



The Think Inclusive Podcast

Season 5, Episode 2

Emily Ladau & Kyle Khachadurian | The Accessible Stall

Audio Transcript

Emily & Kyle: Hi, I'm Emily Ladau and I'm Kyle Khachadurian, and you're listening to the Think Inclusive Podcast.

Tim: Recording from my office in beautiful Marietta Georgia, you are listening to the think Inclusive podcast episode fourteen. Today we have Emily and Kyle from the accessible stall podcast, which if you're going to listen to any other high caste related inclusion disability this is the one. They keep are real about issues within the disability community, we talk about how and why they started the accessible stall, also we have a very interesting conversation about inclusive versus isolated special education schools and classrooms after the podcast please stop by our brand new thinking who says store Think Inclusive store, thinkinclusive.us/shop we're podcast listeners can take thirty percent off their order with a promo code podthirty so, without further ado here is the interview.

Tim: So today on the think inclusive podcast I have Emily Ladau out and Kyle Khachadurian did I say that correct?

Kyle: Yes, you did.

Tim: Oh, this is fantastic. Okay, so Emily and Kyle are the co-hosts of the accessible stall podcast. Emily is a passionate disability right activist public, speaker, writer and disables communications consultant, all of her work is driven by our firm belief that if we want the world to be accessible to people with all types of disabilities, we must make ideas and concepts around the disability accessible to the world. Kyle does not identify as an activist but he is dedicated bringing about a greater understanding of the disability experience and he also works in the field of communications welcome Emily and Kyle.

Kyle: Thank you for having us.

Emily: Thank you.

Interviewer: So Emily and I have worked together before on stuff with "Think Inclusive" and it's been a while since I've actually talked with you Emily so I'm really happy to catch up. And Kyle I don't know other than listening to the Accessible Stall, so I did I did do a little homework and I did listen to a couple episodes and so I want to talk you know more about that but, since Kyle, I don't really know. Your background maybe, maybe you could tell me in the listeners of "Think Inclusive" who you are and what you know why you were drawn to the accessible stall as a you know as a way of talking about disability.

Kyle: Well, I got my start in disability in the same way that I guess a lot of activists I know did, by landing an internship in Washington D.C. It seems to be a rite of passage for a lot of us and from there I just I

was lucky enough to land the job and from there it's all been something outside of disability but, because of the contacts I made during my time in D.C. It's sort of just they've sort of like a professional hobby I guess. What started the exceptional stall, our friends were tired of hearing Emily and I argue all the time and we had this idea to make a podcast for quite some time and what finally put us over the edge was this article about whole foods pulling propelled oranges off of their shelves and we thought we had so many feelings about it we were like we have to do this project right now and we did and that night we recorded like three episodes and then over the next month we worked out a plan to put them out and that was the birth of the focal so fantastic.

Tim: Fantastic! So, Emily the kind of impetus for this podcast, I guess, why don't you just tell me a little bit about why "Whole Foods" pulling propelled oranges off their shelves was that a big deal?

Emily: So it caused an interesting debate within the disability community and there was a discussion from Environmentalist about how pre-peeled oranges that are then put in plastic packaging aren't really wasteful but on the other side that a matter of access for the disability community, people who may not have such scarcity to peel an orange, people who may not have the ability to eat an orange in the way I suppose the way nature intended it to be eaten. Find a prepared orange is making the healthy food more accessible to them and so Environmentalists and disability activists really butt heads over this issue and so Kyle and I rather than coming to a very decisive conclusion on the issue wanting to explore it from all angles and really have an in-depth conversation about the conflicting needs too. In this case saviors and also ensure the disabled people have access to healthy food so, when we realize that something as small as a prepeeled orange could lead to an issue of big as the earth verses eating food eating we decided that it was time to get down to business and have a conversation about it and that record it would that help only other people would weigh in and that was indeed what happened that was when me started engaging in a larger dialogue around disability issues.

Tim: So I understand you've recorded about how many episodes so far?

Kyle: I think we're number thirty six now.

Tim: Okay and so and that's been in a relatively short time is that correct?

Kyle: Yeah, I mean just over a year we celebrated our one year podcast anniversary on April eighteenth and we've been steamrolling ever since.

Tim: That's great, you've already beaten the thinking inclusive podcast, I mean this is episode fourteen, so that's great I love it. Well, okay so the podcasts that I listen to, were the one about you getting your hearing aids Emily.

Emily: Oh okay. So a more recent one.

Tim: Yeah, yeah!

Emily: Okay.

Tim: I haven't listened to the, the ones that I've listened to are the most recent, are some of the most recent ones including and this is the one that I found particularly compelling was the shelter workshops versus the sweatshops. I thought that was good conversation.

