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**Children's Perceptions of Disability in the Context of
Elementary School Dance Education**

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Michelle Zitomer recently completed her PhD in education at the University of Alberta. Michelle completed an undergraduate degree in dance with teaching certification at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance and a Master's degree in adapted physical activity at McGill University. Over the years she has been teaching dance to children starting at three years of age in various in and after school settings in which she had opportunity to practice inclusion of children with diverse abilities.

Abstract

This study applied a relational ethics lens to investigate the perceptions of disability of elementary school children without disabilities within their dance education contexts. Fourteen children between the ages eight and eleven from five elementary schools participated. A qualitative interpretivist approach guided the study. Data collection involved two small group semi-structured interviews, a drawing activity, researcher observation of classes, and researcher field notes. Data analysis followed thematic analysis guidelines. Findings were conceptualized based on four themes: (a) disability as limited ability; (b) difference as normalized; (c) dance as expression of uniqueness; and (d) classmates as helpers. While understanding disability as a limitation, participation in a dance education environment that encouraged collaborative creative movement exploration contributed to the children's learning to view difference as ordinary, and appreciate every person's unique ways to dance.

Key words: inclusive dance education, children's attitudes, disability perspectives.

Résumé

Cette recherche porte sur les perceptions d'enfants de niveau élémentaire non handicapés de ce qu'est un handicap dans un contexte d'enseignement de la danse; ces perceptions sont examinées à la lumière de l'éthique relationnelle. Quatorze élèves âgés de huit à 11 ans de cinq écoles élémentaires y ont participé. Une approche qualitative interprétative a orienté la recherche. La collecte de données s'est faite par le biais d'entrevues semi-structurées en petit groupe, d'une activité de dessin, d'observations du chercheur en classe et des notes d'observation du chercheur. Les étapes de l'analyse thématique ont orienté l'analyse de ces données. Les résultats sont catégorisés en quatre thèmes: (a) le handicap en tant qu'habileté limitée; (b) la différence normalisée; (c) la danse comme expression de l'unicité; (d) les pairs comme des personnes aidantes. La participation à un programme d'enseignement de la danse axé sur l'exploration collaborative de la création de mouvement a contribué à l'apprentissage de la différence comme étant une situation ordinaire et à une appréciation des façons uniques de danser de chaque personne, tout en démontrant une compréhension du handicap comme étant une limitation.

Mots clés: enseignement inclusif de la danse; attitudes d'enfants; perspectives sur le handicap.

Introduction

Selected elementary and secondary schools in a number of Alberta school districts offer dance as a curricular subject (Robinson, 2008). As such, learning focuses on dance as an artistic medium and a means for creative expression (Alberta Education, 2009; Whyte, 2013). Due to Alberta Education inclusion policies that emphasize all children having access to the same educational opportunities (Alberta Education, 2011), potentially many children with and without disabilities are gaining opportunities to participate in dance together. Inclusive education aims to ensure each student achieves a sense of belonging and receives a quality education, regardless of ability, disability, language, cultural background, gender, or age (Alberta Education, 2011). Classmates without disabilities play an important role in creating inclusive environments through their daily interactions with peers with disabilities. Their behaviors towards peers can result in positive experiences reflected in a sense of belonging (Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010) or in negative experiences reflected in a sense of social isolation (Blind & McCallister, 1998). Furthermore, peers with disabilities aspire to identify with body, physical activity, and fashion values portrayed by classmates without disabilities (Coates & Vickerman, 2010; Doubt & McColl, 2003; Fitzgerald, 2005; Fitzgerald & Kirk, 2009; Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, & Van den Auweele, 2002).

The behaviors of classmates toward peers with disabilities are related to a number of factors including gender, age, and previous experiences interacting with individuals with disabilities (Hutzler, 2003). Furthermore, behaviors can be influenced by information children receive from their parents and the media (Vignes et al., 2009). Schooling holds an important role in teaching children values of acceptance and appreciation of diversity. Inclusive education can encourage children to reflect on their perceptions and practices regarding individual differences (Johnson & Darrow, 2003). Dance education, in particular, can embrace this mission by enhancing awareness of physical norms and values that underlie various dance forms, as well as encouraging reflection and exploration of ways such values can potentially change (Benjamin, 2002; Kupperts, 2000). Despite their importance in upholding or changing these values, limited research has explored the perceptions and experiences of classmates dancing together with peers with disabilities.

