Appendix to ARP Blog 4: Focus Group Discussion Transcript

Date: 10th November 2025
Discussion Duration: 29.42
Participants: 6 first-year BA Architecture students (anonymised as Student 1-6) and researcher, Kuljeet Sibia
Activity: Group discussion following the 1ˢᵗ focus group workshop, reflecting on observed case study videos on DeafSpace, beauty and blindness, and safety/gender/disability.

Note: This transcript has been transcribed with the help of AI tools and edited by the researcher. Further details and reflections of this process are captured on the blog.

Discussion Transcript

Researcher: I'd like to just pick up a discussion. First of all, would you like to perhaps just kind of reflect a little bit on the topic itself that we've been exploring this evening? And then I'll come in with some prompts.

Student 1: I mean, in the second video, when she said "disordinary architecture," I think that kind of strikes something. Why are we looking into seeing it as disordinary and why should it not be just ordinary architecture? It shouldn't be inclusive design, it should just be in the design in general. We shouldn't have to think about it as a separate topic.

Researcher: Thank you. Anyone want to build upon that or have a different...?

Student 2: I feel like I knew a lot about inclusive design, but after this session, I feel like I really didn't know even the surface of it in the first place. There's so much more that I didn't think about.

Researcher: Could you expand on that a little bit more, maybe reflecting on the first exercise that we did where you started speaking about your understanding and where you are now?

Student 2: I thought, at first, what inclusive design would be, sort of having those textured pathways for blind people or maybe braille signs that they could feel. I didn't really think about how... The way I was thinking of it was just having something that's having necessities. I didn't realise that inclusive design wasn't just about the necessities, it's more about making people feel like they're being just as thought about as normal. Like, not normal, like, the same amount of consideration as someone who is the ability level that it's designed for in the first place.

Researcher: Able-bodied.

Student 2: Yeah, able-bodied. It's really hard sometimes to think of the word, and I struggle as well.

Researcher: I find able-bodied is the technical term that we might choose to use. Thank you for that. I saw you kind of nodding your head along.

Student 3: Yeah, I kind of agreed with that part of it. Well, kind of more consideration into the design versus it just being present, so talking about the ramps and the lifts and stuff and instead of considering it to an extent of just including it in the design versus how the actual social interaction with the user would affect the person, like, saying with the ramp at the back of the building and stuff, or even just not, you don't see, when you're in a tube station, if you're not taking the lift a lot of the time, you won't even see it, and you don't think about how that would affect the people who need to use these features of a building.

Researcher: That really lovely reflection in terms of the hidden bits. You've picked up on some really great points there. Anybody else?

Student 4: I feel like that is a bit, not devastating, but knowing that most of those topics aren't really taught, you know, it's like nothing, I'd say, like, non-disabled people, for example, or we all come here, we can all see, you know, like, it's not something we're confronted on a daily basis, so I think it's not something that seems obvious to a lot of designers if they don't want to purposely confront themselves with those designs. I feel like it's very selfish in a certain way to only think of oneself and one's own ability to design the space for maybe a majority of people, but what happens to the rest, and that's just very devastating to me. I wish that I would get taught, like, sign language, for example. You know, that should be something that kids learn in school, you know, it's like, it's a, yeah, I think it's just a lack of knowledge, in many cases, because you can't design if you don't fully understand it, or relate to it in a certain way, and it's just designing of an assumption we make, so unless we understand it, it's not really helpful to even think about designing it, and it needs communication, and all of that, but it's a very big process, and you can't just say, okay, I'm gonna design a building for blind people. You want to include everyone, and those intersections between everything. It's just a bit overwhelming.

Researcher: Okay, thank you for that.

Student 5: I wanted to say that what really stood out to me about the videos, mostly, is how Chris and Poppy kind of spoke on what we see and what we don't see, so in regards to, I would have never thought about having curved walls and corners so that people can actually see that they're not rubbing into people and see people coming, and the lifts, having them at the forefront of the building instead of from the back, or, you know, when I stand at the station for my train sometimes, I see people in wheelchairs, and they're going, and they disappear, and I don't see them again until I've got off the train and then I see them again. It's like, where are they going to, you know, everything is kind of behind the scenes, nothing's happening in front of me, so I wouldn't know, and yeah, that's it for the most part.