Emily: Oh, yeah!

Kyle: I think that was, I think that's my favorite one.

Tim: And I think it's a good reflection of the relationship that both of you have and the respect that both of you have in disagreeing with each other and then coming to; like what you said Emily, not coming to a conclusion like well I guess we solve that problem but, more like like it's still kind of open for debate this is what I'm thinking this is what you're thinking I know that other people have thoughts about this so, it's a it was a very refreshing conversation.

Emily: I don't think that we are actually ever going to really solve problems, in fact I would we do a good job of creating more sometimes and stirring up a little bit of controversy but disability is the nuance and complex that there's really no right or wrong answer in a lot of cases so, it's important not to have a firm stance on anything that can't be discussed you know if you're going to have it and from something you have to be able to pick it apart talk about it. Discuss why you feel that way and so that's what we try to do, we try to poke holes in each other's logic and then come out with a stronger perspective on the other side.

Tim: Yes, I believe that that's I think that's a good way to look at you know a lot of complex issues so something that we try to discuss on the on this podcast is issues related to inclusive education. So, there's kind of the broader idea of inclusion the big eye inclusion and then we do get down into the weeds a little bit about inclusive education and so since I had both of you on here I wanted to pose a question to you and maybe we could have a just a mini conversation. Because inclusive education is one of those very nuanced issues that a lot of people have very strong feelings about. So, I don't know who wants to go first but let me let me ask this question So what would be your impression, both Emily and Kyle of the idea of the self contained special education classroom so, just to be clear that's a classroom that is designed and really only for students that have a particular disability or type of disability but it's really only for students with disabilities?

Emily: So you're talking to two people whose education was pretty much diametrically opposed to one another. I went to a mainstream school, mainstream public school throughout my education and Kyle actually went to a school specifically for disable people so, certainly we have some interesting first seconds on that. For me I feel that I've benefited strongly from being place in a mainstream school, interestingly enough my parents were posed with the option of sending me to the exact same school that Kyle went to you and they choose not to because they felt that sending me to a mainstream school would be both practical in terms of being close to my house and also ensuring that I had solid education all the foundation so, I think I benefited from it largely because I wasn't put in a self-contained card room. I was very much included in everything that was going on, granted I think my situation might have been slightly unique in that I did not have an individualize educational program, I actually have had meetings for Section 504 so I basically had a Section 504 plan which is to say that my needs were largely physical rather than academic. So I think that made it a little bit easier in most cases for teachers not to sort of look at me as extra work and I really hate to say that but if you think that sometimes teachers perceive inclusion classroom verses self contained classroom as more work because they have to gear their, their lesson toward students of all different learning abilities even though I think that the job of the teacher.

So, I'm very much against self-contained classroom because I feel that being included was exactly what helped me to thrive but I also think that's not to say that you know just because Kyle was basically in a

self-contained school if you will that, he's not thriving right now. It's an interesting conversation to have that but I'm firmly in the mindset that we need to have inclusive classrooms and I'm pretty much know what Kyle's going to say but I want to hear what Kyle going to say.

Kyle: You know I went to the exact kind of school that you described Tim and I really did not like it in retrospect, you know I've been going to that school since I was four years old so when I was four years old, I needed the services they offer and I needed the P.T., I needed the O.T. and quite frankly I was already a smart kid out of nursery school so education took a backseat to my physical requirements and my parents at the time thought that best but not really because I actually also went to a mystery school for people with disabilities and although, I grew up in an environment where everyone was inclusive by nature and although I had an I.E.P. with a ton of accommodation that I did not need. As I got older what ended up happening was that it stunted my social growth you know and that's something that it's, it's very unfortunate for me to say and I suppose it turned out okay but when I got older I realized just how much of the quote, unquote real world I was missing out on and when I left to go to college, I stepped out of my bubble, even though I was a commuter in college, it was as if the floor fell out from under me and I was immediately put on academic probation because, I was used to environment where quite frankly the work a lot of it got done for you and I had to like go over this whole process to get off of it so, I like to be, I like to be in theory and obviously if your disability is, if you have medical needs you know that conflicts with your ability to receive an education from form or another then you know they're great but if you're like Emily or myself where you know your needs are nearly purely physical then I'm not really a big fan of them and I wish I had gone to a mainstream school because, I mean my school was so small that we couldn't get things that other schools had like I like A.P. classes and there were plenty of students in my school that could benefit from them but our school just had too small of a student body, you know, like that and so right out of the gate we were sort of at a disadvantage.