Review of Literature

In a study of inclusive university dance technique classes in England, Whatley (2007) found that students without disabilities initially viewed the wheelchair as invading the dance studio. These students experienced difficulty believing people with disabilities could achieve any level of artistry, but thought dance as therapy would be beneficial. This perspective is not surprising given that society tends to view dance as demanding particular talent related to physical aptitude, body structure, and appearance, while perceiving individuals with disabilities as lacking capacity and needing medical attention (Elin & Boswell, 2004; Kupperts, 2000; Sherlock, 1996). Sharing the dance space over the course of the school year with dancers who used wheelchairs enabled Whatley's participants to view the wheelchair as an extension of the body and inseparable from the dance. Thus, these students were able to re-evaluate their perceptions of dancers and dance as an art form. However, many dance students begin receiving dance education in their childhood years (Risner, 2007). Therefore, it is also important to investigate children's experience and perceptions of sharing the dance space with peers with disabilities.

Zitomer and Reid (2011) investigated perceptions of dance ability and disability of children between six and nine years old as a function of their participation in a community inclusive dance program. Contact theory (Allport, 1954) and situated learning (Greeno & Van De Sande, 2007) guided program activity construction. Their findings indicated that most children without disabilities felt children with disabilities were different but could not explain why. Similar to Whatley's (2007) participants, the children did not believe children with disabilities could dance. Dance ability was viewed as ability to turn and jump. Through engagement in collaborative creative movement activities, the children began adopting new ideas about dance and about the abilities of their peers with disabilities to dance. However, their perceptions of disability only showed subtle change as they identified equipment (i.e., walkers) as creating difference. The authors speculated that the children needed a longer program for their perceptions of disability to change more extensively.

To date, there are no existing studies that have explored children's experiences and perceptions of inclusion in school dance education environments. A systematic review of inclusive physical education research studies by Qi and Ha (2012) identified a total of eight studies addressing attitudes of students without disabilities toward inclusion, and three studies addressing the impact of inclusion on students without disabilities. With the exception of one study of high school inclusive physical education, all identified studies used quantitative surveys. These studies revealed that generally students displayed positive attitudes toward inclusion, while girls tended to be more positive than boys. Further, studies found that inclusion did not have negative impacts on motor skill learning and physical activity time of students without disabilities. Qi and Ha suggested that there is a need for more naturalistic studies based on interviews and observation to yield richer data regarding perspectives and experiences of children without disabilities in inclusive physical education.

In an observational study in a fourth grade inclusive music class, Jellison (2002) assessed on and off-task participation of children without disabilities in proximity to peers with disabilities. Her findings indicated that children were more on-task than off-task. However, some off-task behaviors stemmed from children trying to help a student with a disability during a time they were expected to concentrate on a class assignment or listen to instruction. The authors speculated that because children did not receive instruction on how to help, they may have viewed certain students with disabilities as needing more help, and acted in a manner they saw as responsible. In dance education, Stinson (1993) advocated for enhancing student autonomy by encouraging students to ask for help and to offer help to one another as a way of facilitating care relationships. Stinson's approach resonates with the idea of establishing interdependent relationships, which is key in a relational ethics approach to inclusive dance education.

Viewing Inclusive Dance Education through Relational Ethics

Inclusion extends beyond placing students with and without disabilities in the same class to an approach, which values the diversity and equality of each society member (DePauw & Dol-Tepper, 2000; Kaufmann, 2006; Stainback & Stainback, 1992). In this study, I used relational ethics (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005), as a lens through which to view what I consider to be an ideal inclusive dance education environment.

Relational ethics aims to encourage reflection on how people relate to one another in situations characterized by ambiguity of right or wrong actions. Its four interconnected constructs—mutual respect, relational engagement, embodiment, and environment (Bergum &

Dossetor, 2005)—can contribute to exploring relationships among children with and without disabilities in elementary school dance education. Such exploration can also enable reflection on dance teaching practices that facilitate the creation of inclusive environments.

Mutual respect refers to unconditionally recognizing, acknowledging, and accepting people (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). These values resonate with inclusion practices, which strive to encourage all students to feel welcomed, valued, and able to experience individual growth (Furman, 2015). In dance education, inclusion means recognizing each child as having an integral role and something they can contribute to the creative and learning process (Benjamin, 2002). These inclusion values are also consistent with those of relational engagement.

