

Transcript

00:00:01 Claire

Welcome to the Repair-Ed podcast where we reflect on education and reimagine equitable futures. I'm Claire Neaves, a researcher who worked in education in the city of Bristol in the Southwest of England for over 15 years. In each episode, I'll talk to educators and thinkers about current injustices in our schooling system and their ideas for creating fairer educational futures. This podcast forms part of Repair-Ed: a 5 year project, funded by UKRI to examine educational inequality in Bristol's primary schools.

00:00:34 Claire

Welcome to another episode of the Repair Ed podcast. My guest today is Jodie Clarke, an autism specialist and consultant, trainer and speaker. Hi, Jodie.

00:00:44 Jodie

Hi.

00:00:45 Claire

Could you tell us a bit more about yourself and how your work relates to education?

00:00:50 Jodie

Yeah, sure. Umm, I'll try and keep it brief. So, yeah, I'm an autism specialist and I am late recognised autistic and ADHD myself and also a parent to three neurodivergent children which I always add in because I feel it's really important, certainly when I'm working with families, training, speaking, that people are aware that I wear several hats. So all of my work, all of my training, all of my support is based not only on personal experience of parenting, but personal experience of living as a neurodivergent person.

00:01:27 Jodie

But as well as sort of my academic, theory-based, knowledge-based...hate the word qualification, but I've also got that sort of academic background as well, so I bring all three hats into my into my work. I work, my work's like constantly evolving really. So my work started off very much as a frontline practitioner working with, directly with children and young people, mentoring, supporting families and parenting, to sort of an advocacy around getting needs met. Now, obviously, that's always fallen into education and a lot of the advocacy around EHCP's (Education, Health and Care Plans) and needs assessments and just working alongside children, young people, their families, to really gain a really

accurate, valuable insight into what it is they need in order to thrive, particularly in education, and that's always informed all of my reports that then inform EHCPs.

00:02:38

My work has sort of slightly developed in that I'm doing a lot more training and speaking now, which for me feels really really positive because for a long time, particularly in my own sort of clinical supervision, I was like, there's so many families that need support and I really wish I could support. So now if I go in and I train a school or I speak to a group of professionals, such as educational psychologists or CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health) practitioners. I feel like, OK, I'm hopefully making a difference for more children, more young people, more families.

00:03:07 Jodie

So yeah, it's it's quite varied. It's quite varied, my role which is really, really nice. I still really value my, my direct on the ground frontline practitioner work and I still do work directly with families, just a smaller number really, but that's really important for me because every single family I meet, every single child or young person I meet has had a different experience, have a different, you know, experience of the world and how they process the world and, and I think think that's a really, really important thing is that I can't tell the story for all autistic people. I can't tell the story for all autistic children because you know, I hate it when people say, oh that they're an expert in all autistic, autism like I'm not. I I I'm not. I can't be an expert in every person's individual experience. So all of my work is completely bespoke and it's completely child and family-led.

00:04:07 Jodie

And that's, you know, something that I try to preach a lot about is that we're you know, we have to really, really stay child, child-centered, young person-centered and unfortunately, I think our education system has massively lost sight of that...

00:04:22 Claire

Absolutely.

00:04:23

Through the various different pressures and tick-boxing and policies and crowd control, unfortunately, and again in terms of my link with education and why I talk about schools quite a lot, most of the young people I work with have hit a level of mental health crisis and high levels of autistic burnout. There's not enough research in that area at the moment.

00:04:52 Jodie

What we do know anecdotally and from one very good non-published research paper is we've got all of these children and young people that are 'school refusing' and I'm sort of doing a little inverted commas there cause I hate that term. So I work with a lot of children who are unable to attend school and, and have significant school trauma and burnout as a result of school and...

