the environment that we're having around at the University, justice, etc. And then there's institutional work which is like policy, practices that institution has to do. Talk us through some of those differences, what they look like? And then, how they work together so that people can maybe be more precise because sometimes it's a precision of language thing, right? It's not that nothing is happening. There are things happening. But sometimes it's institutional work that isn't as visible, and sometimes it's interpersonal work that we see. So talk a little bit about that.

Dr. Anna: Oh, such a good, good, good question.

Dr. Joan: We try, we try.

Dr. Anna: So, let me start here. I was giving a talk sometime for Zoom land. I was talking about kind of the challenges in the academy, and what's happening, what the work ahead is, and why are we in this moment. The context was, what kind of moment is this? Right? Is it that higher ed and kind of the nation, are we going to kind of get over? Are we done yet? The project is over, and so higher ed kind of overcorrecting, right? This was the genesis of the reflection moment. So what does it mean? What should we do? Part of what I said back was the harm of higher education is in the interaction, and that when people talk about the challenges that they say, 'Okay, I experienced that department as racist.' I felt like that, you know, this was, and they talked about sexual harassment in the nation. You can talk about in the academy. What they're saying is this is all in the interaction. This is in the interpersonal. This is in the 'how did you treat me?' I talk about respect a lot, right?



Dr. Joan: Yep.

Dr. Anna: And I said, well, people say, I'm experiencing racism or sexism or homophobia. What they're saying is you didn't treat me with respect and my identity is why. It's because I was Black, it's because I was a woman, it's because I am gay, and you read that identity as not deserving of respect. And in that interaction, you demonstrated it, whether you said hello, whether you pass me by, whether you held the door open, or you closed it in my face. Whether you acknowledged my hand was raised, whether you heard the comment I said in the meeting and spoke over me. All of that is in the interaction.

Where is the institution in that? It's not. That's about how you and me show up. The institution comes in, and what happens next? Because if you're in a position of responsibility and authority over me, or if I was sitting in the room, all of this happened, and it's disrupting my ability to succeed. We are in the Student Success business.

Dr. Joan: That's right.

Dr. Anna: It's what we come together to do. And if these slides accrue in ways that inhibit the success of all of us, the work we're in, what we're set here, or do, the institution has a responsibility. So, it's two-fold. The work is twofold. And I started there because you need that context. So often it's like well, what does any of this, you know, diversity and fuzzy stuff, if I use my most generous phrase, right?

Dr. Joan: There are other words that people use to describe it but fuzzy works.

Dr. Anna: Who tell us fuzzy? Mine? Not mission-critical, not central. And the point I say back is if we want success on all levels, if we are calling the equity question, that actually requires an institutional response. That requires institutional attention because individuals can't do equity by definition. Equity is a project. Equity is a question of looking across all of these things. What happened? And then, it's asking when I actually look across all these things, what's getting in the way of equity? And then, as I look into that it's like, Oh, that interpersonal. Oh, that's structural. Oh, that policy. We've got to be coming at this thing from both ways. Right? Again, it's not for us to say the institutions engaged in real work. But then we're missing the harm that's happening in the interactions on the ground.

One of the things I say often about behaviors and the reason why it's so important for us to think about and contend with behaviors, in real-time, is when students leave a program, when a faculty member leaves a department, it's never because of what the institution globally did or did not do. Not globally, ever. Right? There were the things they wish they did, ways they wish the institution would intervene. But it is often because of something someone said or did, or something someone did not say [crosstalk] or...

Dr. Joan: That's right. Or didn't do. That's right.



Dr. Anna: Then the question becomes; Was that someone a stand-in for the institutions? Because if that someone was in a position of authority. So, this blurriness around when is the work institutional and when does the work at personal? It's both at all times. And the goal for us in the work and why we need, I call it having multiple on-ramps to inclusion. It's not just one kind of work. But what are all of the ways that we need to be doing this work and coming at the problem so that we can go forward in substantive ways, right? So it's both and.