Relational engagement is a collaborative process of exploring issues that enable discovery of individual strengths (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Dialogue as means for enhancing development of reasoning, mutual understanding, empathy, and appreciation of differences (Noddings, 2005) is key to relational engagement (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Dance education can contribute to development of reasoning (Kaufmann, 2006) and facilitate learning to appreciate each other's dance ability through engagement in collaborative movement exploration activities (Zitomer & Reid, 2011). Such activities also facilitate embodied learning.

Embodiment, in relational ethics, relates to the idea of learning about self, others, and the environment through the body (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In dance education, Anttila (2007) advocates for teaching children to use their bodies to listen, sense, feel, and engage with others in a dialogue. Embodied dialogue connects the constructs of relational engagement and embodiment and can contribute to creating inclusive dance education environments.

The environment is the relational space created in each action and each decision taken by teachers (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Such actions can communicate messages to students about disability and inclusion (Burke, 2015). Lessons in dance are learned from interaction with teachers and peers (Stinson, 2001). Therefore, this study aimed to explore understandings children gained from their inclusive dance education contexts about disability and inclusion. The research question guiding this study was: How do students without disabilities perceive disability within the context of elementary school dance education?

Methods

An interpretivist qualitative research approach was used to gain understanding of the dance education environment from the children's perspective. Interpretive research aligns with relational ethics in its aim to encourage reflection and theorizing on ethical insights that emerge from practice without attempting to control ethical action (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005).

Participants

Ethical approval was obtained from the university ethics review board. Criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) guided recruitment. Children who took part in an elementary school dance program and had classmates with disabilities were invited to participate. Fourteen elementary school children (10 girls and 4 boys) between the ages of eight and eleven, from five school dance programs participated. Dance teachers or classroom teachers identified participants. Children's parents signed consent forms and the children either signed or verbally indicated their assent to participate.

Study Context

The study took place between January and June 2015. Eight children attended four arts focused schools and had dance as a stand-alone subject taught by a dance specialist. Six children attended one school that had a residency program where two dance artists taught six dance lessons over a two-week period. All classes lasted between 30 and 45 minutes each. With the exception of one student who transferred into one of the arts focused schools at the beginning of the current school year, the children in the four arts focused schools had all been dancing with peers with disabilities since kindergarten or grade one. In three schools, dance took place in the gymnasium, while in two schools classes were held in a room designated for dance. Eight of the children were aware they had peers with disabilities in their class. Out of the eight, four were aware of their peer's disability label. Six children were unaware that they had peers with disabilities in their class, but reported that they had encountered children or adults with disabilities in their school.

Data Collection

Multiple data collection methods were used to gather information from the children including group interviews, artwork, class observation, and field notes. Over a six-month period, I observed five to ten classes in each school, depending on class schedule and the number of children participating in each class. Observations were non-participant: I sat on the side and recorded notes (Creswell, 2012). However, based on teacher request, I occasionally joined class activity. I began observations before I interviewed the children to allow them to adjust to my presence in their classes so I could build rapport with them (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). My observations also enabled me to learn about the roles children played within the social context of the dance classroom (Clark, 2011).

Children participated in two small group semi-structured interviews. The small group setting created a natural context for discussion, in which children stimulated each other to comment and collectively constructed their meanings (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). I used a semi-structured interview guide with prompts that enabled idea development and expression (Greig, Taylorand, & Mackay, 2007) related to the children's experiences in dance. The interviews included questions such as: Can you tell me about your dance class? Can you tell me what you think disability is? Do you have classmates with disabilities who dance with you? How do you dance together with them? If you were a dance teacher, what would you do ensure children with disabilities can participate? Interviews occurred in a quiet room at the participants' schools and lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. I recorded and transcribed verbatim all interview sessions. A drawing activity also facilitated children's engagement in the interview process (Clark, 2011). The drawing activity involved, for example, asking children to draw a picture of an experience that made them happy or unhappy in dance. This was followed by questions such as: Can you tell me about your picture? Why did this make you happy/unhappy? The children's reflections were recorded and transcribed along with the rest of the interview.

