

Intelligent Lives Discussion Guide



Naomie Monplaisir (second from right) stands with students at Empire Beauty School in Warwick, Rhode Island, as they prepare for a fashion show. Naomie has an internship at Empire as she works towards competitive, integrated employment.

FOR THE DISCUSSION FACILITATOR

Review the discussion questions and prompts below. Have your group think about and jot down their answers to 1-2 of the questions prior to viewing the film. You might have these on cards on tables, as handouts, or simply state them clearly before the film. They may want to revisit the same questions after the film.

Following the film, you may use the questions or prompts by “assigning” small groups to consider an individual question or topic. You might also pose several of the questions to the entire group—depending on the size and makeup of your audience.

BEFORE YOU WATCH INTELLIGENT LIVES

- How do YOU define intelligence? Do you think intelligence quotient (IQ) tests—

or any standardized test—can predict a person’s ability to learn, or their future?

- What do you consider positive life outcomes for yourself? Do you think people with a label of intellectual disability have the same or different dreams for themselves as people without that label? Why or why not? What do you consider to be positive life outcomes for individuals with a label of intellectual disability?
 - Does your response include college? Career? Home ownership? Meaningful relationships, including the possibilities of marriage and children?
- Imagine you are planning for three people and you have been told that these people have IQs of 160, 100, and 40. How do these numbers impact your perception of these people? How might their future opportunities for education, jobs, residences, and relationships look the same or different?
- How do you think people who have communication challenges are perceived by society?

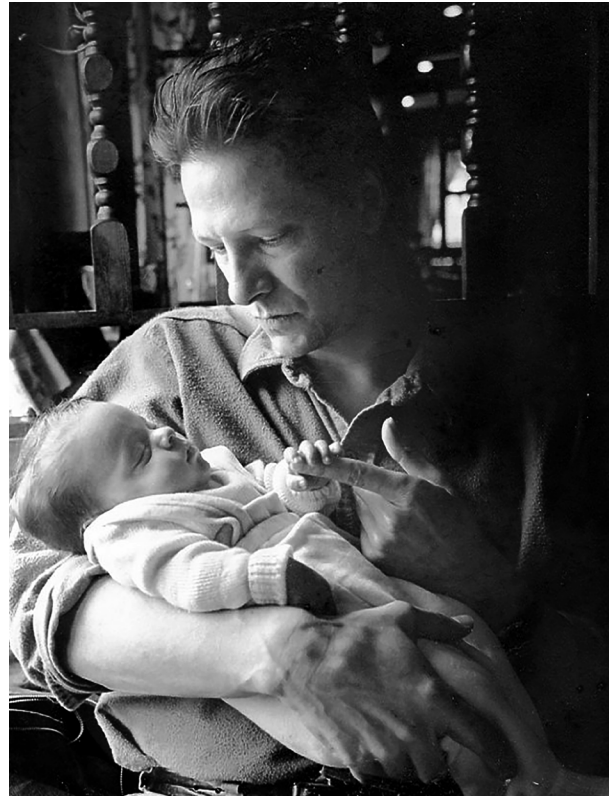
- What happens when there are other factors involved, such as race, socio-economic status, gender, etc.?
- In the past 50 years, do you think society has changed its understanding of what makes someone intelligent? How so? Give specific examples.
- How can families, schools, adult service systems, and communities support individuals with the label of intellectual disability to achieve their dreams?

AFTER YOU WATCH INTELLIGENT LIVES

Intelligence Testing

Chris Cooper states that *“49 of 50 states still use intelligence testing as one of the tools to determine whether a student carries the label of intellectual disability. Only 17% of students with intellectual disability are included in regular classrooms. Just 15% of the 6.5 million Americans with intellectual disability are employed.”*

- Think about your own life experience. Have results from IQ testing or other standardized tests impacted (positively or negatively) your educational, college, career, or relationship outcomes?
- What purpose might intelligence testing serve? What other factors might one take into consideration when determining whether an individual needs supports in life?
- Do you think IQ testing results in a self-fulfilling prophecy for individuals with disabilities?
- Were you surprised to learn about the eugenics movement? Did any of the historical uses (military enlistment, segregation, eugenics) of IQ testing surprise you?
 - Do you think any of these practices still exist?
 - What are the remnants of this movement today?



