



The Think Inclusive Podcast

Season 9, Episode 18

Ira Eidle | Autistic Archive

Tim Villegas:

For the last 30 years, there has been a movement going on one you may not know a lot about, or the origins of. It's the neurodiversity movement and our guest Ira Eidle wants to share with you what he's learned about it. IRA is the curator of autistic archive, a collection of video lessons about the history of the neurodiversity movement, links to websites created by autistics for autistics and recommended books written by people on the autism spectrum among other resources. My name is Tim Villegas, and you are listening to the think inclusive podcast presented by MCIE. This podcast exists to build bridges between families, educators and disability rights advocates to create a shared understanding of inclusive education and what inclusion looks like in the real world. To find out more about who we are and what we do. Check us out at thinkinclusive.us or on the socials: Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Before we jump into our interview with Ira, I wanted you to meet a friend of mine.

Bryan Nance:

My name is Bryan Nance I'm 37 years old, and I have very minor Aspergers.

Tim Villegas:

Bryan and I met when I was having coffee with a friend and inclusion advocate at a local coffee shop called circle of friends in Woodstock, Georgia. Now circle of friends employs people with and without disabilities to work together. And there are a number of coffee shops like this in the area. One of them is very close to me. It's called independent grounds in Kennesaw. Bryan works for both coffee houses.

Bryan Nance:

I work here at independent grounds as a barista and a janitor.

Tim Villegas:

Before his current jobs, Bryan felt stuck doing work that didn't have much meaning for him. At independent grounds...

Bryan Nance:

I get to make friends. I get just a little time to myself and I get to meet and help other people.

Tim Villegas:

And now that he has meaningful work, Bryan says it's helped improve his quality of life.

Bryan Nance:

I've always enjoyed working here because I've got boss that is a really, really nice boss. And then I've actually improved in certain skills. I've actually improved in like my social skills, my behavior skills and some other things, you know, though, I still have some problems at home. I actually think I've improved in other places.

Tim Villegas:

Bryan didn't want to get into specifics, but previously when he was in school, as well as an adult, he was segregated into disability only spaces.

Bryan Nance:

I mean, before I used to have some problems back in the past, but we won't talk about them.

Tim Villegas:

But now he loves working and he loves his boss.

Bryan Nance:

I feel like Laura and my other boss, I've known for a while, but I feel like there's something special with Laura that makes me feel right at home.

Tim Villegas:

But he's not satisfied when I asked him about what his goals and dreams were for his life. He couldn't wait to talk about them.

Bryan Nance:

Here we go. This is a good one. My goals and dreams are to at least try to get my drive license or at least a learner's permit that way so I could go drive around and be more independent. My, my mom and stepdad are getting old and yes, I did say old. And I would like them, I would like them to retire. At least let me go out on my own and give them time to relax. I actually have a lot of life left in me and I don't wanna waste it.

Tim Villegas:

On the wall of independent grounds there's a sign that reads "inclusion matters." I asked Bryan what that phrase meant to him.

Bryan Nance:

I feel like, I feel like everyone should get along and not look at everything as a negative, but if you know that there's a good person out there that can share good ideas and stuff, no matter if they're missing a part or something or don't look or don't look right, they should, they're still a person too. Right. And they should be included.

Tim Villegas:

If you are ever in the Kennesaw Georgia area, stop by independent grounds on the side of the Bixby student apartment complex near Kennesaw State university, they've got some great coffee and you just

might run into Bryan. I'm sure he'd love to chat. I'm so glad you're here. Thanks for listening, subscribing and rating us on apple podcast or Spotify. And now our interview with Ira Eidle.