00:05:17 Jodie

My ADHD head has just stopped that track and now I don't know where I was going with that, but essentially what I see all of the time is children being harmed by our education system and when I say that in certain circles or circumstances or environments I'm looked at like, I must be absolutely crazy, because how on earth can this place of nurture, care, where you know everybody believes that this is the best, but not everybody, but that this is the best place for our children to be and government, you know, particularly during COVID, were all about getting bums back on seats and even still, now this massive drive for attendance.

00:05:58 Jodie

I said it to a pediatrician a year or so ago, maybe longer, talked about a young person having school trauma and it...they were a medical pediatrician in A and E and they were like, what do you mean, school trauma? And I was like, well, they have trauma from school, and it was just like, I was speaking another language because there's still this massive blind spot of understanding that actually, and this isn't me school blaming or teacher blaming – I'm talking about the institution as a whole. There are still, there are still so many aspects of our education system that are not only not conducive to neurodivergent neurology but in some, for some young people, immensely harmful.

00:06:45 Claire

Yeah. So, let's, let's get into that a bit because our, so our project and this podcast looks at educational injustice and, and you know, we will absolutely not shy away from using the word harm when it comes to school and the schooling system. And like you said, that's not to put the blame on teachers and schools, but it's looking at the systems and, you know, the way things are set up and I think you know one of the things that I think having been a SENCo (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator) for you know, many years in my previous career was you, you can't talk about injustice in education without talking about special educational needs and disabilities. And so yeah, could you give a brief outline of some of the ways in which the system is unjust for pupils with special educational needs.

00:07:36 Jodie

Yeah. I mean, there's so much. There's so much. There's so much. I'll try and keep it brief. There's so much in, there's so much in the environment. So, one of the things that I'm really fortunate and privileged that one of my supervisors is Dr Luke Beardon, and he has coined the 'Golden Equation', autism plus environment equals outcome.

00:08:00 Jodie

And the environment is like our main focus. What, what is going on within an environment that isn't leading to positive outcomes for our children and young people?

00:08:12 Jodie

And the environment - there is so much that falls into that environment box. So on a on a sort of umbrella scale, we've got, we've got policy and we've got and this is where my brain sort of fails me slightly because I'm not one that can soak up statistics and policies and lots of government writing. That's not where my, where, it's not where my skills sit but on a very basic level, just the the just the policies that we're seeing in schools, around attendance, uniform, behaviour are all immensely ableist.

00:08:41 Jodie

In it it's it's come up again for me in the last, in the last week with this heat wave, where parents are awaiting emails from schools to tell us whether or not they're allowed to remove their blazers.

00:08:56 Claire

Mmm.

00:08:57 Jodie

There's no autonomy for our young people to make good choices and trust what their bodies are telling them and the repercussions of that are massive, particularly if you're a an autistic student who you know, feels and senses not only just uniform in a different way, but particularly heat intolerance and all of that sort of stuff. Um, attendance policies. And this is another thing I talk about a lot. Our attendance policies insist on 100% attendance.

00:09:26 Jodie

As an autistic adult, I cannot physically work full time. I'm massively privileged in that I am self-employed and I work in a way that allows me to energy account. Now if I go into schools and I do quite regularly go into schools either to deliver a training or sometimes just sitting in a classroom to observe a a, a child or young person.

00:09:48 Jodie

Those environments are so demand heavy. They are so demand heavy from a, from a sensory perspective, from an executive functioning perspective, from a social perspective that expecting our, our autistic children and young people to be in school 100% of the time is not conducive to their learning or their mental health, so our attendance policies do not take into account how difficult, challenging, hostile the environment can be for so many of our neurodivergent students.

