

**Genia:** Welcome, welcome, welcome to the Good Things in Life Podcast. I'm your host Genia Stephen. For the last several episodes of the podcast, I've been letting you know that this series on inclusive education is sponsored by the course that Good Things in Life is offering with inclusive education expert Marilyn Dolmage called *Belonging in School: The What, Why and How of Inclusive Education*. Thank you so much for all of your feedback and all of the excitement. So here's what people are saying. The course sounds amazing, but what happens when I need support afterwards? And what about day to day implementation and problem solving? And how can I get access to the recordings of the Good Things in Life events like Erin Sheldon's presentation on AAC for self determination and supported decision-making: How to stop guessing that people want? Those videos are available in the Good Things in Life membership called Inclusion Academy.

**Genia:** Enrollment has been closed for a while, but I've been really listening to your feedback. I know that you worry about what's going to happen to your son or daughter with a disability. I know that you, educators and therapists are committed to inclusive education and supporting communication and access to the curriculum and helping kids truly belong at school. But you're frustrated because actually building good inclusive lives is hard. It isn't a one and done kind of fix. It's really a journey and that's why I am so super excited to tell you that I'm opening up enrollment in the inclusion academy for a short time. And now this is a really big deal. Good things in life has partnered with Integration Action for Inclusion to bring you effective inclusion strategies, ongoing training and supports, in short, doable bites. Whether you're a parent or an educator, you don't have time to chase down high quality evidence-based information, ideas, strategies and tactics.

**Genia:** And you can't afford to go to every conference to hear the right experts and thought leaders. So Good Things in Life is going to bring it to you starting with Marilyn Dolmage in *Belonging in School: The What, Why and How of Inclusive Education*. And then month after month, we'll cover content that helps you reach your goal of supporting your kids with disabilities to build good inclusive lives in community. We take all the ideas that we cover in this podcast and go way deeper with additional information, tools, supports, and a community to help you sort it out day to day. Enrollment will only be available for a short time. If you're interested, go to [goodthingsinlife.org/inclusion](http://goodthingsinlife.org/inclusion). Now onto today's podcast guest, Shelley Moore.

**Genia:** Originally from Edmonton and now based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Shelley Moore is a highly sought after teacher, researcher, speaker, and storyteller. She's worked with school districts and community organizations throughout both Canada and the United States. Shelly's presentations are constructed based on contexts of schools and communities and integrate theory and effective practice of inclusion, special education, curriculum and teacher professional development. Her first book entitled *One Without the Other*, was released in July, 2016 to follow up on her TEDx Talk. Shelly is currently a PhD candidate at the University of British Columbia and host of the Five Moore Minutes' Podcast, YouTube and resource series on inclusion. Now, if all that sounds a little bit much, essentially Shelly Moore is a badass who's trying to blow up special education.

**Genia:** Shelley, Moore, thank you so much for joining me on the Good Things in Life Podcast. I'm really, really excited that you're here today.

**Shelley:** Me too. This is so fun.

**Genia:** Um, I feel like this has been a long time coming. I've been waiting a long time.

**Shelley:** We've been trying to do this for months.

**Genia:** Yeah, yeah. Um, I'm really, it's, you know, but what we've been doing for months has been pretty cool too. You've been, uh, enjoying your summer outside of school. I've been traveling across Canada with my family. So it's been time well spent, um, living the life we're trying to help kids achieve.

**Shelley:** And now it's fall. It's like [inaudible] too fast.

**Genia:** Yup. And for us it felt like somebody just flipped a switch. It was summer and then we woke up and we woke up in Kenora, Ontario in Northern Ontario and all of a sudden it was fall. So Shelley, let's start, um, with you introducing yourself and talking about your relationship with people with disabilities and their families.

**Shelley:** Okay. So, hi everybody. I'm Shelley Moore. Um, so I, who am I? So I, um, am currently an educator and a researcher and, um, a consultant and advocate and I live in, um, actually I live, I was going to say Vancouver, but I thought I don't live in Vancouver anymore. I moved to a little island right off the coast of Vancouver called Bowen Island. And um, and I've been here for about 15 years. Before that I grew up in Edmonton, Alberta. So I was there and I grew up and took my education there. And um, usually when I tell this story, I tell people like I made it to about grade three, um, on just being cute and funny to maybe because if you got pigtails and make people laugh, you can kind of sneak through. But grade three was the year that I started having a really hard time in school.

**Shelley:** And so that's, um, when disability started to affect me, I was diagnosed with a learning disability in grade three, but it was also during the time when we didn't talk to kids about that stuff. [inaudible] I have no idea until I was an adult. And so just trying to navigate that. And so when you don't know what disability is or that it affects you, you just think that you're broken, there's something wrong with you kind of thing. So, um, so I really struggled through school. How about manifested for me would often come into behavior as it does for many of our kids. Um, and so that was that, that story and also my mom really negotiates ability and disability and mental health. And so there's that kind of aspect to it. And then, um, it's still supporting her, um, today.

**Shelley:** And then where disability really found its place in my life, um, in a, I think a really positive light was when, um, I became a teacher and, I originally wanted to work with students who really had my profile. Do you mean, as we often do, right, we want to work kids who struggle with behavior, who we're negotiating probably, you know, you know, things in their life, poverty, mental health, you know, really kind of thinking about where I came from. And then because special education is such a, a field that will first of

all is way more broad than I knew even could imagine. Um, I got, my first two years I worked in New York and worked with kids like me, um, of course in a totally different context, those in the Bronx. But when I, when I moved back to Canada and moved to Vancouver, the students that I started working with were students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and I never had an opportunity to ever have work as either as a student or as a teacher.

**Shelley:** The students with intellectual disabilities growing up. And you know, it was, I remember that first day like being scared, like not really scared, but like, like through like I didn't know what to do, right? And so, but what I, what I learned very, very quickly with this incredible community that I worked with was that this was a little light to a path did that just swallowed me in like, I found purpose in this community. I found strengths in this community. This community taught me more than I had ever learned in my entire life. You know, with the kids that I work with and the families and the educational assistants that I work with and you know, so me and this community that existed in this school is where, who knew that it would be like 20 years later still working on this. But like what does inclusion mean for this community in and what you really real, cause when we started there, we weren't included.

**Shelley:** We were down a weighing, you know, we had our own room, we had our own gym. And you know, I learned through this process like what inclusion means, um, but also if you can make it work for the kids that are the hardest to reach, you can make it work for anybody. Right. Which is just the essence of inclusion. And till this population, these kids, I had about 18 kids that I was working with and their families and we kind of like uncovered a lot of secrets in education in general, you know, and how school needs to change for all kids. And I'm so grateful for them to them for that and still in contact with, with many of them. So it kind of put me on this journey that has led to a Masters and now a PhD research projects about how do we make education work for those hardest to reach kids that are often forgotten, but yet instead could be the leaders of how we can just blow up education in general.

**Genia:** Right. And it needs to be blown up.

**Shelley:** It needs to be blown up. It's my new hashtag. Let's blow up special education because like just the more that I learned about it, the more I'm like, how is this still happening?