Emily: Hey Kyle I have a counter point for you . I mean of course I do. So you said that people whose needs medically prevented them from receiving a certain type of Education or I don't want to put words in your mouth but I'm just trying to figure out what you said but, I'm thinking isn't the goal of inclusion is to ensure that even if someone have medical needs that they can still be incorporated into a mainstream classroom as much as possible?

Kyle: Absolutely!

Emily: So would you argue that it could be the role of the school to; maybe it's not a counterpoint, maybe that is what you mean and use that in a way that I don't understand.

Kyle: No, no that is what I think but my school I think was at the risk of saying this a little too inclusive. I think that if they zeroed in on students that had, you know, a certain set of needs that there that those students could have excelled but, because that school had so many students with so many different disabilities and so many ability levels you sort of had to play by, I don't want to call the lowest common denominator but, it was sort of like that where you had to like average out everyone's ability and you know education and go from there. I think that if they took a more narrow approach; not that I'm saying that like, school should be less inclusive of course not but, I think a more specialized education in terms of balancing education with medical needs in that school in particular would have benefited the students who needed it most because, I'm not going to say that I received a subpar education from there I didn't and in fact I received some education that quite frankly I think people in mainstream schools aren't taught like, for example we are taught how to write a resume and do a job interview, which I think is very practical but at the same time we missed out on like I said things like A.P. classes or

honors classes and you know things like that so it was sort of a give and take and I don't think there's a great answer for it but personally I wish I had gone to a mainstream school in retrospect.

Tim: Interesting. So, let me kind of talk about the special education kind of as it is now because there is this continuum of services right, continuum of support that special education is supposed to provide for all students. In the way that, that I.D.A is set up in this continuum of support the idea is and how it's supposed to work is if you have students that can access their education in what we call the least restrictive environment right? You have students that are able to access their education in a general education classroom with minimal supports and some with, small group supports. So, you have you have your students in general education with accommodations and then you have students who receive specialized instruction which means that they're still working on general education standards, they're just it's being presented in a different way or maybe using a separate curriculum but, still hitting the same standard so you're kind of ; that's the specialized instruction right, or maybe a smaller group but maybe they only receive that for math or language arts and then, you also have co-teaching support so you have an extra teacher in that classroom that is there to help with that specialized instruction, specialized strategies on how to have that student be included in and then you go further into the restrictive environment you know continuum. Where you have small group classes you know four students with a particular; different districts do it different ways so you have some districts have autism only classrooms or students that have a label of an intellectual disability and sometimes they even split up the classrooms in the severity of the intellectual disability. And then you have other types of classrooms that I don't even know about so and then the more restrictive and more restrictive and more restrictive.

So here's my question, is that if IDEA is really doing it, like if we're providing services the way that the law was written, do you think that potentially is a good model and if it's not then you know what are your thoughts on on maybe how it should be? Does it make sense?

Tim: Then you know what are your thoughts on, on maybe, how it should be? Does that make sense?

Emily: Yeah I think so. And it's something that I struggle with a lot because I think that sometimes inclusion as a concept, if it's not done well it can actually risk education quality for everyone because it you know, maybe focusing in too much of teaching in a way to accommodate some people and not other people and so I think inclusion in and of itself can be really really complex and so. I in some cases I understand the need to have more and I hate the word isolated but isolated learning environment for people in specific kinds of disability to ensure that they thrive. But I also think that there needs to be some kind of happy medium where you people, people are not cut off from mainstream interaction and you know have that ability to interact with peers of all different ability and so you know, I find it I don't think that as it stands that the law, if it's truly being followed in all school districts as it should be to the letter is doing the best it could to ensure that everyone has what is it, the free appropriate public education, is that it?

Tim: You got it.

Emily: Yeah

Tim: Ding! Ding! Ding!

Emily: I did summer courses on this a while back You know so this is charging my memory certainly on the law. You know I think a free appropriate public education looks a little bit different for everyone

depending on their needs and that not just disability related that you know person really that everyone is unique and so I don't think that right now the law that stands in the way that people are following is the best option but, you know I think it's better than nothing but I think that we need to be working on restructuring how we think about how best to include everyone while also meeting everyone's need. I don't know if I just talk myself in the circles or if I made any sense but that's my answer.

Tim: Well, what about your thoughts Kyle?

Kyle: I am actually going to chip at a little bit there's not a single word of what Emily said that I would disagree with. No one. Yeah it's definitely tough though, the balance between, you know, where do you draw the line between somebody you need regarding In regards disability and need in regard their education I think you know if like Emily said if the world will follow the law to the letter which you know I doubt it in many cases. I still don't know if it can ideal scenario but quite frankly I don't know enough about special education to develop my own sort of model for it so. I guess we have to work with what we have you know.