00:10:26 Jodie

Yet there's this massive drive and I'm constantly talking about attendance in my training and when I'm supporting parents and you know, we are striving for 100% attendance for our kids and yes, some of them are managing 100% attendance. But what I'm quite commonly seeing outside of that is social burnout or a level of burnout that means after school during the holidays, at weekends, those kids aren't able to manage play dates with friends, kicking the football around the park, family days out to the zoo, holidays, they - all of their time outside of school is recovery and recharge and, and some of the older young people that I work with who hit, who've hit burnout in secondary years, when we look back over there, educational careers they realise that they were putting so much energy into surviving the school day every single day that actually they missed out on childhoods. You know, I'm working with teenagers who missed out on getting the bus into town on a weekend and these maybe to government, maybe to some people, these things don't seem important, but for, for our child development and for our feeling of belongingness with families and, and belongingness with peers like those things are really significant and are really, really important.

00:11:55 Claire

And yeah, a couple of things strike me there like firstly, it's it's it's strange that that's not obvious because if you speak to any teacher, they'll talk about this cycle of burnout in themselves, right? You know I experienced it as a teacher. So you, you are literally kind of getting through until the holidays and then you just crash. I was always ill in the school holidays, so you'd expect teachers to be able to, to see that that would be, you know, have such a big impact on autistic pupils and the other thing is just this question around, you know, what is education for and you know, you're absolutely right to mention those, those social skills outside of school, which not only are kind of holistically really, really important because, you know, we want young people to develop those skills.

00:12:48 Claire

But if you look at the EHCP's that a lot of these children will have they'll actually have, you know, things around friendship and preparation for adulthood and, you know, travel

independence and all those things on them. So it's almost like we're preventing autistic children from meeting their goals by expecting what everyone else is expected to do in school.

00:13:12 Jodie

Yeah, yeah, yeah. And.

00:13:16 Jodie

Yeah, completely that. And on top of that, you've got also these levels of exhaustion and burnout, which then you, know in, and school trauma and everything else that compounds all of that.

00:13:30 Jodie

You know, not only you know they're not given access to it at the time, and then when it does come to the time, like when it does come to the time where they're out of the education system, they're just too exhausted and trauma-ed to manage the world.

00:13:44 Jodie

It's just, it's just really hard. Like I I work with some incredible schools and I can think of one school in particular that I've spent a lot of time at and who – it's a primary school and they've got two incredible SENCOs. And I'll go and spend like a couple of days with them doing various different things. And they took me into a reception class and it was, I don't want to use the word chaos because there's negative associations with that. But but the level of need in that class and you know I said, “how come you've got this child here? Like, “this is I think what this child needs,” blah, blah, blah, blah. “They really need a specialist setting. How come they've ended up with you?”

00:14:30 Jodie

“Well, you know, we've met them and we told the LA they need a specialist setting, but there isn't a specialist setting, so we've been told we have to have him in our environment.” And I said, “that's actually, that's not, that's not safe. It's not safe for him.”

00:14:46 Jodie

Um, when I talk about safety, I don't mean about physical, just, just about physical safety, but emotional safety, sensory safety, relational safety like, nobody's got – there's no resource to keep him safe and it's absolutely heartbreaking. And this is a school that are doing so much work with, with their staff, with their parents, with their children, with their

students, and yet they are also in a position where, the 'powers that be', as I call them, are insisting on situations which, yeah, aren't safe.

00:15:26 Claire

And that's something that I recognise a lot, you know, from my time in schools, the, you know, the recognition by pretty much everyone, that mainstream is not the right setting for a particular child, but there just being no option because there isn't a special school place available.

00:15:48 Jodie

Yeah, a big part of what I used to do as advocacy, so I would quite often I'd spend a lot of time meeting families, meeting young people and doing EHCP needs assessments. These were always either me doing them free of charge or parents having to privately fund, um, because I'm independent and don't work within a local authority and the hardest thing for me was I've got to a point now where I do less and less reports because I'm saying to families, "look, I can come and meet you and I can meet your child and we can, you know, collaboratively put together a plan of need. But I cannot guarantee you that that report will then be followed and accepted. Even if it is accepted by your LA and they put the recommendations in the EHCP, I still then can't guarantee that that will actually mean a difference for your child day-to-day because there's not enough money. There's not enough resource."