Researcher: Thank you for that.

Student 6: Going off both Student 4 and Student 1, it was quite, I don't know the word, it was sobering almost to realise what we consider architecture is very, it shuts a lot of people out of it, and I think after watching these videos, I'm quite eager to explore how we can actually consider all of these, the intersections between people with different access needs, and whether we should even call it access needs, whether it's just like, you know, this should just be the norm, it shouldn't be something that's like, you know, this is like a special thing for this group of people, and how do we sort of make this a more equitable discipline and make spaces that have the same sort of value for every group of people.

Researcher: Yeah, thank you very much. I think you've all kind of picked up on different aspects of whether this is part of the role of education or the role that you are developing into in terms of a designer and how you can, how we would like to think of these aspects just as part of design, not as accessible design, and then this is design.

What about your, so in the second exercise that we did where you were reflecting quite quickly just on your own sort of personal experiences, and I was talking to you about that in quite a spatial, trying to drive a conversation that was considering the space, the spatial qualities. Were you able to, whilst you may not, and maybe some of you do, you may not relate to the videos that we had in terms of deaf and blind. Were there other aspects of your self-reflection in terms of exclusion in public spaces that gave you any sort of deeper understanding of the ability of design? Does that make sense?

Student 5: Mostly the height levels. In my first reflection was when I was in primary school and in the canteen sometimes, everything feels a bit overwhelming and large, and me being as little as I was, I kind of felt like I have to sit whilst I couldn't just watch everything so that I'm aware, but yeah, mostly how everything is just really high or just like kind of out of sight or out of reach.

Researcher: That's a lovely reflection. And I think that when we did unit one and we talked about young children and we had to go, they're not at our height, they're suddenly down there. So designing for, and the role of inclusive design outside of disability at height, which is something that we all experience because we're not this height when we're born.

Anybody else on sort of self-reflection? That's absolutely fine if you don't want to share or if there's probably no sort of connections. But I wondered if maybe some of the conversations in terms of safety from Poppy's may kind of relate because we all have our own experiences with safety or I thought the conversation around beauty was really interesting because suddenly we start talking about beauty that isn't visual and then I actually think about the places that you may have considered and reflected on more positively and felt belonged to. And that's why I kind of, when I mentioned feelings, what are those sorts of feelings and how does design have a role in that?

Does anyone have a feeling from their sort of space that they felt that they were included in that they'd like to share?

Student 4: So it was calm.

Researcher: Calm. And what was the spatial quality of that?

Student 4: So it was outside on like a pier sort of thing and someone was playing on their piano but it was more of like a street piano and I think that it was surrounded by water as well and by the sounds of that area and by the materials being used. So it was like a stone upon the floor and I was laying on that floor with my family and so I was really like feeling the area and with the sounds of the ocean and the piano, it was all giving me like a calm space even though it was completely open. It wasn't like a, I feel like many people say, okay, I have your four walls and the bed and that's safe but I could have literally like lived there because it felt so safe even though it was completely open. I feel like how the space was created unintentionally was just like a very safe place in a way.

Researcher: Yeah, no, it does. I think you've spoken about some really fundamental design qualities there in terms of material, controlling of acoustics by nature. So I think, yeah, that kind of maybe encompasses some of other things that people may have mentioned.

I want to ask you, and again, whoever would like to answer this absolutely fine, is what do we think it means to consider inclusive design as an architect, designer slash architect?

Student 3: I mean, my kind of initial thought about it, which kind of agreed with what the people in the video said, like, instead of it being, I feel like, and what Student 5 said as well, like classing it as inclusive design, I almost feel could be, obviously you need to talk about it but I feel it could be reductive in a way that you don't want the people who are using this space, who are differently able to feel like you want them to feel like they've been thought of but you don't want it to be being shoved in everyone's face as a merit to the architect where it should be considered just as much as the regular design and also be experienced in the same way. If it's too obvious and you can see that the architect or the firm or whatever wants to be rewarded for having a really accessible building, I think that almost takes away from it because it's like commodifying a thing that is a normal experience for the disabled users. For them, it just makes this building or this area as usable as it would be, as every other space would be for people who aren't disabled. And I think you kind of teeter on the line of kind of being patronising almost by thinking that you should be thanked almost or be rewarded for including the people that should be included anyway.

