00:00.00

louisekuchel

Okay, it's a recording so how about we just test out our voices first cat would you say hello excellent and Katrina beautiful. Okay, we'll start so I start by saying welcome to the podcast. Oh.

00:06.24

Kat

Hello. Everyone.

00:09.89

Katrina Martin

Hello. Everyone.

00:18.32

louisekuchel

Actually before I do start I can edit all this um Catt how do I say your surname ah hi. That's what I thought okay cool. All right, let's start welcome to the podcast Dr Katrina Martin and Kat ha hi.

00:19.27

Katrina Martin

Are.

00:21.98

Kat

Oh har high yes.

00:35.20

Katrina Martin

Thank you so much for having us.

00:39.48

louisekuchel

Yay! I'm so glad you're here now today is like a big new experience for me. 2 people to interview at the same time which I've not done before. So thank you for both being so patient with me as we move forward and my second. Second time I've interviewed somebody in the us. So um, thank you so much for being here on ah the day before the day that I'm recording. So you're you're yesterday aren't you.

00:59.26

Katrina Martin

Um.

01:06.20

Katrina Martin

Yeah, we're a little bit behind in more ways than 1 Ah.

01:09.20

louisekuchel

Ah, well, we're going to talk about that? Excellent yeah as well. Not excellent, but we'll we'll get to that. Um, so let's start with the icebreaker questions which I'm going to put to you separately. So let's start with you. Katrina. Um, can you tell us this is all just a bit of fun. Can you tell us what your favourite animal is and why.

01:30.18

Katrina Martin

Um, well I had to really think about this because I I just really like all animals. Um, but 1 of them that I really like that's kind of perhaps a little different is the squirrel I love squirrels. Um I just think they're so funny and quirky and cute. Um. They remind me a bit of my children. They're kind of energetic and playful and always hanging off of things. Um, and then they also remind me a little bit of myself because they often overthink and overprepare. Um, there's lots of multitasking when you're a squirrel. Um. And so I feel like that kind of represents a lot of my neuro divergence of of who I am and then ah also they're just really cute like when they eat with their little hands I mean adorable come on.

02:18.61

louisekuchel

They sure are when we moved to the Uk I just remember we were like videoing squirrels and taking photos of them because we don't have them here I guess the like the the closest thing we have here are possums. Ah so yeah, yeah.

02:30.30

Katrina Martin

Oh wow. Yeah, they have this these cute little fuzzy tails and they communicate in all sorts of really interesting ways. So they have like a verbal communication. But then there's a lot of behavioral communication that they do um with their tails and their bodies as well. Which I find really fascinating.

02:45.16

louisekuchel

Oh yeah, cool I Love it when people relate it to neurodivergence as always could and what about you cat? Do you have a favourite animal.

02:53.92

Kat

I do I did not have to think about this at all. Ah, my favorite animal are dogs um dogs are one of my special interests or passions as a neurodiergent person and I could probably talk about them for the. Entire day much less the entire duration of this podcast. Um, but I um actually feel like there's a lot of Parallels between um, ah, animal behavior and human behavior and also. Injustices that we've created um that humans face and injustices that we've created that animals face. So maybe that's another rabbit hole we can explore at some point.

03:31.71

louisekuchel

Ah there's lots of rabbit holes and we would be here for all of your night if we kept going I'm sure I'd love to talk to you for hours. Um, that's yeah dogs. We've had dogs before definitely um. So the next question I have for you is a little bit more serious. Um and I'll start with you again. Katrina if there was 1 thing that you could change in this world. What would it be and why.

03:59.87

Katrina Martin

Well I agree with some of your previous guests that this is kind of an unfair question because there's a lot that needs to change in our world. Um, but I'll stick to kind of the topic at hand here. So I think that um you know it as it relates to Neuro divvergence. Thing that I would love to see change is the assumption that there's such a thing as a person who is normal normal is just such a lie and I think that so much of our world has been really calibrated around this false notion of what normal is and what it means.

04:26.20

louisekuchel

Yeah.

04:37.82

Katrina Martin

Um, and really, what is considered normal is simply what's been designed to be accessible and supportive of white able-bodied neurotypical men and if you don't fit this Profile. You are really just expected to um, either change yourself. To fit within these expectations or find a way to accommodate your own quote difference. Um, so I Really think that um in order to create an equitable world. We really have to embrace diversity in all aspects of Humanity. Um, and in a sense. Um.

05:01.32

louisekuchel

Yeah, yeah.

05:16.43

Katrina Martin

We have to enlarge the round hole rather than wearing down the edges of the Square peg.

05:21.13

louisekuchel

Absolutely I love that Yes, that Poor Square peg is getting bashed so cat. What about you? What would you like to change in this world. Yeah.

05:33.88

Kat

Ah I mean everything Katrina said and also um I'm not going to name. 1 thing I'm going to name a couple things because I can't marry them. Ah um, ah land back to indigenous people. Um.

05:44.20

louisekuchel

That's okay, go for it.

05:54.30

Kat

Reparations to ancestors of enslaved black people. Ah and I would also take all of the wealth of Jeffrey Bezos and redistribute it among the working class.

06:06.16

louisekuchel

Yeah, wow. Yeah yeah, we we are ah we have similar situation with the indigenous and the first nations people in our country as well. I feel very passionate about that as well and try to be an ally for that. But um. Yeah, it actually gets me a bit I get a bit emotional and sad about hearing all the stories all the time. It's just just awful. Anyway, we'll keep going and we keep working moving forward but I totally hear you and I totally agree. So let's move on to our next question. Um. Again for use first Katrina if that's okay, can you expand on your so on your story a little bit for us and and tell us about your profession your your current role. But also how how does it relate to the square peg trying to fit into the round hole.

07:02.59

Katrina Martin

Well I think um, one of the most important aspects of who I am in my profession really comes from who I've been my whole life. So as a neuro divergent person. Um I personally flew under the radar in school it wasn't until I was in. Closer to third grade that anyone actually recognize that I don't read in the same way that everybody else does um but then interestingly even after I was diagnosed dyslexic I wasn't given a lot of support from my school because they thought I did just fine without it. Um. And you know in 1 way they were right I got good grades I had high comprehension. Um, but what they didn't acknowledge really was just this immense effort that it took for me to keep up with everyone else. Um, and I always find it frustrating. Um. That if a disabled person doesn't struggle in a way that society views as valid. Um, and that they manage to kind of get by. They aren't given the supports that would really allow them to excel. Um, oh in any case, all through primary school I really kind of made myself. Small enough to fit through that round hole that was social and academic kind of acceptability and then when I got to college I found that that no longer worked that my self-developed strategies really kind of stopped being effective. And for the first time I found myself really getting stuck. Um and I remember this one professor in particular um, who required us to learn all of the latin names of all of the plants and animals that were native to the area and I just couldn't do it. I couldn't say the words so I couldn't think the words I know and but because I couldn't think them I couldn't remember them there just was no way that my brain could hold that information and I remember um going to the professor.

