Creating Inclusive Elementary School Dance Education Environments

by

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Abstract

Inclusion, despite being a topic of discussion and debate across education domains internationally, has received limited research attention in dance education. Inclusion is grounded in an understanding that students with disabilities have a right to be educated alongside their peers in general education classrooms. Inclusive dance provides opportunities for people of all abilities, including individuals with mobility or cognitive disabilities, to experience dance by enabling equal access to all its activities. The purpose of this dissertation study is to explore how an inclusive dance education environment is created for elementary school children with disabilities. Specifically, three research questions were posed: (a) How do dance teachers perceive inclusion and their roles and actions in creating inclusive dance education environments?; (b) How do students with disabilities perceive the elementary school dance education environment?; and (c) How do students without disabilities perceive disability in the context of elementary school dance education? Relational ethics was the conceptual framework that guided study development and interpretation. A qualitative interpretivist approach facilitated the process of understanding the experiences of four dance teachers, eight children with disabilities, and fourteen classmates without disabilities. Data collection involved interviews, observations, and field notes. Data analysis followed interpretive thematic analysis guidelines.

This paper-based dissertation consists of three papers. The first addresses the teachers' perceptions and roles, the second addresses students with disabilities, and the third addresses classmates of students with disabilities. In addition, an introductory chapter sets the stage for this research, and a culminating chapter summarizes the findings from the individual papers, and discusses implications for research and professional practice. This study contributes to extending practical and theoretical knowledge in dance education and inclusive education.

Insights from this study suggest that elementary school dance education can potentially offer students a safe learning environment that enables collaborative movement exploration, problem solving, and creativity. The environment is created by teachers who are committed to inclusion and value the uniqueness of each student. Through participation in this environment classmates learn to regard uniqueness as an ordinary aspect of their classroom diversity, and students with disabilities gain a sense of belonging.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Michelle Zitomer. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Creating accessible dance education environments for school aged children, “Creating inclusive elementary school dance education environments”. No. Pro00047010, June 9, 2014.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A number of elementary and secondary schools in Alberta have begun offering dance education as a stand-alone subject separate from physical education (Alberta Education, 2009; Robinson, 2008). As such, dance education curriculum emphasizes learning to create, interpret, and appreciate dance as an artistic mode of expression and communication (Alberta Education, 2009; Bonbright 2001; Edmonton Public Schools, 2009; Whyte, 2013). Dance education aims to foster development of the student as a whole person through activities that address psychomotor, cognitive, affective, and social domains (Cone & Cone, 2005). The psychomotor domain encompasses motor skills, muscle strength, coordination, agility, flexibility, posture, cardiovascular endurance, and balance (Green-Gilbert, 1992; Kaufmann, 2006). The cognitive domain consists of creative problem solving, and critical thinking skills (Ehrenberg, 2015; Leonard & McShane-Hellenbrand, 2012). Further, dance education enhances listening skills, concentration, memory, vocabulary, and pattern recognition (Kaufmann, 2006). The affective domain includes self-confidence, self-expression, and self-discipline (Kaufmann, 2006). Finally, the social domain addresses appreciation of differences, turn taking, sharing of ideas (Kaufmann, 2006), and opportunities to make friends (Cone & Cone, 2005).

Due to inclusive education policies in Alberta that emphasize placement of children with disabilities in regular classroom settings to the extent possible (Alberta Education, 2011; Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Thompson, Lyon, & Timmons, 2015), potentially, more children with disabilities gain opportunities to experience dance alongside peers without disabilities. Beyond placement of all students together in classrooms, inclusive education in Alberta aims to ensure that all students regardless of ability, disability, gender, gender identity, race, or any other factors, are able to access meaningful learning experiences and be provided with appropriate

instructional supports (Alberta Education, 2015). Ultimately, inclusive education aims for all students to learn mutual respect, caring, and support for one another as members of an integrated society (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). In dance education, this would imply an approach to teaching that celebrates individuality by encouraging students to appreciate their own talents and those of their peers (Kaufmann, 2006). Teachers are expected to take responsibility for educating all students together by differentiating instruction and assessment, and establishing collaborative relationships with students, other support staff, and families (Alberta Education, 2013). Little is known about how teachers and students with and without disabilities perceive and experience the inclusive dance education environment in elementary schools. In the next section, I discuss my experience with dance and individuals with disabilities that drew my attention to the importance of exploring inclusive dance education.

Dancing into My Research

My mother tells me that I was dancing before I was even born. I officially started ballet training as a seven year old. Although the love of dance was within me, it was cultivated and inspired by the wonderful dance teachers who worked with me throughout my childhood and teenage years, teachers who created positive and noncompetitive environments for me to explore and discover all that dance had to offer. My dance teachers made me feel at home in the studio, so much so, that I would frequently refuse to let my parents take me home until all the classes were over. I would finish my class and sometimes linger in the studio and dance with the older students or just watch them, inspired to one day become as skilled as they were. In the dance studio, magic would happen as the shy girl I knew to be myself would disappear, thanks to teachers who encouraged the dancer and choreographer in me to shine.

My love of dance, combined with enjoyment of working with children, led me to undergraduate studies in dance education at the Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance. As a student, in addition to my regular teaching experience requirements, I took part in a project aimed at encouraging student involvement in the community. Engaging in the project provided me with an opportunity to work with children with disabilities, first on a one-to-one basis, and then teaching dance to a group. In the first year, I worked with a teenage girl with cerebral palsy (CP). One day as we were sitting on the floor of her bedroom, working together on a school project, she told me "I get sad when I go to parties with my friends and I cannot dance because I cannot walk." I was deeply affected by her comment; dance was so much a part of my life that I could not picture a life without it. I began to wonder about who determines who can dance, how we dance and where we can dance. I wondered, 'Do we really need to walk to be able to dance?' I told the girl that I thought she could dance, and we put on some music and danced together sitting on the floor. This made her very happy. The girl's comment made me realize how dance was a privilege I was lucky to have, but children with disabilities may have been denied. I wanted to do something to provide more children with opportunities to experience the joy I take for granted in dance. During my last year of involvement in the project, I ran a dance program at the girl's school, a specialized school for children with CP, and she joined my class. I had a tremendous joy seeing her happy every week as she was discovering her ability to dance. Working with this girl and her classmates taught me to see the dancer in every person, and affirmed my belief that dance is a right everyone should have, rather than a privilege.

After graduation, I taught ballet, jazz, creative movement, and modern dance to children as young as three years old in community centers and after school programs in Israel and in Canada. As a teacher, I had the opportunity to practice inclusion of a range of children, including

some who had Down Syndrome, learning disabilities, low muscle tone, and a child with a brain tumor. As a dance teacher, I made every effort to ensure I provided any modifications necessary and that all children participated in demonstration classes and end of year recitals.

A second incident that sparked my interest in exploring the topic of inclusive dance education occurred few years after I completed my undergraduate degree. I was enrolled in a community adult jazz class and a man with autism was participating in the class. He was employed, had his own car, and was a paying participant just like any other student. Yet, the teacher treated him as if she was doing him a favor in allowing him to participate in her class. She would make statements to other students about the man being autistic. When we practiced locomotive combinations or choreographic phrases, the teacher had the man dance separately rather than with a group; she would be the only one to accompany him and demonstrate the moves to him. On the surface, the teacher's treatment did not seem to bother the man, as he rarely missed a class and he displayed great enthusiasm in his dancing. Sometimes, to show my support for him, I would join the man in the combinations so he would feel included.

One day, the man lost his balance in the midst of a turn and he fell, landing on the teacher. Although no one suffered any serious injuries, his fall caused a commotion in the class. Fellow students began talking about how the man did not belong in the class, as if he was not even present. It did not seem to occur to the other participants that losing one's balance in a turn could happen to anyone, or that the man was able to understand that they were talking about him. I could tell by the way he was pacing back and forth and repeating "I just lost my balance, it happens to me sometimes", that he was upset and perhaps embarrassed. I wanted to do something, but did not know what would be the right thing to do. I thought that saying something to my classmates in the midst of the commotion that was happening in the room would have just

inserted me into the group that was talking about the man in front of him, and might make him feel more uncomfortable. I also did not know the man well enough to know if approaching him and trying to comfort him would help or cause more hardship for him. I decided the best thing to do would be to wait for the class to end and to try and speak to the teacher when she was calm.

When class ended, the man stayed to talk to the teacher and she told him it was best to find another class. Her reasoning was that the class was for more technically advanced students than he was. He begged her to allow him to continue, but she refused. After the man left, I approached the teacher as we had known each other for a number of years, and she knew I had some previous experience working with children with autism. The teacher told me that the man demanded too much of her attention because she had to do all the combinations with him instead of being able to watch the rest of the class. She also thought he posed a danger for other students because he lacked movement control and spatial awareness. I asked the teacher if I could do the combinations with the man so that she could focus more attention on others. She said that it was still not safe because he could fall and hurt me, and then as a result I might not be able to dance anymore. She felt this man needed a class with other people with autism and that he did not belong with us. I felt terrible for the man because he just wanted to dance but was excluded because he had a disability. At the same time, I understood that the teacher's actions were not intentionally harmful, but were based on preconceived notions of individuals with autism in addition to a lack of knowledge on how she could make the dance environment more inclusive. The teacher failed to create an inclusive environment for this man due to her use of labeling practices, identifying him by his impairment rather than by his personhood, and singling him out from the group. The other students seemed to only know him by his impairment and did not get to know him as a person who enjoyed dancing, as they did. This incident made me realize the

importance of pursuing research on inclusion in dance education and seeking ways to create environments that allow all persons the opportunity to dance. As a direct result of this realization, I specifically chose to work with children during my Master's degree because I thought that if children were exposed to inclusion in dance at a young age, situations such as the one described above could potentially be avoided in the future.