Dr. Joan: If one plus one don't make two? That's it. That was just so brilliant. I mean, it was absolutely brilliant because of course, it is, right? Like, it's not just whenever people... So I also work in Anna's shop. And so, people tell me things, and I hear stuff and stuff happens. And the point about something happens or something doesn't happen, and who responds and who does not respond. It's so, it's so tangible because that's literally what the feedback is.

Someone, you know, makes comments, and I, you know, share this with other people, and I don't like that. And it's not comfortable. And this person whose managing does nothing. The manager who has responsibilities to intervene, get right, and correct, failed to do that. Now, the institution ain't worth it. It's trash. I'm using air quotes because it's [inaudible]. That's where things get messy and then person departs. And when you ask them how was your experience there? It's well, no one did anything and it was bad. I don't like it. And we have ruled as institutions and say, "Here's what's supposed to happen when somebody goes left. Here's what's supposed to happen when things aren't right." Here are protocols that help us to do these things. And when institution does not do that because the person who's in institution role doesn't do it, we're in a bad place. So...

Dr. Anna: So, Can I, can I jump back in

Dr. Joan: You sure can.

Dr. Anna: Part of what that narration, that example that you gave that there are so many examples of is we have to own as a starting point. We don't know how.

Dr. Joan: Yeah

Dr. Anna: As a starting point. Again, going back to the brilliant name of podcasts, the idea of holding space to reflect. And from that place of reflection to make an informed decision to think about, to have some context, to not let the fear of getting it wrong, get in the way. So many people, leaders, in particular. The risk, the greatest, the greatest stereotype threat for those of you who are not familiar. The stereotype is that what happens when my identity when I'm triggered? When I am in fear of my identity being the thing I am defined by?

One of the greatest ones provided by [crosstalk] is being thought of as racist. It actually stops, like functioning. Like wait, wait, no, no, I don't want this, it's racist. I want to be seen as — And so, there's so much brainpower lost in. I don't want to be seen as racist. It actually compromises



your function. So you're not actually doing the thinking that you should be doing in real-time and support the people around you. And so it's like, well, this diversity, equity, and inclusion work is secondary. Here's the thing, when you are in a diverse environment, and you actually have not been taught or built the capacity to be aware of diversity, but not be impaired by your fear of being racist or getting it wrong. You're not doing your job well. You are in a diverse environment. And if you don't build that capacity with intention, there will be moments of frustration, moments of slippage, moments of problems because we are human and we are in a workplace or a classroom. And in that moment, were you ready? For most people, the answer is no.

So then, when the comment is made, when the thing is said and things start to go left, there's twelve things happening. Well, what happened? Did I tell her that? I'm not sure. And so, yes. So then, for the person who's impacted, it's the institution did nothing. For the person who's in that leadership role, it's well what was I supposed to do? I didn't know. Here's the thing. If you take nothing else from what I just said, that moment is not the moment to ask that question.

Dr. Joan: That would be correct.

Dr. Anna: Before that moment, what did you do to be ready? Because you know the environment that you work in. We are in a compositionally diverse environment. There's going to be a moment of time where something related to race, identity and let's not even just talk about, right, let's talk about sexuality, nationality,

Dr. Joan: Religion.

Dr. Anna: Ability. We're wearing masks right now. What about those that need to read lips to participate fully in your meeting? How are we accommodating and thinking through [inaudible]? How are we thinking about those who struggled with substance abuse, and the ways that we have downtime? It is in your leadership bucket to be thinking comprehensively. So in that moment, when something goes down and there's frustration like, "Oh, I trained for this." That's why I took that Workshop. That's why I've got some skills. But if I do nothing else, I can hold space to limit the harm. Because if there's harm in interaction in the academy, the second most common harm in the academy is the silence. Because it's not only am I not going to deal with the original interaction. No one's going to be comfortable enough to name in the aftermath and do something about it. So to pivot to planning as you were starting to do and I got off on a roll.