08:56.49

louisekuchel

Don't think anyone could do that surely who are the people that can do that.

09:13.96

Katrina Martin

Um, and trying to explain why this particular task was just so hard for me and just being met with this kind of concrete stare and total lack of understanding and empathy and I failed. Um, and I think that experience along with others of being Neuro divergent myself. Um, really kind of pushed me to create this this company that we have Now. So I'm now the founder of um Burgess learning system which is just so exciting to even say loud and I've really dedicated my life's work. And my kids' college funds um to create this curriculum that really supports children who don't fit neatly into Society's expectations of what they should be or how they should Learn. Um, and I Really believe that without this curriculum.

10:06.63

louisekuchel

Yeah.

10:12.85

Katrina Martin

Um, children who hopefully are using us instead. Um, but if they weren't they would be in programs where they'd be coerced and manipulated into appearing to be like everyone else. Um at the real risk of losing their authentic selves. So.

10:31.78

louisekuchel

Yep.

10:32.63

Katrina Martin

I I believe very strongly um that diversity is a gift to be cherished and not a malady to be extinguished.

10:39.50

louisekuchel

I love that oh I just love it so much. Thank you so much and thank you for founding what an amazing organization that we're going to talk more about. Thank you and Kat what about you? Can you tell us a bit more about yourself and how you got here.

10:57.80

Kat

Yeah, absolutely um, my name's Kat um I am a late diagnosed multily neurodiergent person I'm autistic and ad hd I'm also multiplely disabled um and when I ah.

10:58.60

louisekuchel

Today.

11:16.22

Kat

First read this question and knew we were going to be asked this on this podcast I I mean I immediately identified with this metaphor of square peg in a round holele. Um, and it almost runs parallel to the one that I have often used to describe to people. What. It's felt like to come into my neuro divergence or understanding of my neuro divergence in adulthood which is um like I felt like um I was given the user's manual for a mac computer and it turns out I'm using a pc this entire time and so.

11:49.39

louisekuchel

Well.

11:51.88

Kat

When I finally got the correct user's manual. It was like okay like things are clicking. This is making a lot more sense than what I was working with before. Yeah um, and ah with kind of the idea of a.

11:56.00

louisekuchel

Wow I Love that analogy.

12:08.72

Kat

Square peg in a round hole I mean I I feel that in my neuro divergence. Um I feel that as a queer person too and I think there's those are just 2 examples of so many identities where um were either were conditioned by the world either by kind of. Implied um socialization or through explicit socialization and things like social skills training or aba were taught to kind of shapeshift and the world says I see that you're a square peg I'd really prefer if you weren't a square peg. So we're gonna put like. An extraordinary amount of time and effort and energy and resources into making you as round as possible and sometimes you become so round in that process that it almost looks like you fit into that round hole and then moments of burnout happen. Ah moments of mental health crises. Um.

12:50.58

louisekuchel

Yep.

13:03.39

Kat

And it kind of reveals the inordinate amount of energy that it takes to make that shapeshifting happen. Um, and so again I Really like this metaphor I think I'm I'm now in kind of a period of my life where I'm trying to intentionally unmask. Um, I'm trying to embrace the square peg that I am as opposed to putting so much energy just trying to force myself into the round hole just because it's It's so much more Sustainable. It's so much better for my mental health and it's so much better for like the world I'm trying to help create for all of the.

13:27.43

louisekuchel

M.

13:42.24

Kat

Um, neurodivergent kids that are coming after me.

13:44.55

louisekuchel

Thank you so much for doing that work And yeah I'm sure you can imagine that didn't take me long to come up with the idea of the name it it. It really does feel that way doesn't it. It's so much about the shape of that peg.

13:51.96

Kat

Um, yeah, absolutely yeah.

14:00.67

louisekuchel

And if I love the way you're saying you're going back to being more square and and you're very proud and and we want you to be square. We want you to be a square peg. We don't want you to change. Yeah, anyway, that's that's wonderful. Oh thank you I Love the way both of you articulate.

14:04.54

Kat

I And he yeah.

14:18.69

louisekuchel

Ah've heard you before you wonderful way with words. Thank you? Um, so my next question is for Katrina um I have heard Katrina that you have been on a journey professionally when it comes to the type of support that you provide to the neurodivergent community. As you know this podcast is about embracing differences and moving away from behaviourism as we've just discussed and towards neurodiversity affirming practices I understand you have a very important life experience in this regard. You've just told us a bit about that. But can you tell us more about how you moved away from behaviorism and what that felt like and what what led to that was there a light bulb moment was there something that happened.

15:02.96

Katrina Martin

Yeah, absolutely um, well so I've had a lot of formal education and a lot of work to undo but that's jumping ahead a little bit I think um, all through my formal education. Um I was really raised with this sense of um. The behavioral model being touted as the only real intervention is the only real hope even for neuro divergent children and the idea of evidence and research and data were so clearly prioritized. They were just. The most important metric of success. Um, and while at times in my education. There were kind of isolated instances of um you know cries for inclusion even within these inclusive settings. Um, you know. Neuro Divergent kids were still being subjected to behaviorist interventions and um so I kind of I I went along I I learned and I I would raise my hand every now and again and say you know this. Pretty ableist you guys like you know, don't you think um, there are different ways that people can express themselves or behave. Um, but it was um, it was a hard it was a hard line um and so you know I I didn't really see any other options at that point. But you know that was really my own fault. Um, and it's because I wasn't really looking in the right place I was looking where I'd been told to look I'd been looking at research articles I'd been looking at textbooks and listening to people who were experts. Um, and yet shamefully I never really listened to the community. Um, and so finally a little over a year ago. My husband and I took this trip just the 2 of us got away from their kids and responsibilities and. We sometimes do this and we go out and we you know we dream together of what what life could be like and so we were dreaming and I was talking about. Um you know my frustration um over the lack of my effectiveness at changing the world from kind of inside the system. And I talked about what I would do differently if I was the one in charge. You know it's that's the dreaming everybody you know if I was in charge. What would I do differently and so it was just this kind of basic vacation daydreaming. Um, and that was kind of how it started so.