As part of my Master's thesis, I created and led a children's inclusive dance program. I was eager to ensure I offered a safe and supportive environment that allowed all children the opportunity to explore their movement potential and engage in social interaction with peers. I specifically sought a community center location for the program, rather than a school for students with disabilities, or a rehabilitation center, because I wanted the location to be one that was open for any child to attend recreational activities. I wanted to ensure my program was seen as offering opportunities for every child to dance, rather than being viewed as a form of therapy for children with disabilities. My Master's study sought to explore changes in children's perceptions of dance ability and disability as a function of their participation in my dance program. My findings indicated positive change in children's perceptions of dance ability. Children without disabilities started the program believing that if one cannot walk, they cannot dance, and at the end of the program were able to understand the different ways every person could dance. I even observed children without disabilities incorporating ideas they learned from the dance class, such as levels in space, into their free play at the beginning of the class. By adding crawling movements into their tag games, they created an opportunity for one of the children who had difficulties with balance to feel comfortable joining the activity (Zitomer & Reid, 2011). However, my study did not explore children's experiences in great depth, and teachers' experiences were not discussed at all. Furthermore, I initiated my program with the

intention of creating an inclusive dance education environment for students with and without disabilities in a community setting. Thus, the choice to practice inclusion was mine and not enforced upon me by any policy. Within school systems, teachers do not usually get to choose whether or not to practice inclusion, and in elementary school, when dance is offered as a curriculum subject, children cannot choose whether or not to take it. Based on my previous work and experience with dance, disability, and inclusion, my dissertation study explored experiences of inclusive dance education from perspectives of elementary school teachers and students with and without disabilities.

Overview of the Study

Research Questions

My dissertation study explored how inclusive dance education environments are created in elementary schools. Specifically, my research questions were: (a) How do dance teachers perceive inclusion and their roles and actions in creating inclusive dance education environments?; (b) How do students with disabilities perceive the elementary school dance education environment?; and (c) How do students without disabilities perceive disability in the context of elementary school dance education?

Significance

In June, 1994, over 300 representatives of 94 countries and 25 international organizations gathered in Salamanca, Spain to discuss fundamental policy shifts needed to promote inclusive education for children with special educational needs (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 1994). The framework was guided by the principle that schools have the responsibility to accommodate every child. Proposed actions included the combination of articulating clear inclusion policies with adequate funding, effective public

information to reduce prejudice, extensive programs for staff training, parental and community involvement, and international cooperation. Additionally, changes were proposed in such schooling aspects as curriculum, school management, pedagogy, assessment, staffing, and extracurricular activities (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca statement advanced earlier conference decisions to ensure every person's right to an education, adding emphasis on the right of individuals with disabilities to be educated in inclusive classrooms (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1999). Inclusive education has since become an international topic of research, discussion, debate, and policy development with diverse interpretations (Reindal, 2015).

Inclusive education has been a topic of concern in Canada as well. Inclusion policies vary widely in each of Canada's provinces and territories, as there is no federal legislation in connection with inclusive education (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015). Each province creates its own inclusive education policies ensuring the rights of children with disabilities to an education (Towle, 2015). In Alberta, inclusive education policies aim to ensure that all students "regardless of race, religious belief, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, family status or sexual orientation, or any other factor(s), have access to meaningful and relevant learning experiences that include appropriate instructional supports" (Alberta Education, 2015, p. 25). Teachers have the responsibility to provide differentiated instruction that recognizes and supports the learning needs of all students (Alberta Education, 2010). Additionally, a shared responsibility is encouraged between teachers and students, as well as families, in creating inclusive education environments (Alberta Education, 2013).

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of schools in Alberta offering dance as a distinct subject matter separate from physical education (Alberta Education, 2009;

Robinson, 2008). In a context of inclusion, children with disabilities can potentially gain opportunities to participate in dance education alongside peers without disabilities. Research addressing inclusive dance education experiences of teachers and students is scant, and in relation to the Alberta context, nonexistent. My study contributes to the understanding of the complexities involved in creating inclusive dance education environments by exploring the perceptions of dance teachers and students with and without disabilities, as well as the intersection between those perspectives. I now provide an overview of the potential practical and theoretical contributions of this study based on each of the participant groups.

Teachers' perceptions of inclusion influence their teaching practices (Lienert, Sherrill, & Myers, 2001), which can promote or hinder the creation of inclusive dance education environments. By investigating elementary school dance teachers' perceptions and practices, I was able to gain insight into effective teaching practices, and areas in which teachers may require additional support. Insights gained from this study can contribute to advancing teacher education and professional development opportunities that may increase availability of inclusive dance programs as well as increase efficacy of existing programs in and out of school.

The voices of children with disabilities are barely heard in dance education research (Rolfe & Warburton, 2011; Zitomer & Reid, 2011) as well as in other arts subject areas such as music (Abramo & Pierce, 2013). This study gave opportunities for children with disabilities to voice their experiences and perceptions of their school dance education environment. Further, it is important for teachers to hear what children with disabilities have to say about teacher inclusion practices in order to provide meaningful dance education experiences to all students.

Although perceptions of children without disabilities related to inclusion of students with disabilities can be an important source of information for inclusion efforts (Block &

Obrusnikova, 2007), these perceptions have not been explored in depth in dance education. Students without disabilities may also require inclusion support at different times over the course of their schooling (Furman, 2015). The perspectives of classmates that are shared in this study can enhance understandings about how dance education activities can foster shared movement exploration that contributes to building inclusive school communities.

Review of the Literature

A Note of Clarification Regarding Language Use

Prior to discussing inclusive education, it is important that I clarify my standpoint on language use regarding disability. *Disability* is a contentious term (Whatley, 2007) because it is often associated with a "lack" in comparison to others perceived as "normal" (Schwyzer, 2005). In this dissertation I use "person-first" language (American Psychological Association, 2010) because this discourse form recognizes disability as secondary to the person who is experiencing it. In education, children with disabilities are often referred to as "children with special needs". However, some individuals with disabilities find terms such as "special" to be patronizing and offensive (American Psychological Association, 2010). As Cooper-Albright (1997) and Furman (2015) remind us, many people may have special needs, not only those identified as having disabilities. I view disability as existing on a continuum where people can have disabilities at any given moment depending on the demands of the context in which they live and work (Wendell, 1996). For example, during my pilot study in private studios, I interviewed a girl whom I recruited as a peer without a disability. But when I began my interview with her, I quickly learned that while in the studio she was not recognized as a student with a disability, in school she was in a class for students with learning disabilities. Thus, this girl was disabled by the academic demands of the school context, but within a dance context was able to excel.

I am further defining disability based on the International Classification of Function (ICF) which is the framework for health and disability developed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The ICF defines disability as "an umbrella term for impairment, activity limitations, and participation restrictions" (WHO, 2013, Disability and health, para 1). I use this definition because the WHO is considered an international leader in statistics and terminology addressing disability (Winzer, 2008) and is referenced in Canada by government agencies such as Statistics Canada (Statistics Canada, 2012). Furthermore, the WHO definition of disability has evolved over the years to recognize the impact of the interaction between the environment and the person with a disability. The WHO definition also aligns with the statement provided by the UN declaration on rights of individuals with disabilities (2006): "Recognizing that disability is an evolving concept and that disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others." (Item 67 bhttp://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml)

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is an approach that advocates educating all children in general (regular) classrooms with same age peers, while providing equal access to all learning and social activities (Porter, 2008). Inclusion is based on understanding that it is the right of students with disabilities to be educated alongside their peers in classrooms (Erten & Savage, 2012). Inclusion is first a mindset, a commitment to principles and a willingness to place them in practice (Winzer, 2008). It extends beyond placement of children into classrooms and is viewed as an approach for implementing social justice in schools and society (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; DePauw & Dol-Tepper, 2000; Hehir, 2005; Theoharis, 2009). Inclusion is about participation of

every student (Brendhal, 2008) within the learning environment. It can be viewed as a process in which change occurs in varied dimensions of the school setting and practices to promote participation of children with disabilities (Fitzgerald, 2006). Furman (2015) defined inclusive education as a classroom that enables all students to "explore shared topics through a rich variety of entry points" (p. 63). She further asserted that an inclusive curriculum should have as many entry points as there are students. Thus, inclusive teaching recognizes the unique learning needs of each student, not only those identified as having disabilities.

Canada's charter of rights and freedoms passed in 1982 ensures all citizens have equal rights to access benefits under the law, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability (Part 1, section 16). This constitutional act also ensures the rights to an education for individuals with disabilities. On March 30, 2007 Canada was one of eighty countries that signed the UN convention on the rights and freedoms of persons with disabilities (Porter 2008; United Nations Treaty Collection, 2015). Article 24 in the convention states the agreement of signing parties to allow children with disabilities equal opportunity to access inclusive quality primary and secondary education (United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2006). However, in Canada education is the responsibility of the provinces. Therefore, inclusion policies are mandated differently across Canadian provinces, although all provinces stress placement of students with disabilities to the extent possible in the general education classroom (Hardy & Woodcock, 2015; Thompson, Lyon, & Timmons, 2015; Towle, 2015). According to Towle (2015), three types of inclusion seem apparent in practice across Canada: the first is inclusion where students with disabilities participate in the class. A second type of inclusion is one where

students with disabilities participate in a classroom, but are pulled out. And a third type of inclusion is one where students with disabilities learn together in their own separate classroom.

In Alberta, policies regarding the placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms were first developed in 1993 (Alberta Teachers' Association, 2014). Currently, Alberta Education defines an inclusive education system as one that ensures each student gains a sense of belonging and receives a quality education regardless of ability, disability, language, cultural background, gender, or age (Alberta Education, 2011; 2015). This does not necessarily imply automatic placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, rather a shared commitment to meet diverse student needs in any school setting, by focusing on student strengths instead of limitations (Government of Alberta, 2010). Thus, in seeking inclusive dance education settings for this dissertation study, I started from the idea of students with disabilities learning alongside peers without disabilities in general (regular) education classrooms.

The ultimate goal of providing inclusion support services for students with disabilities is to enable children to fulfill their potential, enjoy life (Wendell, 1996), form social networks and friendships, and contribute to society (Stainback & Stainback, 1992; Wendell, 1996). Through valuing diversity, equality, and unique student contributions (DePauw & Dol-Tepper, 2000; Kaufmann, 2006; MacKay, 2007), inclusion aims for all students to learn mutual respect, caring, and support for one another as members of an integrated society (Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

Inclusion in Practice

Because dance tends to be seen as either art or physical activity, its place in the curriculum varies between school settings (Francis & Lathrop, 2014). Therefore, in addressing issues with inclusion in practice, I provide a brief review of findings from arts and physical

education. A review of qualitative and quantitative studies of physical education and fine arts teachers' attitudes and experiences of inclusion revealed that teachers valued the idea of inclusion. They saw it as means to promote equality and socialization of students with disabilities (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Hodge, Ammah, Casebolt, Lamaster, & O'Sullivan, 2004; Qi & Ha, 2012b), and teach students without disabilities values of acceptance, tolerance, and understanding of diversity (Darrow, 1999; Nabb & Balcetis, 2010). However, inclusion 'in practice' was perceived to increase the complexity of managing the learning environment due to increased diversity of students with different physical, cognitive, and behavioral capacities participating in the same class (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Darrow, 1999; Lienert et al., 2001). Pressure to meet curricular (Haycock & Smith, 2010), performance, or parental expectations (Darrow, 1999), and concerns for the impact of inclusion on other students' achievement further enhanced the complexity of including all students in learning activities (Morley et al., 2005; Scott, Jellison, Chappell, & Standridge, 2007).