Tim Villegas:

Today on the think inclusive podcast, we have Ira Eidle, who is from Decatur, Georgia. He is an autistic person who was diagnosed at a young age. Ira holds a bachelor's degree in theater and performance studies at Kennesaw state university. Ira was a cohort of the autistic self-advocacy networks 2020 autism campus inclusion. He started a student organization on his campus called neuro divergent advocates of Kennesaw that he led for a year. Ira has also done undergraduate research on disability and performance, which he presented at the 2021 national conference on undergraduate research. More recently, Ira has been working on an archive of the neurodiversity movement known as autistic archive and is currently an intern at the Hirsch academy in Decatur. In his free time, Ira likes to play video games, rest in his bed, spend time with his dogs and browse the internet. Ira is a staunch proponent of the neurodiversity movement and believes that nobody is too disabled to live an autonomous life. Ira, welcome to the think inclusive podcast.

Ira Eidle:

Hello.

Tim Villegas:

Hello. I'm really excited for you to be here. You live in the same state as me, which is great. I guess we first connected over social media or at least I recognized your name and kind of like your comments and stuff like that. And then I saw you, you went to TASH, I saw you at TASH.

Ira Eidle:

Yeah, I did go to TASH.

Tim Villegas:

And then I saw that you had created this thing called the autistic archive and That is what I, I kind of dove into that and I said, this resource is fantastic. I need to have him on the podcast to tell people about it. So would you just introduce yourself? I know I just read your bio, but would you kind of introduce yourself to our audience of educators?

Ira Eidle:

Yeah, sure. So I've so I've been involved in the role of self advocacy for about three years now. I started out by working with some local organizations. And then I moved to doing some, some stuff online. Now I've kind of moved back to doing stuff locally and online too, I guess. But I, I, I mainly got my start with a local ASAN affiliate group on physics, health, advocacy Atlanta, and then I just branched out from there to other things I've kind of been, I've kind of been jumping between different things because I'm so new to this, I'm relatively new to this. And I think it's mainly because I was finding what exactly my niche was in this field of of self-advocacy. And I, I think the archive is at least a step towards me finding what exactly that is.

Tim Villegas:

I would say because I, I don't think there's anything like it.

Ira Eidle:

Well, there have been just nothing like that's current.

Tim Villegas:

Hmm.

Ira Eidle:

Oh, I'll get to that in a bit.

Tim Villegas:

Okay. Okay. Well, why don't you explain to our audience, what is the archive? And, and then we can kind of dive in from there.

Ira Eidle:

Certainly. So autistic archive is a collection of materials related to the history of the neurodiversity movement. It, it includes websites, forums, graphics, videos, audio files, articles among other things. It, I, I think it's necessary because because the neurodiversity movement has been around for about 30 years now. And much of that history isn't widely known. I think I think a lot of people assume that it's only been around for maybe 10. And there have, there have been other archives. So this is what I was alluding to. So there have been other archives particularly, and I, I listed them under websites on, was like archive. Some, I listed a few that weren't autistic and specific, but had some autistic stuff in them, like a mouth magazine and a ragged edge, which are both really great resources.

Ira Eidle:

And, but there was one in particular called neurodiversity.com. That was maintained by a woman named Kathleen who I believe was a parent of an autistic person, not, I don't think she was autistic herself. But she was very involved in like the community and everything. And her archive focuses a lot more on the sciencey side of things than mine does. I really wanted to showcase the autistic side of the history and the history of the autistic community and, and autistic self-advocacy and the neurodiversity movement specifically. And there is that kind of stuff on there, but also the, the website hasn't been updated since 2008. And I think because of that, there are a lot of links that are on there, a lot of broken links. But it also a lot has happened since 2008. I, I was in, I was in like third, fourth grade in 2008 and now I'm outta college. So, you know, clearly that's quite a passage of time right there. I think there also needs to be better education about this movement's history because there tends to be a lot of misinformation about it as well as people repeating past mistakes. I don't think that's all because they don't know the history, but I think some of it at least is.

Tim Villegas:

Hmm.