I recorded field notes throughout the data collection process. Notes described the school setting, the dance classroom environment, interactions between children with and without disabilities and their teachers, as well as children's interactions with me.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis procedures based on Braun and Clarke (2006) guided analysis of interview transcripts and field notes. Data analysis commenced at the start of data collection (Creswell, 2012) and followed six phases: first, familiarization involved data transcribing, reading,

and making notes on margins. Second, coding involved reviewing transcripts, highlighting text segments that reflect identified codes, and identifying common patterns. Third, creating a “quotable quotes” folder based on the codes. Fourth, identifying themes involved gathering and grouping codes based on commonalities to describe the children's perceptions. Fifth, refining themes involved evaluating whether they accurately reflect the data and re-coding as needed. Finally, the last phase involved defining and naming themes through describing and comparing them to theory and previous literature.

Trustworthiness

Reflexivity, credibility, and ethics (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014) are imperative in demonstrating a rigorous research process. As a reflexive researcher, I share my position in relation to this study topic (Darawsheh, 2014). I completed an undergraduate degree in dance and graduate studies focused on inclusive dance education. The credibility of this study process was enhanced through triangulation which entailed collecting multiple data sources, thereby providing a deepened account of the elementary school dance education context (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, I engaged in member reflection by returning to children with additional questions that emerged in data transcription or analysis (Tracy, 2010). The interview guide was pilot tested with children of a similar age who were dancing in private studios. Further, direct quotes from the children illustrate themes and ground interpretive claims (Creswell, 2012). Ethical concerns were addressed by considering power relation issues inherent in interaction between adults and children (Graue & Walsh, 1998). To prevent situations in which children aim to respond ‘correctly’ to questions posed by an adult interviewer (Eder & Fingerson, 2003), I began interviews by explaining that the study was about their experiences and that there could be no wrong answers. I then invited the children to choose their own pseudonyms.

Results

Elementary school dance education exposed the participants to diverse dance forms including folk dances from different countries; creative dance based on Laban's movement approach, hip-hop, musical theater, tap, jazz, and ballet. Engagement with these dance forms contributed to children's experiences of dance education as a space that allowed movement exploration and opportunity to collaborate with peers. Within the collaborative exploration space of the dance class, most children understood that being a good dancer in school required having positive attitude, willingness to make an effort, and work as a team. During the interviews, children also offered advice to dance teachers. They recommended that the teacher stay in close proximity to students with disabilities or arrange to have a helpful classmate close by. Additionally, teacher should break movements down and teach them slowly, but also allow their peers with disabilities to have creativity in interpreting dance moves. Ashley (age 10), for example, suggested: “choose a dance that everyone in the class can do including him, because some things that we do in gym, he can't understand what to do so he gets other things. In dance he could do everything we did.” I conceptualized my findings from interviews with the children and my observation notes into four interconnected themes related to children's perceptions of disability within elementary school dance education contexts: (a) disability as limited ability; (b) difference as normalized; (c) dance as expression of uniqueness; and (d) classmates as helpers.

Disability as Limited Ability

“Sometimes, disabilities are like when people can't do. Sometimes when people have disabilities, they can't do everything.” (Rose, age 8)

All of the children perceived disability as a difference that stems from limitation in a person's functional capacity. This theme appeared in children's initial definitions of disability and continued into their descriptions of working together in dance. Neymar (age 9) explained, “Like people that have trouble hearing, and trouble walking and seeing.” The notion of limitation also appeared as a comparison to what children felt most people could do and made the person with a disability less able. For example, Diane (age 11) explained,

If you can't do something as well as somebody else as well as regular people would do. So if the boy in our class, he has a hearing disability, he can't hear as well as us, he can't talk as well, so he has a talking disability.

Some children discussed disability in comparison to their own abilities explaining that their peer with a disability moves slower. As Lisa (age 10) explained: “he does the correct movements, but not at the same time as others.” A few children perceived disability as having limited or no control over one's body. For instance, Ashley (age 10) found that “If we're jumping, he does it with us when he finally sees it. He might do it late, but that's ok because he can't really control himself.”

Despite children's view of disability as a limitation, Aria (age 11) emphasized that disability was not inability. Rather, she perceived people with disabilities as having a brain or a body that function differently from everyone else's.

People with disabilities have something that's like not necessarily the same as everybody else. They can't learn the same or they don't look the same... their brain doesn't work in the same way as other people's does. That doesn't mean you don't have the ability to do things. It just means something in your brain or something in your body isn't quite working the way everybody else's is. So that results in what people call disability.

While all children viewed disability as a limitation, they also expressed an understanding of disability as an ordinary part of their classroom community.