Teachers in the reviewed studies sought varied ways to address student learning needs by modifying instructional strategies, activities, curriculum materials, and equipment. Searching for these strategies and implementing them resulted in increased demands on teachers' time for lesson planning (Conroy, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2012; Grenier, 2006; Morley et al., 2005). Furthermore, additional areas teachers perceived to impede inclusion encompassed:

- Lack of sufficient resources to prepare individualized learning activities (Guay, 2003; Van Weelden & Whipple, 2013).
- Lack of training or insufficient training resulted in teachers feeling challenged by trying to meet student diverse learning needs, and inadequate in their practice

(Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Conroy, 2012; Hodge et al., 2004; Kuster, Bain, Newton, & Milbrandt, 2010; Lienert et al., 2001; Morley et al., 2005).

- Large class sizes, particularly in physical education, contributed further to teachers' sense of a lack of time to devote to skill development of students with disabilities during lessons (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Hodge et al., 2004; Lienert et al., 2001).
- Lack of knowledge about availability and cost of adapted equipment, for example, musical instruments (Nabb & Balcetis, 2010).
- Inadequate human resource support such as paraprofessionals (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Darrow, 1999; Morley et al., 2005; Lienert et al., 2001; Van Weelden & Whipple, 2013), and lack of knowledge on how to direct and supervise their support (Causton-Theoharis & Burdick, 2008; Guay, 2003).
- Limited access to support of adapted physical education specialists (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Conroy, 2012; Hodge et al., 2004; Lienert et al., 2001; Qi & Ha, 2012b).
- Lack of communication with other school staff members working with the same students (Conroy, 2012; Van Weelden & Whipple, 2013).
- Limited parental involvement (Qi & Ha, 2012b).

Given the preceding list of challenges, it is not surprising some teachers thought inclusion in practice was not fair to students with disabilities (Haycock & Smith, 2010; Qi & Ha, 2012b). Students with disabilities were limited in the number of activities in which they could participate and as a result often engaged in separate activities (Haycock & Smith, 2010). Qi and Ha found that teachers thought that students with disabilities were unhappy in physical education because

they experienced difficulty understanding instruction and were uncomfortable with receiving extra attention.

For the practice of inclusion in physical education, teachers preferred indoor activities, as a closed location enabled better class management. Further, activities such as dance were perceived as less likely to require substantial modification (Morley at al., 2005). Grenier (2006) described how a physical education teacher modified a dance activity for a third grade student with cerebral palsy by providing him a drum and stick to beat the rhythms of the movements the other children were executing. This study demonstrates the value of teacher thoughtfulness and openness to seeking varied ways to encourage student participation. The modification allowed the student to create his own representation of the movement concepts being taught and thus meaningfully participate in the activity together with his peers (Grenier, 2006).

Dance Education

According to Hanna (1999), dance is a form of human behavior containing purposeful, rhythmical, and culturally influenced body movement intended for artistic expression and communication. Given the centrality of the body in dance expression, dance can have multiple ways of being experienced and described depending on who is dancing and who is viewing it. I chose to use Hanna's definition to inform my study because it leaves room for accepting a variety of ways to view dance. Dance education is the teaching of different dance forms (Green-Gilbert, 2005; Stinson, Blumenfield-Jones, & van Dyke, 1990) and facilitating learning through dance (Hanna, 2008). Dance education takes place at varied settings including private studios, recreation centers, professional training, and public and private school settings (Stinson et al., 1990). Dance education is, thus, the main introduction future dancers and audiences gain to dance (Hanna, 1999). Exposure to dance education enables students to discover whether or not

they enjoy it enough to feel motivated to invest in it further (Stinson, 2006). Dance can be taught as a discrete subject matter within the fine arts curriculum alongside subjects such as music, drama, and art. In Alberta, dance is also part of the mandated physical education curriculum as one of five movement dimensions (Alberta learning, 2000). Furthermore, teachers of subject areas such as science or language arts may integrate dance activities into their instruction to enhance learning (Cone & Cone, 2005; Skoning, 2008). Depending on the context in which dance education is provided, curriculum content can include technical skill training, improvisation, composition, performance (Kimmerle & Cote, 2003), and movement vocabulary (Bresler, 2004).

In my dissertation, dance education refers specifically to dance taught as curriculum subject matter separate from physical education. Several elementary and secondary schools in a number of Alberta school districts offer dance, as a subject within the fine arts curriculum (Alberta Education, 2009; Robinson, 2008). Dance within physical education classes may focus primarily on dance activity (Connell, 2009), and risks dance content being reduced to motor skill, coordination, and competition (Bannon & Sanderson, 2000). However, in dance as a subject within the fine arts, the focus shifts to dance as a unique learning area concerned with aesthetics and body movement (Connell, 2009; Sansom, 2009) as modes of artistic communication and expression (Bannon & Sanderson, 2000; Bresler, 2004; Edmonton Public Schools, 2009). Taught as a subject matter in its own right, dance education fosters an appreciation of dance as an artistic and cultural endeavor (Sansom, 2009).

Dance education in schools exposes students to a variety of styles and techniques (Francis-Murray, Taschukt, & Willoughby, 2006), and the curriculum typically emphasizes inquiry, creativity, and personal meaning as opposed to discipline based dance skills (Bresler,

2004). To date, Alberta Education has not developed a specific curriculum for K-12 dance education (Robinson, 2008). However, the Edmonton Public School district has developed a curriculum which is used in several schools in and outside of the district. This locally developed dance curriculum for elementary schools specifies three main goals: (a) to foster appreciation of dance as an art form; (b) to provide a global perspective on dance by exposing students to a variety of dance styles and possibilities through application; and (c) to promote dance as a means of expression and communication (Edmonton Public Schools, 2009, p. 1). Through focusing on these three goals, dance education aims for children to discover who they are, how they feel, and how they relate to others (Edmonton Public schools, 2009).

Dance education seeks to foster development of the student as a whole person through activities that address kinesthetic, cognitive, affective, and social domains (Cone & Cone, 2005). Dance is an art form that utilizes the body as its representation mode in a process of interaction and creation (Anttila, 2007; Bresler, 2004). As an embodied artistic form, dance can also be a way to display and inscribe new understandings of the body (Quinlan & Bates, 2008). Within the dance field there are various forms including ballet, jazz, contemporary dance, contact improvisation, hip-hop, social, and folk dance. Each of these forms has rules of its own related to the "dancerly bodies" that are valued for body structure and skill level considered essential (Cooper-Albright, 1997; Kuppers, 2000). Common to all dance forms is an expectation of a certain ability, fitness, and control level. These descriptors are often contradictory to societal perceptions of disability (Cooper-Albright, 2001; Kuppers, 2000; Sherlock, 1996).

Inclusive dance education enables individuals of all abilities to experience dance (Helfenbaum, 2009). Inclusive dance education has the potential to influence norms related to what constitutes dance, who can dance, with whom we dance, and where dance might occur

(Hanna, 1999). Kuppers (2000) explained that inclusive dance requires more than just accessible training spaces or adapted techniques. She also calls upon dance teachers and choreographers to challenge social perceptions of which bodies are considered suitable for dance. Teaching inclusive dance requires teachers to engage in reflection on the messages they may convey about dance through their interactions with students with and without disabilities during each lesson. My dissertation research process encouraged such reflection from the teachers I interviewed and from myself, by applying a conceptual framework of relational ethics to understanding inclusive dance education.

Conceptual Framework: Relational Ethics

> "Relational ethics is about being with, as well as being for, the other" (Austin et al., 2003, p. 46).

Relational ethics is the conceptual framework guiding my dissertation study. Relational ethics was developed by Vangie Bergum and John Dossetor to address ethical issues that emerge in daily practice of healthcare workers. It is based on the assumption that ethical practice is situated in relationships within communities (Austin, Bergum, & Dossetor, 2003). Bergum and Dossetor's work sought to deepen understanding of the nature and value of relationships between people and of modes of human responsiveness to each other in the context of ethical reflection and decision making (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In their book *Relational Ethics: The Full Meaning of Respect*, Bergum and Dossetor (2005) explained that the philosophical research traditions that served as foundation for relational ethics were phenomenology and hermeneutics, because these traditions attend to thought, feeling, and behavior within a shared experience, as opposed to being viewed from an outside perspective. Throughout their book, they mention a number of education scholars including Martin Buber, Max van Manen, and Ted Aoki who were

influential in the development of Bergum and Dossetor's ethical framework because of their attention to the significance of relationships in ethics.

While my dissertation research draws from Bergum and Dossetor's relational ethics, considering the context of my research is elementary school dance education, my analysis is also informed by the works of other scholars that discuss the importance of ethics in relationships in education. Nell Noddings is known for her work on ethic of care in education. Her 2005 book *The Challenge to Care in Schools: An Alternative Approach to Education* discusses care ethics as a relational ethic between a carer and a cared for, where both contribute to the relation. Camacho and Fernandez-Balboa's (2006) article "Ethics, politics and bio-pedagogy in physical education teacher education: Easing the tension between the self and the group" discusses ethical relations in physical education pedagogy. These authors encourage teachers to reflect on their pedagogical practices and find balance between their personal freedom and social responsibilities in their relationships with students. Sue Stinson is known for her work on ethical relationships in dance education. Among her many articles upon which I drew is Stinson (1985), "Curriculum and moralities of aesthetics" in which she advocated for dance teachers to use dance experiences as a way to encourage students to engage with their surroundings and develop caring relations with others. Additionally, Eeva Anttila (2007) discussed dialogue as key for understanding pedagogical relations and children's experiences in dance education. Her article "Searching for dialogue in dance education: A teacher's story" advocates for encouraging children to engage in embodied dialogue in which they turn toward each other, sensing, feeling, and listening to one another.