Chris Cooper holding his newborn son, Jesse, in 1987. “Jesse was, and still is, a force in this world,” Cooper says in the film.

Micah recalls: *“I like saw a sheet of paper in the mail that said I had a 40 IQ. And I like Googled what a 40 IQ is and they like said that somebody who can’t really like work at like a job or can’t like move from their parents’ house probably or things like that.”*

- How do you think intelligence testing helped or hindered Micah, Naieer, and/or Naomie?
- Have you ever been informed of your own IQ? How did it impact your view of yourself?
- Have you ever been informed of someone else’s IQ? How did it impact your view of him/her/they?

IQ Testing, Disability, Race, and Intersectionality

Chris Cooper narrates: *“Research tells us that IQ test results can be biased by factors*



Naieer Shaheed listens to classmates in the cafeteria of the Dr. William W. Henderson Public High School in Dorchester, Massachusetts. The school's principal, Patricia Lampron, says that "having kids with significant disabilities has helped us to really become more careful, individualized, personal educators."

such as socio-economic status and cultural background. African American students are almost twice as likely as white students to be classified with intellectual disability."

- Naieer's parents have fears about how he will be perceived by law enforcement. Do you think those fears are valid? What can be done to change these perceptions? Is there any effort in your community to have open dialogues between families, law enforcement agencies, local government, schools, or other community organizations?
- What biases might Naomie's parents encounter given that they do not speak English fluently?
- In the past, IQ testing has been used to justify racism, low expectations, and segregation for groups of people. Do you think the IQ test can be used in

the present day without leading to systemic segregation or limitation for those whose test results label them as having an intellectual disability?

- Why do you think IQ tests remain so prominent in our culture?
- Statistically, African American students are more likely to be identified as eligible for special education. What does this mean for equity in our country? How has IQ historically been used to discriminate against people and how does it continue to do so?

Communication

According to teacher Samuel Texeira of the Henderson School, *"I have a lot of students who don't communicate in traditional ways and are non-verbal, or*

they communicate in ways that the outside world sees as very different.”

- Do you think if people communicate in non-traditional ways, it affects how they are perceived?
- In your community, if a student is unreliably speaking or expresses herself in a non-traditional way, does the school support that non-traditional communication? If so, how is the school supportive? If not, why do you think there is a lack of support?
- What are some ways that individuals express their intelligence if they are unable to communicate verbally? What examples did you see in the film?
- The principal of Henderson says she doesn't look at a student's IQ to make decisions. What do you think about this approach?

Romantic Relationships

According to Micah, *“Everyone should be able to get married or meet other people. And dating...they should be able to do that because it's their right. And maybe down the road I might be interested in having sex. Maybe one time I would like to maybe be a dad, but I don't think right now.”*

- Do you think intellectual disability plays a role in a person's ability to develop and maintain romantic relationships? Why or why not?
- Micah expresses universal desires for love and relationships. What strategies are you familiar with to assist individuals in achieving these goals?

Jobs/Careers

Eve Hill of the U.S. Department of Justice says, *“The Harold Birch Vocational School struck us as the height of segregation and low expectations.”*

- Do you think the general public knows about sheltered workshops and that they still exist across the U.S.?



Naomie Monplaisir paints the nails of a student at Empire Beauty School in Warwick, Rhode Island. Her brother Steven says, “She’s definitely a smart girl. She’s definitely always willing to learn. I don’t want to see her just be boxed in just because of her disability.”

- As far as you know, what employment options are schools presenting to students with intellectual disability and their families?
- It was clear that Naomie’s family didn’t know that there were other options for her. What resources are available in your community to help families understand options for inclusive education or employment?
- Do you think the director of the beauty school considers Naomie’s intellectual disability when she is offered the job of Project Assistant? What qualifications does Naomie bring to the position?
- Micah works as an assistant teacher at Syracuse University. What qualifications does he bring to the position?
- What were your impressions of Naomie’s job selling items from a food cart at the beginning of her story?
- What strategies did you see in the film for identifying a good fit between individuals with disabilities and employment opportunities?
- What strategies did you see in the film for building effective supports for employment?
- How can individuals and families advocate for effective support networks?



Clockwise from left: Naieer's painting "Vincent Vase;" Chris Cooper with his son, Jesse; Micah in his "Personal and Social Health" class at Syracuse University.