Difference as Normalized

“Well, that part about everybody is normal, erase that, everybody is different. You're always different, it's not like everybody in the world is like a clone like me.” (Diane)

The theme ‘difference as normalized’ was apparent in conversations with five children who knew they had classmates with disabilities. Furthermore, the fact that six children were unaware of having classmates with disabilities further points to teaching practices that emphasized all children belonging equally in the classroom community. The idea that ‘everyone belongs’ was apparent when Emily and Mia (age 8), who were unaware that they had peers with disabilities, explained how they would make a child they knew from school feel comfortable in their dance class: “We would tell her that everybody belongs in here.”

A few children discussed learning from their experience that children with disabilities are human just like themselves. They like to dance, they want to participate and have fun, and they have feelings. Therefore, as Courtney explained, it was important to treat classmates with disabilities like you would any other person:

Well it doesn't really matter... some people in dance class when we're doing a partner dance, or... like if you're holding a boy's hands that you don't like, some people might like, “ew, you have cooties” and stuff like that. And then it's kind of hurting the other person's feelings. So..., a person with a disability, and you're a partner with him, if you

say, you have cooties, you're going to really hurt his feelings because he probably like, some people don't understand what they have. So they just think they are a normal person like everybody. But everybody is normal. That's what I think, and I think treat people the way you want to be treated.

Ben (age 9) understood that peers with disabilities have similar experiences to other children when he explained that his classmate is scared when the speaker makes loud noises but so is everyone else: "When the speaker makes a loud noise, he doesn't really like it and the whole class doesn't really like it because it really scares them." Diane added that with a bit of help, rather than judgment, people with disabilities are almost as capable of doing things as others:

When I think of disabilities, I think of one or two things...of how someone is different from you. It makes them unique. Some things are harder for people to do things that you can do. But if someone helps them, or if you help them... or if people don't judge that person by their disability, they can do most things that you can do.

The understanding that every person is different extends in the next theme to illustrate my participants' appreciation of every person's unique way of dancing.

Dance as Expression of Uniqueness

"In dance, you could move in any particular way." (Aria)

The theme 'dance as expression of uniqueness' stems from children's understanding of what it means to be a good dancer in elementary school in addition to accepting difference as ordinary. Diane did not perceive herself as a skilled dancer, but understood that everyone can be a good dancer in school if they have a positive attitude:

When someone says "good dancer", they usually think of someone who does dance a lot. They really focus on dance, they love doing it, they are good at it. But in school, a good dancer is someone who cares, who actually wants to do this, who has a good attitude about the dance, they try. I'm not very good at it, but at least I try. I put an effort, and I'm still doing the same things as everybody else, and it doesn't matter that I'm kind of wobbly and the other people are like (shows straight posture).

Diane further described a peer with a disability who may require help, but can participate like other students: "He does dance with everybody else and it's not much of a difference... He just needs a little help, but he's having fun." Many of the children talked about how everyone has different response to a tune they enjoy. For example Jack (age 9) explained, "Some people, they can dance to any music, like hip-hop, any zoom or calm, or jazz... If they have a disability they can still dance."

Activities in which children had to collaborate in small groups or pairs to create short choreographies were also part of dance classes. Courtney demonstrated her appreciation of unique ways of dancing, when she, as the group leader, ensured her peer with a disability was able to contribute his movement idea:

When we were doing the five-person group, I made sure everybody got a turn to share their ideas including him.... Because I don't think it's really fair if you don't let other people that...you think they are not exactly like you. I think you should actually share your ideas with everybody. And he did share his ideas and we all did it.

Sabrina, Jack, and Astrid (all age 9) were unaware that they had classmates with disabilities. They discussed a hypothetical situation of a person with a disability who worked at their school coming into their dance class. Sabrina felt that with a little bit of assistance, people with disabilities can dance because dancing does not need to be limited by the body: "You don't

have to use your legs to dance. So someone can be pushing you down the lane like how we do in our dance, and you can dance with your arms.” Jack also articulated the idea that people with disabilities may have their own dance moves or a style that people without disabilities may not be able to emulate:

That person can make up a move that's so awesome that everyone that doesn't have that disability would be like, “can you please show me how to do that?” And they keep trying it over and over and over again, but it's hard, and they can never do it but only people with a certain disability can do it.