Relational ethics focuses on how people live together in interdependent relationships. Beyond moral reasoning, relationally ethical actions involve attentiveness and responsiveness to

commitments to others and our surroundings (Austin, 2008). Buber (1947) explained that in the process of living in a community, one may encounter situations in which a right or wrong way to act is not clearly expressed. A relational ethics approach focuses on questioning, and encourages reflection on ways people relate to one another in daily practice situations characterized by ambiguity of right or wrong actions (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Knowing how to act evolves out of one's relationship with others (Austin et al., 2003). Thus, through reflection on actions, relational ethics shifts the focus from what people do to who they are as human beings in a relationship (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Austin et al. (2003) explained that although relational ethics is an action oriented ethic, "a relational ethics approach asks one to consider the merits of the opposite: 'don't just do something, stand there!' (p. 46). In education, van Manen (1991) explained that in the teaching and learning process, teachers may encounter various unpredictable situations which require them to respond in a form of action or non-action. A teacher's response would inevitably impact student learning and experience of the environment (van Manen, 1991), as well as affecting student reaction. More specific to arts education, Kupfer (1978) argued that students are exposed to aesthetic experiences which can potentially contribute to moral instruction because relationships found in works of art are similar to ethical relationships within a community. In a work of art, Kupfer continued, each part takes on a character and meaning in relation to other parts of the work, and contributes to the creation of the whole. Thus, the parts of an art work are interdependent as each part modifies and depends on the other parts. Stinson (1985) stated that relationships in aesthetics are imperative to consider for curricular thinking in dance education. She advocates for teachers to inspire students to experience creating, performing, and viewing dance, in order to consciously engage with the world, and to increase self-understanding and relationships with others. Further, Stinson

encouraged students to recognize responsibilities and to respond to one another in relationships which do not end once children leave the dance studio or classroom. In my research, a relational ethics approach facilitated illumination of issues of dance teachers' daily practice occurring in their interactions with students in the process of creating inclusive dance education environments.

Bergum and Dossetor (2005) defined ethical commitment and responsible agency (taking responsibility for one's actions) as fundamental to relational ethics (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Several researchers refer to similar commitment in educational settings. For example, van Manen (1991) explained that teachers' ethical commitment to their students can be expressed in their constant concern for what is or is not good for students. Dance educator Stinson (2002) found that teachers are able to recognize their responsibility toward their students through their relationship with them (Stinson, 2002). In the process of caring for student needs, teachers may find themselves conflicted as to when to set aside their need to meet curriculum expectations and focus on meeting individual student needs (Noddings, 2012).

Although several educational researchers refer to ethics, I chose to use Bergum and Dossetor's relational ethics framework for my dissertation because its four intertwined constructs—mutual respect, relational engagement, embodiment, and creating environment—are elements that seemed important for creating ideally inclusive dance education environments. Each of these constructs will be discussed in relation to inclusive dance education.

Mutual Respect

In relational ethics, mutual respect implies that parties in a relationship show regard for each other's feelings, desires, interests, knowledge, or rights. Mutual respect means people are unconditionally accepted, recognized, and acknowledged and are not made or treated as if they

were the same (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Mutual respect is essential for authentic communication (Austin et al., 2003). It provides ethical space to empathically explore individual views, culture, knowledge form, and system differences. As such, it calls for appreciation of various kinds of knowledge including physical, cognitive, affective, and spiritual (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Mutual respect acknowledges the circular and reciprocal nature of giving and receiving by including self-respect and respect for others as well as respect from others (Austin et al. 2003; Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Respectful interaction requires people to be able to speak, be heard, and to listen (Austin et al., 2003). In teaching and learning, mutual respect implies that teachers need to accept and respect their students for who they are and who they can become in the process of strengthening their positive qualities (van Manen, 1991).

The importance of interdependent relationships. Mutual respect can only exist in interdependent relationships, meaning individuals are connected to one another while at the same time remaining separate. Thus, autonomy always depends on the actions of others and is actively changing rather than being achieved (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Bergum (2003) further specified that pedagogical relations depend on teachers and students coming to the realization that they affect each other and the surrounding environment. van Manen (1991) added that in the teacher student relationship, students are inevitably dependent on their teachers and their actions. However, at the same time, teachers need to be open to the influences their students may have on them and their perceptions of themselves and their actions. Aoki (1991) described this relationship as “curriculum improvisation” which requires teachers to be sensitive to their own and their students’ ongoing lives and experiences as they interact within a teaching and learning space. The idea of interdependent relationships in dance education is expressed in Stinson

(1993), who advocates for dance teachers to enhance student autonomy by encouraging them to ask for help and to offer help as a way to teach and facilitate care relationships.

Personhood as fostered through relationship. Personhood relates to how individuals are recognized as distinct human beings. In a relational ethics perspective, personhood is achieved by virtue of one's speech and action within relationship to others. Respect for difference, be it role, gender, knowledge, ability or disability, is seen as respect for the person living these differences (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Fisher (2012), in an article about ethics in qualitative research, explained that individuals who are recognized as persons are more capable of exercising their agency than those who are misrecognized due to association with a particular group considered vulnerable.

Power. Power is present in interpersonal relationships that enable people to voice their concerns and make decisions and enable others to listen their concerns (Austin, 2008). Power is, thus, a major concern in mutual respect. Focus on power also shifts concern for powerlessness (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In an inclusive dance education context, Eherich (2010) described teaching practices that facilitated a relationship of shared power between the teacher and her students by encouraging student self-expression and collaboration. These are also essential elements for relational engagement.

Relational Engagement

Relational engagement relates to community connection and requires one to be attentive to both self and others. It exists in moments when people find ways to collaboratively explore issues (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Engaged action enables discovery of abilities not previously known (Austin et al., 2003).

Practices such as labeling (or coding), common in education (Erten & Savage, 2012; Gilham & Williamson, 2014; van Swet, Wichers-Bots, & Brown, 2011) can inhibit engagement. Labeling or disability descriptions can be helpful for service provision, but can also become isolating and objectifying (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) because they imply a focus on the disability as a problem rather than on the person as whole. Thus, labels can potentially have a negative impact on teaching and intervention practices (Erten &Savage, 2012). Labels may result in individuals with disabilities experiencing difficulty participating in reciprocal relationships of giving and receiving (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In an ethically ideal situation, disability would only be defined for appropriate support and service provision purposes that enable active participation in community (Wendell, 1996). The caregivers or teachers' task is to see beyond labels and respect the dignity of all people in their wholeness (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005).

Time investment is important for relational engagement and a sense of a lack of time can become a barrier to the engagement process (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Bergum and Dossetor explained that professionals need to be "time-full" (p. 121). For dance teachers to be time-full they need to be present in the moment in dialogue and in teaching. Teaching dance to students with diverse needs requires teachers to invest time in communicating with the students and other professionals working with them in and out of school to become familiar with their individual capacities and needs (Band, Lindsay, Neelands, & Freakley, 2011). Finding the time to engage with the different staff members working with students with disabilities can become challenging for dance teachers who may be teaching the entire school, or additionally have classroom teaching responsibilities.

The importance of dialogue. Dialogue is essential for engagement (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Beyond just verbal communication, dialogue involves touch, movement, the written word,

and silence (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Dialogue is also an important concept in education. As a common search for understanding, empathy, and appreciation (Noddings, 2005), dialogue can lead to bonding between people of different backgrounds (Buber, 1947). Therefore, dialogue is essential in inclusive dance teaching practice (Ehrich, 2010). Through dialogue, students may gain opportunities to discuss their abilities, difficulties, and goals for their learning, thereby being involved and owning their educational and assessment process (van Swet et al., 2011).

Embodiment

Bergum and Dossetor (2005) describe embodiment as the integration of mind body, and spirit that brings us back to life as we live it. Embodiment relates to the idea of experiencing, living, sensing, knowing, and understanding one's world through the body (Markula & Silk, 2011). Therefore, embodiment is, a particularly relevant concept for my research of inclusive dance education. Dance utilizes movement as a way of displaying and inscribing new understandings of the body (Quinlan & Bates, 2008). Communication of lived body values is common in dance education settings (Horton-Fraleigh, 1999). Some bodily values commonly communicated in dance relate to the types of bodies considered appropriate for dance (Kuppers, 2000). For instance, female dancers are expected to be thin and possess strong technical skills and control over their bodies (Cooper-Albright, 2001; Elin & Boswell, 2004; Stinson, 1993). In contrast, bodies of individuals with disabilities may be perceived as weak, helpless, and out of control (Cooper-Albright, 1997; Quinlan & Bates, 2008). Dancing extends beyond just moving the body to sensing one's body in motion (Stinson, 1991). Bodily sensations are positioned as important in the dance learning process. Ehrenberg (2015) described the idea of sensing one's body in motion as "kinesthetic mode of attention" (p. 44). A kinesthetic mode of attention is an intentional consciousness. In dancing this includes attentiveness to body movement, problem

solving with the body, curiosity about body feelings in varied choreographic, educational, and performative contexts, as well as embodied translation processes of verbal description into body movement.

According to Bergum and Dossetor (2005), "Embodiment expresses recognition that people live in a specific historical and social context as thinking, feeling, full-bodied, and passionate human beings" (p. 137). Anttila (2007) discussed the notion of engaging dance students in embodied dialogue by establishing relationships between bodies in space through gentle touch and weight sharing, to enhance individual consciousness of one's own body actions and sensations as well as awareness of those of others. Anttila's idea helps connect the concepts of embodiment and dialogue in the context of a dance education environment.

Despite the importance of embodied learning, in many areas of life, the body is often seen as the material "other" inferior to the mind (Cooper-Albright, 1997). This issue is a result of dichotomies such as mind/body, objective/subjective, professional/personal self/other, and autonomy/community, which are apparent in various life domains (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) including teaching and learning. These dichotomies, along with idealization of the body, emphasis on appearance, and pressure to perform, contribute to objectification of bodies (Wendell, 1996). In her discussion of relational pedagogy Bergum (2003) described this idea of objectifying bodies as "becoming disembodied" (p. 123), which results from ignoring the bodily feelings of self and others. Such separations can cause people to be isolated and dissociated from one another (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In a dance context, dissociation from one another can be seen in social tendency to assume that individuals with disabilities would not be associated with dance training and performance (Aujla & Redding, 2013; Cooper-Albright, 1997; Kuppers, 2000; Sherlock, 1996) as they may not be perceived as capable of achieving artistry and mastery

of dance technique (Whatley, 2007). Through embodiment, we can challenge some of the dichotomies by creating a relational space where thinking, feeling, objective, subjective, self, and other can unite and establish new knowledge and understanding (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Through recognizing different body movement possibilities, embodiment can contribute to creating dance spaces that enable individuals with and without disabilities to dance together in their own ways (Quinlan & Bates, 2008).