00:17:00 Jodie

I will quite often say to families now, "come back to me when you get to tribunal level" because I know in a court of law, because I am suitably qualified, my report will stand up in a court of law, so I've got to the point where I'm like, "look, let's not spend the time and the money now, let's wait to the next stage."

00:17:20 Jodie

Like, ooh, I was going to swear then! It's awful. It's awful to have to say that to families. I've taken a massive step back from advocacy and you know, I used to attend a lot of meetings with local authorities advocating for kids, particularly when I've been working with them long term and I knew them really, really well.

00:17:37 Jodie

Uhm, I've stepped back from that massively for my own self-preservation. I've had to fight for my own children and had to attend, you know, two tribunals for my own children. I've been exposed to the parent blame and all of that, that comes from being a parent of

neurodivergent kids, which is potentially a different subject altogether, but, um we, you know, you know just, just been posting to a parent actually this morning.

00:18:08 Jodie

Parents are being traumatized by the SEN system and, and again, for people who haven't experienced that or don't have insight into that world, that might sound really dramatic, but it's it's genuinely not. It's incredibly traumatising to be sat there knowing exactly what your child needs as a parent and a professional and that actually, some of these things aren't rocket science and some of these things aren't expensive.

00:18:38 Jodie

But, that, that, there's this barrier that's, or it feels so much like, and I think lots of people will relate to this. It feels so much like the whole square peg, round hole analogy. Like, actually, yeah, we know that what you're asking for probably isn't, you know, it's definitely not unjustified, but actually it doesn't quite fit with our system.

00:19:07 Jodie

And I think – this is me going all over the place - but I think a big thing for me as well is that OK, there are needs of SEN, autistic, neurodivergent young people that always need to be very, very bespoke to them. But there are also massive elements of our education system that need changing and could make a massive difference to our EHCP kids, in my opinion, would make a massive difference to all kids, not just the SEN kids, but I have this belief that actually our education system is causing a lot of the issues that we're seeing in our kids as a whole, all of our kids, you know, we know from the various different Young Minds research that we've got some of the most mentally unwell kids that we've ever had and everyone wants to blame parents or COVID or social media, but...

00:20:11 Jodie

It frustrates me that nobody is looking at, well, nobody in power is looking at our education system, particularly when you know, recent reports that have come out. And again, I've not got a brain to remember numbers and stats, but our retention of teachers is so poor. And when teachers have been asked why they're saying because the pressure is too much. The tick-boxing is too much, the workload is too much, so people seem to be accepting that our teachers aren't able to thrive within the education system because of the workload. But why is nobody putting that next to what's happening to all of our kids and, it's, for me, the education system is an ever-increasing pressure pot.

00:20:58 Claire

Yeah.

00:20:59 Jodie

We've got this, this, push all of the time from government to progress, progress, progress. When my daughter was in year two or three, so primary what age is that? 7/8? 6? No younger than that. 6-7 I don't know.

00:21:15 Jodie

Um, I remember the teacher speaking to me because she was struggling with maths - this was before we even knew that she was neurodivergent - struggling with maths and the teacher said, "one of the issues, that's, you know, the whole class is struggling with is that what I taught them last year in year one," - 'cause it was the same teacher - "what I taught them last year in year one was the standard and we, you know, we we did everything we needed to do for year one but overnight, like over the summer holidays, the government had decided that they want all year twos to be at year three level. So in year two I've got to teach some year two and year three maths."

00:21:47 Jodie

And I was like, "why?" And this seems to have continued. I mean, my daughter's 16 now but I still hear this all the time. Oh, you know when they're bringing home homework, that's like, I mean, what, like I did- I didn't do this til secondary.