Dr. Joan: No we are right on the same train, we just took a different route.

Dr. Anna: [crosstalk] building the capacity of leaders to create and so, employments is a priority because it doesn't just happen. If we want to get to the kind of environment that were talking about. That we want to build to, leaders have a special role play. And so does everybody else in that environment, which is why diversity education, such a big investment. But these pieces are critical for us to really imagine a support, the path forward. It's not about blame. It's not about



who's wrong and who's right, but it's about us really taking seriously, what is the work of us being together? What does it mean to be a community? What is unique about higher education as a space? As a workplace? As a classroom? It's you're actually coming together in equal status contact. Because America's hyper-segregated racially, and Jersey, more so.

We do not live in environments, even though they are diverse, where we've got high-frequency cross-racial contact of equal status. Where I'm looking at you, you're talking to me, and we're navigating our differences. We don't do that except on campus. And we don't, we're not comfortable with it. Since being able to own that discomfort upfront, being able to hold some space around, being able to build some skills so that your discomfort doesn't get in the way.

Dr. Joan: I am taking more notes, have a couple questions that are just actual reflections, but with that point around discomfort. There's a term constructive discomfort. And in the diversity Ed realm, one of the grounding principles, so whenever we do diversity Ed pieces, we start with our grounding sentiment because people get really nervous. Like, "I don't know if I mess up saying the wrong thing. I don't know. I'm not racist. I'm not sexist. I'm not [crosstalk] like, I never made that claim, Friend. What I'm saying is, we're here to learn." It is a learning opportunity, I can go on all day about learning, and the struggles in learning, and it matters. And in the future podcast will get to ideas around learning about this because it is an actual thing to learn.

But constructive discomfort is required. It's a prerequisite to contend with the areas of knowledge and skill that we know that we don't have, that we know we need, or the areas that we don't even know that we need that word, then made aware of that we lack, and to be willing to immerse ourselves in knowledges, that we didn't even know existed. And then be willing to ask ourselves the question, Why didn't I know? why might I not have known? And lean in with curiosity. So in the Truth Racial Healing and Transformation Healing Circle, they ask, they have these rules and one of them is won't guideposts, not rules, is before you move to judgment, move to curiosity. And then opens you up to be okay with whatever you receive, right? You can ask questions. And so that discomfort is purposeful not to harm you but to allow you to say, "What is it that I might take on that can help me make sense of this and maybe put some easier, or maybe is that tension?" That cognitive dissonance it is, that is where you're kind of doing through your work.

So, questions that came up that you had said that I just want to repeat that I got it. What did you do to be ready? Now, you all don't know, but I'm low-key churchy and where I'm from, that's a whole shout point right there. What did you do to be ready? It's, it's it's a wonderful question because people ask in sessions oftentimes, you know, we have new people coming in and we want to show them that we're a great place to be. And my question to them is, what evidence do you have to show that that you are a place where they can be well? And so, what did you do to be ready? Can you give account for that, not in the.. I'm what, I'm wagging my finger, but honestly, truly an assessment of yourself, what did you do to be ready? What do you give deliberate attention to? What is it? What are you paying attention to on purpose? Not accidentally stumbled on. What do you actually paying attention to? And what do you have an



active pursuit of, what is it? I'm thinking around those areas, can give people kind of somewhere to go. We'll put those reflective prompts in the follow-up syllabus and resource list. So, that's just that. Dr. Branch, you brought up the Diversity Strategic Planning Process. Yay! What's going on with that? Where is it at? What is it? I didn't hear about it. What's going on with that? What do you mean there's a planning process happening? What's going on?