Jack and Astrid displayed creativity and problem solving skills in their discussion of ways they would hypothetically choreograph with a peer who uses a wheelchair. The chairs on which they sat during the interview inspired the two children. Astrid suggested, “Well, everybody can have a wheelchair, and they all have to move.” Jack took her idea further and said, enthusiastically:

Yeah, like a chair with wheels, and then we can do this (shows pushing the chair back with feet and waving arms). And if you don't have a chair with wheels you can use normal chairs cause you can also move them.

Participants' appreciation of everyone's unique ways to dance reflected their perceived role as helpers.

Classmates as Helpers

“I like to dance with someone that needs help because then I can help them so that they can actually understand how to do it.” (Ashley)

Whether children knew they had classmates with disabilities or did not, most of them expressed a desire to help peers with disabilities. This theme connected to the previous themes of the children's understanding of disability as limitation, their appreciation of unique ways to dance, and their understanding of the value of teamwork.

When Courtney led a collaborative creative activity, she emphasized that her peer with a disability could find his own way to interpret a movement. Her approach not only enabled her peer to adapt the suggested movement, but also helped him to calm down when the movement challenged him. Courtney's support for her peer came from her understanding of his frustration and her perception that every person has a unique way to interpret movement.

I was in a group with him, and he gets frustrated sometimes as he doesn't get moves, and he wasn't getting one move that we were doing because one girl in our group made up a move called the splits... He couldn't do the splits and he started getting mad and freaking out, and I told him, “you don't have to do the splits normally, you can just pretend... like spread out your legs, you don't really have to go in the actual split”, and he calmed down and he worked and did it like that.

Lisa explained how, as a student who was assigned to help her peer with a disability, she negotiated the order of movements the group chose with the group leader to ensure her peer would be able to perform them: “I asked the girl who was leading. I said he can't go from this to this, so I think it would be better if we did it in a different order to make it easier for him.” Diane added that in her class everyone cooperates as a team to help their peer with a disability learn the dance:

We all kind of help him. Like, not one person goes and is his...mentor. We all help him together and...whenever he needs help... In the dance when we were... spinning around, we were like (name), don't move...we were trying to teach him the actual dancing move and once he gets it, he can actually do the dance.

I observed Diane's class when they were learning a folk dance routine with two circles where one partner was on the inside and the other was on the outside of the circle. The partners performed a movement sequence together and then the partner on the outside had to move clockwise to a new partner and repeat the movement sequence. In my observation, the classmates worked together, guiding their peer to remember the steps he needed to perform with his partner, and finding where he needed to go to meet his next partner. Diane also drew a picture of this scenario (Figure 1).

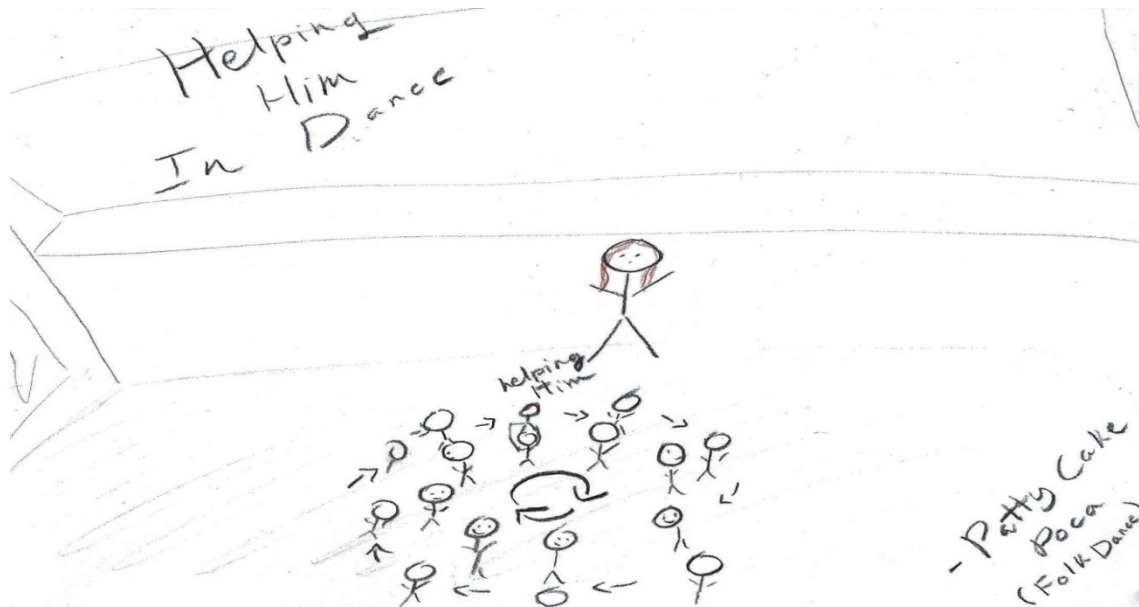


Figure 1: Diane's drawing of her classmates and her helping their peer with a disability in dance.