Ira Eidle:

The, the way I, how I started with this was I, I, I found this on web archive. It can only be accessed on web archive. It's called autistic.org. And it was I believe the people, the main two people who were in charge of it were Mel Baggs and Laura. I started a Google doc and I, I just, I went down the line, they had a lot of other resources that led to other websites. So I just started just started putting the links to all

that stuff and a, and several Google documents. And then I moved them to Google drive folder and called it autistic archive. And then the project began in earnest once I decided I, I decided to move it all to Google sites to make it a website and that took like a month or so of work to like, get it, to be ready to launch.

Ira Eidle:

And once it was ready to launch, I sent it out several people including a private group of alums. So the a lot of people were very, a lot of, I got a lot of compliments on it. People were very were very pleased with it. In particular Julia Bascom, the executive director of ASAN messaged me and said that this was a great labor of love, which I didn't even really think of it that way until then, but yeah, I guess it is. I mean, I do love the neurodiversity movement with all of its ups and downs. I, I think I just thought of it as this needed to be made. I'm interested in this stuff let's get to work. Yeah.

Tim Villegas:

Yeah, and and again, I, I am slightly familiar with some of the resources and websites that, that are on the site, but a lot of 'em, I, I just had never heard of, so I think that autistic archive is an incredibly important and valuable resource for people to understand the movement. So I think, I think, you know, kind of where, like we are coming from as far as like thinking inclusive and Inclusive education and stuff like that. But one of the, one of the, I guess, criticisms of this idea of inclusive education and people being educated together yeah. Is that students, in particular K12 that there is some value with autistic only spaces or spaces that are, you know, designed for people with autism. So, and I, so I just wanted to know your thoughts about that.

Ira Eidle:

Oh yeah. Absolutely. Like I think, yeah, it all depends on who's in charge as the late Roland Johnson would say, well, he's, I think for him, who's in control, he was involved with self advocates being empowered and he was a survival of institutionalization. He gave this really powerful speech in the nineties about like, who is in control, is staff in control or are you in control? And I think really that's like a very important principle to this. Like like, because you can have autistic people involved with something, but if they're if they're not truly in charge, if they're not in the driver's seat, then is it really meaningful involvement? And I think the things like Asperia go way to the extreme where it's like, we should have our own country or whatever, you know, or just where, where it gets into the homogenous the, the like homogenous society kind of thing or whatever, like utopia.

Ira Eidle:

And I, and I don't think for the most part, that's what people want, you know, I think what you meant is more along the lines of what people want, or even if something is a school per se is like made specifically for a certain population. If it's by that population, it's completely different, you know, like Gallaudet university is not the same as an oralist school for the deaf. You know what I mean? Yeah. so I think there's value in having both, you know, inclusive general ed and things like Gallaudet and really the Hirsh academy, which I, which you mentioned right. Since that was in my bio there. Yeah. so yeah, that's that, that's what I would say about that. Yeah. All depends on who's in control.

Tim Villegas:

Right. And, and I guess I would say also if, if it's truly a, a choice right.

Ira Eidle:

And that, that too. Yeah.

Tim Villegas:

Yeah, yeah. And at least from our perspective, the majority of times students are, are separated or segregated it's, it's not by choice.

Ira Eidle:

Yeah. Yeah, exactly. Cause like there's, it's the best the school could do for them. Right.

Tim Villegas:

Right, exactly. So as you have been doing this work recording history the neurodiversity movement has, has there anything that you've uncovered that has really surprised you ?

Ira Eidle:

Quite a few things have. So when I look back at the old discussion forums and the blogs I, I see that the, the way people in the movement talk about things has certainly changed, but it's also fundamentally stayed the same. And I guess like 30 years isn't like that long. So I, but I think even like 30 years later, a lot of the neurodiversity movement will have a lot of the same core principles and central conflicts. So those being who are the ultimate experts on autism? What causes autism? Is that even important? What things are respectful to say about autism people and what aren't and what kinds of service provision are the most appropriate? I think the content on autistics.org has aged better than most of what you'll find on the archive. And it's also like one of the oldest things on there.