Creating Environment

The environment is the relational space for ethical action, which is created in each action and in each decision (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Bergum and Dossetor further emphasized the importance of creating environments that enable freedom and choice and empower individuals by means of informed choice. The space as concept for relational ethics extends beyond physical space where the interactions take place. In dance education, 'creating environment' would mean dance teachers allowing their students to choose how they would participate and contribute to the creative and learning process. In doing so, dance teachers can create environments that acknowledge the unique learning needs and abilities of each student (Sansom, 2009). Through recognition of student abilities, teachers can create a community based on equality, enabling equal access to learning for all students and recognizing mutual needs, interdependence, and contributions by each member (Kraft, 2004). Therefore, mutual respect, relational engagement, and embodiment together can contribute to creation of an ethical and inclusive dance education environment.

Creating environments is impacted by individuals' embodied or theoretical knowledge, community expectations, held virtues, understanding of their surroundings, and their personal experiences (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In other words, as Stinson's (2002) article title "What

we teach is who we are" indicated, dance teachers can embody certain theoretical knowledge and expected behaviors that demonstrate engagement. Teacher expectations are also based on the community and context in which dance takes place. Dance teachers hold personal values, biases, and ways they understand the world, also influenced by their personal dance experience. Moreover, their actions in given situations will be influenced by their understanding of ethical principles, rights, and responsibilities (Camacho & Fernández-Balboa, 2006). All of these aspects feed into the complexity of teaching practice and teachers' ability to create inclusive dance education environments for all their students. As a result, student learning in dance extends beyond principles and movement to encompass lessons about authority, relationships, their bodies, and themselves (Stinson, 2001). My dissertation study investigated the experiences of teachers and students in inclusive dance in order to gain a deeper sense of this complex environment.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology guided my process of gaining understanding of the experiences of teachers and students with and without disabilities in inclusive dance education. Horton-Fraleigh (1999) explained that describing a dance experience relies on qualitative discourse. Thus, qualitative research methodology provides a rich approach for the study of dance since qualitative values are intrinsic to dance and are present in human experience of it (Horton-Fraleigh, 1999). Specifically my methodological considerations are routed in the interpretive paradigm. Interpretive research is largely descriptive, carefully documenting human action and ways of living without criticism (Schwandt, 1996). It aims to explore what actions mean to people who partake in them and how they understand these actions (Pope, 2006). Thus, interpretive research aligns with relational ethics to invite reflection and theorizing on ethical

insights brought from practical situations rather than trying to construct a theory to explain or control ethical decisions (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005).

As an interpretivist researcher, I endeavored to understand how the dance teachers and students in my study understood and experienced their dance education environment. My epistemological stance is that knowledge is situated and co-created through a process of interaction between human beings (O'Donoghue, 2007). My ontological perspective is relativist: individuals construct reality through conscious interaction with their surrounding environment (Scotland, 2012). These epistemological and ontological stances align with a relational ethics perspective that emphasizes a need to accept the legitimacy of different viewpoints (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Viewing dance education based on my ontological and epistemological perspective implies there is not just one definition of dance, but also that there are multiple angles from which to view and experience it. Dancers and teachers in inclusive dance education construct their realities through interaction with their surroundings. Through my interaction with teachers and students, I learned about what my participants are experiencing, interpreting, and coming to know as dance education in which individuals with varied abilities are involved.

According to Bergum and Dossetor (2005), different knowledge forms are necessary for ethical action. First, descriptive knowledge is subjective and based on exploring one's changing personal values and experiences. Relational knowledge then builds on intersubjectivity through conversation between people. Recognizing my participants' knowledge and constructing relational knowledge required a hermeneutic and dialectical methodology. My participants and I engaged in interaction to construct knowledge, and the knowledge constructed was interpreted using hermeneutic techniques, which were then compared and contrasted through dialogue (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Dialogue occurred not only during follow-up interviews, but also in

each interview as new information brought by participants was compared to information shared by other participants.

Participants

Criterion sampling (Patton, 2002) guided participant recruitment. Participants were recruited based on their experience as dance teachers or as students with and without disabilities participating in inclusive dance education in elementary schools. Four elementary school dance teachers, eight children with different types of disabilities, and fourteen classmates participated in this study. The children were all between six and eleven years old. Of the children with disabilities, six were boys and two were girls. The children with disabilities included children with autism spectrum disorder, neuro developmental disability, intellectual disabilities, and visual impairment. Of the classmates, ten were girls and four were boys. The four elementary school dance teachers were their schools' dance specialists. School administration informed teachers about this study, and teachers contacted me to express interest in participating. Dance teachers signed consent forms after a one-on-one meeting explaining the project and process. The dance teachers then sent information and consent forms to families of the selected children. The dance teachers selected participants through their own decision-making regarding suitability for the study or advice from the classroom teacher. Parents and/or guardians signed consent forms and children indicated their assent to participate either verbally or by signing underneath their parent's signature.

Study Context

Between January and June 2015, I visited five elementary schools in two Alberta school districts that offered dance as a subject separate from physical education. Four schools had dance as a curriculum subject area, while one had a two week residency dance program. The residency program was a two week intensive program that involved the entire school and was taught by

two dance artists (whose experiences are not described in the dissertation). Each classroom received six lessons and the program culminated with a performance that was co-created by the artists and the students.

The four teachers in this study taught at the schools that had dance regularly as a curriculum subject. Additionally, two children with disabilities and six classmates participated in the residency program, while six children with disabilities and eight classmates were in the subject area dance classes (Table 1). I made the decision to include the findings from the children participating in the residency program with regards to disability and inclusion because children's experiences were quite similar across study contexts. Additionally, given I only had two children with disabilities in the residency program, by including the residency children in with the other children I was able to further disguise them and thereby protect their anonymity. I chose not to include data from the residency artists for the purpose of the dissertation because while the artists were responsible for providing the dance program, they were not elementary school teachers, and relied heavily on the classroom teachers and EAs to help with supporting individual needs. However, I will be writing a paper addressing my findings from the residency artists at a later date, in addition to writing about my findings from a junior high school class, and my dance studio based pilot study.

Table 1

Participant groups by dance program

Participants	Dance as regular subject	Dance residency
Teachers	4	
Children with disabilities	6	2
Children without disabilities	8	6

Five children with disabilities had an educational assistant (EA) who accompanied them to their classes, while three children participated independently. Dance classes lasted between 30-45 minutes. One school had dance twice a week for 30 minutes each session while the others had one dance class each week. Due to the absence of a specific provincial K-12 dance education curriculum, teachers constructed their curriculum based on their district's locally developed curriculum or Edmonton Public Schools' locally developed curriculum, as well as in response to the needs of their school environments. However, all teachers aimed to offer their students an exposure to a large a variety of dance forms, and focused extensively on creative movement.

Data Collection

Data collection involved observation, interviews, and researcher field notes. I observed between five and ten dance classes to obtain additional information regarding the actions teachers take in their teaching processes and student interaction and participation. The combination of observation and interviewing created a holistic approach to data collection and analysis (Atkinson & Coffey, 2003) that contributed to optimized understanding of the complexities involved in creating inclusive dance education environments. Class observations started before I interviewed the children to allow students to adjust to my presence in their classes and so I could build rapport with them (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). Observations also enabled me to learn about the roles my participating children played within the social context (Clark, 2011) of the dance classroom, and provided additional information regarding the individual communication needs of participating children with disabilities. In some cases, due to children's manner of verbal expression, observation became one of the main strategies by which I was able to gain access to their experiences (Coates & Vickerman, 2013).

To avoid influencing the setting and participant experiences, observations were generally 'nonparticipant': I recorded observation notes without direct involvement in the class. However,

occasionally, based on teacher request, I joined class activity. I ended up joining in activities in two schools. In one school, this happened during my first visit, possibly because the teacher may have felt more self-conscious when I was sitting on the side taking notes, or perhaps she wanted to see if I really did have knowledge of dance. In the second school this was suggested by the teacher as a way for me to more closely observe and interact with children who were participating in my study, as the class size was large. By joining in the activity in that context, I had an opportunity to have a few informal conversations with the children, which seemed to help them to feel more comfortable with me by the time I interviewed them. It is also important to consider that some influence of an outside observer is inevitable. During my first visit to a couple of the settings, teachers offered to change the content of planned lessons so that I could see specific dance styles that they taught. I explained that my observations were giving me context to understand children and teachers' experiences in dance and that whatever content they were teaching was part of those experiences. Therefore, I did not want them to alter lesson planning because of my presence. One teacher felt a need to address me in front of the students to explain what was going to happen in the class on the first day of my observation. By my second visit, she stopped addressing me specifically and acted more naturally.

During observations I recorded field notes that contained details including what teachers said/did, how students reacted, and description of the school and dance class setting. Additionally, I recorded descriptions of my interactions with teachers and students. Field notes also contained my personal thoughts, hunches, insights, and emerging ideas (Creswell, 2012). Interviews took a different format for each participant group as follows:

Teachers. Teachers participated in two one-on-one semi-structured interviews (Ennis & Chen, 2012). Each session lasted between 40 minutes and an hour and a half. The first interview took place prior to any class observation to allow the teachers opportunity to reflect on their

background, teaching practice, experience, and perceptions, free of my observation bias. Interview guides were developed based on review of previous literature about teachers' perceptions, attitudes and practices of inclusion, as well as relational ethics, and my personal experience as a teacher. Examples included the following questions: What does inclusion mean to you? What would you describe as 'ability to dance'? What are some critical issues you find in including students with disabilities in your dance class? How would you describe your teaching practices in inclusive dance? (See Appendix F for full interview guide).

The second interview was used to clarify ideas that emerged during the initial interview and to ask additional questions based on my observations. Questions in the follow-up interview were, therefore, more specific to individual teacher's contexts. For instance one of the follow-up questions I had for Julia was: "You talked about wanting kids to feel safe, and I could see from my observations and from talking to the kids, that they do all seem to feel that kind of safety in the environment. But how do you create that from the very beginning so it grows to that?"

