

## **SLIDE 1: INTRODUCTION**

Hello! My name is Elisabeth Staal and thank you so much for joining me for this presentation. I am a woman with pale white skin, brown hair that is medium length hair with bangs across my forehead, wearing a white shirt

Before we begin I would like to share a little about me and what brings me here today. I am currently a graduate student at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, as well as the Research Fellow at Open Door Arts, a Boston-based organization dedicated to expanding representation of and access to the arts for PWD in Massachusetts.

Prior to my return to school I spent 6 years working for arts nonprofits in MA and Washington DC, with a particular focus on this intersection of arts education and disability. I was motivated to return to school to further learn about the inequities that prevent certain people from accessing high quality education experiences, including the ways in which PWD are or are not able to access the same arts education opportunities as their nondisabled peers.

So, while at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, I have been exploring the question that is on the current slide. This question reads “What does inclusion look like, and who gets to decide?”

## **SLIDE 2: OVERVIEW**

During our time together today, we will move through the following agenda. This slide reads “overview” at the top with the following bullet points below. First, we will pause to consider why this question should be asked in the first place. Then, we will tackle this question in 2 parts. We will examine the first part of the question “what does inclusion look like?” and then consider “who gets to decide?” I will then share some findings I take away from my research. Finally we will conclude by considering how we move forward with this information.

## **SLIDE 3: WHY THIS QUESTION (1)**

To get us started, I'd like us to consider “why this question?” why should we ask “what does inclusion look like, and who gets to decide?”

I invite you to take a moment to consider why you think this question is important? Why did you choose to watch this presentation today?

## **SLIDE 4: WHY THIS QUESTION (2)**

A few key ideas led me to this question, which I summarize into the research goals shown here.

By exploring this question, I hope to:

1. Contribute to a collective understanding of what pursuing inclusion entails

2. Promote intentionality and challenge complacency
3. Emphasize the power in decision-making and centering student and community voices

I will go through each a little more in depth to expand on my reasoning.

- 1. Contribute to a collective understanding of what pursuing inclusion entails**
  - a. Ensuring quality across programs and organizations is a huge challenge that is sustained as people and organizations operate on different understandings of what inclusion is. While I will not be able to provide a definitive answer today, I hope to contribute to a collective understanding that ultimately helps the field move forward in a united way.
- 2. Promote intentionality and challenge complacency**
  - a. It is great that many more folks want to pursue DEI-related work, however there is also the risk of falling into the trap of using language such as inclusion that has become such a buzz word and trendy in a way that is not entirely intentional.
  - b. Inclusion is not a box we can check off, it is an ongoing ever evolving process. I hope the questions and information I share will prompt folks to challenge complacency and continue their journey
- 3. Emphasize the power in decision-making and centering student and community voices**
  - a. Decision-making is a huge position of power we should not take lightly. Staying true to the disability community's coined phrase "nothing about us, without us" it is crucial we center the voices of students and community members with disabilities in our work.
  - b. I hope the information and questions presented motivated folks to further center those voices

## **SLIDE 5: RESEARCH**

I dug into the question "what does inclusion look like, and who gets to decide" through two primary methods. First, I conducted a short survey and second I looked at examples of practice among organizations.

The survey gathered a small sample of qualitative data, and is used as an opportunity to hear a few varied perspectives rather than a definitive description of the field.

## **SLIDE 6: SURVEY QUESTIONS**

This survey was sent to program managers, educators, leaders, and/or designers working in arts education. All answers are anonymous. Respondents answered the following questions:

1. How do you personally define inclusion of students with disabilities participating in arts education programs?
2. Whose perspectives or what influences inform how you define inclusion?
3. In the context of students with disabilities participating in arts education programs, please define how inclusion is operationalized in your work

4. Who decides, or whose perspectives inform, how inclusion is operationalized in your work?
5. (Optional) Do you identify as being disabled or having a disability? This question is asked because it is important to know how voices of the disability community are or are not represented in this work. This question is entirely optional.

### **SLIDE 7: PAUSE & ANSWER**

I invite you not to pause the presentation and think about how you would answer each of these questions.