**Genia:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Shelley:** How is it still happening?

**Genia:** One of the things that, this is not the most important thing about your story by far, but one of the things that sticks out for me in your story is what a great example, um, you are in highlighting that you, you can't look at a grade three kid with behavior problems and anticipate who they're going to become. You know, I'm sure when you're standing on stages and, um, you know, doing the work that you do now, people aren't looking at your lovely, charming, intelligent self and thinking, "Oh, I can totally see that meltdown that she was at when she was..."

**Shelley:** And there were plenty, like I was the queen of meltdowns. And people often ask me like, "Well, what change? Like what was the switch for you?" And I'm just like, you know, and it's the answer people will often answer, right? Just be like, well there was one teacher or there was one year and I had the opportunity to actually talk to these, these teachers cause I'm still in touch with them. And I remember, um, one of them who was very pivotal, it was in like my eighth grade year because seventh grade was so horrible, I was expelled. And so grade eight, your who like spoke at my wedding last summer, like we are still very close and we all have this person. But what she said to me has become like a foundational principle of this idea. And she, I said, I'm just like, "Why did you like, why didn't you just see that the behavior?" You know, like cause so many times that's what we see because it's in our face.

**Shelley:** And I'm like, why didn't you, cause now that I'm an educator, I know that there's things like transition meetings about kids. Like I know they would've talked about me coming.

**Genia:** Yup.

**Shelley:** And I'm like, why weren't you scared? Like why weren't you fearful? And she's like, you know, cause she was a special educator. She was like, you know, here's the thing is that you learn very quickly in a career that if you read the file before the kid, you've lost them. They learned very, very early on that I have to read kids because sometimes their story doesn't tell it how they are today. You know? And that just like always stuck with me. Cause I think so often does stories that follow kids and we talked about it before, like this whole idea of like this, the story that comes with kids is so based in deficit and so, and kind of this historical medical model of here are the things that are wrong.

**Genia:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Totally miss what students are actually bringing. And, and that to this day still impacts my work. Like how do we see what kids bring as opposed to [inaudible] thing and it's becoming, it has become foundational.

**Genia:** Yeah. It's, it's also kind of living in a social media world now for the very first time in the history of humanity. I think there's an awful lot of, um, like it's a really good window into what we've seen historically with kids with files, right? If everything that you ever did that you weren't super proud of ended up on social media,

**Shelley:** That's a good point.

**Genia:** What would your life be like, and what would people think of you and how would they treat you? But that is exactly the way students,

**Shelley:** Oh, my gosh. I've never even thought about that, but that is so true.

**Genia:** Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Nope, Nope, no privacy. Um,

**Shelley:** Oh, absolutely not.

**Genia:** And he's just lifts forever. Yeah. Yeah.

**Shelley:** I mean those files exist like 50 years ago, some ridiculous number.

**Genia:** Yeah. Yeah. It's shocking. Um, yeah. So, so meeting the kid and getting to know the kid before, um, before you read their file, it seems to me that if you read most kids' school files, given the degree of documentation and the deficits approach that those files tend to take, it would be near impossible to presume competence. It's like that it would be so deeply planted, their perceptions would be so deeply affected that you would, even if you wanted to presume competence, you would be unconsciously influenced.

**Shelley:** I have these conversations often. Because I mean, I've never had a conversation with someone who full up says, "Oh, I don't presume competence." You know what I mean?

**Genia:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Almost everyone I talked to has exactly what you say, these subtleties of, "Oh, they can't do it" or "That's not an appropriate placement", "Oh, they need to be streamed." And I'm like, what you're doing right now is assuming you're in competence, right? Like it's so deeply ingrained because of the paradigm that we've existed and grown up in. Right. This, you know, this whole idea of special evolving out of the medical model. You know, like you don't get service until something's broken. And that whole paradigm is what needs to get blown up because it's just not helping candidates. It's actually re-traumatizing them. Yeah.

**Genia:** Yeah. I, oh, I couldn't agree more. Yeah. So, um, there's so many different ways I could go with this. I mean the, the idea of the, the re-traumatization and the chances or, or lack thereof, that kids have of pulling themselves out of a bad situation, if they don't have those teachers, you know, those that intervene. Yeah. And, and honestly, that teacher who was so awesome for you probably didn't show up for some other kid, not because they're not awesome, but because how many kids can you possibly show up for in that way within the way the school is structured. Right?

**Shelley:** Absolutely.

**Genia:** So there's a lot of kids because of the way, um, because the, the, the re-traumatization, we can't save all of them from it if we just keep traumatizing them, you know, the key is just stop doing it.

**Shelley:** It's the system that's doing it, not the teacher. [inaudible]

**Genia:** Yeah, exactly.

**Shelley:** Yeah. I can't get to all of them just because that's how the system is.

**Genia:** Yeah. Yeah. I, my sister is a grade six teacher and she, every school year we had this conversation where she's just like, man, like I know I'm not getting to every single kid

the way they need. So, um, so this, so then that leads me to thinking about a couple of things that, um, I've heard you talk about, but maybe we should go back and define, like, just talk about presumed competence. Like what does that really mean and why do people talk about it these days? Like why is it such a popular conversation compared to 10 or 20 years ago in education?

**Shelley:** That's such a good question. Um, well as you know, presume competence has, you know, came out of the like disability field. Um, I give my props to Douglas Brooklyn every day. Yes. I think, um, the reason why it's becoming such a big conversation right now is because it's no longer, um, it's no longer, I think applied to students just who have communication difficulties or intellectual disabilities. Like we're going through a whole revolution right now in Canada in terms of reconciliation. And you realize that these indigenous kids who, who aren't presumed competent and you know, you start to see these equity issues about, well, it's not, it's not an ability or disability. That's the barrier. It's the actual system. Right. You know, and it's easy to brush off for kids with disabilities but what if they don't have a disability and they're still not being successful?

**Shelley:** Right. And so I think it's another example of, you know, what we can learn from these kids who are the hardest to get to. We're going to capture kids who have mental health difficulties and kids who are English language learners and kids who are, you know, struggling with poverty and trauma. And I think that it's becoming a big issue because fewer and fewer kids are being successful. And so at what point in time, like I remember when I was at the high school, we had a conversation where like if you know 11% of the population is designate, but 35% of the school receives and even more needs access to special education. At what point do you say it's not the kids?

**Shelley:** Um, other thing that's happening here, if you know high, your population higher than those who actually like qualify for service needs service, right? Yeah. Think to myself, like at some point we have to kind of draw the line in the sand and be like, this is no longer the kids. This is a systemic problem. Right? I mean, if you look in the states, the whole conversations that are happening about like kids of color, you know what I mean? Like they're, they're diagnosed, um, they're diagnosed with disabilities two times higher than their white peers. Right. This kids are diagnosed three times higher than their white peers. Like those are not student issues. Those are competence issues. Right. Those are, and you know, that's where we have to look at the structures in place, in the environment, in the school and the education and the practices and the classroom models. Because what's gonna happen is everyone's going to need special education.