00:22:03 Claire

Yeah, the system keeps, like getting, the expectations, keep getting higher and higher, don't they? Just to pick up on what you were saying about, you know, how you believe that there are changes that could be made for children with Education, Health and Care plans that would sort of make things better for everyone, I think that's - we've been seeing parallels across all areas. So when we talk about what schools are doing for children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds or what children are doing for, what schools are doing for children with particular needs, or you know what schools are doing to celebrate particular cultural backgrounds like those things benefit all pupils, but they're such small pockets at the moment compared to that, that real shift in just making education inclusive by design, you know, for pupils with SEND, for Black and brown kids, for kids from deprived areas. That's, you know, if we could just think, well, how does education work for these pupils? We'd, we'd get it right for everyone. And the other thing that really struck me when you were speaking is, is how little value we place on parents when we talk about education in this country.

00:23:27 Claire

You know, you're absolutely right that parents are often blamed. You know, we're not seeing the impact. But we did some, our project, did some work with parents of Black children in Bristol and they were able to articulate exactly what their children need. And you know from that we were very easily able to produce a report which said these are the things that children need and you know I guess what you're echoing is that parents, parents know the solutions.

00:24:00 Claire

And those barriers are, are those accountability systems within education, which, like you said, are leaving teachers absolutely broken, and they're leaving the profession. But then when our children opt out, it's not the system that's held to account, it's them, and their parents, isn't it?

00:24:21 Jodie

Yeah, yeah. I mean, for me this just all boils down to that stigma and marginalisation like we as neurodivergent people, as parents of neurodivergent kids, and then if you've got intersectionality that you're you're Black or brown, or you're queer or, you know, you come from a deprived area all of that then just compounds, like I am privileged in that I'm white and I have, I have a level of education, yet still as a parent, when I sit in tribunal, I have been and, and even before tribunal in terms of when my children were assessed, I have been blamed. I have been blamed for being overly anxious or I mean it's written even in one of my kid's reports that I am, that I was not allowing him to go to school.

00:25:27 Jodie

And I'm sat there and I'm going... I I at the time I lived opposite the primary school where he was on roll and every single morning I watched all the parents - and he did - walk past with their kids, drop their kids off and then go and do whatever they wanted to do, whether that be work or pleasure or shopping or whatever. And then go pick them up at 3:00.

00:25:47 Jodie

And as much as, I didn't resent my child at all for that. Like I I wanted to say to them, don't, don't you think that that's, that would be really lovely for me? Don't you think that would I could I I could work more, blah, blah, blah, I could have some rest time.

00:26:04 Jodie

It's - sorry, I've gone off slightly on a tangent, but that stigma and marginalisation and discrimination is, is rife within that system, I've worked with parents, with mothers who -

can't remember who that was that told me this, or whether I've heard it on another training or from maybe from Kieran Rose, The Autistic Advocate. I can't remember, but there was a mother of an SEN child that basically found a man - she's a single parent - found a man to take - look, I'm sure he just wasn't a complete random man off the street - to take him to a meeting because as a, as a mum, as a female in that environment, it's like...you see it, it drives me mad written in reports, "Mum reports..." Mum's mum. In in one of my kids report, 'Mum's hypothesis' and I'm like...

00:27:02 Jodie

So you've got that gender inequality as well. It's just, just massive and the whole 'just Mum' stuff is horrendous. I had a, I had a bit of a, I had a bit of a rant about this the other day actually about this whole sort of link between people and I, I don't know if I'll get the term right, um, people that fall into our lower socio economic status category and because I was having this conversation with a with a parent and about this, this marginalisation, and I was like, hang on a minute, if we are late discovered neurodivergent people who have been also failed by a system historically, that education hasn't necessarily met our needs, and we haven't been successful in education and we have suffered health inequalities and all of that discrimination unknowingly and we have ended up as a result in a lower, uh in a lower SES class or status or whatever the term is...

00:28:13

Mm-hmm.