Researcher: It's a really interesting reflection. I think your thought process is beyond the industry at the moment, which is perhaps a lot of people that, because it will actually maybe counter that. Why might it be hard? What are some of the barriers to design as an architect or whoever we might be in public spaces to consider inclusive design in our designs?

Student 6: I guess like education or like a lack of knowledge.

Researcher: Lack of knowledge, okay. What else?

Student 3: Maybe finance because it's not standard. If you're designing things that isn't normal, like normal practice will cost more money if it's like custom things.

Student 4: I was going to say understanding or the desire to understand, because I think the whole design process starts from the design.

Researcher: Anything else?

Student 5: I think it's difficult and you could say understanding because we as individuals will never truly know how we all experience the space differently because we're all kind of in our own heads, especially possibly when designing. It's easy to maybe go off track or consider too much to the point where what you're considering now, you're kind of putting it at the forefront of your design but it's like, how do you make this accessible? Well, it doesn't have to be just accessible. How are we going to kind of consider anything else kind of thing, does that make sense?

Researcher: Yeah, I think so. I think you're talking about, it's not just, is this accessible tick? And then move on. It's actually, is the access of it is actually part of the overall thing. So we should bring it in and think about it as an overarching topic.

Student 5: Yeah, holistically, yeah.

Researcher: Okay, and so we've got some perhaps finances might be the lack of knowledge, the sort of what the role of understanding and desire to actually want to understand and also how we make sure that this isn't just a kind of tick box exercise with the sort of challenges of, well actually as an architect, this should just be what we should do. It shouldn't just be inclusive design. It should just be part of design. So interesting.

We will come into next week's conversation where we start to understand the role of different peoples in that. But I think the fact that you've had as a stage one architecture student have said this should just be part of design is probably something that some people are coming to at the age of 60 in their career.

I'd like to ask one last question before we wrap up. Could you reflect on watching the case studies and hearing from the people, perhaps by comparison to how else you've been taught inclusive design or if this was a lecture by me, for example.

Student 1: I think it's more personal, the case studies, because they have their own personal experiences and they've used that to educate you. Whereas if you're in a lecture, they can't, they're not talking on behalf, they are talking on behalf of everyone that is disabled. And that isn't something that they can talk on because they won't be fully educated on the idea of their personal experience.

Researcher: Yeah, thank you for that. That's great reflection. Anyone else?

Student 5: I think that kind of makes it feel more real in the sense that sometimes when we hear times like inclusivity and stuff like that, it kind of just, it's like a, I've heard it, yeah, like, yeah, like seeing it actually kind of helps to visualise what the problem is if there's a problem and kind of makes you put yourself in their shoes.

Student 4: I also think they showed quite a lot of examples or like talked about examples and that's something specifically important for us in the first, in like our first year to get as many examples as possible to kind of see what's possible, like what's already there and what's still lacking, what we could still add to that existing solutions and maybe even, I don't know, do like excursions or like field trips to such places to actually feel what they were talking about, whether that's like a different surface and you can actually close your eyes and feel the space or try to navigate yourself through the space, like learning by practically doing it. I think that's the most efficient way for most of the students.

Researcher: Okay, yeah, thank you for that. I guess in terms of, yeah, I'm gonna let you go in a quick minute. What about the actual, I'd like just to hear from you in terms of the fact that it was a video and we are in a room and it's maybe, you know, if this was shown to you in a lecture with all of your other students versus being in a room with just six of you and me or perhaps it was a studio group, so 13 of you or if this was a link that was sent out that said, watch this if you want to know more. Rather than the topic just as a learning tool, could you reflect on that?