**Genia:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Ridiculous.

**Genia:** Yeah. And with your, with that idea that everybody's going to need special education, I really want to come back and get you to explain your plane, your plane

**Shelley:** Oh, the airplane. Yeah.

**Genia:** I do but before we do that, before we go there.

**Shelley:** Yeah.

**Genia:** One of the things that when I look back over disability history and I don't, I, you know, this is just my own reflection on this, but when I look back over disability history, um, you, there are lots of good accounts and if listeners haven't heard, um, accounts, please reach out to me and I'll provide you with resources. Um, actually I think, um, Geraldo, you reference in one of your videos,

**Shelley:** Geraldo.

**Genia:** [inaudible] he's not the only one though.

**Shelley:** Yeah. Yes.

**Genia:** If people don't know what institutions were like then, then let me know and I will give you resources. But um, you, an awful lot of material and our, and professional understanding about the competence and potential of people with disabilities was based on observations of people in institutions. And then since the trend towards the, well not trend, movement towards deinstitutionalization. I feel like there's a good focus on presumed competence because of the millions and I, I don't say that number lightly, number of times when people went, "Oh, no. We had it all wrong."

**Shelley:** We did.

**Genia:** [inaudible] had so much more potential.

**Shelley:** Yeah. In every challenge that we set up, so that tells us it's not them. It's that the conditions are disabling. The environment is disabling.

**Genia:** Yeah, yeah. But yet we keep talking. We ,there is still, even though there's a strong conversation on growth mindset and presuming competency in education, we still are telling people have low expectations. So one example of this, um, was, um, that I experienced was when my son was only a few days old. And, um, I don't know why I even consented to the consult. There must have been some reason. Um, but somebody sent in, he was in the, um, neonatal intensive care unit. He was quite sick and a genetic genetics team came in to do a consult and they said, um, you know, they did their assessment. Um, and they said, "Well, we think that your kid has this syndrome." And then they handed me all of the professional like summary literature because they knew that I was a health care provider.

**Genia:** So they figured that that would, you know, that I would appreciate that. And it was devastating. Like basically it said, your son is going to be, um, short, fat, bald, stupid and, um, hunchbacked and riddled with cancer. This is essentially what it said. And I was, I was completely devastated. Um, and, um, and I called my mom and I was crying so hard that she couldn't understand what I was saying and I finally choked out what they were

saying and she said, "Oh, for heaven's sakes, Genia! I thought he was dying. Like, pull yourself together and stop being so foolish." And I didn't appreciate it at the time. But, um, that literature was really all based on institutional observations. And really if you live in an institution, you're probably going to be short, fat, stupid with [inaudible].

**Shelley:** All of us, all of us would.

**Genia:** Exactly. Exactly. Yeah. So, you know, and that was 13 years ago. So it's not like ancient.

**Shelley:** It's not long time ago.

**Genia:** No, no. And as a midwife, I see this all the time with the information that parents get. So I think with our need to blow up the education system and your observation that all these kids are getting, um, sluced into special education, there's the problem with the presuming incompetence and therefore slucing kids towards special education. But there's also the observation that our school systems are not really, um, meeting kids' needs. Um, and so now I want you to talk about your plane analogy.

**Shelley:** Oh, the airplane. Okay. Okay.

**Genia:** Love this. Love it. Love it.

**Shelley:** I know. Well, I mean, okay, so there's so many things I could say. So I think first of all, there's a misunderstanding that with inclusive education, I mean, we do want to blow up special education, but we don't want to lose the support.

**Genia:** Absolutely.

**Shelley:** Strategies and expertise with special education, so I think that's important to clarify. Which leads me to this idea of, you know, I think the problem with education in general, and this is not just my opinion, this is well researched that, um, you know, is that we're teaching to kind of this mythically, this mythical average student. Right. And there was a principal that I worked with who did this brilliant activity with her staff before the students showed up and um, in the fall, and she put them in grade groups and she's like, okay, all the grade three teachers over here, all the grade five teachers over here. And I want you to design what you're, you're, you're, the average student you're going to have this year. And you realize that these, these teachers are creating profiles built on all of the students they've ever taught, not the kids that are actually showing up.

**Shelley:** Right? And so then they designed this average student and then she handed up their class lists, and she was like, put a star beside the person that you described. And there wasn't any right? Like we've been designed, we've been taught, it's not our fault. We've been taught to design for this average group. So this has really, really bothered me because, you know, or I was never an average student, but doesn't mean I didn't find success and happiness in my life and in the world. Right. And in fact, I think the people who are the most successful of people who didn't fall within the average box. Right? And so this has always been a tension for them, but I didn't, I couldn't explain it. So the

airplane metaphor really helped me understand it. So just as a quick little little briefing, um, this story is from a book called *The End of Average* by Todd Rose.

**Shelley:** And Todd Rose is, um, he's a researcher at Harvard who's in charge of the like individuality institute at an opportunity to have him on my podcast and my diet of happiness. Um, but he basically in this book tells why average doesn't work in education. And it completely helped me not only see why it doesn't work, but what the alternative could be. So here's the story that he tells and you can find this on YouTube as well, or on, um, on YouTube with TEDx, TED Talk. But basically he says, you know, average is really useful if you're comparing two large groups of one dimension, right? But in an education, we're not comparing groups to each other, we're comparing an individual to a group. And an individual isn't one dimensional. So this is very problematic. Okay. Because there's like just have a number that represents us cause we have many facets of our being both physically and intellectually.

**Shelley:** Um, and historically that, you know, there's, we have strengths in some areas. We have stretches in some areas. So the example that he talks about, this is a true story, in the 1950s pilots who flew and fighter planes were getting injured because the cockpits of the plane didn't fit them properly. So they were getting jostled around. Cause when you go really, really fast, small movements or big movements, right? So the pilots are getting injured, the government's like we have to fix the plane, we can't solve our pilots getting injured. So they hired a body researcher to do the biggest human body research that has ever been done. And they got, so that they know they need a big sample size. So they find 4,000 pilots and they take their measurements in 10 dimensions, like their legs, their hips, their shoulders, data. And so their first attempt to solve this problem was to take the data, average all the measurements and design a perfect plane.

**Shelley:** But as you know, no one will fit in that plane because no one has like one person's legs might be the average length, but that's not the, that's like the only part of their body that would fit that. Right? So they realized that it actually was fitting nobody perfectly. And so this, it was, it's called the airplane dilemma where on one hand, you know it'll be really efficient to design one plane that standardized that everyone has to fit in. Right? But it's not effective at all. Right? So then we're like, well what's the, what's the alternative? Let's just custom make individualized planes for every pilot. That would be so effective but it's not efficient. Like you can't just design 4,000 airplanes. Like we don't have the resources for that. Right? And so this dilemma, this airplane dilemma is the exact same dilemma in education around curriculum, right?

**Shelley:** It would be very effective to design individual education plans for every student. That'd be really effective. But like we don't have the resources for that because it's not efficient. Even if we had all the funding in the world, it's not going to happen, right? Like there's no way. So then people think the alternative to this is, well then I guess we just need one standardized curriculum for all learners that would be really efficient. But we're realizing more and more that it's so ineffective, it doesn't fit any perfectly. And so there's this curriculum dilemma and government will often always go with efficiency, right? Which is why it is really hard time in in education because it's not fitting everybody and people think the solution is still designed IEP is for every kid, right? And

no one has time to do that. So what my favorite part of the story is this, is the researcher.