Despite their desire to help their peers with disabilities, Aria, Cortney, and Diane expressed an understanding that they also needed to recognize and respect their peers' need for independence. As Diane explained, "Sometimes he needs help, but sometimes he just needs to be independent like other kids." Aria waited for her peer to ask for help because she noticed how upset he feels when people assume he needs help, "They know how to ask for help. But if they are frustrated, I know my classmate, when he gets frustrated, he yells, or sometimes he swears. So, you can tell, and if he doesn't need help, don't."

Ashley and Lisa wanted to help, but did not know how to, in their words, "cooperate" with their peer with disability due to his limited verbal expression. The two girls thought they had to help their peer by holding his hand and leading him through the movement. They interpreted their peer wanting to follow without holding hands as "not cooperating." Ashley explained: "When you are trying to do something with them, you can't really do it because they don't cooperate cause when I try to get him to hold my hand when we're doing something, he doesn't always do that." In my observations, Ashley and Lisa were holding the boy's hand and telling him what to do during the entire activity. It did not appear from my observations that he was resisting them. But perhaps they experienced resistance because he was not copying their movements exactly as demonstrated or was a few beats behind the others. These two classmates assigned to help him also seemed to follow the example of the educational assistant in physically guiding his movement.

In summary, the children all perceived disability as an ability limitation different from themselves. Further, the notion of disability as a normal aspect of a diverse society was apparent in most children's experiences. These children's acceptance of difference, along with their

understanding of what it means to be a good dancer in school, contributed to their acknowledgement that every person has a unique way to dance. Moreover, children's perception of disability as limitation, as well as their understanding of the importance of teamwork, contributed to them perceiving their role as helpers for peers with disabilities.

Discussion

Findings from interviews, drawings, and observations of the fourteen children indicated that they generally displayed favorable attitudes toward inclusion and their peers with disabilities. This result is consistent with previous findings regarding children's attitudes toward disability (Johnson & Darrow, 2003; Obrusnikova et al., 2003; Skar, 2010). The children in this study shared a desire to help and consider different ways their peers could participate in dance, whether or not they were aware that they had peers who had disabilities.

Consistent with common societal views, participating children perceived disability as limited or lack of functional capacity (Becket, 2014; Cooper-Albright, 1997; Quinlan & Bates, 2008; Titchkovsky, 2003). Accordingly, these children assumed helping roles because they viewed peers with disabilities as needing support for participation (Jellison, 2002; Skar, 2010). At the same time however, participants articulated an open understanding that everyone is different and that peers with disabilities were no exception. This conceptualization of difference being seen as "ordinary" is key to inclusion (Furman, 2015). Furthermore, children's acceptance of their peers as they are resonates with the relational ethics construct of mutual respect (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005).

According to Burke (2015), children construct their values of inclusion and exclusion based on messages communicated in their environment. From a relational ethics perspective, an ethical environment is one in which community members unite in action (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Through their participation in a dance education environment that did not offer separate activities for children with disabilities, the children came to see their peers with disabilities as able to participate in dance like any other person. The opportunity offered to these children to experience a variety of dance forms appeared to enhance their ability to see the diversity of dance movements and expression (Greene, 1999). Experiencing diverse dance forms enabled children to find their own way of moving (Buck, 2006) and to accept other ways of moving (Cone & Cone, 2011). Embodied learning occurred through shared movement experiences that enabled classmates to see beyond conceived limitations of their peers' disabilities, and instead, to envision the expressive capacities every person has (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Thus, children came to understand that while dance relies on the body as its expressive medium, it is not limited by the body's capacities (Cooper-Albright, 1997).