00:28:17 Jodie

Because we are neurodivergent and then we end up with, we, we then have a family and we have neurodivergent kids again unknowingly. Yet in these areas and some of these in some of these areas within, our schools within these areas there's not enough awareness of that link between actually it you're more likely to be neurodivergent in, in those areas, so therefore we're more likely to have neurodivergent kids, but in those areas, in those areas, parent blame is rife. So this parent was saying, well, you know in, in this school that she was trying to do some work in and saying, you know this, this child is potentially neurodivergent. They're like, "well, it's because no, it's no, he's not neurodivergent. It's cause dad's in prison." Well, actually, dad's potentially in prison because he's neurodivergent with unmet needs and has been failed and whatever else, so like we need to, they've got, nobody's making these links, so then this child is not getting the right approach or the right understanding or the right framework around him because, well, he's like that's because dad's in prison.

00:29:30 Claire

Yeah, and there's so much research out there which, you know, explores some of this in terms of, you know, the, the number of, um, children who are known to the youth offending service who have special educational needs, the number of people in prison who have literacy difficulties. But this kind of, that research seems to sit out here on a limb and isn't kind of brought into the mainstream. You know, when we talk about research in schools, it tends to be what's the best way to ask children questions, and what's the best way to sequence a lesson and a unit of learning and less so much so focused on, you know, some of the intersections that you've talked about.

00:30:19 Claire

And yeah, I I I don't think I've ever heard anyone speak before about that link between neurodivergence and class and you know how schools in those areas are likely to have higher levels of neurodivergent kids. And so they should be set up to, to work for higher numbers of neurodivergent kids, shouldn't they?

00:30:43 Jodie

There's still much so much focus on behaviour and behaviourist approaches, so these kids still in these, particularly within these, within these communities, these kids are still being, just deemed 'the naughty kids.'

00:30:56 Jodie

And so what, so, so what are we going to put in place? "Oh, we're going to put in place behaviour charts and reports and, you know, and making them sit still on the carpet with the hands in their laps," without anybody recognising actually this kid's potentially got sensory needs and, you know, executive functioning challenges and actually this child is communicating distress. It's, yeah, it's, it's, it's just one of the very, it's just one of the very nuanced aspects of frustration, to be honest with the education system.

00:31:33 Claire

And who is allowed to communicate distress is sort of a whole podcast episode in itself, isn't it? You know, the ways in which certain people's distress is, is listened to, but you know it's, it's, it's dismissed in so many sections of the population as you know, and blame is overlaid instead, and I think you know, we see that Black and brown parents talk about that with regards to racism and you know, we've got neurodivergent parents and parents of neurodivergent kids feeling that blame and shame and, you know, yeah, it intersects with class and it's, yeah, you've really got me thinking today about the ways in which we, we

view parents within the system and, and it'd be interesting to explore that further I think and you know part of our research, we do talk to parents and it's interesting that we do get, we get parents turning up to some of our sessions who don't often turn up to parents' coffee mornings. You know the schools say to us, "Oh, I haven't seen those parents come before so you know it's, it's great that they've come in to participate in your research," and there must be a reason for that. I think there's a real kind of breakdown of trust sometimes.

00:32:56 Jodie

Yeah, I was going to say I think there's a massive breakdown of trust and, and fear. Again, it's sort of that intersectionality between the communities that you come from, stigma and marginalisation and speaking out.

00:33:14 Jodie

So if you are speaking out, if you are asked to go into a system and speak out against it, if you fall into one of those stigmatised communities, you're, you're not necessarily safe and it's a really fine balance to, to play because you know, when I'm working with parents and supporting them to advocate and empowering them, um, there's also this massive part of that that actually and, and I see this all the time in my work when parents stand up to the system and when they say, "No, I'm not forcing my child into school. No, I am going to insist that you listen to me as a parent, as the, as the advocate for my child," referrals go into social care. All the time. All the time.