Ira Eidle:

So it's really, I, I think a lot of it had to do with Mel. I don't know how much you know about Mel, but Mel Baggs was an excellent advocate and was just an all around amazing person, at least from what I know, I didn't personally know Mel, but from what I know, she was just like brilliant and just had was an excellent writer in particular. And now there is plenty of history leading up to autistics.org. I, I think like the place to start when you're talking about the history and neurodiversity movement is the history of autism network international because that's when it really got off its legs. And that's definitely where you should start, but after that, I'd say autistics.org is like a good second step, I guess. There, there are plenty of things I've found that of both fascinated and disturbs me and about equal amounts.

Ira Eidle:

A lot of the more disturbing stuff I've purposefully kept off the website. Though I certainly wanna find a way to discuss it, especially with a critical lens, kinda like that's kind of why I've done the videos. So I can, I talk about things like Aspergia, but I also talk about wrong planet um and just like other things that I don't necessarily have on my site. But I, I still like want to discuss, because like, it's important to talk about what went wrong here or wrong planet still, you know, still active. So like what what's going wrong and you know, why is this problematic? What can we learn from this? And that's like the, that really the essential thing that comes to the video lessons, like what happened, what went well, what didn't, what can we learn from this? And what does this say about the history of the movement?

Tim Villegas:

So yeah, so what I'm hearing is that there are parts of the neurodiversity movement that, that are problematic and continue to be. And you wanna be able to, I guess, talk about those things without promoting them. Something that I learned watching the videos was about the the email the list serves. So, so I'm I went to, I was in college in the early 2000s, well, late nineties.

Ira Eidle:

Oh, okay.

Tim Villegas:

So so I remember list serves as it was something, you know, that I participated in. Wasn't like a, you know, it wasn't like a, I wasn't huge into it, you know, they were part of like my digestion of information. Right. So you highlighted some list serves that were early on even before, like the internet and forms were really a thing, right?

Ira Eidle:

Yeah. Yeah. Well, like a and I, I and St John's autism list serve, which ANIL was created because several autistic people and including Jim Sinclair well, actually it was autistic people and cousins. So people who like had similar disabilities, but weren't exactly autistic. They had also just called them ACS. A lot of them didn't feel like they were really being respected on that list. In fact, there was something called the snore wars where Jim Sinclair playful actually found this guy on Facebook named Steven Drake. They had a playful conversation about how Steven was snoring at, at a conference. Like, I think they stayed in the same hotel room overnight, and like Jim made fun of Steven snoring. And then they just like, had a playable conversation about snoring. I think, like they talked about llamas a little bit, and then that became an in joke with a and I and that also because a lot of the members had an interest in llamas, but they were just like having fun or whatever.

Ira Eidle:

And there were one of the parents who ran the forums was like, you're wasting bandwidth which is like wild to think about nowadays. That definitely wouldn't waste bandwidth now, but I know it was ER, limited back then. And I think there were just other incidents where they just felt like they weren't really respected. So they're like, we're, we're gonna make our own list. And I think, I forget what server it was on initially, but it was, it was after a year or two, it was moved to Syracuse university. And I actually tried getting access to that, but it wasn't successful cuz I found a bunch of list serves that Syracuse university had, but I, I have to, it sounds like I have to have been there to be able to access it. So if I ever do, oh my goodness, that's gonna be a treasure trove in of itself because I'm sure ANIL is like one of the really early ones. So I'm sure that's going to, that. That's gonna be a gold mine of like of information and everything really.

Tim Villegas:

Well, you know, let me, let me take this opportunity that whoever is listening, cause I bet you, somebody from Syracuse listens or has listened to this podcast.

Ira Eidle:

That would be cool.