**Shelley:** He says, "Everybody calm down. There's another solution. We can have both ineffective and inefficient plane or looking at the wrong data." And he says, "We have this data. But what we're looking at is the average. If we change the data set that we're looking at from average to the range, then we can use the range of data to design a plane that's adjustable." And it's from this study is the reason why we have adjustable seats in our cars because you realize that you can't change someone's dimensions. And when I thought about that, I was just like, oh my goodness, that's so true. You know, in education the, the information and data that we collect about kids and we were taught to do this is find out all the things they can't do or find out all the things that are wrong or find out all the disabilities they have.

**Shelley:** Like everything is from a deficit point of view. But if you think about the word dimension, if someone asks me how tall I am, I never say what I'm not right. Like I've never said, "Oh well, I'm not six feet", right? Like, "No, I'm five, eight. That's just how tall I am. I can't change that." And I always come back to this idea like what would it mean to design an adjustable curriculum for a range of learners but thinking about the data that we collect from a dimensional point of view as opposed to a deficit point of view? What do they bring to the classroom? What is there? What are their abilities instead of their inability is what are their strengths instead of their weaknesses? What are their identities instead of what they're missing? Right. And, and I think like that you asked me earlier, kind of like what is driving me right now, it's this idea, right?

**Shelley:** Like what are student dimensions from that perspective of you cannot change what you collect. You cannot change someone's history, you cannot, you can't change someone's intellectual ability, but we can respond to it. This has like completely changed the way by the book education and special education and support and inclusion about how, how do we make plants that are efficient. They still have to be efficient, right?

**Genia:** Yes.

**Shelley:** But also effective. And in order to do that, we have to change the data we're collecting.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** I'm looking at where kids should be. So just where they are, you know, what could they do? What's their range as opposed to comparing everybody to this that actually represents no one?

**Genia:** Right. So where does, where does the, so really when taking this, um, plane example to a classroom teacher, really we're saying to teachers, "We know that you cannot build a plane for every pilot. That that's not possible. That's not achievable for you. Um, and um, and we also know that you can't help your students to be successful by creating one plane and then trying to get them to have different lengths [inaudible]"

**Shelley:** The work, the workload, the workload of fitting, the workload of both. The workload of designing individual airplanes and the workload of trying to fit kids into a plan that isn't adjustable. The workload is so high.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** It is so high. Like I totally understand why teachers are like no inclusion because that's what they think. It's either one of those two things.

**Genia:** Right. So that's, what does it mean to build an adjustable seats in a classroom? What does it mean to work differently instead of more [inaudible]?

**Shelley:** Right. And this is the idea because doing, finding like designing individual plans and forcing kids into a standardized plane is more work. Absolutely. And so the different work is, but both of those, well of those idea target supports for kids after teaching has already happened, right?

**Genia:** Can you say that again?

**Shelley:** Yeah. So in, in designing individual planes and retrofitting a plan for all learners is those are both like, those are both actions that you do after the teaching has happened. Those are adaptations, those are modifications. Those are retrofits to an already existing green plan is how I call it.

**Genia:** Okay, right.

**Shelley:** So the difference is this, and this is where the different work comes in is when you design an adjustable airplane, right? That has to be done before you teach. You have to design the plane before kids fly it as opposed to finding out after the plane has already been built that kids don't fit. So that right there, that essence of designing the seat is the most underutilized support on the planet like education, healthcare, architecture. Because it is so much more cost effective and efficient to build in these types of supports and strategies before the plane is built, before the building is built, before the classroom, the lesson is taught, right? So this aspect of design incorporates a couple of things.

**Shelley:** It's not only just the kids that we're designing to, but it's also about the barriers that are in that environment, right? So, you know, when I work with teachers on this, I kind of think about, okay, so how do we do this? How do we design this adjustable plan? The first thing we have to do is know what the dimensions of the kids are. You know what I mean? Who are they? What are their interests? What are their strengths? What are their stretches? What are their needs? What are their barriers? Right? But collecting that from the perspective that you can't change any of those things. There are dimensions like legs, right? And then we have to kind of take the curriculum, which in many places is still very standardized, right? And it's taking that curriculum in [inaudible]. How do I take this curriculum and make it adjustable for that range?

**Shelley:** Right? And so there's many, many planning frameworks that I'll, that I'll walk through, um, teachers with around, um, planning pyramid around backwards design. Many of these frameworks, which aren't new, but we also weren't taught how to do them in a way. Cause like all the planning that I received support that I received in university was assuming that we were designing for an average student, not a diverse range of students. But the part that I'm really learning about right now is you can have the students and you can have curriculum, but the power comes from the adjustments. And those adjustments are what are the different challenges that we can offer kids and what are the different supports that we can offer kids. But my favorite part of the whole metaphor is if you think about a pilot going into an airplane who makes the adjustments?

**Genia:** It's the pilot.

**Shelley:** The pilot. But if you think historically in classrooms who's making the adjustments to curriculum supports and strategies, it's the teachers. And so this, I think it's an underlying piece to presuming competence and inclusion in all growth mindset and all these things that we talk about is that we have to stop making those adjustments. We have to empower kids to know when they need challenge. We have to empower kids to know when they need supports and what supports they need. And I fully believe that every student can do that. But not everybody believes that.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** Right?

**Genia:** So me what that looks like. Tell me what that looks like for a, a kid with complex communication.

**Shelley:** Yeah, so I think, um, so, okay, so I'm going to tell you an example. That was told by my PhD supervisor. So she, um, Deb Butler, she worked in California, right? And this, and so when she was practicing teacher, and so this is in the day when there's no inclusion. There's absolutely segregation based, purely on this idea of, because they can't do it. Right? And so I was asking her one day and I'm like, "Okay, well what does this idea of student agency look like for kids with intellectual disabilities? Like, can you teach these things?" She's like, "Oh no, everybody is regulating. Their [inaudible] effectively or efficiently. Okay. So here's the example she talked about. So in her high school, the students with intellectual disabilities, their job was to clean the cafeteria. Right? Now this is,

**Genia:** Of course.

**Shelley:** Of course it was right?

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** And she remembers looking at it as a student thinking that this was ridiculous, right? But not only was it ridiculous that they were cleaning the cafeteria, but it was ridiculous how they were taught to clean the cafeteria. Right? So for example, these students were taught to clean it from left to right. So they start at the left hand side, they cleaned the tables, and they moved to the right hand side. They didn't take into consideration that the students in the cafeteria don't eat like that. They don't start on the left side. They just fill in tables randomly. So what was happening was the students who have the disabilities who are doing the chores are clearing the tables across. But that's not where the need was. Right? And so she always thought about this. She's like, there's no reason why people can't be taught to scan an environment to prioritize, right? Prioritize is a perfect example of, um, a dimension of student agency that all kids can do.

**Shelley:** Looking at where do I need to start, teaching the skill of where do I need to start instead of teaching a skill or you just start on the left hand side. Everybody can do that, right? It isn't about ability or disability. And regardless of the fact that this shouldn't even be happening in a cafeteria, what it was is that she was just like, we assume that kids can't make those decisions. So we just teach the content. We teach the process as opposed to teaching kids how to make decisions. Right? And I, I think about, look at the email that you [inaudible] or too disabled for inclusion. And I think that if you, if you never teach kids how to make the decisions, then yeah. But one of the biggest gifts that we can give kids are help them to make decisions in environments that are unpredictable. Irony of special education and segregation is that those are the most predictable environments.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** Right? And so this whole idea about like, I've never met a kid that can't scan what's around them and make a decision best for them, often those decisions are defective in terms of anyone else in the classroom. Right. And so really understanding about how do we teach decision making skills to kids at the essence. That's what's happening. All kids are already doing that.