If you are interested in sharing any of your thoughts or responses anonymously and seeing the thoughts of others, you can click the JamBoard link on this presentation page. This will bring you to a JamBoard where you can add sticky notes and text in response to the prompting questions.

### **SLIDE 8: DEFINING INCLUSION**

And welcome back! As you considered your responses, I bet you came across the tension between how you personally, aspirationally define inclusion and how inclusion is operationalized or actualized in your work. If so, you are not alone.

Every respondent to the survey had a significantly different answer for their personal definition than how inclusion is operationalized. While most aspirational definitions saw themes of students having a sense of belonging, students with and without disabilities meaningfully participating together or engaging with each other, and the space they are in providing all needed support, the operational definitions became quite specific and tangible. One respondent shared specific class sizes and what percentage of students have disabilities or don't, others mentioned sub separate spaces for students with disabilities, and others described their program offerings at their organizations.

Physical vs social inclusion

I share two quotes from responses on this slide. From a response to the question "How do you personally define inclusion of students with disabilities participating in arts education programs?" this quote reads: "Inclusion of students with disabilities takes place when all individuals can belong and make meaningful contributions to the organization, space, and program."

And to the response to the question "In the context of students with disabilities participating in arts education programs, please define how inclusion is operationalized in your work" the quoted response reads "...creating learning environments where students can meaningfully interact with materials, learning processes, content, and with their peers in ways that account for and value multiple ways of being and doing."

I think these two quotes exemplify a bridge between these two definitions from different respondents. I see the sense of belonging valued in the operational definition

## **SLIDE 9: INFLUENCES & DECISION MAKERS**

So who influences how inclusion is operationalized? On the slide I list the most common response of what determines how inclusion is operationalized in work. Some of the answers were:

- Partner schools
- Administration
- Staff
- Budget
- People with disabilities

This list calls out that PWD are not an assumed decision maker, and often these other influences take priority when it comes to creating programming.

The influences on aspirational definitions of inclusion overwhelmingly stated people with disabilities and students. Two exceptions include one respondent naming a particular mentor and another naming the principle of UDL.

This wide variety of influences draws attention to the varied ways definitions of inclusion are formed, and how individualized understanding is. This makes me wonder if it is possible to have standards for inclusion, that shared understanding, while remaining responsive to each community and individual needs.

## **SLIDE 10: COMPELLING EXAMPLES OF PRACTICE**

In addition to the survey, I looked at how various arts organizations conduct their work. Based on interviews, my own experiences, and observations I found three compelling ways organizations center student and community voice in their decision making.

The first is an advisor model. This allows organizations to form a team, or multiple teams of advisors for particular programs and projects. The flexibility of the members, time period, and involvement makes this approach well-poised to be responsive to ever-evolving scenarios.

The second method is maintaining student feedback loops. This strategy is dependent on organizations having access to students or parents, but when maintained well can be effective.

Finally, I see community partnerships as a valued mechanism. Community partnerships are helpful for programming in terms of resources, but when the partnership includes folks with different perspectives, in this case people with disabilities, it can add a valued layer to the partnership.

## **SLIDE 11: FINDINGS**

My findings are primarily more questions. I know this can feel disappointing, but questions are the path to learning more and doing better. Questions encourage our curiosity and lead us to n possibilities.

Questions I pose to you, are:

- How can student voices be centered more in decision making?
- Are people with disabilities given decision-making power?
- Are student choices restricted because of their disabilities in a way that is unnecessary?
- How can our personal definitions of inclusion be realized in how we operationalize inclusion?

### **SLIDE 12: SO, WHAT NOW?**

To move forward, I invited you to take 2 actions steps:

1. Keep asking questions
  - a. You are invited to use the questions I pose here, as well as create and ask your own questions. Ask these questions to your peer teachers, administration, mentors, and anyone and everyone you are pursuing inclusion and equity with.
2. Consider how you can immediately center voices of students and the disability community in your work. No step is too small to start taking, it only matters that we begin taking steps.

Thank you so much for spending this time with me. If you wish to talk further, you are welcome to email me at [elisabeth\\_staal@harvard.gse.edu](mailto:elisabeth_staal@harvard.gse.edu).

Thank you