Student 3: I mean, I think maybe, I don't know if irony is the right word, but I think thinking about the video with talking about how like with blind people and how they were showing images of what she was talking about as she was doing it and same, I mean, with the deaf, the first video with the deaf man as well with the audio description, I think that is, I mean, I'm sure they had access, like accessible versions of these things, but I think watching a video about a blind person talking about how they experience space definitely seems a bit like, I don't know, how would a blind person even be able to watch a video about how a blind person interacts with the space and I think you then have to, you're relying on people to have a motive or have some sort of personal interest in this topic and I don't know how you would, yeah, I mean, you can't force people to be interested in stuff, but I think it's a good tool, but it's also like, if we're talking about accessible design, inclusive design, I feel like maybe there could be other ways that this is relayed, whether that's having someone talking in person or, I don't know, I don't have the answer, but, yeah.

Researcher: Yeah, there's your, from what I hear you sound, you've kind of raised concerns of a video as a tool rather than hearing from somebody directly, it's a different experience.

Student 4: I feel like the space is already very helpful compared to a big lecture and all like a link.

Researcher: Can you expand just the, yeah, the link we, I understand, but just expand the difference between this group and a lecture.

Student 4: Well, the lecture is more anonymous, I'd say, and I feel like in this room, like the exchange is different, you know, where in the room you'd most likely be quiet and just listen, and to be completely honest, I think many of us, when the lights go out and we watch a video or watch the lectures, you just stop paying that much attention because you're kind of, especially in the mornings, it all goes down to sleep again. Whereas here, even though we had the lights on, we had like our little paper in front of us, we could take the notes, we couldn't take them as well, like it's up to us and you're much more engaged within the subject, and within you as like our tutor as well, so it's a different kind of conversation, I think. It's a different platform for exchange.

Student 5: I was gonna say, yeah, it's a lot more confrontational because there's less of us, number one. Number two, this space is smaller. We have papers, we have desks, like we can be more engaged in the sense that lectures, they're kind of built around one person talking and everyone else listening, so if we know we're not gonna speak about it or have a large discussion, that's gonna go on for a while. We kind of just zone out, yeah.

Researcher: Wonderful, thank you. Would anybody else like to add anything from the conversation we've been having today?

Student 2: I just have like a little, I just had an idea about how disabled, like this kind of disability included design, like inclusive design kind of benefits even able-bodied people, so one of the things I was saying for the negative experience I've had with this space was the trains, they have this kind, like the older models, they have this kind of compartmentalisation of their, like of the sections of the train where if you're in one compartment, if it's just you and it's a man, it feels kind of scary because you're alone and you can't even see into the other compartment. It's just a very small window and in the newer trains, I've noticed that this kind of, this division doesn't exist. It's just one long train and I feel like a disabled person would also enjoy having that kind of freedom of movement as well in those trains and then another thing was the lifts being like clear, like as a disabled person, obviously that person in a wheelchair, they would have definitely liked the day in the video. She definitely liked the idea of having a clear lift where everyone can see in and it's just more secure and safe. I feel like as women as well, able-bodied women would also perhaps enjoy that kind of safety. So I think when you're thinking about inclusive design, sure you have this one, sure you can design for just disabled people, but at the same time, you're also kind of, through that, you're also covering a lot bigger, a lot of a bigger ground than you realise. I think one of the things that we were discussing was that some firms seem to just do inclusive design, just to have like some kind of merit, some kind of like, oh, we've done this. Let's get praised because we've catered to this one marginalised group. When in truth, this kind of design, it should be implemented regardless because it's designed for a specific disabled group, does not mean that it can't be enjoyed by a lot of other groups at the same time as well when it's not in use.

Researcher: Fantastic. I think that is you have identified that inclusive design is not just about disability, it's about everything that we do and that sort of initial understanding of if we're going to design an inclusive space, we're going to make sure that wheelchairs

can go from here to there. So is it a lift and it's a ramp? Tick, tick. But actually, even if we talk about inclusive design, not just being for able-bodied, so not just for being for disabled people, but also able-bodied people, we actually say, well, if you are experiencing something differently because it's been changed, that means it's inclusive for you regardless. So even if you are not disabled, you are still part of the conversation of what becomes inclusive because inclusive design will encompass disability, culture, race, gender, and every other sort of intersectionality that we consider. But architecture, a lot of the time, will talk about wheelchair users and that's it. And not diminish the wheelchair users, but as the only understanding of what inclusive design means.

Okay, thank you very much for today.

End of transcript