Children with disabilities. Children with disabilities participated in two individual semi-structured interviews. These were structured individually to address differences in individual communication needs and number of children available in each school. Interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes depending on children's individual communication skills and needs as well as ability to sustain attention. I used a semi-structured interview guide to attempt to cover different aspects related to the children's experiences in dance education, through use of prompts that enabled children to develop and express their ideas (Greig, Taylorand, & Mackay, 2007). Interview guides were developed based on review of previous literature about experiences of children with disabilities in physical education settings, as well as relational ethics, and my personal experience as a dance student. Example questions included: Can you tell me about your

dance class? Can you tell me about something that makes you happy/unhappy in dance? Are there things that are hard in dance? Does someone help you when things are hard? Who helps you, and how? If you were a dance teacher, what would you do to make dance fun for everyone? (See Appendix G for full interview guide). Questions in the second interview were specific to individual children's experiences that they shared in the first interview or were related to specific observations I had made. For instance, after noticing in my observations that John seemed to take on a leadership role when working with a group of peers, my question to him was: "When you were working on the movement sentence, I noticed you were the leader of the group. How did it feel to be a leader?" To gain access to the experiences of children whose verbal expression was limited, I sought advice from their parents, teachers, and educational assistants to learn about these children's communication modes and discussion topics that would best enable me to build rapport with them. At the same time, I ignored comments from teachers or educational assistants that seemed to underestimate children's ability to communicate (Davis, Watson, & Cunningham-Burley, 2008).

Children without disabilities. The children without disabilities participated in two small group interviews. Interviews lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. Group interviews contributed to reducing the inherent power dynamic that exists in adult-child interaction as children may feel more comfortable interacting with adults in the presence of their peers (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). The small group setting provided an intimate environment for individual voices to be heard (Clark, 2011), while creating a natural context for discussion, in which children stimulated each other's comments and collectively constructed their meanings (Eder & Fingerson, 2003; Graue & Walsh, 1998). The children all seemed comfortable with each other and the group setting. The conversation was lively, as children engaged freely, adding to each other's words. I used a semi-

structured interview guide to cover different aspects related to the children's experiences in dance through use of prompts that enabled idea development and expression (Greig, Taylorand, & Mackay, 2007). Interview guides were developed based on review of previous literature about children's attitudes and perceptions of disability, as well as relational ethics, and my personal experience as a dance student. The interviews included such questions 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? (See Appendix H for full interview guide).

The follow-up interviews for the children without disabilities were designed based on individual comments children made in the first group interview that I wanted to explore further. For instance, a follow-up question for Aria was: "You said something very important about helping classmates with disabilities when they need it, but not if they don't. How do you know if they do or do not need help?" This question resulted in conversation between Aria and two other peers that enabled me to further understand their perceptions of helping their peers with disabilities. I recorded and transcribed verbatim all interview sessions.

A drawing activity was also used to facilitate 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 about their drawings were recorded and transcribed, along with the rest of the interview. Some children however, opted not to draw. For two children with disabilities a gluing activity was used to create short stories or sentences about their experiences, using

pictures downloaded from Microsoft Word clip art (http://cliparts.co/dance-cartoon-images). I chose this activity with these children because they could not share their experiences verbally or draw their own picture of dance and explain it to me. In constructing this interview activity, I drew from experience I had working with picture exchange communication techniques with children who could not express themselves verbally. The activity helped these children share something about their experience in dance. I downloaded the pictures based on my observations of dance class activities or children's participation behaviors that I had noted in their classes.

Data Analysis

Interpretive analysis is a creative activity that strives for deep understanding to explore both subjective and objective aspects of situations. The process involves a circular investigation which shifts understanding from the whole to the part and back to the whole (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Data analysis began with the data collection (Creswell, 2012), while at the same time attempting to avoid premature conclusions (Green & Stinson, 1999). Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis provides a rich and detailed, yet complex account of the participants' perceptions and practices without committing to a specific theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Sparkes & Smith, 2014). The process began with transcribing data, repeatedly reading each transcript, and making margin notes. I generated codes by reviewing data and marginal notes, and identifying common patterns. I also created a 'quotable quotes' folder based on identified codes. The quotable quotes folder contained quotes from each of the participants that I thought helped illustrate emerging ideas and themes. I grouped sets of quotes under potential titles and as the data analysis progressed, I returned to this folder and re-examined my chosen quotes and selected additional ones from individual transcripts as needed. All codes were then gathered, read and grouped based on

commonalities, to form themes. I then re-evaluated each theme and returned to data coding as needed until I could ascertain the final themes. The next phase involved writing a description of each theme to evaluate appropriateness of theme title as well as the extent to which the theme answered the research question. Naturally when interviewing a number of participants, some tend to be more articulate than others or have insights to share that more strongly illustrate emerging themes. Therefore, although each of my themes shared in the following chapters represents findings from all of my interviews and observations, some participants are more often represented in quotes.

Ensuring Research Quality

I used the six quality criteria by Zitomer and Goodwin (2014) for evaluating the quality of qualitative research in adapted physical activity for this dissertation. Those include: reflexivity, credibility, resonance, significant contribution, ethics, and coherence. The criteria were developed through a systematic review of criteria suggested for evaluating qualitative research in multiple disciplines to address the multidisciplinary nature of research conducted in adapted physical activity. The review resulted in creation of a flexible criteria set that allows researchers to determine the criteria and strategies that best align with their paradigmatic approach. Researchers are encouraged to reflect on their paradigmatic approach and the relevance of their chosen criteria. The following section describes five out of the six criteria because the contribution of this study is addressed within the significance section (p.7).

Reflexivity. Interpretivism values researcher subjectivity as important throughout the research process rather than as a problem of bias. For that reason, it encourages reflexivity in reporting researcher pre-conceptions (Cohen & Crabtree, 2008). Therefore, I shared some of my personal experiences that brought me into this study at the beginning of this chapter. Further,

from a relational ethics perspective, researchers need to reflect on their actions and how those actions may influence the relationships they establish with participants in the research context (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). I kept a reflective journal throughout the research process identifying my assumptions, observations and impressions of the context, relationships with participants, situations encountered, and actions addressing them.

Credibility. Credibility refers to the plausibility and persuasiveness of research findings (Tracy, 2010)**.** In my study, credibility was achieved by means of triangulation which involved collecting and analyzing multiple data sources including participant groups and data collection methods (Creswell, 2012), to enable viewing the inclusive dance education environment from varied angles. Rather than using 'member checks,' I used 'member reflections' by returning to participants with additional interview questions that emerged during their transcript review, or using what emerged from transcripts to form new interview questions for other participants (Tracy, 2010). Use of member reflection provided additional opportunities to dialogue with participants and enriched my data set as a result. Follow-up questions started by reminding participants about what they said in the first interview and asking if they could clarify what they meant or elaborate on it. This helped the children remember our previous conversation and elaborate on what they said since they were too young to be expected to read their interview transcripts. For the teachers, one of the reasons I did not do member checks was because the teachers in my pilot study did not want to read their interview transcripts even though I offered them the possibility to do so. Results are displayed in the form of themes that are illustrated through use of direct quotations from participants and my field notes. Use of direct quotes helped ground my interpretive claims. The use of quotes also enables readers to evaluate the extent to

which my interpretations reveal participant perspectives of the inclusive dance context, rather than just my own.

Resonance. Resonance refers to the impact the study has on readers and its potential to inspire future action (Zitomer & Goodwin, 2014). By providing rich descriptions of the study context and findings, readers are able to potentially visualize the context and identify aspects of it that can be transferable to their own contexts (Finlay, 2006). It is my aspiration that findings from this study will inspire teachers to take action in creating more inclusive dance education environments in their schools.

Coherence. In the writing of each of my articles, I tried to demonstrate a clear line of reasoning guiding the research process from assumptions about knowledge, the research question, methodological decisions, interpretation strategies, to resulting knowledge.

Ethics. Any research process involves ethical considerations. However, given the direct interaction between participants and the researcher in qualitative research methodology, ethical issues can become increasingly complex (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012). Tracy (2010) identified four forms of ethics that are important to consider in qualitative research: (a) procedural ethics refers to obtaining approval; (b) situational ethics refer to circumstances that emerge during research; (c) relational ethics refer to researcher actions and their influence on relationships formed with participants; and (d) exiting ethics refers to how researchers leave the field and share their findings. In preparing for my research a number of ethical considerations were anticipated including achieving informed consent, participant confidentiality, researcher relationships with participants, ethical data collection and analysis, and sharing of research findings (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2001). Furthermore, I carefully honored the main

principles of human research ethics: beneficence, respect for participant autonomy, and justice (Creswell, 2012).

I honored the principle of autonomy through informed consent, which I obtained from participants before beginning the research process. The consent form contained information regarding the study purpose, the data collection process, time requirements, and participants' right to withdraw at any point of the study. For some children with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorder, the consent also took a process format in which different phases of the research process were explained separately, allowing them to consent at each phase. As such, every time I arrived at their schools, I would ask if I could watch them dance.

Physical harm was not anticipated to result from participation in this study. However, emotional or financial harm could result from exposure of identity or revealing participant experiences. For example, a teacher may lose her job if her employers are offended by something she said about her school dance program. To protect anonymity (McNamee, Oliver, & Wainwright, 2007) of the teachers and the students, their names as well as the names of the schools in which they teach were replaced with pseudonyms from the moment that I transcribed the data. Further, in sharing the findings, I avoided any descriptions that could lead to identification of teachers, children, or schools. Children's disabilities were only described in general terms. I only referred to specific disabilities if the information was relevant to the particular experience a teacher or student described. As a dance teacher who is also a researcher, I needed to avoid getting personally involved if situations occurred during an observation, and to take care not to offer advice or judgment related to what participants shared in their interviews. Reflective field notes in which I identified issues related to my role as researcher were helpful in

monitoring the extent to which my personal experience and dance teaching background could be interfering with my researcher role (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000).