Tim: Right

Kyle: and learn how to implement it better at least

Tim: Yeah, yeah something I thought that was really interesting this happened a couple weeks ago and I'm totally dating the podcast because I'm referencing something that happened in the news so I apologize but, but, I think Betsy Deval who is the education secretary said something about that students or families shouldn't have to sue school districts to get the education for their child with the disability that that they need and so I thought that was an interesting sound bite because I in principle agree with that right.

Kyle: Yeah that's probably the only thing I've ever heard a woman say that I would agree with

Interviewer: Yes, yes. But because I know that her interpretation of school choice and options don't necessarily you know, we're not on the same page there I did I do think it's an interesting point because, because that is what ends up happening is that families because of, because they are fighting for their child and what they they feel like their needs are for their education end up having to sue Districts in order to get their child included or get their child a, you know interpreter, an A.S.L. interpreter for their classroom or you know special audio visual devices for the classroom or technology for the classroom that they feel like you know that is that is fate for their kid and so you know this is something I constantly think about because not only is it my job because I work you know for a school district and it's constantly on my mind but because I've been, you know, I've been, I put myself into this world where I am in this constant dichotomy of well what is inclusion? What is inclusive education mean in the system that we have? You know because I don't have a magic wand I can't you know wave all self-contained classrooms away. But yet when I do talk to some advocates, they're like "How can you be OK with self-contained classrooms?" and being a teacher as as a teacher that taught in a self-contained classroom for many years I do see the benefit for some students and I think that having this conversation is is really important because when when I'm when I was kind of struggling with this idea of inclusive education and what you know what should education look like for all students and for students with disabilities I kind of felt alone because I had these kind of conflicting thoughts but I didn't hear anybody on the advocacy side echoing my thoughts it was all self-contained classrooms or they're bad they're evil you know you should really reconsider your job Tim, stuff like that.

Emily: Well it's so tough because I actually just published recently I guess again here we go dating the podcast but one of the jobs they have is as Editor in Chief of a blog for an organization called Rooted in Rights and we just published a piece by a great artistic writer exploring why homeschooling for the disability community should be an option but it should not have to be the only option and so we were so as we were going back and forth on the piece the theme that emerged was that homeschooling is a great option but it shouldn't be a last resort because your public school would not accommodate a student with a disability properly and so I think that there are so many different and valuable forms of education but off in the law becomes a fallback and not something that's actually followed and so what do we do? We have to sue for our basic right to an education and that's becoming exhausting to fight for inclusion especially when the term inclusion is used loosely and it's not even really being done well and so then that's when you do start to see demerit of self-inclusive classroom or an environment specifically for people with disabilities that knows how to work with people with disabilities and you know meet their needs so it is an issue that I understand the conflict around because when the options you're presented with are not always very good option you know then what are you supposed to do? You know are you just supposed to say "well even if at inclusion is terrible at least they are including me you know I should be grateful" I and you know that I mean I don't think so

Tim: Yeah I agree I agree and so so I guess how I how I wrap my brain around this. And you tell me because I definitely want to hear both of your feedback on this is, is really striving for inclusion in your own context so whatever inclusion means for you or your family in your context whether that is like you know cause experience in a school for only you know special education students or in the mainstream or an inclusive classroom. You know what about, what about my context can I make inclusive for for myself and my family? I don't know...

Tim: That's that's just kind of my my own thinking on that..Because I have talked to too many people who are like well I would not choose inclusion for my for my child or I would not choose inclusion for myself like I want to be in a I want to be in an environment where there are people like me you know. So anyways I think, I think that's a really important conversation I'm really glad that you were able to weigh in on that.

Kyle: Just a corollary I don't think there's anything wrong with environment full of quote people like me I just think that in my particular case there were a lot of times where ones medical needs superseded the rest of our educational needs I mean because I didn't need them as much of whichever student in question I felt I don't want to say shortchanged do a pretty much shortchanged but I don't think that's their fault that the fault of the way that the questions were structured I think that that's just the way the particular school handled it I do absolutely see the merits of an inclusive classroom plus a classroom full of students like me. I think that, it so tough because there are pros and cons of each and I, It's it's just so hard to wrap your head around that is because I don't really know if there's a right answer but I don't think that it's as easy as you know self-contain classroom bad inclusion good. There's a huge gray area that I think that taking and you know I think either absolute is sort of like ignoring the larger issue

Tim: Yeah, yeah for sure

Emily: you're also making me think about how I almost had the opposite of your experience too in that I was around a bunch of people without disabilities for the school year and then at the same time that you Kyle were exiting that bubble for the summer I was entering that bubble because I went to...