Dr. Anna: Oh, man, fun times! Fun times. If you like a little good structured disorder and input from all sides. Where we're going, what we're trying to do? So, part of the aim after the rapid Equity audit was to say, "Okay, the central administration went through this kind of comprehensive and intensive process to get at where we are." And what does the path forward look like? But the rest of the campuses did not, and so, what did that look like? And so by Chancellor-led unit and in the central administration, part of the question, that was part of the question. One of the outcomes in the equity audit was that less than 10% of people thought we had attended to diversity in strategic planning well in the past, that we have metrics around. What we aim to do, and that we have the funding and resources behind it. So that was that that's a note of import. And then ninety-nine, ninety plus percent of people thought, it was risky for us to keep doing what we were doing. So, part of the strategic planning process was a response to that.

Was how do we, in a systematized way, get better at planning, thinking about diversity with some intention, identifying our metrics and our goals, and start to put funding behind it. But not in a closed-door, 10 people sat in a room kind of way, but in a broad participatory way, during a pandemic. It was a fun year. But all the campus, in lots of ways, we got back in and I really applaud the university community, writ large for that because it took different forms on each campus. But the engagement was high with leaders, in particular, being really intentionally parts of the work. And so, from the diversity strategic planning assessment survey that went out then, over 5,000 participants that, then got distributed out to the campus leadership to stakeholder meeting, constituency groups rooms, groups large and small, that came together in departments, in schools to talk about what is the work we need to do? One of the ways we talked about it, in the guide, in the toolkit was where are we right now? What's our current state? And then in our ideal state? Where do we want to be? And the planning process was what do we need to do to get there? Like, what's the gap? That's the minding process.

And so, from about January earlier this year, the building of the inclusive Academy was our kickoff that depose him that happened in January 2021 through August. We are getting to a place where we're getting ready to share draft goals by campuses. And so, by the time this podcast goes live, will be in a place where people can kind of see. Well, what did my campus say we need to work on? What does it mean for us to integrate back to our language for Pursuit? The purposeful pursuit of diversity as an Institutional goal? What does that look like? Right. Because diversity isn't just fuzzy, we should be able to talk about it and look at it and see if we did it. And how does it integrate into the meaningful day-to-day work that we associate with the institution? And the biggest thing I would say about the strategic planning process is that it's clear and clearer for all of those that participated.



And the next steps that the work of building the institutional commitment to diversity is not the work of the University Equity and Inclusion office. It was really clear and it's really clear span across has evolved the ways in which for the institution to realize its commitment — all parts of the institution has to own it.

Now, the planning process and the planets emerging is the way in, which we can be clear about that. Here's how this looks, right. Here's how the commitment to diversity and inclusion shows up in Human Resources. Here's how it shows up in Arts and Sciences. Here's how it shows up in Mason Gross School of the Arts. Here's how it shows up on Rutgers Newark. Here's how the shows up in clinical operations. That ability to show that breath is what the strategic planning process helps us to do. So this not just a global question. What is Rutgers doing about diversity? But what is the University Equity inclusion office doing? Right. And for us to be able to point to an answer and to be responsive to our community in a real way and say, "Here's what's going on an annual basis. Here's what we said we're going to do. Here are the things that we're working on. Here's what happened to this year. Here's what we're working on for next year."

The work for us ahead is Phase because we've never approached the work quite in this way. And what I appreciate about Rutgers coming here and in this new role is really learning about the campus. What I have deeply appreciated is one of the breadth of work that's been happening. But we have told our story well, right? And so being able to give some visibility to some of the amazing work that's been happening throughout the university. So there's a view sense of like, oh, wow, it's not just talk because so much of the frustration that people have around the University where we are, where we've been, where we're going is, is this just transitory. Is this a George Floyd overreaction? Is that why we went through this whole work? Or are we going to really do it? And so, my hope I had is asked me to continue to do this that will be clear to say, here's what happened in 2020 and 2021 at Rutgers. And then being able to have a look back book basically, but says, oh and then that happened and then that happened and here's what this looks like and it just wasn't in one corner. But here's how that work really got integrated. Here's how we were purposeful to go back to where we started in our Pursuit.