Children, particularly those with disabilities, are considered vulnerable in varied ways, as research participants (Lewis & Porter, 2004). Therefore, I made ethical considerations regarding child participation in research throughout the entire research process, including stating the research question, recruitment of participants, consideration of ways to ensure participants are treated with respect and dignity during the data collection process, and how findings are shared (Brendhal, 2008). Despite the fact that, legally, children may not be considered competent to consent to participate in research independently, it is important for researchers to gain their informed assent (Greig et al., 2007). At the same time, it is important to consider the emancipatory potential of participation in qualitative research particularly for those considered vulnerable in enabling them to voice their experiences, and whether or not their ability to provide informed consent may inhibit their human right to be heard (Fisher, 2012). In order to ensure children with disabilities were able to express their assent, I sought ways to clearly communicate with the children regarding my research project, their role in it, and their rights to choose to participate or withdraw at any point during the process. I sought assistance from their parents and teachers as to the most appropriate way to ensure the children understood what the consent entailed. I then explained the concept of anonymity to the children and invited them to choose their own pseudonyms. Most of the children enjoyed the idea of being able to pick a name for themselves. However, a number of children did not want to choose a name other than their own. I asked them if they had a favorite pop or movie star, or any other character from a book, film, or video game, and I used the name they provided as their pseudonym.

Naturally, interaction between adults and children is subject to issues of power relations, as adults tend to be viewed as holding knowledge, setting rules, and granting permission (Graue & Walsh, 1998). This issue can result in children seeking to respond 'correctly' to questions posed by the adult interviewer (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). In order to overcome this issue, at the beginning of interviews, I explained to child participants that I am a student, working on a homework assignment about their experiences. I stressed that there is no such thing as a 'wrong answer' because they know best what their experiences are like.

The Paper-Based Dissertation

I chose to write a paper-based dissertation (University of Alberta Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, 2015). Within this format, I produced three distinct, publishable papers based on my findings. My decision to write my dissertation this way was based on the following rationale. First, the format enabled me to examine inclusive dance education from different perspectives and uncover some of the complexities involved in the process of creating inclusive dance education environments. Second, this format is practical in the sense that it enables me to publish or present my work in the process of writing my dissertation. All three papers presented here will be submitted for publication. They have been written in the format required by the journals to which I intend to submit them.

Overview of the Papers

Paper 1 "Always on your toes: Elementary school dance teachers' perceptions of inclusion and their roles in creating inclusive dance education environments" describes dance teachers' perceptions and practices of inclusion. I chose to start with the paper about teacher perspectives because creating an inclusive dance education environment starts with teaching practices. The paper is intended for submission to the *International Journal of Inclusive*

Education. In this paper I address my first research question: How do elementary school dance teachers perceive inclusion and their roles and actions in creating inclusive dance education environments. This study provides insights from elementary school dance teachers that can contribute to enhancing knowledge for experienced teachers and those who are new to inclusion.

Paper 2 is called "Dance makes me happy: Experiences of elementary school children with disabilities in dance education." It is intended for publication in the journal *Research in Dance Education.* I chose to place this paper after the teacher paper because the teachers have positive intentions and made efforts to create inclusive dance education environments. However, experiences of students with disabilities can inform us with regards to other aspects within the environment that can promote or hinder inclusion. The paper sought to answer my second research question: How do children with disabilities perceive the elementary school dance education environment? The paper provides one more opportunity to listen to voices of young children with disabilities and to learn from them about the nature of the elementary school dance education environment as they perceive it.

Paper 3 "Children's perceptions of disability within elementary school dance education contexts" is intended for submission to the journal *PHEnex* which is a Canadian journal for research in physical education and health. The paper addresses my third research question for this study: How do students without disabilities perceive disability in the context of elementary school dance education? This paper showed that in a dance education environment where children are encouraged to collaborate in movement exploration, they can come to understand disability as an ordinary difference comprising their classroom community.

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Chapter 2: Always Being on Your Toes: Elementary School Dance Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion and their Roles in Creating Inclusive Dance Education Environments

Abstract

Teachers are key players in creating inclusive dance education environments. Guided by a conceptual framework of relational ethics, this qualitative study explored the perceptions and practices of four elementary school dance teachers teaching in public schools in two large school districts in Western Canada. Data collection involved interviews, observation, and researcher field notes. Thematic analysis guided data analysis procedures. Analysis revealed six themes connected to teacher perceptions: (a) valuing uniqueness; (b) establishing supportive relationships; (c) becoming pedagogically aware; (d) regarding children's needs; (e) teaching students about responsibility; and (f) having high expectations. Dance teachers valued inclusion and dance as a means for enabling student movement exploration and discovery of their unique style and ability. By acknowledging and respecting difference, the practice of accommodating diverse learning needs contributed to the learning of all students.

Key words: elementary school dance, inclusive education, dance teachers.

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Always Being on Your Toes: Elementary School Dance Teachers' Perceptions of Inclusion and their Roles in Creating Inclusive Dance Education Environments

Inclusive dance education aims for every student regardless of ability to experience dance (Helfenbaum 2009). Dance taught in schools as a fine arts subject area focuses on creating, interpreting, and appreciating dance as an artistic communication mode (Bonbright 2001). Dance education can provide children with disabilities means for expression, learning, and responding to varied dance forms (Cone 2015). Teachers are central in creating inclusive learning environments (Erten and Savage 2012), because they are role models of appropriate behavior (Bruce-Marks 1997; Shue and Beck 2001), and can influence student perceptions and experiences of the instructional environment and the subject (Haegele and Sutherland 2015; Kiley 2010). Further, teachers' teaching philosophy, personal background, and values (Stinson 2002), along with perceptions of student ability (Warburton 2004), influence their professional practice. Thus, teachers who value inclusion will likely intend to use varied instructional strategies (Lienert, Sherrill, and Myers 2001) and create accepting and tolerant learning environments (Kang 2009), where all students can be dancers and dance makers (Cone and Cone 2011).

Exploring dance teachers' experiences and views of teaching inclusive dance may enhance understanding of the complexities involved in the process of creating inclusive dance education environments. Therefore, this study aimed to explore Canadian elementary school dance teachers' perceptions of inclusion and their perceived roles in creating inclusive dance education environments. I provide a brief review of literature on dance teachers' perceptions and practices in inclusive dance. I then describe relational ethics as a conceptual framework for understanding inclusive dance teaching practice and discuss findings from teacher interviews.

Previous studies have looked at the perceptions and practices of dance teachers who teach inclusive dance at universities, professional dance training schools (Aujla and Redding 2012; Band, Lindsay, Neelands, and Freakley 2011; Whatley 2007), or in adult community programs (Cheesman 2011a; 2011b; Ehrich 2010). Instructors in university and professional training programs expressed a lack of sufficient resources (i.e., physically accessible buildings and human resources such as instructional assistants) and knowledge about disability as barriers to offering training opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Further, instructors were concerned about ways to provide inclusion support and the need to adapt course instruction without compromising training excellence (Band et al. 2011; Whatley 2007). Similar concerns were expressed by elementary school physical education teachers (Lienert et al. 2001).

Three main ideas, important for teachers in any inclusive context, emerged from this literature. First, prior planning and support for learning by gathering information regarding student physical and communication needs, abilities, and limitations (Aujla and Redding 2012; Band et al. 2011) is central. Second, it is important to adopt a flexible teaching approach based on the teacher's reflective practice and establishing close relationships with students. Close relationships facilitate a safe environment for students to communicate their needs openly with the instructor (Aujla and Redding 2012). A flexible teaching approach can also contribute to creating an environment that is open to student ideas (Cheesman 2011a; 2011b). Finally, understanding the unique learning needs of students enables instructors to make practical teaching choices and adapt teaching and learning approaches (Aujla and Redding 2012; Band et al. 2011).

Cheesman (2011a) directs readers' attention to tensions that dance teachers without disabilities may experience when working with students with disabilities in adult community

settings. Those include instructional language such as “walk” or “stand”. Cheesman opted to discuss her language use with students who used wheelchairs to seek alternatives. Cheesman also felt tension between offering adaptations to students with disabilities and stepping back and allowing students to adapt independently. Austin, Bergum and Dossetor (2003) observed that such dilemmas are natural for any practitioner as their caring instinct elicits a need to ‘do something’ even when the ethical action may be to just ‘be there’. Thus, teachers’ sense of responsibility for the children under their care (Stinson 2002; van Manen 1991) will likely elicit similar tensions for elementary school dance teachers. Cheesman (2011b) advocated for open teacher-student dialogue and cooperative creative activities in which all students are encouraged to share ideas.

Ehrich (2010) draws upon an ethic of care, justice, and critique along with the construct of empowerment to describe the story of Morgan Jai-Morincome, a dance teacher at the Radiance Dance Project. Jai-Morincome’s program enabled dancers to experience individual and collective empowerment in a space where diversity was valued and self-expression was encouraged. Students achieved individual empowerment through embodied experience and collective empowerment through engagement in collaborative movement activities. Jai-Morincome’s teaching practices created an environment based on values of respect and care that removed barriers between dancers with and without disabilities.

The previous research in inclusive dance education highlights teaching practices that value student uniqueness and seek ways to accommodate student learning and success. Such practices would be applicable in elementary school dance education as well. Professional practices guided by a relational ethics approach share the same core value (Bergum and Dossetor 2005).

Inclusive Dance Education as a Relationally Ethical Environment

Although implemented differently in each Canadian province, inclusive education policies generally promote placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms (Hardly and Woodcock 2015). Beyond placement, inclusive education ideally is an approach that promotes student acceptance and belonging (Porter 2008). In dance education, this implies an approach to creating learning environments that value diversity and enable students of all abilities to participate together and experience success (Ehrich 2010; Kaufmann 2006). These are also core values for relational ethics promoted by Bergum and Dossetor (2005) for ethical practice in nursing. In this paper, I use the four intertwined constructs—mutual respect, relational engagement, embodiment, and environment—to understand an inclusive dance education environment as a place for relationally ethical practice. These constructs can facilitate reflection on ethical issues that dance teachers encounter and the actions they take in their daily professional practice in situations where a right or wrong way to act may be ambiguous (van Manen 1991). I now discuss the four constructs in more detail.

According to Bergum and Dossetor (2005), interdependent relationships, power, and personhood are important components in building relationships of mutual respect. Respect for student individuality is also one of the core values of inclusive dance education (Kaufmann 2006). Mutual respect in education implies that teachers accept their students as they are and recognize their potential to grow through a process of strengthening their positive qualities (van Manen 1991). Honoring individuality requires teachers to create collaborative relationships with children and colleagues where individual perspectives are considered (Ehrich 2010; Cheesman 2011b) and physical, cognitive, spiritual, and affective knowledge forms are recognized (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). This collaborative process underlies the construct of relational engagement.