17:44.37

louisekuchel

You know.

17:46.68

Katrina Martin

I've just been incredibly privileged to have the opportunity to make this dream a reality. Um, so I started bridges in 2021 the very beginning of 2021 it's just been over just over a year now.

18:00.48

louisekuchel

Oh well.

18:02.53

Katrina Martin

Um, and shortly after I started cat joined me and man talk about a perfect fit like she and I just peanut butter and Jelly I tell you we worked together very very well. Um, and so you know I think the biggest shift at that point was setting aside.

18:07.31

louisekuchel

Yeah I can see that very clearly. Yeah I can see that.

18:22.36

Katrina Martin

Um, this notion of Expertise Um I had to put my pride my education. Um, all of the research that I'd done and I had to just move it out of the way. Um, so that I could do what should have been done all through my education and all through my research. I Had to listen to the lived experiences of the community. Um, and so that's what I did and that's how I started my journey. Yeah.

18:47.74

louisekuchel

Oh My cat's looking at my reactions I can see oh my goodness. Seriously I feel like I'm looking in the mirror in so many ways you and I are very very similar and even that bit where you said. You go dreaming with your husband and talk but I do that with my husband too we talk and he says to me. He often says to me, you know you can't just fix all of this right Now. Don't you and you know I find it so frustrating my goodness now I know why chebron my? ah. Person that I was telling you about chebron Lamb. My Wonderful mentor suggested I talked to you far out. That's really blown me away. Sorry I had no idea it was so similar and I had no idea it was so recent I thought you'd been doing this for much longer. Wow I Love you.

19:44.36

Katrina Martin

Yeah, thank you so much. Yeah, it's It's all it's been a whirlwind for sure. It really has and you know we are just so um, excited that we have gone from beginning of our company to releasing the curriculum in the amount of time that we have and have just.

19:45.88

louisekuchel

You're excellent. Ah.

19:50.91

louisekuchel

Yeah.

20:03.71

Katrina Martin

Seen So many people who were waiting for it. They were just waiting for us to create this curriculum and it's been such a joy.

20:06.44

louisekuchel

Yeah, oh yeah oh I bet it far out I'm so excited. Um, okay so I'm going to ask the next question now of you again. Katrina um, so I don't know if you've listened to this episode. But. Ah I hope most listeners will have listened I interviewed an amazing neurodiversity affirming occupational therapist. Her name is Carly Coleman here in Australia in an earlier episode and Carly explained concepts of sensory processing dir flaw time. Um, and a lot more about the role of neurodiversity affirming occupational therapy and if you haven't listened to that episode I encourage listeners to go back and and do listen because she really introduces a lot of these concepts at the at the beginning. Okay. Oh I thought you put your hand up sorry I'll to edit that out. Oh you did.

21:00.20

Katrina Martin

I I know I did I did Lou I just was just going to say um, would you ask cat why she joined the team too because it's a cool story too I'm sorry.

21:07.19

louisekuchel

Oh oh so sorry of course ah well that is coming in this question I was going So I'm going to start by asking you about this and then don' I say what drew you to this team cat is that okay now is that ah is that all right to do it that way.

21:13.97

Katrina Martin

Oh I'm jumping ahead I'm so sorry Lou I messed it all up. Yes, it's but.

21:24.71

Kat

That is totally fine. We just didn't want to make the editing too easy for you? yeah.

21:26.73

louisekuchel

It's fine. You've got.

21:31.81

louisekuchel

It's all right I love I Love it when I can just go delete of a big section. So um I won't say all that again I was just trying to set up I'll don't worry I'll edit all this out I was just trying to set up the.

21:35.13

Katrina Martin

Um, okay.

21:46.58

louisekuchel

Fact that we have discussed some of the basic concepts of these these things these neurodiversity affirming practices and then I was going to ask you what led you to develop um the the actual bridges learning system. So shall I just keep going. Okay, right today we won't go in over those concepts again because we we did that before but what I really want to know is what led you to starting the bridges learning system. So what is it about the bridges learning system that is unique and groundbreaking katrina.

22:22.35

Katrina Martin

Well I think this is really the first time. Um that a curriculum has been developed from this direction. So our goal was to create a curriculum for autistic and neuro divergent kids created by the autistic and neuro divergent communities. Um, so we wanted to move away from this notion of social skills as though there's 1 right way to communicate or socialize and really embrace the idea that there's just so many right ways. Um, of course we know the world is built to accommodate you know, only certain. Types of people. Um only the round pegs. So our curriculum really focuses on changing the environment. Um that children live within by developing more neurodiversity-ffirming support people. So the slps ots mental health practitioners families. Um. All while at the same time building up. Children's awareness of their own individual needs and developing self-addvocacy skills so that they can get those needs. Met. So um, you know we take our charge of creating materials that are neurodiversity- affirming. Very. Very seriously um, every single detail of our work has been influenced in some way by the community our content and teaching strategies came from priorities from the community. The workshops were written by Neuro Divergent curriculum writers even the world that the curriculum takes place within the world of the insight sprites was the brainchild of our autistic illustrator. Um, and because of that because of all of these influences rather than in spite of them. Um. This is a curriculum that I really believe is groundbreaking and will change the world.

24:17.81

louisekuchel

Fantastic. It sounds like it will I had a good look look at it on your website and it looks fascinating. So thank you for explaining that and what about you Kat what drew you to join this team.

24:31.90

Kat

And yeah, um, so I was late diagnosed as neuro divergent in adulthood um, not all that long ago and upon kind of discovering this new piece of myself. Um. And I had previously. Um ah known about disability justice and kind of had one foot in the disability justice world but upon kind of discovering my diagnosis a lot of things fell into place all at once and a lot of things just started to make sense in terms of like. Things I had noticed about myself and things I had noticed in interpersonal react or interactions in people around me and so um, after learning I was neurodivergent I really wanted to do something related to um. Ah, making the world a better place for neuro divergent people. Um and two things that were really important to me is I had learned through my own experience kind of the dangers and how easy it is for neurodivergent people to be socialized to Mask. So. Camouflaging our neurodiergent traits and replacing them with ones that look more neurotypical so things like I mean like I've been I've been standing here this whole conversation fidgeting and rocking when I'm masking I don't do any of those things I sit completely still and I cannot focus on. Anything that's going on at the conversation but I look slightly more neurotypical in those moments. Um, and yeah, yeah, it's it's thank you yeah yeah thank you I appreciate that

26:08.20

louisekuchel

Wow I'm glad that you feel comfortable enough to just be yourself right now Fidget away I don't care if you walk around the room.