Higher Education

Naieer's teacher, Samuel Texeira, says, *"Whether it's college, trade school, something...students need something beyond a high school education. But going to college for the sake of going to college isn't important. Going to college for the sake of bettering his life, financial success..."*

- Do you agree with Texeira's statement? Do you think our society overvalues college and undervalues the trades? How do you think this perspective might impact individuals with intellectual disability in terms of receiving encouragement to consider higher education?

- Both Micah and Naieer have dreams of participating in higher education. Do you think this is typical for students with the label of intellectual disability?
- Before seeing the film, did you know that students with intellectual disability are attending college across the U.S.? If this was new information for you, what were your immediate thoughts about it?
- People *without* intellectual disability go to college for many reasons. Should people *with* intellectual disability only be supported to pursue college if it will increase their employment outcomes?

- In your experience, are students with the label of intellectual disability encouraged and supported to pursue higher education? Why or why not?
- How can high schools support the transition to college for students with intellectual disability?
- How might institutions of higher education (e.g., universities, colleges, community colleges, trade schools) better support access and success for students with intellectual disability?

Self-Advocacy and Leadership

- What examples of self-advocacy did you see in the film?
- Are there scenes in which the individuals might have advocated more strongly for themselves?
- How can educators and individuals in the disability field better promote and support self-advocacy, self-determination, and leadership skills among individuals with disabilities?
- Naieer talks about the importance of voting. In some places, individuals with disabilities are not easily able to exercise their right to vote. How might individuals with disabilities be better supported to participate in elections?
- How do the families and support networks of Naieer, Micah, and Naomie help them build self-advocacy skills?
- How can individuals be supported to be leaders of their own lives and best represent themselves, their dreams, and their talents?

Supported Decision-Making and Guardianship

From Naomie's social capital meeting:
"Someone like you, Naomie, who's connected to the community of Providence, connected to the Haitian community, has social capital."

Micah on guardianship: *"I talk to my parents about...big decisions and stuff...but it's my final decision of how I want to live my life."*



Top: Naomie learns how to set curlers with Empire Beauty School instructor Anthony Riggi. **Bottom:** Micah Fialka-Feldman at his graduation from Syracuse University. He received a certificate in Disability Studies from the School of Education.

- Both Micah and Naomie have intentional networks to assist in decision-making and organizing supports in their lives. What did you notice about these networks?
- What consistencies and differences did you see in the supports that Naieer, Micah, and Naomie each have?
- Micah talks about the importance of being his own guardian and making his own decisions. What is the role of his Circle of Support in this effort?
- What differences did you notice between Micah's perspective on guardianship and that of Meghan and her family?
- Do you think that issues of race, gender, socio-economic status, etc. influence supported decision-making and guardianship issues? If so, how?
- How might the education/employment/human service systems utilize Circles

of Support, self-advocacy, and principles of social capital to support individuals with disabilities?

Inclusive Education and Inclusive Communities

Artist Steve Hamilton says, *“When you’re talking about inclusion, you’re talking about all these things. Inclusion is meaningless without empowerment. If you’re not empowering marginalized groups, then your movement is toothless.”*

- What were the differences in the educational experiences of Micah, Naieer, and Naomie?
- Can you attribute any of those differences to race, class, and/or the ability to speak English?
- If the Coopers had used IQ test results in the decision-making process, do you think Jesse would have been included in general education? What benefits did Jesse and his family experience as a result of Jesse being included? What about benefits to the other students?
- What benefit does inclusive education, such as the experiences of Naieer and Micah, seem to provide to those who are included both in and out of school?

- What role do you/might you have in promoting quality inclusive education such as Naieer’s high school experience?
- What are some specific portrayals of people with disabilities in the media, art, or literature that bother you? What are some portrayals that you appreciate?

Family

Naomie’s brother, Steven, about his sister: *“She’s definitely a smart girl. She’s definitely always willing to learn. I don’t want to see her just be boxed in just because of her disability.”*

- Some people say that inclusive school and life experiences are only open to those with strong family support systems. Do you agree or disagree?
- What examples of strong family support did you see in the film?
- Siblings play a significant role in the lives of the individuals in the film. Do you think the siblings were “exceptional” or typical examples of how siblings support one another?
- Are you aware of sibling support networks where issues of guardianship, supported decision-making, and interdependence are addressed?

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