Tim Villegas:

Yeah. anyone with information that could help the autistic archive and Ira collect this information. That would be great. You can, we we'll at the end of the podcast, we'll make sure you give all the information, how people can get ahold of you to, to help you with this project. As you know a lot of our audience are educators, so general ed teachers, special education teachers, principals, district administrators. What would you want educators to know about the narrative or steam movement?

Ira Eidle:

Yeah. So I want them to know that it's been around for a while probably much longer than most assume a lot about what educators and people in general have been told about the movement about the movement's history is like, is likely either inaccurate or is just limited. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. That's just how it is. But that's kinda why the archives here I've done a lot of research into this, but I'm by no means the ultimate authority on it. Nor can I give you the most authentic perspective I'm I'm I'm 24 years old when most of this was happen when most of the early stuff was happening, I was either not born yet or a baby. And so most of what the good news is, most of the OGs of the movement are still around and you can ask them for direct recollection of things that are on there that I've talked about. So yeah, I I'm simply a curator of of history. But you know, as neuro neurodiversity and disability rights have stress time and time again, nothing beats lived experience.

Tim Villegas:

Hmm. What, what lessons do you think an educator could take from learning this history?

Ira Eidle:

I think they could take that, you know autistic people, neuro diverging people by the way, the word neuro divergent was coined by Kassana. Who's yeah, one of, one of the oldies in this movement, then she's still pretty active on social media. So anyway that, you know, we're capable of organizing our own things. And I think we're just as good at it as non-autistic people are honestly. And you know, there, there have been moments of victory celebration. There also been things that went wrong and it, it doesn't, I don't think it really says anything about our condition or disability. I, I think it just has more to do with that. Everything that's happened in this movement, history is just human nature. And of course it, it has a very particular look to it because autistic people, nerd people have been at the helm of it, but at the same time, like, like every kind of human thing has, you know, has happened between us. You know, I don't think we're in that regard. I don't think we're that exceptional. I think we just happen to have a particular brain wiring.

Tim Villegas:

Hmm. So let's say let's say, Ira the autistic archive can, like you could do anything you want with it. Like what would be your goal and dream for the archive?

Ira Eidle:

I'm hoping to eventually teach a class on this. Prob an elective at a university. The videos I've made under lessons are laying the framework for that. And I've got like a whole curriculum quote unquote laid out, which is really just the stuff that I'm gonna go over in the videos. But if this were a class would be the curriculum I've already done a little bit of teaching the students at Hirsch academy about this. And I, I hope to present it to more people because I'm, I'm very I really want to talk to people about this. I just think it's super interesting. I also hope for the site to grow and perhaps a, a bit to a more formal host. I

think Google sites is fine and it's free. But it's also not like it's not the most robust web building system. There, there, there are less robust ones out there and so regardless I very much intend for autistic archive to be a long term and project.

Tim Villegas:

Awesome. Well, yes. So if you're listening and you are thinking this resources as fantastic as, as we do please contact Ira and let him know how you can help him with the autistic archive. And so Ira, why don't you drop in your contact information and how people can get ahold of you?

Ira Eidle:

Yeah, so I, I believe there's a contact me tab on the website that has my personal email that I've had since I was 12. It's very obvious that a 12 year old came up with it. But if you, I guess a more formal email is iraeidle@gmail.com. I also I'm on LinkedIn. You can message me there. I have, I have social media. So like any social media, you can find me on, feel free to message me there. I, or at me on Twitter at eidle_ira, I'm, I'm completely fine with whatever way you want to contact me about this. So, so yeah just reach out to me in whatever way you'd like to

Tim Villegas:

Awesome, awesome.

Ira Eidle:

Even reach out if you wanna, you know, write it, write it on a scroll, put in a bottle, ship it to me. Yeah. Feel free to do that too.

Tim Villegas:

Send it by owl.

Ira Eidle:

Yeah.

Tim Villegas:

Well Ira Eidle it was a pleasure having you on the think inclusive podcast. We appreciate your time.

Ira Eidle:

Thank you.

Tim Villegas:

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