26:21.65

Kat

It does it really does make it easier when there's um, explicit permission like that given um, just because yeah, the um ah the current is strong and it definitely feels like swimming upstream at some points. Um, but I had. Was aware of the really negative mental health and physical health implications of masking. Um and knew that that was kind of an important value of mine that I wanted to do something around supporting neurodivergent kids learning that they don't have to mask. And then also a really big thing I've noticed mostly in people outside of myself who were diagnosed yeah or earlier in life is the presumption of incompetence from people in their lives. So um, kids who get diagnoses at 3 4 5 ah earlier in life. Um I mean there's still so much. Really bad information about neuro divergence that is unfortunately usually the first that gets shared with caregivers of newly diagnosed kids that. A parent hears that their three year old was just diagnosed as autistic. Um, like the first resource they get is like a handout from autism speaks and like your kid needs to go to 40 hours a week of aba therapy and now every interaction that that caregiver has is completely 100 % shaped by. Um, this really limited understanding. They have of who their child is and what they're capable of and so they start treating their child and assuming oh you're not, you're not absorbing the things that are happening in this conversation. Those things are going over your head. Um, you're ah. Not capable of enough to go to college. So we're not going to worry about um, taking steps forward in the college application process or it's not possible for you to maintain a job so we're not going to work on anything to work on job skills or get you started with an application process. Um, and. I mean that has obviously many material negative impacts. But also the internalized ableism um that occurs when a child who then turns into an adult if they're lucky they turn it into an adult when they've heard all of those messages again and again and again. From parents from teachers from doctors from therapists their entire life. Um, they've then internalized this message of oh I'm I'm not good enough I'm incapable I'm incompetent because I'm neuro divergent. Um, and that had.

29:12.33

Kat

I'd seen a lot of that going on in my life growing up and um, it never fully sat right with me and I never really had the language to explain why until getting older and kind of gaining some disability justice vocabulary and also learning about my own neuro divergence. And so those 2 pieces like ah wanting to create safety to unmask and wanting to create a world where we always presume competence those were 2 really important kind of values of mine and things in the back of my head so this is my really long-winded explanation of.

29:47.10

louisekuchel

Ah, it's not oh sorry? Yeah oh thank you? What can I say to you that was fantastic. That was brilliant and I'm so glad I asked you that question I.

29:50.19

Kat

Ah, um.

29:59.62

Kat

A.

30:05.10

louisekuchel

Like I mean I have obviously an experience of N equals one as being a parent to see seeing what exactly what you're saying I can definitely relate to it. It's the it's that pathway of the um, starting with the aba and trying to fix the child and.

30:08.38

Kat

Rain rain.

30:23.65

louisekuchel

It's all so deficit-based and impairment based and just awful. It's awful, but it's still happening and you know when we were talking before we started this interview. You asked me if we could talk in the future and I would love to torture you more in the future cat.

30:25.47

Kat

Um.

30:36.24

Kat

Um, in.

30:38.83

louisekuchel

About what's happening in Australia versus other countries compared to other countries and you know that is that is exactly what's still happening here and the the alternative to that is.

30:46.42

Kat

Um.

30:52.58

louisekuchel

Still very slow to take off and and that's why I'm here doing this my little bit I'm just a parent trying to do a little bit to get that message that you just so brilliantly articulated out to as many people as possible, especially those young parents who need to hear that what you just said.

30:54.73

Kat

Um, yeah.

31:08.51

Kat

Um, right? Yeah, thank you for making a space for me to say it.

31:10.74

louisekuchel

So thank you for saying it really appreciate that. Um, oh you've always got a space with me. Trust me, thank you so much. Um I guess we better keep going I want to keep talking but you you but we'll I'll go keep going. Um. The next question I have is for Katrina but feel free to both answer. It's absolutely fine. What is the neurodiversity affirming curriculum katrina that you provide and the c I noticed you've got this cbridge system and how can australian therapists and parents access or interact with it. Do you have many australians involved already.

31:54.38

Katrina Martin

We are so excited to say yes, we we do. We probably have almost as many australians as we do people from all other countries combined including the us. Um, we have had a huge ah uptake by. Australians and it's just it's been so wonderful to hear and I think that's why um you know Kat was mentioning before this. Um I think it's amazing that um you know australians seem really ready for this really ready to take that step towards being neurodiversity- affirming. And how wonderful that is. Um I think here in the States. It's been a little bit slower. Um, but you know we're making our way. Um, and so I'll tell you a little about the curriculum itself. Um, so our flagship. Program is called the sea bridge. It stands for social emotional acuity bridge. Um, and it's a series of workshops so we have 41 hour workshops um and they're used about once a week with autistic and neurodivergent kids. Um, either individually like in 1 ne-on-one sessions or in a group setting and um, each week. There's a different topic that children explore and we've mentioned some of them already but others are you know, different styles of communication. Um embodied emotions. Authentic social connection. So we're covering some of the same topics as you might hear about in like a social skills program but we are not a social skills program because as we're talking about these different concepts. We're not teaching that this is the way you need to communicate. Um, we're not putting placing value on one form of communication over another or one form of socialization over another um instead we really validate different ways of interacting and communicating um and then we teach ah, both. Children and the adults how to build these bridges when you have a different style so building bridges across neurotype we recognize that um the the double empathy um perspective is is real that um, often autistic folks. Ah, really understand autistic books. Um, but ah, better than a neurotypical person might understand that autistic person. So um, really a lot of the work that we do is on trying to build this understanding across 2 neurotypes. Um.