**Genia:** Right. So I'm going to push back just a little bit as

**Shelley:** Please do.

**Genia:** as a parent because I can just hear all the parents in my audience saying, um, "My kid regularly does things that puts their life at risk. They run out in front of traffic. They, you know, like all kinds of." In fact, the primary job of a parent of any kid for many, many years is just to stop them from killing themselves and to deal with the child's anger about being stopped from killing themselves. So I just want to, um, I actually, I do believe what you're saying about the importance of teaching prioritization and decision making skills. You gotta address that issue of like, actually kids don't always make decisions that are good for them.

**Shelley:** No, no. And I, and I totally agree with that. And I think that rather than thinking they can't do that, I think it's thinking what barriers in the environment do we need to reduce so that they can, right. And so if we think about our kids who are running out into the

street, for example, they're doing that for a reason. You know what I mean it's trying to figure out, well why are they want to cross the street? What supports do they need to understand that consequences? I mean there's tons of supports and strategies around that. It might take some kids longer to understand those things. It might take them a lifetime to understand those things. But, um, I think that not teaching them the process because we think that they can't make those decisions is exactly going back to, well, why aren't we teaching them? Because we think they can't do it.

**Genia:** Yeah. Excellent. And I also think, you know, historically, like some of the criticism of, of, um, education in the last several decades has been that often kids are not actually learning prioritization and decision making until when they leave high school. And so, and that, that's not serving them well. So this isn't just an issue, um, around kids with disabilities, but just in general, the importance of teaching kids how to make a good decision.

**Shelley:** Yeah, and I think too, like if we think about a lover, a lot of our kids who have some of these, you know, like unsafe behaviors or risky behaviors, right? We think about, well how are we teaching them? Cause often those are the kids that are in segregated programs with other kids who are displaying risky behaviors, right? Like the most likely for a kid to learn how to cross the street is to be around people who are, who know how to cross the street.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** Right? And so this is also kind of pushing back around that whole deficit paradigm of well, if we want kids to behave, they need to be around people who are regulating their behavior.

**Genia:** That's right.

**Shelley:** We want to learn how to read. They need to be around readers. If we want kids to learn how to speak English and to be around English speakers. But we do the opposite of all these things. And so instead, we put all of these kids together who all need help in one area, the only person who's regulating them as the teacher. Right? So I think like, like even when I was school-based, like if we needed a kid help crossing the road, it wasn't us that taught them. We got all of the peers to help them. Because one of the things that, like another example of a student agency skill or a skill that build student agency is helping kids to scan. What are other people [inaudible] but if the other people around you are bolting across the road. Right? And so this idea of, you know, I, I'm not, I'm not saying, "Well let's just let kids run around and run into traffic." That's not what I'm saying at all. But what I'm saying, we have to continue to believe that it's possible that kids can learn that.

**Genia:** Right. And that the best way for them to learn it is to have appropriate role models that, that are able to demonstrate the skill who are only maybe one or two steps above them in skill level. Cause that's a more achievable gap for them to, to be, um, imitating the power of imitation. And then also the motivation for choosing, or maybe I'm saying that

wrong, but we're more motivated to follow the lead of a role model that we have chosen and it's far more likely to be appeared [inaudible]

**Shelley:** Absolutely. And I mean honestly and I mean I can appreciate like I'm not a parent and so I can never put myself in that space and I understand that at the end of the day you're going to choose your battles. Like I totally get that. But I also think like school play, has to play a really huge part in how do we support families to [inaudible], right? And so I think that's the other part of this is that it's so divided sometimes between this is what we think your kids should know versus what parents want their kids to know. And so, I mean there's a safety aspect here for sure, but I find so often schools are reacting to the behaviors and decisions kids are making as opposed to taking a step back and being like, "Wait a second, why is this even happening?" Right? Like how do we teach differently as opposed to reacting to the crisis?

**Genia:** Right. So what are, what's the parents' role then as part of the school team in this? So a lot of what you've talked about is, is really education system based, right? It's like what is the curriculum and what are the demands that government places on, um, the demands or requirements that government places on teachers and how to teachers structure classrooms and adopt curriculum and, but where, where do families really fit in, in, in contributing?

**Shelley:** This is a really good question. This is one that I'm really digging into right now. Um, I'm trying to blow up IEPs as you may have noticed from my [inaudible] profile because I think, you know, if we're really going to empower kids to be agents of themselves, um, an IEP can be a very powerful document to support that identity. But you cannot build identity in a deficit based model. Right? And so I have this whole vision about what if IEP is where really just like planning documents to facilitate agency. Right? And so our students then who have disabilities and the families that represent and support them, you cannot, a school and it's really the bridge, right? Like a school cannot make these plans without the voices of the parents and the, and the individuals and the families around. Right? And so if we were to kind of shift,

**Genia:** Wait, sorry. When you say, I'm sorry to interrupt you Shelley, when you say they cannot make these plans, what do you mean by that?

**Shelley:** I just, I don't believe that an individual education plan could be made for a student without the input from the student and the families.

**Genia:** It can be made well.

**Shelley:** It can't be.

**Genia:** It can be done well.

**Shelley:** I just, if it's made, it's not a plan then. You know what I mean? Like it's a policy.

**Genia:** I think that's really, yeah, I think that's really helpful. Yeah.

**Shelley:** Yeah. And so I think if we really want these to be plans that are visions of the students' future, I just, I don't know how they can be made to the actual plans without the input from students.

**Genia:** Okay, great. Sorry I sidetracked you there.

**Shelley:** [inaudible] But I also understand why students and parents won't have nothing to do with the plans that exist right now because they're totally medically in deficit based. I had a parent wants to just be like, "I stopped coming to these meetings cause I don't need reminders about what my kids can't do." Right? And so.

**Genia:** That's really interesting.

**Shelley:** Yeah. I know. By the time they get to high school, parents are like, "I'm done. I'm done fighting." And I'm like, "How depressing is that?" Right? Yeah. And we're going through kind of a pilot project right now in British Columbia, but what if IEPs were strength-based, right? What if they were to facilitate the building of identity? What if they were, you know, built on what kids could do rather than what they should do. Right? In order to be able to design that, they have to have input from the family and the value and the individual themselves, or they can't be done.

**Genia:** It's so funny, I'm just thinking about the last, so I am not despondent about my son's school or his education or that is not my experience. But my experience has is with the school at this stage that we are often kind of like, okay, so we're, you know, kind of keep, we're just doing more of the same.

**Shelley:** Yeah.

**Genia:** And it's good and it's good stuff. Right? So.

**Shelley:** Yeah.

**Genia:** I'm not spending a ton of time on IEPs with the school. So it's been a couple of years since I looked really carefully at the document but first of all, it's a format of document where you can only click certain boxes. And the strength section is like this. I think it comes first because everybody's trying to give a nod to it. But usually for my son and for the people, other IEPs that I have seen, it's like it's almost condescending the strength section.

**Shelley:** Well, they're not used.

**Genia:** Yeah. They're just like, it's like some platitudes, we put some platitudes in the strength section and then we move on to the real work, which is [inaudible].