00:34:10 Jodie

It's, it's frightening because we do know that, you know, there's loads of research into this and sort of a separate topic of itself, but all intertwined is the levels of parent blame and FII - fabricated and induced illness - and children falsely being removed from the care of their neurodivergent parents is a risk and I cannot pretend, I can't - I have to acknowledge that when I'm working with neurodivergent parents of neurodivergent kids and say actually, you know, we know this is what your child needs, but we need to, we need to advocate safely. And I work with lots of parents that agree to services and interventions that actually they know will not work for their child and potentially compound their child's trauma. Yet if they say, they can't say no, because if they say no, they're at risk of blocking.

00:35:07 Claire

Yeah, and conversely you know, what schools are saying to us is that the thresholds for social care are just so high. So we've got this kind of double problem where, you know, one group is being seen as needing referral to social care, when we've got children who, you

know, we are really concerned or at real risk of harm aren't able to access the care, you know the level of support that they need, so it's...

00:35:40 Claire

I guess I think I want to ask you now given kind of everything we've talked about, is there anything in the system that gives you hope or things that are working well?

00:35:50 Jodie

Um, yeah, I mean, every time I deliver a piece of training to a school and and, and get feedback, that's like, "that's really made us think." Any time that I have professionals reach out to me asking like teachers, school staff reaching out to me asking questions about students, I'm like, "yes, this is amazing." But a big thing that I'm a big advocate for as well is our alternative provision community. Like we have got some immense alternative provisions. There is a, there is a but to that - in that accessing them and funding for them is a challenge, but I think if we can look at our alternative provisions and if we can start putting some really nice evidence-based research that's coming from them.

00:36:34 Jodie

And, looking at how to get it right and we focus so much on what is going wrong, but there are pockets of things going really, really well, but we need that to be filtered, filtered into policy and filtered into government. We have to accept that the school system doesn't work for all kids and that there is an alternative, but we need to make that alternative accessible.

00:37:08 Jodie

I love working with alternative provisions and seeing kids thrive within those environments. It's really joyful. There are some incredible SENCOs, teachers, schools that are trying so hard to raise the voices and they are listening to parents and there are parent carer forums who are doing incredible work. I work a lot with parent carer forums and there's been some money called the PINS, PINS project, PINS funding, I can't remember what PINS stands for now that's being put out to parent carer forums and it's basically trying to in, in, increase inclusivity in schools, so there's pockets of funding that's coming forward that is giving parents, parent, parent carer forums weight and empowerment. Our parent carer forums are brilliant because like particularly the local one that I work with a lot, they are well in with some of the powers that be and they have a voice within those boards and panels and forums.

00:38:27 Jodie

And and they're, you know, they're parents, they're parents that have, have that lived experience and specialist insight into what not only is it like for their parent, for a parent, but also you know some insight into what their children experience and the challenges faced there as well.

00:38:45 Jodie

There is like, I'm really privileged that I get, I get to supervise some brilliant research as well, being done by autistic people, by autistic trainees and students that is looking at the experiences of neurodivergent kids and a really incredible piece of research that I'm involved with, a trainee clinical psychologist who's looked at the experience of parents of autistic kids and I can't wait for that to, to sort of be finalised and published, because the richness of the data and everything we've talked about – the, the breaking down of trust, the, the fear of advocating for your child, the education system as a whole, it's all within there. It's, it's, I mean it's, it's massive and it can go off in so many different directions.

00:39:34 Jodie

But there is some brilliant, there are some brilliant, passionate academics, researchers that are, that this is a big focus for because they have that personal experience and they have made it out the other end and they want to use their experiences to, to inform best practice.

00:39:56 Claire

Brilliant.

00:39:57 Jodie

So yeah, there's there's, there's, there's lots of pockets. There's lots of exciting, joyful pockets which you know, we have to hold on to don't we? So...

00:40:07 Claire

We do and that's great. And I think that brings us nicely onto our final question, which is the same for all guests on the podcast. What would a just education system look like to you?