Dr. Joan: That was a really concise recap, Anna because I was like, that's going to be a 15-minute question and you tighten that right on up. So there are people who are listening as a pastor would say, I'm about to close here. They're people wondering what their role looks like moving forward. So the question, then it's for you. I have my own answers but for you, how can people find themselves in the work that is equity, diversity, and inclusion as we move forward toward this Beloved Community? Toward the more Equitable campus, toward this inclusive Academy? How can they find themselves in that work?

Dr. Anna: My question, my brain, I think in quotations so often. Where my brain went to was if can't run, walk. If you can't walk, crawl. You know, but that notion of progression. And that the ask is that everyone locate themselves in the work of progression, but it doesn't have to look the same point. That's not the ask, right? And in that, that, that if you, if you are a leader, your



responsibilities look different. It's creating the space for those who report into you to take active steps, right? If you're an individual say, well, I'm not respond only responsible for myself. Then it's saying for yourself. What ways can you clench in to the work ahead? And the work on the solo level is multifaceted. It's and what ways can I learn and can I grow? In what ways can I take apart? Can I apply for an initiative, so that I can active work? Here's a skill that I have. Here's the community I'm a member of. Here's the need that I see.

What if you did this to help reach out to that part of the beauty of the diversity of this community. And when I say diversity, I've missed this point, which I say in all my talks. When I say diversity. I don't mean black and brown. Like, there's often the mistake that that's the only thing I'm referring to. But part of the beauty of the real diversity on so many levels, neurodiversity, religious diversity, sexual identities, and you name it, we got it right here at Rutgers. Means that the ideas for the ways that we can engage our community and build understanding, are extensive. There is work for everybody. There is a community for you to join there, something for you to learn for all of us and to embrace that work. And that, as we begin at some individuals to institutions. As we embrace it as an organization, don't sit on the sideline. That's the number one thing. And that don't say, "Oh, well, I went to that workshop last year." That was your last year's progress. What's this year's progression?

Dr. Joan: That's right.

Dr. Anna: What's my unit doing now? And once I've learned it, In what ways did I enact it? Because that's a different part of the project, right? That active learning. That learning by doing. That's the work ahead. And so, so don't just sit on the sidelines. That's, that's where you locate yourself, find a part. Whether your work is in the community, whether you workers on campus, there is room for all of us to enter. And part of our work in University, In equity and inclusion is making sure the mechanisms exist. So that when you want to raise your hand, come find us, find your people on your campus, and say, "I want to be a part of the road ahead and I just want to figure out what that looks like." Because that's where the real work of inclusion will happen. Compositional diversity is just the first step, right? But really compositional diversity is an invitation to a whole new level of work.

Dr. Joan: Locate yourself in the work of progression. Doctor, Enobong (Anna) Branch, senior vice president for Equity. You are just fabulous. I tell you that all the time. But truly it's, it is, it is fun to hear you talk to the broader audience in a way that we talk more casually all the time. And so diversity, inclusion Equity access, justice, as those are all things people have a lot of questions about. And so, as Dr. Branch's shared, do, when you are locating yourself in the work of progress, Look us up. Look on the website. We have resources that are available. But again, just what did you do to be ready? Always be ready.

Dr. Joan: And so, if there's nothing else, Dr. Branch, any final words, anything you want to leave with the people?



Dr. Anna: You got what to say in that, you just give me a setup, if you stay ready. You don't got to get ready [crosstalk] and you know?

Dr. Joan: You ain't got to get ready. It's in the text!

Dr. Anna: And you know, that for those of like we're being real casual. No, we're actually being real serious, right? Because if you fit, the idea is that if you understand a thing, you're not surprised when things go wrong because you understand the complexities [crosstalk] and that's what it means to be ready. But let's not just say, "Oh, I have got a diverse team, but I didn't expect that there might be disagreement about the path forward." This is actually what it means to get ready in the best ways. Like, to really embrace that. Diversity is an outcome of operational organizational excellence. That embrace that, that work and so it's not a kind of simple straight line. But if I've done my good work to be ready as a leader, [crosstalk] great things happen. So, if you stay ready, you don't gotta get ready.