**Shelley:** And I mean like that, that's not helpful.

**Genia:** No. No, no, no, no. Not as

**Shelley:** As I'm like, if we're gonna really do this, then we have to use the strengths in the plan, not just notice to make it. Right? And so this, this is the book, this is the book I'm writing right now, is how do we support individuals and their families to kind of bridge that home to schooling gap, especially as kids get older to actually look at IEPs as strength-based documents that help build student agency and identity, right? Now, the part of the reason why I think this is really important from an educational point of view is because that's where curriculum is moving for all kids. The student agency is becoming like the number one predictor of success and which is why it's like the element of the new curriculum in British Columbia, right?

**Genia:** [inaudible] say that we're so far away though. Like my,

**Shelley:** Oh, absolutely.

**Genia:** My older son was home-schooled for a couple of years and had a lot of agency over his time and he went back to school. And he, um, on a Friday called me and said, "You know, it's going to be a long weekend. If I'm not, there's nothing happening in class, can I come home?" And I said, "Sure." So he went to his math teacher and said, "Are we doing something?" She said, "Well, there's an in class test." And he said, "Can I take it home?" And she said, "No, it has to be an in class test."

**Shelley:** Right.

**Genia:** And he said, "Well, I'm going to go home." And then, so I got this call from the teacher later who was stunned that he would make the decision.

**Shelley:** Yeah, yeah. Oh, I know. [inaudible] absolutely.

**Genia:** Like she was like, seriously stunned and I was like, "Yeah, well he just made an"

**Shelley:** Made a decision for his well-being. No, I know. And I think, and I think like this, like we know the research backs, this, like the importance of student agency. And so it's like, well, how do we support educators to be able to respond to that? How do we support parents and schools able to respond to that? But even in the conversation that's happening about student agency in British Columbia, we still aren't including kids with disabilities in that conversation.

**Genia:** Oh really? Interesting.

**Shelley:** Right?

**Genia:** Yeah. The, the purpose of our education system I think has changed too over the last several decades. Gordon Porter in an earlier interview, um, I can't remember his exact wording, but essentially he said, "We're, we're, we send our kids to school to learn how to effectively socialize with each other, how to problem solve, make decisions so that we can become contributing citizens and that, and to establish relationships with people

in our communities", which is a very different purpose than we might have said 50 years ago.

**Shelley:** Absolutely.

**Genia:** And so agency really fits nicely.

**Shelley:** Oh, that's exactly what it is. And I don't think there's a lot of people who disagree on that, but how they think those goals need to be met are totally different depending on where you go.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** You look at the programming of special education, the plans and processes we're putting into place for students with disabilities are not aligning with that goal.

**Genia:** They're not even in the same [inaudible]

**Shelley:** They're not even, they're not even in the same planet. And so I think, you know, and what happened here was we had this whole curriculum redesign in this whole amazing student agency curriculum, and then they released the new IEP and it's nothing has changed. And I'm like, if we're going to change everything, if we're going to evolve everything, we have to change everything, right? And I think that you cannot, you cannot not change this one aspect. And when you actually dig in, it's two, for two reasons, because people don't know what to do or they [inaudible].

**Genia:** You cut, you cut out there for a second, people don't know what to do or?

**Shelley:** Or they believe that kids can't do it.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** They're not competent enough. So I'm like, okay, well let's dig into this then we know kids can do it. And so let's really target the how do we do it then, right?

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** And I think that there's some powerful opportunities for innovation right now. So I'm very, very excited about what's happening in British Columbia in terms of not just the space that was given to animate, innovate, but the backing that we got from some pretty major stakeholder groups to be like, well, what if, what if, what could this look like? And so this has kind of been what I'm digging into this year, is like what would it mean to support student agency for kids with disabilities and their families? Right? So that that kind of bridge between school and home isn't so drastically different. There was no wonder kids are having a hard time at school. It's no wonder, right? It's no longer building the skills that they need.

**Genia:** So I'm trying to imagine 10, 20 years from now, what the classroom with the adjustable seats looks like, and what that means then for how we plan for kids? I wish I had a more like a more detailed or succinct question, but can you paint a picture?

**Shelley:** Well, I think I'm, my vision in 20 to 50 years is that we're not talking about, I mean, I hope sooner than that, but let's just say I'm not talking about kids with and without disabilities. We're talking about different kids with different needs, which is all kids, right? What are their needs? What are their strengths, what are their interests? And really figuring out how do we take this curriculum which, which is shifting? The curriculum is shifting, right? And say, how do we, how do we create, like institutions of education where kids can develop these skills of agency in ways that honor does, exactly what you say, decision making, um, developing passions and interests and you can already see glimpse of it. There's pockets of it all over the place. There's incredible resources around, um, you know, inquiry and around passion projects and helping kids to develop all of these skills in classrooms. And it's happening.

**Shelley:** You know, you see these passion projects, these inquiry projects happening all over schools in British Columbia. My question is, is that, but why are we still having this conversation about kids without disabilities? You know what I mean? Like, why can't, like, why is it still so separate that, oh, everyone gets to have all these passionate interests projects except for kids with disabilities. They still need to learn functional math. Right? And so my vision 20, 50 years from now, and I honestly, I hope it doesn't take that long, is that this exciting innovation that's happening in education actually applies to all kids where kids, all kids can learn about interest areas. All kids can be, you know, decision make, decision makers and agency and what they're learning and how they're learning and what supports they need. And even knowing what needs they have, [inaudible] this like, "Oh, everyone is doing this over here, but we still have these special education segregated programs where kids are doing puzzles." You know what I mean? Like I just, I don't, that's my vision as if they come together.

**Genia:** Right. So, so that is a beautiful vision. And now I want to kind of go womp, womp, womp.

**Shelley:** I know, I know.

**Genia:** And to, and, and just get, I mostly am just imagining, um, I'm just imagining parents and, and, and then thinking, well, that is great for Shelley's career. Like that, that she can be involved in innovation, innovative programs and really see best practice and what's happening, but my kid is being restrained in class or my kid is, or I'm just entering into the school system and I don't even know what the rules are.

**Shelley:** Right. No. And that's cause I mean, I think that too is that you have this vision of where you're going, but it's also acknowledging that every parent, every teacher, every school is going to be at different entry points on that continuum. Right?

**Genia:** Right. Right. Totally. So if you are, I mean the, I'm not asking you to speak sort of like I, you've said you're not a parent and I don't think you have to be in this way, so I'm not trying to,

**Shelley:** Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**Genia:** pin it on you. But so if you're a parent and you are just entering the system and the system is not a best practice area, you know, um, or you are really, really struggling to advocate for, um, like basic quality education for your child. How might parents, this is such a broad question is perhaps the meaningless. So I appreciate that. And you can just say that if that's the case. But how do parents take some of these really solid concepts and best practice, um, and also this vision of what should be and how do they bring that into curriculum of the school teams where that's not where the school teams are?

