

Teaching Notes: Gender Inclusivity in the ANNA Crusis Feminist Choir

TEACHER NOTES

Learning Objectives

- Recognize examples of gender inequity within the structure of a musical organization.
- Create a sustainable inclusivity plan to address issues of gender inclusivity in an organization.
- Lead an organization through a process of self-reflection and dialogue.

Topics For Discussion

Dialoguing Through Difference

As ANNA Crusis embarked on a journey of reflection and change, it became clear that members of the choir held different understandings of gender-inclusive practices. Some members felt an urgency to make the choir more trans-inclusive while other members felt the choir was changing too quickly, disregarding its important history as a distinctive women's choir.

- Ask the students to empathize with each viewpoint expressed by members of the choir. Why might some members have worried about losing the group's original purpose and values? Why would the age of members of the choir or the number of years someone was a part of the choir be important to understanding someone's perspective?
- Ask students to consider the different components involved in facilitating dialogues around contentious issues. How do the identities of the facilitator(s) matter, and/or how do individual identities have the potential to directly / indirectly influence a conversation? What are some strategies that you can use to build empathy among members of the group? How can you gently nudge people towards more inclusive beliefs or behaviors while also being mindful that everyone's journey looks different and operates on their own timetable?
- At the time, ANNA Crusis did not have any members who openly identified as transgender. Ask students: How important is it to have trans voices present during these discussions/dialogues? ANNA Crusis chose to bring in some outside facilitators from the Transgender Training Institute. What are some other ways that you might be able to bring in trans voices into your conversations?

Institutional Inclusivity

ANNA Crusis was founded to carve out space in the musical landscape that was solely for women, who had been historically excluded and discriminated against in many spaces. Due to that history, ANNA Crusis has strong ties to inclusivity and social justice at its core.

- Encourage students to reflect on what it means to be inclusive. Split students into small groups and ask them to come up with definitions for “diversity,” “equity,” “inclusion,” and “social justice.” In a large group conversation, ask students from each group to share and to identify any similarities or differences between their definitions.
- As Miriam Davidson notes, ANNA Crusis must continue to think about the relationship between inclusivity and voice parts. Ask students about whether they believe an organization can claim to be inclusive while excluding certain individuals, whether based on identity or voice part. Relatedly, is it necessary to be fully inclusive of all individuals if it conflicts with the reason why organizations specifically created for historically marginalized communities exist?

Working in Community

Change does not occur overnight nor in silos. To better represent its members, ANNA Crusis shifted to a circular organizational structure where leadership is distributed over several committees, called “the body of ANNA.” Refer to **Appendix I**. Recall also that the choir put important decisions about the choir’s future to anonymous voting. **Appendix II** details the questionnaire about whether the choir should include transgender members. **Appendix III** and **IV** allowed members to decide on the choir’s formal name change. Additionally, throughout ANNA Crusis’ process of reflection and change, individuals engaged with each other and with outside resources like the Transgender Training Institute.

- Ask students to reflect on the importance of relationship-building as a step towards facilitating social or structural change. To what extent do relationships within an organization matter?
- To what extent does the structure of an organization create or hinder avenues for change? ANNA Crusis utilized a committee structure and designated a special committee to address gender inclusivity initiatives. Ask students to consider the advantages to a committee structure. Are there any disadvantages?
- What are the benefits and drawbacks of using a voting system for major decisions within an organization? On the one hand, this can seem inclusive. On the other, it places paramount decisions about an organization’s future and health in the hands of members who may not have training in strategic planning and nonprofit administration. Ask students to evaluate the method of voting and its outcomes in ANNA Crusis.
- Assess other changes ANNA Crusis implemented through group decision making, such as concert dress and repertoire. How well do these changes support the choir’s mission and new gender-inclusive practices? Recommend other changes for the choir to consider.
- Many organizations rely on various stakeholders such as a Board of Trustees or high-profile donors to make decisions. Prompt students to think about how they can leverage their relationships with various stakeholders to facilitate change. What stakeholders need to be included in the process from the start and what stakeholders can be informed afterwards?