Dr. Joan: Cnd for the people who think we just talking, we still read books, we still watch webinars. The work that we are talking about applies to us too. It is not a work that we get to opt-out of because we studied it in school and we do it for the organization. We still do, he's saying, they're still things we are learning more about. Expanding our understandings of all sorts of things. And so, I just go back to, what do you do? What did you do to be ready? What do you give deliberate attention to? What do you taken active pursuit of and thinking about how you locate yourself in the work of progression?

[Sounds]

Dr. Joan: Welcome to office hours, a segment of this show when we ask our guests to share resources for us to continue to learn about the topic of the episode. Doctor Branch, what do you recommend our audience read, watch, or listen to, that will give them a better understanding of the work of equity diversity and inclusion?

Dr. Anna: Love the question and I love to geek out on good tools. So I'll share some of my favorites. Number one is a small book that I reference often. And it's, What If I say the Wrong Thing?: 25 Habits for Culturally Effective People. I said a moment ago in the podcast, how much fear gets in the way, how much brain space people lose with their fears of getting it wrong. And the reason I love this book is what space would it create if we actually engaged in the work of resilience on purpose. That is, we let go of the like, "Oh, I'm going to get it wrong." But like, if we just said, "okay". Let me, let me just own that. At some point, If I live, I will get it wrong. So what happens after that? This is that book. Here are the range of ways, the things you need to keep in mind. It's a hundred pages at most. Really great short resource. Absolutely. Check it out.

The other one I love. I'm a my big Brené Brown fan. So the things I was talking about in terms of leadership, it's one of my favorite books. When you think about leadership. What does it mean for leader leaders to lean in this intentional way, right? To kind of get ready. She gets into the



nuances of Readiness in ways that are about kind of vulnerability and staff awareness that I think are really key to be a good leader. No matter what kind of leader you are. And even if only person leading right now is yourself, right. That resource, and it's just both book and podcast form. That really helps you do some thinking and reflective workarounds. How do I embrace this in particular diversity and Equity space, What's the vulnerability that this whole conversation around diversity is creating for me? Right. And so, how do I get comfortable with that, Right? And that and not try to shrink the vulnerability as something to get rid of, right? And so, that's a really awesome book. Kind of leave into that notion and just all of her work in general. It's really about that.

So I should... She's amazing and I think all of her books and that's all of her books really Give it that, but that's one of the reasons why I'm a big fan of that resource. And then the last one of a limit myself to three is Diversity's Promise of Higher Education. That for some folks who are just like, okay, I got the like, let me do my work versions of this. Those are the two first resources I gave you that are really, really excellent to help you think about how do I do this and notice that I didn't give you University books. In general, I gave you good, good growth books. But this is a good substantivework. But what's the business of higher education? And how do we understand, who was working for who it's not working for? And what does it mean for us to take that work of diversity? Seriously. It's a great all-around book, no matter what kind of role you're in. In fact, the staff, administrators, students who's curious. Diversity's Promise for Higher Education. Making it Work is the subtitle, and that book is by Darrell G Smith.

So, What If I Say The Wrong Thing?: 25 Habits For Culturalyl Effective People by Verña Myers, Dare To Lead by Brené Brown. Those are three of my favorites.

[Sounds]

Dr. Joan: I can't thank Dr. Branch enough for that truly wonderful conversation. I hope it inspired all of you to get ready. Part of the practice of holding space is making room for genuine curiosity. If you have questions about anything we discussed, which is a lot. Check us out online at diversity.rutgers.edu or send us an email at diversity@rutgers.edu.

Before we end, I want you all to reflect on the following quote by Audre Lorde: 'In our work and in our living, we must recognize that difference is a reason for celebration and growth, rather than a reason for destruction.'

From the Holding Space team, myself, producer Joy Collazo and editor Francine Henry. See you all next time.

[End]