**Shelley:** Yeah. And I think this is a really good question because at the end of the day, I think parents are really struggling with something. And this is, and you could tell me if this is true cause you're the parent and I'm not, I can say all these things and these beautiful ideas and he's, he's [inaudible]. But if I ever had a kid who was struggling in school, I'm gonna make the decision that's best for them regardless of the vision. Right? Like I am never going to judge a parent for decisions that they make. Right. Because I feel like sometimes they're being put in this awful situation of do I advocate for change or do I advocate for my kid? And I don't want to put my kid, I don't want to sacrifice my kid for the advocacy that you don't even need. Cause I feel like conversations that I've had with parents that just like, "Yeah, I want my kids to be included." But that's not like they're not going to get what we're talking about today in that space. Right. And so I think for a parent that is, has a kid in their class, included classroom with their peers, I think conversations, first of all, every kid has a right to be in their community grade-based classroom. You know, I know that parents will hear something different than that. So just going in knowing that.

**Genia:** That is the right.

**Shelley:** Right? And the parents are so powerful, they're so, they're way more powerful than any educator and even straighter any, you know, like they are so powerful. Okay. Two things. The next thing I would say is a conver, if this were the piece of advice I'd give parents, this is what I would say, parents going into have a conversation with a school or a classroom often the conversation, it is what is happening for my kid? Which I get, which I get. I think the conversation, like I'm wondering if the conversation, if we help parents to ask questions, yes, what are you doing for my kid? But also add to that, what are you doing for this teacher? How are you supporting this teacher to support my kid? How are you supporting this classroom to support my kid? How is the school getting support to support my kid? Because as long as it ends at the kid, it doesn't actually isn't actually advocating for inclusion.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** Right? Because it's not just the kid that needs support, it's their peers. It's the classroom, it's the school. And so one really good question that one parent asked once that I loved was, you know, when is there time for my kid's teacher to talk to a special educator? When is there time for my teacher to talk to an EA? When is there time for my teacher to work with and learn about inclusion? Because I think there's a capacity building issue here that's not being addressed because there's an assumption that teachers have to become an expert at everything, which just isn't possible to do.

**Genia:** Right. Yeah. Yeah that's, yeah.

**Shelley:** And so I like, I say we can have the best teacher in the whole world and they may never know what to do if a student has autism but to let them know that's okay. So how do we also advocate for teachers to learn about autism? Right? And that's that community and inclusion piece and the contribution, the beautiful contribution that kids and families can bring.

**Genia:** Yeah. It's, that's a really great way of, of talking about it. I have, I often talk about the power of saying, um, to the school team. I know you don't have all the answers and I don't judge you for that. Um, and um, and I expect that there will be mistakes and I, um, sort of, I, I know people will object to the way I'm saying this. I hope people could just follow my intent would not my specific words, but I forgive you in advance.

**Shelley:** Right.

**Genia:** Let's talk about it. You know, so, but I haven't ever actually asked the question and what are you doing to make sure that the school team that maybe doesn't have all the answers has an opportunity to get them

**Shelley:** Totally. Cause the most, honestly, I know that that what parents are told is to advocate for EA time.

**Genia:** Yeah. [inaudible].

**Shelley:** If you know what I mean? For all these supports and strategies and actually like at one-to-one EA is actually has a detrimental effect.

**Genia:** Yes. Yeah. Let's talk about that a little bit.

**Shelley:** Totally. But, but having an EA is very powerful at a classroom level, right? Well, the number, honestly, honestly, parents, if you're listening, the number one thing you can advocate for, for support for your kid and inclusive classroom is collaboration time for the teacher to work with an EA and a special education teacher to plan for the whole class. It's the number one thing you can ask for. It's even more powerful than an EA is to say, when is this classroom teacher getting collaboration time to plan for everybody in this class? And I know it sounds like you're not advocating for your kid, but the benefits of inclusion come from that.

**Genia:** Yeah. Not at all. Yeah.

**Shelley:** [inaudible] together to figure out how is this EA supporting everybody? Because if you're a parent, you do not want adult creating your kid. You do not, it limits social, it limits academic, it limits everything.

**Genia:** How is that possible, Shelley?

**Shelley:** How is that possible? And so we think like in there's so much research that's coming out that it's actually has a detrimental effect to the goals of inclusion. Now that's not to say we don't need the EAs. We need the EAs, absolutely. But thinking about them from a classroom point of view as opposed to this individual student gets them.

**Genia:** So can you get way down into the minutiae about, about why a student with significant support needs is harmed by having a one-to-one EA?

**Shelley:** So the biggest benefits, and I, I, and I even pushed back on this a little bit right now, but if you look at it in inclusion, um, historically, the biggest benefit of inclusion that has been researched the most is the benefit of social connection, right? So you're in a community with other kids in your community, you're in a cohort, you're gonna see them outside of school, you're going to see them at birthday parties, you're going to see them outside of that space. If you think about just kids in general, they are way more social together when there isn't an adult present, right? And so if you think about kids with disabilities, if they always have an adult present with them, that inhibits the social connections that kids have with each other. Because not only do kids want to be social not around adults, especially as they get older, they're going to actually start to avoid them. And so there's a kid with a velcroed EA beside them, not only are kids not going to gravitate towards those person, but they're going to avoid them.

**Genia:** Right?

**Shelley:** And so the alternative to this is, okay, let's tactic that EA, keep them in the classroom but have them global. And actually a really big benefit is helping the EA to help the other kids to know how to interact with the individual disability, especially if there's communication difficulties so that the peers become the buffer rather than the EA becoming the buffer.

**Genia:** Right. So, but how is it possible that having one-to-one, a one-to-one EA for, um, instruction is harming kids' academic achievement?

**Shelley:** I'll tell you exactly why. You ready for this?

**Genia:** I'm totally ready for it. Lay it on me.

**Shelley:** How kids learn the best is from each other, right? It's a, it's a social, we learn from people. We don't, we don't learn from things, right? Like we have to construct it together. And so when kids are working together and have to like understand how other

people are seeing things, um, and you know, regardless of the ability to see your peers figuring things out and really building things and talking things through, that's how kids are learning. Okay. What often happens if a kid has an EA is that they're A, not learning what the peers are learning, right? And so there they might as well just not even be there because they're on a program that's totally separate. And then we're pushing on, well that's integration. If they're just physically there, but they're not working with their point. Right? But, and there may also, there may absolutely be a time for explicit instruction, but even during that time of the explicit instruction, it should be with a teacher, not an EA. Right. That's not their role. There's not their role. And so if you think about this idea of what ends up happening is that the EA ends up just doing the work for the kid.

**Genia:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Right? Instead of actually facilitating how this kid is going to learn this information, how this kid is going to be interacting with other peers, what are the concepts? Because just doing a parallel book about functional money math in a math class with an EA on the side, it's actually inhibiting the social goals and the learning goals that they're actually there to be promoting.

**Genia:** Okay. So what about safety though?

**Shelley:** Yeah, so safety I think is becoming, it's almost becoming such a big question because often that's not what EAs are being used for, right? Are kind of these social, these social buffers which I get if you have a kid who runs away, you need to have someone who goes after them. I totally get that. And I think if we're really going to like invest in our EAs, knowing how to navigate and deal with challenging behavior is a must, right? But I think what often happens is our EAs, and it's a really unfair position to put them in. They're trained to deal with the reactions of behavior, but then that's the of the conversation, right? Like there is no follow up on why is this behavior happening? Which isn't the role of the EA anymore. Right? And so I think there's this, this, we're putting EAs in such an unfair position because there's, just solved the problem, just solved the problem. You're here for this kid, just solve the problem. But the problem will never be solved unless you actually dig in with a team approach to say, why is this behavior happening in the first place? So I think like, I don't want you to misunderstand that EAs have a very valuable role.