34:36.63

Katrina Martin

So The workshops really ah themselves take place in this really beautiful imaginative imaginative place and it's the world of the insight sprites. Um, and it's really, ah, fun and engaging for kids which is I think a big part of. Success Honestly like this is not some dry boring even replacement for flashcards. This is really um, you know, bringing kids into this world. That's a lot of fun and where they can really see themselves. So We take kids through activities that take place in the world of the insight sprites. Um, we have activities like choose your own adventure stories Puppet shows, videos. Um and the world of the inside sprites is really familiar. Um, but also just different enough to be. Really fascinating and Interesting. So For example, um, the insight sprites go to school in a log that's a fallen log in the Forest. Um, and so it gives you this impression that um, this world is just beneath your feet somewhere. Um and we have been so incredibly fortunate to have. Um, our insight sprite architect who is also our illustrator and is um, just a brilliant creator come up with all of these amazing and Imaginative. Um characteristics of the world and the sprites themselves. And so it allows kids to really find themselves. Um not because of the skin color or the gender of the sprites but because of who they actually are and I think this is really key um to kids being able to identify. Me This is really key to kids being able to identify. Um, you know what their own needs really are because they don't have to say oh you know I really need to spin in order to feel comfortable instead. They can see our character dot spinning in one of the activities and say oh I do that too.

36:35.79

louisekuchel

M.

36:44.64

Katrina Martin

And so it takes the pressure off. Um, there's not this like you know, looking at the child and saying Okay, what's different about you What what is it specifically that you need Um, instead there's this lovely um way to kind of relate to something that is completely Normalized. Um, within this world of the insight sprites so they go through these different activities. Um, and then they're led by the SlPOt or mental health practitioner through a series of discussion questions. So We start in this really safe space. Um.

37:17.33

louisekuchel

Okay.

37:22.58

Katrina Martin

That's familiar but different and then we move to discussion where we go back into our own world and we talk about how these concepts really relate to our classroom and our community. Um, and then we have a follow up activity that kids do at home with their caregivers where they really. Dive deep into how does this concept relate to me as a person and so it's just this really beautiful I call it a learning arc where you have this? Um, nice flow um of engaging fun content that um. Allows kids to really connect with it. Um, from a safe space all the way to how it's meaningful to me as an individual. Um and so so that's that's what the sea bridge is um obviously I have a lot of love for this curriculum of it's been.

38:15.60

louisekuchel

Yeah, yeah.

38:18.36

Katrina Martin

Ah, created over the past year um it's it's taken a while but we are really really excited about how it's come together. Um, and right now we're selling it really to slpots and mental health practitioners. Um. Families and caregivers that are interested in using it. We encourage to find you know a provider who is using it. Um, it's really I think helpful to have somebody who can facilitate these types of conversations amongst groups of. Neuro divergent kids because really when you're when you're talking about concepts of neurodiversity. It is really helpful to have more than 1 person present. It's helpful to to understand diversity. Um, as it's really situated within a community. So um, that's that's what the sea bridge is.

39:02.99

louisekuchel

Yeah.

39:10.44

louisekuchel

Okay I was gonna ask you that? yeah.

39:15.52

Katrina Martin

Um, it's available online which is how we've gotten so much interest from Australia and can be delivered either remotely or in person.

39:19.98

louisekuchel

Yeah, yeah.

39:26.10

louisekuchel

Okay I was going to ask you some. You've answered some of the questions that were in my head and at the end there is there any particular age that the kids need to be or.

39:36.55

Katrina Martin

Yeah, so we've designed it for kids age 5 to 10 Um, that said it's that the content is really appropriate for all people. Um, you know I think these ideas of um, learning to.

39:40.42

louisekuchel

Okay.

39:48.77

louisekuchel

So.

39:54.89

Katrina Martin

Ah, identify and validate your own needs come up with boundaries and express those boundaries to other people super pertinent for um, middle school and high school age kids as well where we really see kind of the um.

39:56.15

louisekuchel

Um, yeah.

40:12.79

Katrina Martin

Little bit of the the myth for kids that are much older. Um is with the characters themselves. So the insight sprite characters are all designed to kind of resemble elementary age kids. Um, they also you know we we know a lot of um.

40:23.53

louisekuchel

Yeah.

40:32.23

Katrina Martin

Adults who really like Pokemon and um, my little pony and so if you have a group that really, um, you know enjoys cartoons and things like that then it may not be a problem at all.

40:33.30

louisekuchel

Yeah, yeah, no, it's true. Yes.

40:48.20

Katrina Martin

So we do have a demo we encourage anybody who's interested to check out the demo and that allows you to really think about it. Um, you know press the different button see what happens and think about it with your your particular group of kids in mind.

40:51.10

louisekuchel

Yeah, yeah.

41:01.14

louisekuchel

So yeah, okay, great. Yeah I'll link all of those things the demo I think that's on your website isn't it and um, I'm just thinking about people who are listening here in Australia and and you've explained how they can interact with it. It's an online program. Um, what about teachers is this this something that you. Because I have a lot of teachers that listen I think here in Australia um, what? What do you think their their role would be would it be something they could recommend to the families of students that they have and that kind of thing. What what do you? do you think about that.

41:34.61

Katrina Martin

Yeah, definitely I I Also think there is a place for this in schools. Um, you know, Ultimately, we hope that our classroom um will be in like a public school system.

41:39.82

louisekuchel

M.

41:51.31

Katrina Martin

Um, where Neuro Divergent neuro typicalical kids are sitting side by side learning the same thing learning the different ways of communicating are all valid. Um I mean how important is it. You know it's so important for neurotypical kids. Um to really hear these messages as well. So I do think that there is a place um in the classroom. Ah you know for this curriculum and certainly for this this content and this message. Um, and really um, you know it's about kind of developing an appreciation of diversity as opposed to. Um, exclusion or even tolerance of diversity. We really want an appreciation because it is um, you know all of the different ways of thinking of being of communicating. Um that make up a community really add.

42:29.24

louisekuchel

M.

42:45.29

Katrina Martin

Add value to it.

42:45.58

louisekuchel

Well I think this adds something to my Armamentarian when I'm advocating with education departments here in Australia often. We're saying we don't want you to do these behaviourist. Sort of approaches of the carrot and stick and the rewards and sanctions and those things are not working for we we argue all students based on what we've been learning from experts like Dr Mona delahook and Dr Russ Green but this offers a solution to. That will benefit everybody and provide that connection and insight that you're you're saying. So. Thank you again. I'm going to explore this further that they're going to be sorry when I get on to something they sort of go oh here she goes but this will be really good to. Um.

43:28.15

Katrina Martin

Yeah, absolutely.