00:40:20 Jodie

Um in a nutshell? Uh, I would like, uh, OK, so if I was to put this really, really in a nutshell, I would like an education system that trusted kids.

00:40:35 Jodie

I think generally, societally, we don't trust kids. I don't think we trust kids to make good choices for themselves and for other people, I don't think we give our kids enough autonomy. I think we are still quite Victorian sometimes in our, in our, in our views or our approaches to child, to children, and we don't, it's all about control. And if you're not controlling your child, you're not a good enough parent. And if a teacher isn't controlling the class, she's not a good enough teacher.

00:41:13 Jodie

I, I pride myself on having, I, I, I want to use the word feral but not in a negative way. Feral children. But my children have an awful lot of autonomy and that works for us.

00:41:26 Jodie

I work with lots of burnt-out young people who I constantly I'm saying to services, give them autonomy, trust that they will when they can, trust them to make their own choices about what feels safe, what doesn't feel safe. Our kids have completely lost touch and disconnected with what they feel about what feels good and what doesn't feel good because they're constantly told when they can eat, when they can go to the toilet, what they can learn, how they can learn it and it feels like this containment of our kids is causing a lot of the issues that we're seeing societally with, you know, all of this 'out of control kids'. Well, actually these kids are just desperate to feel in control of their own lives.

00:42:17 Jodie

I love Dr Luke Beardon's analogy of saying that the education system is upside down for autistic kids, where if we gave, and I think it's the same for all kids, but if we gave kids - all kids, but particularly autistic kids, autonomy to hyper-focus and have control and trust over what they choose to learn and how they choose to learn, which is what we are allowed to do at PhD level, then gradually things would, knowledge, insight, interest, curiosity would just naturally broaden.

00:42:51 Jodie

Uh, but we don't have a system that allows kids to learn through exploration and experientially and hyper-focus on interests and I think that's a real shame. When I see that happening, when I work with kids through school trauma and burnout, where we do give autonomy, I see the most incredible, the most incredible outcomes, and the most incredible creativity and authenticity and joyfulness in learning and our, our kids have lost the love for learning because they're told what to do and how to do it. And I think, yeah. Trust and autonomy in education is, and obviously in order for that to happen that the, the, the structure of it needs to look different.

00:43:51 Claire

Absolutely.

00:43:53 Claire

Yeah, I think that's so that's so interesting. I'm just reflecting on all of the people I know, you know, the adults, I know who had really poor experiences of school. And did, you know, really badly if you judge them by the way, that the system judges outcomes but then have gone on to succeed in higher education and careers in a, you know, really big way because they've been allowed to focus on that one thing that really matters to them and, yeah, that's a fascinating idea of, of flipping it. So, yeah, I'm going to sit with that one for a while and think about it.

00:44:27 Jodie

It is something that I have the privilege to see when I work with kids that have left, not even left – have been forced out of the system and we need, we need those brains. We really do need those brains in uh, in, in terms of our diversity of humans we yeah, we we need all of that.

00:44:02 Claire

We absolutely do.

00:45:03 Jodie

And equally if you look at if you look at our entrepreneurs and I'm not going to mention all of them but our entrepreneurs haven't, most of them haven't followed a typical path and just to end because I will talk forever - talking about you said about if if we measured everybody with this or we measured the people you know, with this idea of success, we need to completely reframe what success looks like, because it feels at the moment that we are measuring kids up against what the government wants and for me is all comes back down to money and people who are productive financially and, and that's really damaging for all people.

00:45:46 Claire

Yeah. And that's something - that answer has figured in so many of these final questions. You know in terms of accountability measures or outcomes or yeah, it's something that I think there's a lot of frustration with in the system and hopefully you know in time that will start to shift, but I think it's, it's going to take a lot to get there, but thank you so much Jodie for talking to me today. It's been a really great conversation.

00:46:13 Jodie

No, thank you for having me. It was nice to be invited.

00:46:16 Claire

You're welcome.

00:46:18 Claire

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