Relationships based on mutual respect and embodiment (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) were evident in students' perception of their peers with disabilities as thinking, feeling, passionate, and knowledgeable human beings. For example, they talked about the importance of accepting a peer with a disability as they would any other peer without judgment (Austin, Bergum, & Dossetor, 2003). Arendt (1958) referred to this way of recognizing a person as being able to see *who* somebody is, as opposed to *what*. Recognizing *what* somebody is aligns with modes of categorization where one is described based on qualities that s/he would necessarily share with others perceived as different. Whereas recognizing *who* someone is acknowledges the unique contributions the person can make as a member of the community. Relationships in which classmates recognized their peers for 'who they are' were apparent in observations or children's

descriptions of situations where they ensured their peers with disabilities had the same opportunity to contribute ideas to the creative process, thus creating a sense of shared power across group members (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005; Furman, 2015).

Collaborative activities encouraged dialogue in which a common search for understanding (Noddings, 2005) contributed to engaged action (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Engaged action enabled children to become familiar with the abilities of their peers with disabilities specifically related to dance. They were, then, able to encourage their peers to try, in their own way, to execute movements suggested by others. Thus, through collaborative activities, children learned how to cooperate, compromise, and share decision making (Noddings, 2005). According to principles of relational ethics, ethical action begins with understanding the situation, perspective, and vulnerability of the other (Austin et al., 2003). Classmates displayed empathy and appreciation of their peers' abilities. Courtney and Diane particularly understood that their peers got frustrated when wanting to participate like everyone else, but experienced difficulty understanding instruction or executing particular movement. The two girls noted that once classmates showed and explained the movement or dance routine, their peer was able to participate calmly. Through physical contact, children became aware of the shared space between themselves and their peers (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Anttila (2007) referred to this connection form as embodied dialogue that can occur when children collaborated as a whole class, in smaller groups, or in pairs. Embodied dialogue familiarized classmates with their peers' bodily expression modes, facilitated group creative processes and enabled everyone to participate.

The recognition of peers as autonomous members of the classroom community was also apparent in classmates' expressed awareness of when children needed help, as well as when it was important to refrain from helping (Austin et al., 2003). Ashley and Lisa, as described under the theme 'classmates as helpers,' were the only exceptions to this general awareness. In this particular case, the girls displayed positive intentions, but they lacked knowledge about how to engage with and support their peer in dance class. This difficulty may be related to their limited time and experience collaborating (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) within a dance context. The two girls were chosen by their classroom teacher to provide peer mediated support, also known as peer tutoring. This practice is commonly used in inclusive education to promote peer interaction and facilitate engaged participation of children with disabilities (Klavina, 2008). However, the girls may not have received specific training or sufficient modeling from the adults to know how work with their peer (Noddings, 2005) in dance. More specific peer tutor instruction focused on communication and instructional techniques may have been helpful (Cervantes, Lieberman, Magnessio, & Wood, 2013).

Finally, interview and observation findings indicate that inclusion did not compromise dance education standards, but actually enriched student learning experiences. This enrichment occurred through the combination of a curriculum that offered opportunity to experience various movement forms with the opportunity to collaborate with peers who have diverse abilities and talents. Thus, the shared exploration created a classroom community that enabled learning that matched the needs of all children (Furman, 2015).

Conclusion

According to Stinson (1986), "dance is a way of being in the world, and should not be divorced from our values of living our lives" (p. 43). The children in this study expressed mutual respect values as they regarded peers with disabilities as different, yet equal members of their

classroom community. Although it is possible that many of these values were taught across different subject areas and transferred into the dance space, the explicit dynamic presence of the body in dance may have further contributed to children's learning (Cooper-Albright, 1997; Koppers, 2000). The children came to appreciate the diverse ways people can participate in dance education environments that encouraged collaborative movement exploration and creative problem solving.

One limitation of this study was that teachers selected the children who would participate in my interviews. Some participants may have been selected based on qualities such as holding positive attitudes and being strong leaders. This was a limitation I was ready to accept to ensure that the children I interviewed could maintain confidentiality and respond thoughtfully to questions.

Most of the children perceived themselves as needing to take on a supporting role for peers with disabilities, and peer support appeared to play an important role in the dance classroom. Therefore, future research might investigate children's experiences of acting as peer tutors in inclusive dance education. Qualitative evaluation of children's views of their role and the training they receive to act as peer tutors can uncover factors that mediate effective peer tutoring practice in dance (Reid, Bouffard, & MacDonald, 2012).

Finally, based on my findings, the practice of inclusive dance education in these five schools followed the main principles of relational ethics. Embodied learning, mutual respect, and relational engagement were apparent in children's expressed appreciation of diversity and acceptance of their peers with disabilities as equal members of their classroom community.

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