43:39.39

louisekuchel

To add. So. Thank you, it sounds fascinating and wonderful I wish it was around when my son was younger. Um, okay so I'm now going to ask cat a little bit more I mean is there anything else. Sorry I'll brief I'll edit this. Is there anything else Katrina that you would like to say that is on offer from the bridges learning system in general. Um, that people here in Australia might not know or might need to know before we move on to the next section.

44:11.63

Katrina Martin

I don't think so Kat can you think of anything did I miss anything when I was talking about what the sea bridge is oh we we have one webinar. Yeah, we can. Yeah I think.

44:16.69

louisekuchel

Do you have webinars I think I was going to ask you that.

44:18.52

Kat

Oh.

44:23.13

louisekuchel

Okay, that's fine. It's it's not the focus and I'll get rid of that.

44:28.35

Katrina Martin

We we? Also we we do have we have um blogs and free resources with the blogs we do. Um, we do a lot of kind of talking about. Um.

44:32.69

louisekuchel

Yeah.

44:41.21

Katrina Martin

Moving away from Aba becoming more neurodiversity affirming and then we have invited guests who are New Neuro Divergent write blogs for us. So that's that and then we have some free resources on our website as well I don't know.

44:52.24

louisekuchel

Fantastic Thank you so much for that I will make sure that I connect your website to the to this episode and I have a Facebook group where I can share some of those resources and lead people to those blogs which would be very interesting to read. Thank you and Kat. What else some were you going to say.

45:12.70

Kat

I Just wanted to add that What's turned into one of my favorite parts of the seabridge curriculum is actually not for ah the kids It's for the families. Um, it's a component that we're calling nurturing neurodiversity and it's a. 2 to 3 page. Um handout that gets sent home with families along with every single worker every 2 workshops so there's 20 throughout the whole program and it's basically kind of a.

45:39.37

louisekuchel

Our round.

45:45.92

Kat

Ah, download of the topics that are being taught in workshops but for parents and then kind of more information and links to other resources where if they really identify with something or they're like Wow. That's that's my kid to a T. There's resources where they can kind of explore that further. So. Um, things like I mean one of the really early ones is about um the workshop titled being together being me which is one of the workshops where that really establishes like there's no one way to listen. There's no one way to Communicate. There's no one way to play. There's lots of different things. There's lots of diversity within each of those kind of ways of being around other people. Um and all of them are equally valid and so kind of part of the nurturing neurodiversity for like that specific workshop is educating families. Um. Of like did you know that listening can look more than one way and that for a lot of neurodiergent folks like maintaining constant eye contact or focusing on doing like the perfect amount of eye contact and then the the subtle look away and then look back that actually distracts from listening and. And leads to that person doing a worse job of paying attention and so um, maybe your kid is like me and they ah look into space while they're talking to other people and they rock while they talk or they rock while they listen um but just kind of ah extending the learning from the classroom. To the home so that the child is really being supported in all areas of their life in being able to unmask and kind of be their authentic selves and be as supported as they can as a Neuro divergent human.

47:37.39

louisekuchel

That's such a good point and I was thinking that while you were talking sometimes 1 parent or you know 1 parent's sort of a head on the journey and another one has not yet realized and caught up and it's so important for for even. Siblings. Let's not even start that conversation. But yeah other members of the family you're right, not everybody's on the same stage and and has the same level of understanding so that's a really good point. It's something that might be basic to the mum. The dad might not have realized things like eye contact of course so important to. To go over that again. Um, okay, let's move on I want to talk about now if we can behaviour as it applies to children that you work with cat. What do you want parents and teachers to know about behaviour and neurodivergent children.

48:31.35

Kat

Oh I have so many thoughts about behavior and Neuro divergent children and I will ah keep them relatively brief. Um, when I think of behavior which is a really loaded word. Um.

48:40.10

louisekuchel

Thank you.

48:49.94

Kat

I think of kind of 2 categories just for the sake of this conversation I think of um behavior that's sort of benign in its impact on other people and it can actually be like really positive in its impact on yourself. So when I say that I mean things like. Um, stimming like that does not really have a negative impact on the people around you and if you claim that it has a negative impact on you as the person watching someone stim. That's your own ableism that you need to unpack. It's actually not that person's job to stop stimming in front of you so things like stimming. Um. Like monotropism only focusing on interests or topics that you're really passionate about as opposed to like um, ah, really like small talk or moving from one topic to the next or I mean not following. Neurotypical social conventions. So like not making eye contact none of those things really negatively impact other people and so for those kinds of behaviors I think it's a really like stay in your lane moment for neurotypicals and kind of an opportunity to evaluate. Um. Does this actually affect me or am I just uncomfortable. Um, ah by am I made uncomfortable by disabled people because of my own ableism and then in addition to these kind of benign behaviors that can actually be really positively impactful for the neurodevergent person. Um, there's also those behaviors that are harmful to self or others which are um I think often only looked at at a really surface level and are not fully understood by people outside of the neuro divergent person. Um, and I am actually going to make a dog analogy here. So um, I'm really interested in animal behavior and specifically like dog body language. That's a thing I nerd out about um on my free time. Um, and um, like a really. Common thing in the culture of dog ownership at least like in the United States I don't know if this is true universally, but um, dog ownership is super common. A lot of people have dogs and very few people understand how to read dog body language. And there's also really specific expectations that people have about how their dogs are supposed to interact with other dogs with the world with stimuli with people that think they're cute and fluffy and want to compe them. Um.

51:34.59

Kat

And dogs are very communicative animals. They will let you know when they're not okay with the situation and so when you take your rescue puppy to a highly stimulating dog park and you introduce it to like The. Australian Shepherd that's pulling on their leash because they're so excited to meet this other dog and your new Rescue dog starts fear licking or whale eyeing or turning their head to the side like however that animal communicates. Like hey Mom I'm kind of scared right now could we maybe leave the situation. Um, if you as the dog owner miss those behaviors that dog is going to learn then okay cool This person who's supposed to advocate for me in these moments and not put me in situations that are not okay with me. Um, I'm going to have to advocate for myself and the ways that dogs advocate for themselves is escalating to louder and louder behaviors until whatever the thing is the dog or the person or the stimuli that's making them uncomfortable and so the next time or I Mean. It's not as neat as this there's There's a few more steps between point a and point B. But after a dog has learned my human's not going to advocate for me I need to advocate for myself the next time a dog or the dog sees another dog in a walk that they don't want to say hi to they might escalate to snapping or they might escalate to biting. And in that moment. Um all the humans outside of the dog in the interaction say like Wow What a bad dog. They have really, they're really poorly trained. They have really badly behavior and there's very little acknowledgment of what was happening in the environment and In. Um, the people whose job it was to set that animal up for Success. There's very little acknowledgement of all the factors that went in to let to lead that dog to make a choice that is actually super reasonable. Um, given the context that they're being continually put in situations where. Ah, their know isn't being listened to and so they have to be louder and louder and louder to get their needs met and so okay, circling back to the human world. Um I mean the exact same thing happens every single day in the human world when um. Our our kids are communicating to us all the time and that communication is not always understood and there are dire costs when we miss that communication. Um, and so when there's harmful behaviors either to sell for others in like a classroom for example, um.