**Genia:** Absolutely. Yeah, of course.

**Shelley:** But where we see them right now as just the, they're there to put out the fire, then there's no conversation about how do we prevent the fire next time.

**Genia:** Right. So I think for a lot of parents, the safety issue is not just, you know, what if my kid has a, has some sort of behavior that puts them at risk, but also this idea of care and support and facilitation, um, to navigate the, um, navigate the day. So you, you've addressed the social issues, right? The adamant to the, to, to friendships when there's a

one-to-one EA, but there's also often very often the sense that my kid needs one-to-one support in order to be able to safely navigate the day.

**Shelley:** And I think that there could very well be a place for an individual to provide that type of level of need. But I think it's really important to know what the goal is in that given moment. Right? Like if the goal in that given moment is physical support, then yes, you may need an EA there. But it's also helping EAs and teachers and students to know there's going to be many times in the day where that isn't the goal. You know what I mean? And knowing when to back off and when to come forward and you know, when can appear to this and when do I need to do this? You know, cause I understand that there's a time and a place where for the sake of integrity, peers need to not be present. You know what I mean? Especially around like personal care things like that is for sure. Right? But I think that there's an assumption that a student needs personal care, they need personal care 100% of the time.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** And I don't believe that. Right. And so it's knowing when the goal is and how the role of the EA shifts, depending on what the goal for that child is in any given moment in time.

**Genia:** And have you seen kids with significant, um, physical or academic support needs successfully, um, given that support via natural, invisible or fear or peer support? It's not fear supports, which is [inaudible].

**Shelley:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. And I think some of the most powerful examples I've seen are when the EA, and it's hard because this sometimes is seen as an intuitive intuition, right? To be like, how do you know, like when to back off? And often students who have significant like complex needs, um, that knowing when to back off you almost become a, a background support for the peers as opposed to the person itself. And it's, it's a very line and again, like you know, if we're going to put our efforts into training and supporting EAs, it's really like knowing like when is that time to kind of like facilitate peers to be able to take some of those roles in ways that maintain integrity, but like you make that in a way that it's not intuitive because if it's intuitive you can't teach others.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** Right?

**Genia:** Yeah. [inaudible] that line because I totally understand and I think this is a big misunderstanding to is that there's going to be kids that need to be with their peers 100% of the time, which isn't always true, but it doesn't mean that they can't have an inclusive program.

**Genia:** Right. Um, Janet Klees, uh, talks about support the role of the support person and it replies here as for EAs as well. And thinking about it really like a tri, a triangle of relationships, um, whereas support very often, um, is provided not in a triangle but as a line with the, with the support person in between the two other individuals.

**Shelley:** Oh, okay, okay, okay.

**Genia:** Yeah. Which I think is a really helpful way of thinking about some of the challenges of having that full time velcro or hip-to-hip support is that they really do stand between as opposed to being able to have that distance where they can then support the structure of the [inaudible], like the relationship.

**Shelley:** But also knowing when to not be the intimate jury.

**Genia:** Yeah, absolutely. Yeah. Yeah.

**Shelley:** Really going back and forth between that. And I think, um, but even something really like little about teaching peers who to look at when you're talking. You know what I mean? Like just little things like that. Cause often they'll talk to the EA like these little, these little tiny schools or whatever that I think that, you know, even when I was school-based making IEP is for kids and working with students, I often didn't even consider that every goal I have for a student needs to be a teaching goal for the, for the classroom community that they're in. You know what I mean? And so it's really, really, you know, if we really want to advocate for inclusion, it's advocating as much for peers as it is for your own child.

**Genia:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Shelley:** Yeah. Yeah.

**Genia:** Oops. One of the things that, um, one of the things I think is really helpful too, and when people are very early in their educational experience with their, their son or daughter, um, the, the gaps in the barriers tend to be less earlier on. And so it really speaks to, um, the importance of starting as early as possible, you know, and the, um, because the, the longer the kids know each other, the easier that gets to pull, to pull back. Um, and it's a trade off. Um, it, it's, it's one of the, not a trade off, but it's something that's lost. And yet another thing that's lost when people take like a readiness approach.

**Shelley:** Right.

**Genia:** You can't, you can't really have inclusion until you've got x, y or z in place where you're just sacrificing, um, years of relationship building or time of relationship building.

**Shelley:** Yeah. And I think there, that is a huge misunderstanding that inclusion is a readiness model. But I often think like, why are we waiting for the kids to be ready when the efforts should be put on how do we make the classroom ready?

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** Right? Because everyone is ready for inclusion.

**Genia:** Yeah.

**Shelley:** Like it's our most natural state. We're born into [inaudible] communities, right. And so I think the barriers that come aren't the kid, it's that the kid, people don't know what to do or they don't believe it could happen. And so that's what we need to target.

**Genia:** Right. Shelley, is there anything else that you really feel like we should touch on?

**Shelley:** Conversation is so good. Um, and I do, I do, I have to go catch a ferry pretty soon. Um, I think that, you know, just to really reiterate like the power of parents, right? The power of self advocates, um, and just the power of if we want, if we want to advocate for inclusion, we have to advocate for the community that a person is being included in. Right? And so if we think about the role of parents in advocacy, the power that would come from advocating for supporting the community that your kids being included in, um, which includes classroom teacher, support teacher, educational assistant, SLP, ELL, all of the acronyms, right? All of these acronyms that are in place to support these kids, but they have come from a system that hasn't been trained to collaborate. You know what I mean? Is they're very, very siloed, very, very compartmentalized historically, um, separate services that have been offered. And so I think, you know, it's not just about saying push in, right? It's about how are we advocating for these time, people these times for these people to work together. Cause that's just like kids learn together, adults learn together. And so without the expertise of or without the expectation that everyone needs to become an expert

**Genia:** Yes.

**Shelley:** But everyone needs to learn how to learn from each other from a perspective of multiple expertise.

**Genia:** Right.

**Shelley:** And so the power that comes from that perspective of if I want my kid to be included, we have to utilize the multiple expertise of this educational community, which means where can that, where can we find space for that to happen? Because the trickle down effects on your kids is going to be monumental and that's where the magic of inclusion is.

**Genia:** Yeah. That's great. That's great.

**Shelley:** This is so fun.

**Genia:** This is so fun. I am, I'm really, really grateful for your time and this has been a lot of fun and really informative and I'm, I'm so thankful.

**Shelley:** I feel like we could just talk for hours.

**Genia:** I think we probably could.

**Shelley:** Probably.

**Genia:**

#blownupspecialeducation. I think we should make it go viral. Now, again, Shelley is a podcast host herself. The Five Moore Minutes' Podcasts, look that up. She also has YouTube videos and resources all that will be linked in the show notes at [goodthingsinlife.org/040](http://goodthingsinlife.org/040). And remember enrollment for Inclusion Academy is only going to be open for a very short time, so check it out at [goodthingsinlife.org/inclusion](http://goodthingsinlife.org/inclusion). Until next week. Take care.