Kyle: that's right

Emily: For many many years a summer camp specifically for kids with disabilities. That to me on the one hand is like the least inclusion you can possibly get if you're talking about it from a conceptual standpoint because it's like let's just send all the disabled kids off to this camp but on the other hand it was some of the most inclusion I ever felt, because for those few week every summer there was no explaining myself there was no feeling like I needed to keep up with non-disabled children who maybe didn't quite get the concept of inclusion so in a way that was inclusion in a different context for me that was my opportunity to just sort of have things geared towards me entirely one hundred and ten percent all the time. And I know Kyle went to that camp too and I'm not sure he liked it quite as much as I do.

Kyle: I think well I think if I had gone to a mainstream school like you and my summer was my only exposure to disability I would have liked it a lot more. The reasons I didn't like it were purely personal and personality based but the only way that I can relate it to this specific conversation is I spent nine months with people with disabilities and not that I wasn't one myself but I just sort of wanted to get away from the environment of so many so many you know this was already my life and so when I went to that camp and I only did I still have to be around people with disability but I couldn't be like by myself but I'm making it sound like I don't want to be around them that's not what I'm trying to say (laughs) It was only that but also it was just the same people I was just in the school with and it was like oh my God Can I have my summer without any of you? You know so that's where it was a bit more personal.

Emily: Exactly, Yeah, yeah very limited places for all of us to go so the same people who went to Kyle's school went to the camp with me so for me this was like a new inspiring experience every summer. For Kyle it was just like oh you mean you're all following me to the same place.

Kyle: More of the same that's really what it was the monotony of it all.

Tim: I think that's fair for sure

Emily: That actually points to a larger issue of a lack of inclusive spaces at that all the fact that you know we always face those stigmatized by saying that every person with disability knows each other?

Kyle: oh my God but we do, we totally do.

Emily: But the reality of what we do is... These are not enough basis for you know in any form of inclusive environment that gives us the space to thrive and be ourselves and you know in whatever capacity that may be whether it's educational or recreational it seems like we're still being lumped together and society haven't quite figured out what to do with us and sometimes it can be a good thing like for me summer camp or seeing other people like me. You know but on the other hand after a while, I even got sick of it now it's just for a few weeks at a time when I was like oh why can't a regular summer camp just include me in their activity why do I need to go to special summer camp so I think I've seen the pros and cons luxury throughout my life basically if that's what it comes down to so I don't think I can ever have a definitive answer on inclusion because it means different things to me at different times

Tim: Yeah that's. I like that perspective. Well we're just about out of time so I wanted to where is it? To talk about where people can find the ccessible stall and kind of maybe if you have an idea of what is next I saw you had a big Announcement on Facebook that was exciting I'll let you share that but, yes so what's next for the excessible stall?

Kyle: Oh my God! Spoiler alert we don't quite know yet because our fantastic news was that we just were the recipients for the July disability grant from the Awesome Foundation this was something that we had applied for once before and we didn't get but that didn't deter us and we applied again and this month we got it and we just got the news, I think what two days ago? Emily? and...

Emily: yeah

Kyle: yeah so the next big thing for anyone who listens to us it will just be awesome episode but for us we're going to have to make a game plan and see what's next just like everyone else I suppose...

Emily: And then state it that we just opened a joint bank account (laughs)

Kyle: that's yeah we do, we're basically married now...

Kyle: But, you can find us on Facebook at the accessible stall and on Twitter at accessible stalll and I think most importantly theaccessiblestall.com Yeah and we are available on all major podcasting platform just search theaccessible stall and we're the one that looks like a bathroom site and you can't miss us.

Tim: Well, I just want to thank both of you for being on here having an awesome conversation. We look forward to listening to more accessible stall and I hope to catch up with both of you soon.

Emily: Yeah thank you for having us this is a lot of fun...

Kyle: thank you so much

Emily: And all we've been able to cover.

Tim: Yeah.

Kyle: perhaps we should do our own episode

Tim: That's why we're here, you just go ahead and run with it, that's fine with me.

Tim: That is our show. We would like to thank Emily and Kyle from the accessible stall for joining us make sure you check out their website theaccessiblestall.com and you can find them on Facebook and Twitter follow think inclusive on the Web At thinkinclusive.us as well as Twitter Facebook Google Plus and now Instagram today's show was produced by myself talking to usb head phones H one hand recorder MacBook Pro Garage Band in a Skype account you can also subscribe to the thinkconclusive music store Google Play stitcher for Potter magic dot com the largest community of independent podcasters on the planet from Marietta Georgia please join us again on the thinkinclusive podcast thanks for your time and attention.

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