54:19.34

Kat

Ah, like yes we want to avoid that behavior happening and we can't just look at that moment we need to understand how have we failed to set this person up for success in getting their needs met and listening to their know and respecting their know and putting them in a situation where um. They have a choice to like show up in the ways they want to rather than being forced into showing up in that way. Um, so I guess where I'm going with that is um with behavior.

54:48.93

louisekuchel

Yeah, yeah.

54:55.67

Kat

Um, I think there's a real need to kind of reevaluate. Um, where and why we're placing responsibility. Um and really moving responsibility from ah like nerdivergent people in moments of crisis to. The people around that person who are supposed to support them and saying like how can we change this context to better fit this person's needs.

55:19.56

louisekuchel

Okay, yeah, it's interesting. You use that dog analogy because we have a dog here and she I but actually the dog trainer who helped us with with her is going to come on the podcast I just haven't had the chance yet to interview her. But she is super anxious and has um when I know a lot of people say their dog is anxious but our dog everything you said whale eye that that head down. It's that the body language we have learned so much about which has been so good for our family um to work on that work that that analogy actually describes a lot of our life our everyday life with our dog because we are often doing that with her and saying no, she's guarding that or no she doesn't understand what's happening right now. And you can see her behavior change. So I do that does I relate to that a lot. Thank you for explaining that and you're right that is that is very similar to what happens to neurodivergent particularly students at school experiencing. Ah, those that that ableism where the responsible adult with them may not be recognizing what's going on for them and they'll often say there was no trigger I don't know they just suddenly did something. Because they've not picked up on on what's really going on for them. So yeah, 1 wonderful description of that. Thank you I now want to ask you Kat um, a little bit more about the intersectionality of neurodivergent youth and the criminal justice system. As I believe you have some experience in that area and quite a few of my listeners have asked me to investigate this further I've not yet found the right person. So maybe this could also be another episode but if you could briefly let us know about that your experience is in that area. Um, of you know the the connection between neurodivergent youth and the criminal justice system.

57:22.62

Kat

And yeah, absolutely this is also a question I could spend a very long time going down many rabbit holes. Yeah um, and ah just one My one preface is like I am not a currently or formerly incarcerated person and like the.

57:26.92

louisekuchel

Yes, so I think we might do that? yeah.

57:41.31

Kat

Most expert people to talk about this are people who are have been incarcerated. So that's my disclaimer outside perspective. Um, ah, but my my experience that I do have my background is in social work and the. Position I was in actually before coming to bridges was doing social work in a prison setting. Um and through that experience I learned a lot about kind of the intersections between neuro divergence and the criminal justice system. And I mean the number 1 thing I think of is how overrepresented neuro divergent people are in the prison system and not just I mean yes in the numbers that we do know and that we do have and I would argue the numbers are actually way higher. Than we know of because of how many people um are undiagnosed or were misdiagnosed and I mean a lack of diagnosis and lack of adequate supports is absolutely a factor in what led those folks to be ah. Criminalized in their youth and then criminalized in adulthood for many of those same things and to involvement in the criminal justice system. Um and also acknowledging that. Um, ah people who are nerd iergent while black or autistic. Well black. Um, face a really specific kind of criminalization for their race and for their disability compared to like a white neurodivergent person or a white autistic person. Um and something else I'm really interested in kind of at these intersections. Is the parallels of behaviorism in the prison system and in our education system and in like quote unquote therapy practices. Um, and so the the same exact behaviorism that exists in schools and in aba and all of those programs. And exists in the prison system but kind of like tenfold or one hundredfold. Um like the entire system is built off of what's desirable behavior and what's undesirable behavior which is I mean. Sometimes related to let's reduce harm that's being done to human beings and sometimes it's related to like what's an arbitrary standard that we've come up with for what we like and what we don't like um and there's a whole bunch of rewards and punishments that get used to reinforce those.

01:00:26.00

Kat

Ah, desirable behaviors and weed out the undesirable ones and I say that it's the same behaviorism but tenfold or a hundredfold because of how high the stakes are in that kind of a setting I mean ah like the rewards and punishments are things like. Um, are you going to release on the day when you're actually supposed to release or are we going to take good time away from you and you're going to get back to your families later than you expected or are you going to get to be housed in general population and like have. Human interaction other than just with officers or are you going to be housed in segregation or are you going to have restricted visits where you can't hold your 2 year old kid on your lap. You have to visit with them through the glass and explain to them why like. Mom can't come on to the visiting room. We can't hug today. Um, and so ah, yeah, it's just a really I mean there's this quote which I don't remember who it's by in this moment but we can judge a society by the state of its prisons and I think. Prisons are such a kind of poignant and concentrated example of everything that's that's wrong in society at all levels and ah kind of from all perspectives and I think behaviorism and how that relates to disability and race and gender and. Motherhood. Um, we really see all of those things coming to a head in our prison system.

01:02:02.75

louisekuchel

Yeah, it's really sad and really really concerning I mean we think it's tough enough on the outside but that's why I think a lot of my listeners have asked about exploring this further because well because of just the general concerns. But youth who have had some experience with maybe being arrested for something or you know spending just even a couple of nights locked locked up. Um, you know what? they've experienced and what they've expressed is that even though the people. Looking after them. What do we call the officers the the correction service people um would be aware that they may be autistic or neurodiergent in some way that doesn't change anything about the way they are experiencing that interaction at that time. So. Ah know it's ah no, it's a bigger question and we need we we can't go talking about it for too long here today but I'm very interested to talk about that further in the future because parents want to know what they can do about that and then as you mentioned there's also what we call in Australia the school to prison pipeline.

01:03:06.50

Kat

Um.

01:03:14.69

Kat

And yes.

01:03:16.56

louisekuchel

A lot of our young people experience and you've probably got a similar terminology for it which is just awful but that is what's happening so we do need to address it and um and see what we can do as allies and people caring for others to to try and um.

01:03:20.50

Kat

He yes.

01:03:32.89

louisekuchel

Make some improvements or something I don't know advocate and and try and help. So. Thank you very much for answering that we'll talk about that more in the future just to finish us off now we're getting towards the end Katrina is there anything else that. You would like people to know or that is important to you that you would like to communicate now.

01:03:50.89

Katrina Martin

Um, I think one of the things that we believe strongly as a company um is that the path to becoming neurodiversity affirming is a journey not a destination and you won't get it right? All of the time which I think can be really hard for people who. Perceive themselves as experts or parents. Um, you know I definitely fall into ah both of those categories is um, you know having a hard time sometimes giving myself the Grace. Um, but you have to keep listening and keep learning. Um, one of our values at bridges is that we don't yet know what we don't yet know, um, and so we we realize that we have to we have to keep learning. We have to keep an open mind and continue to enact what we learn and what we hear from from the communities that we serve.

01:04:45.16

louisekuchel

I agree with that too. Of course we're never really there and it's hard. It's still really hard so we need to acknowledge that totally. Yeah, thank you and um I usually ask guests at the end of each podcast episode if they have any mentors or books or resources. They would like to share Kat do you have? You're so brilliantly passionate and interested. You must have some special interest related someone that really matters to you. Can you share that with us.

01:05:22.56

Kat

Ah, yes, and I'm going to create a moment where you need to edit edit this out and I apologize um Katrina ah Katrina and I made a list of things we wanted to shout out and I cannot figure out where we put it. Can you drag up to me into that.

01:05:28.57

louisekuchel

Okay.

01:05:37.86

louisekuchel

That's okay I'll pause for a sec dim. Okay so we're recording again and just to finish the episode. Um Kat I was just wondering if you could tell us, do you have any mentors or.

01:05:41.75

Kat

Okay.

01:05:53.76

louisekuchel

Books or resources that you'd like to share with us. You've been such an absolute wealth of knowledge and amazement today and I can't wait to hear what really drives you and what matters to you.

01:06:03.60

Kat

Thank you I appreciate that? Um, ah Katrina and I've come across such a an amazing laundry list of resources in in creating this curriculum and we have quite a few that we want to just name and shout out if they're of interest to anyone else listening today. Um. And the sort of preface. All of this is that we recommend listening to autistic and neuro divergent voices. First if it's anything surrounding or adjacent to the neurodiversity community um ah terra vance the ceo of neuroclastic is phenomenal. Um, they've written a handful of articles for the neuroclastic website that we absolutely adore and have been really foundational actually in some of the workshops that we've created for our curriculum um articles that we want to shout out right now are parts 1 and 2 of the weaver and concluder theory or wo serious there. We go ah the identity theory of autism um, and very grand emotions. Um there's also a handful of social media accounts. Um, kind of going back to this idea of. Ah, many ways of knowing and academia is not the only form of expertise we do a lot of learning from ah real people living their lives and sharing that experience and information with the world. Ah 2 that we wanted to call out are.

01:07:29.63

louisekuchel

So.

01:07:34.43

Kat

Ah, Tiffany from fidgets and fries on Instagram and Facebook and the justice for Matthewrussianinstagram and Facebook pages and that page is focused mostly on advocacy for. Matthew russian the black autistic man who was wrongfully incarcerated a few years ago um and then ah, an activist and author that I personally really love and has really shaped my understanding of disability justice is miamingus her blog.

01:07:52.98

louisekuchel

Wow. Okay.

01:08:07.73

Kat

Leaving evidence is phenomenal, um, and specifically the post on the medical industrial complex is like 1 that I recommend reading about 17 times and giving yourself like a month long break in between all of the reads because you need to digest it. Um. And then ah, kind of circling back to the conversation about behavior and my very long dog tangent that I went on um the sources of aggression checklist from we are like your children is a really really helpful resource that was written by autistic adults. Um, as kind of a beginning guideline to help I mean mostly parents, but it could be like educators also for trying to identify the source that's leading um kids to act in aggressive way. So are there sensory needs that aren't being met. Are there.

01:08:56.46

louisekuchel

Yeah.

01:09:03.80

Kat

Physical needs or medical needs that aren't being met. Um, so we highly recommend that resource. Um Ots for neurodiversity on Instagram Facebook and teachers pay teachers. They have awesome classroom and clinician materials that are neurodiversity affirming. And then um, ceos through learn play thrive for any practicing clinicians and then finally Rachel Dorsey um on all social media platforms and then she also has a course on learn play thrive. So that's our very long list.

01:09:36.91

louisekuchel

Wonderful. It's wonderful though and I'm so lucky I've got this amazing website where I can I can link all these resources to each episode and then people just click on it and then there it is so and I'll be obviously putting those.

01:09:46.72

Kat

Of clinic.

01:09:53.60

louisekuchel

You know mentioning those links as Well. How wonderful was that? Thank you? What do I say? Thank you, Thank you? Thank you? Both of you. You're amazing. Both of you. It's been wonderful. I Had no idea really it was going to be so Good. So Thank you? yeah.

01:10:12.91

Katrina Martin

Thank you so much Lou we really really appreciate appreciate the opportunity. Um to talk to ah all the people in Australia like what a cool opportunity for us. Thank you.

01:10:22.20

louisekuchel

Yeah, yeah, well as aies. Well, we'll be very keen to hear from you. There's a lot of very desperate parents and teachers as well. We's a real educat I mean I know we've talked about this but there's a real education crisis.

01:10:24.33

Kat

Um, in a.

01:10:38.28

louisekuchel

Think happening everywhere really so the teachers are desperate for some assistance and a lot of those resources you've mentioned and your wonderful articulation of the issues will help them and that's really all that matters isn't it. We just want to help. So thank you? both.

01:10:49.54

Kat

Um.

01:10:54.56

louisekuchel

All right? Well I'll sign us off now the music will start soon and we can um we can say goodbye. So thank you very much.

01:11:00.37

Kat

Thank you so much.

01:11:02.30

Katrina Martin

So thanks Lou.