Relational engagement exists in moments when people collaboratively explore issues and connect as a community (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). In educational environments, such engagement enables teachers to see their students' vulnerability, strengths, and unique qualities (van Manen 1991). Dialogue is essential for building community relations (Buber 1947). It can take many forms beyond verbal communication, including body language, touch, and writing (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). In dance education, Anttila (2007) suggests engaging students in embodied dialogue by establishing relationships between bodies in space. Through gentle touch, and weight sharing students can enhance consciousness of one's body actions and sensations as well as those of others (Ehrenberg 2015). In the context of a dance education environment, dialogue is, thus, embodied, thereby connecting to the construct of embodiment.

Embodiment addresses learning about self and others through the body in the shared common space (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). More than any other art form, dance relies on the body's physical presence and expressivity (Cooper-Albright 1997; Kuppers 2000). Dance education can potentially enhance embodied self-understanding and contribute to moral and ethical pedagogy that honors student lives and enables new ways of viewing human beings (Sansom 2009). The presence of students with disabilities in the dance class can therefore challenge teachers to consider what it means to dance (Kuppers 2003).

Finally, the environment is created in each action (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Through actions that promote open exploration of the movement potential of students with disabilities (Elin and Boswell 2004) dance teachers create environments where all students can be recognized as integral contributing members (Benjamin 2002). Reflecting on inclusive dance education based on the four relational ethics constructs, my research question is: How do

elementary school dance teachers perceive inclusion and their roles in creating inclusive dance education environments?

Methods

I used an interpretivist qualitative research approach to learn about elementary school dance teachers' perceptions and practices. An interpretivist approach holds that instead of single truth or reality, there are multiple ways to view and experience a dance education environment (Stinson and Anijar 1993). Similarly, relational ethics holds that there is not one right way to act (Austin et al., 2003) in a given environment. Instead, teachers are encouraged to reflect on their relationships with their students in the environment (van Manen 1991).

Participants

Upon obtaining ethics approval from the university ethics board, criterion sampling (Patton 2002) guided participant recruitment. Teachers were recruited based on their role as elementary school dance teachers who taught students with disabilities in their classes. School administration informed teachers about this study, and four elementary school dance teachers contacted me to express their interest in participating. I have replaced teacher's names with pseudonyms in the description of the findings.

Study Context

Between January and June 2015, in a Western Canadian province, I visited four elementary schools that had dance as a stand-alone subject. One school had dance twice a week for 30 minutes each session while the other three schools had one dance class each week for between 30 – 45 minutes. Due to the absence of a mandated provincial K-12 dance curriculum, dance learning content varied between school settings. However, all teachers aimed to expose their students to diverse dance forms and focused extensively on creative movement.

Each teacher held a Bachelor of Education and had traditional studio dance training from childhood. All teachers had ballet training and their individual backgrounds varied in terms of the styles they had learned. Two of the teachers had completed one inclusion course in their teacher education program. One teacher had completed a minor in special education which included an additional six courses in special education, and one teacher had been exposed to the ideas of differentiated instruction in each of her courses, but had not completed a specific course on inclusion. Three teachers were classroom teachers and their school's dance specialist, while one teacher was a dance specialist, without other classroom responsibilities. Their years of teaching experience ranged between two and twenty years, but two teachers were new to teaching elementary school dance.

Data collection

Data collection comprised one-on-one teacher interviews, class observation, and field notes. Teachers engaged in two individual semi-structured interviews (Ennis and Chen 2012). Each interview lasted between 40 and 90 minutes. The first interview occurred before any observation, to encourage teachers to reflect on their background, teaching practice, experience, and perceptions free of my observation bias. Interview guides were developed based on review of previous literature about teachers' perceptions, attitudes and practices of inclusion, as well as relational ethics, and my experience as a dance teacher. Interview questions included, for example: what does inclusion mean to you? What would you describe as ability to dance? What are some critical issues you find in including students with disabilities in your dance class? How would you describe your teaching practices in inclusive dance? The second interview was used to clarify ideas that emerged during the initial interview, and to ask additional questions based on

class observation. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim (Patton 2002). Interviews occurred in a quiet location within the school or other location of the teachers' choice.

I observed between five and ten dance classes to obtain additional information regarding the actions teachers take in the teaching process. The combination of observation and interviewing created a holistic approach to data collection and analysis that contributed to optimized understanding of the complexities involved in teaching inclusive dance (Atkinson and Coffey 2003). To avoid influencing the setting and teachers' experiences, observations were generally 'nonparticipant'; I recorded observation notes without involvement in the class. However, based on teacher request, I occasionally joined class activity.

Field notes contained details on what teachers said/did, how students reacted, and description of the school and dance class setting. These notes also contained my personal thoughts, hunches, insights, and emerging ideas (Creswell 2012).

Data Analysis

Data analysis began with the data collection (Creswell 2012), and followed thematic analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic analysis provides a richly detailed, yet complex account of teacher perceptions and practices without committing to a specific theory (Braun and Clarke 2006; Sparkes and Smith 2014). The process began with transcribing data, repeatedly reading each transcript, and making margin notes. I generated codes by reviewing data and marginal notes, and identifying common patterns. I also created a folder with quotes from the teachers based on identified codes. I then gathered, read, and grouped quotes based on commonalities, to form themes. I re-evaluated each theme and returned to data coding until I determined the themes. The last phase involved writing a description of each theme to evaluate appropriateness of theme titles and the extent to which themes answered the research question.

Trustworthiness

I emphasize reflexivity and credibility (Zitomer and Goodwin 2014) here as important for a rigorous research process. Reflexivity involves locating my position as a researcher in relation to the study topic (Darawsheh 2014). I completed an undergraduate degree in dance education. As a student, I had an opportunity to teach dance to children with physical disabilities. My interaction with these children taught me to see the dancer in every person. As a dance teacher I worked with children with intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, physical disabilities, and terminal illness. I always sought ways to ensure all children participated in lessons and performances alongside their peers. As a researcher observing other teachers, I had to remind myself frequently to stay 'on the side' and not become a 'participant' in teaching situations.

A number of strategies enhanced the credibility of this study process. Triangulation entailed collecting multiple data sources to view the inclusive dance education environment from varied angles (Creswell 2012). I pilot tested the interview guide with private studio dance teachers to evaluate question effectiveness and changed the questions as needed. I returned to teachers with additional questions that emerged during data transcription or analysis for member reflections (Tracy 2010). Direct quotations from teachers help ground interpretive claims, and are intended to enable readers to evaluate the extent to which my interpretations reveal teachers' perspectives of the dance context.

Results

The four teachers in my study defined inclusion as enabling all students to participate in dance activities and to learn in the way most suitable to their needs. In a deeper sense, this definition reflects teachers' respect for the uniqueness of each student. Working with students with diverse learning needs and abilities enhanced teachers' awareness of their teaching

practices. The combination of the teachers' increased awareness and respect for differences impacted their accommodation considerations and also contributed to teaching children to take responsibility to support one another. Finally, the teachers stated that acknowledging uniqueness and accommodating diverse learning needs did not mean lowering expectations.

I conceptualized my understanding of these teachers' perceptions and practices based on six interconnected themes: (a) valuing uniqueness; (b) establishing supportive relationships; (c) being pedagogically aware; (d) regarding children's needs; (e) teaching students about responsibility; and (f) having high expectations.

Valuing Uniqueness

The four teachers perceived each child as different and having a unique set of abilities. Cathy explained that there is no right or wrong way to practice inclusion because every child is different. She believed strongly that creating inclusive dance environments requires teachers to be passionate about inclusion and to be willing to find strengths in each of their students:

> When it comes to inclusion… there's no one thing that's going to be the magic manual to follow. I really do think it's ever evolving and as unique as every single individual is... It's one of those things where if you're going to teach an inclusive program, you do it because you love it, because you truly believe in every single person involved... And if you're not willing to look for that superstar in everybody, then maybe inclusion isn't for you… I think that's going to be the biggest barrier to working with inclusive education programs.

Consistent with the idea of valuing uniqueness, all teachers viewed disability as a different ability. Most of the teachers expressed dislike for the term "disability". Julia explained: "I don't

like the word “disability”… because I feel like they all have a chance, they all have an ability to do it (dance), but maybe just a different way”.

Elementary school dance offers exposure to different dance genres. However, all teachers focused extensive time on creative movement as they felt it best supports the ideas of inclusion and could provide children with freedom of movement and an opportunity to express their uniqueness. As Janet explained:

> I find with creative dance … it doesn’t matter if you say, ask them to move like a leaf across the floor, but they are all moving … in different ways, that is creative dance. It’s your own, it’s unique, and ... That’s what inclusion is, it’s finding that ‘best fit’ environment, and with creative dance it’s allowing them the freedom to move in the dance in the way that they are hearing the music and the way that they want to move. So I think that the two fit together quite well.

Establishing Supportive Relationships

Valuing the uniqueness of every child facilitated teachers’ actions in establishing relationships with their students. One important step in establishing relationships was learning student names. This was challenging for some teachers because of the number of students they taught each day. Cathy kept pictures of all of her students with their names as an aid to memory. However, beyond knowing names, it was important for Janet to show attentiveness to her students: “A lot of them would come up to me after and just want to talk and that is ok… not letting them feel like, ok, keep talking and “aha, got to go”, right? Being interested in who they are and what their interests are”. I observed how Janet took time during the warm up to interact with students.

Cathy and Erin established relationships by acknowledging something a child was doing during each class. Through this practice they felt children were able to gain some confidence in their skill level and to feel recognized as part of the group. As Erin explained:

> I find that when we are doing exploring movement and free movement … picking out kids and saying, their name and saying "that looks awesome, I really like what you're doing," because it really just builds their confidence, and they feel so proud of themselves and then they know that they are being recognized and I feel that has gone the furthest in building those relationships.

Cathy emphasized the importance of making students feel included by valuing their ability to contribute:

> Giving them that opportunity to feel included and to feel like whatever they are doing in the final product is great and is contributing, and is acceptable, is celebrated and valued. I think that's where those connections are made with those kids. Not seeing them as having a disability, but seeing them as able to contribute just like everybody else.

Being Pedagogically Aware

All four teacher's perceived inclusion to require flexibility, thinking on their feet, and being ready to adapt instantly in their teaching. I labeled these ideas 'being pedagogically aware'. The teachers recognized both the effect of their pedagogical practices on their students' learning and the effect their students had on their practices. For Janet, inclusion meant that she could not expect one strategy to work the same way in every situation. She had to continuously engage, observe, and be ready to quickly find a new strategy:

> Inclusion is about taking it hour by hour, day by day, because every day is going to be different. One strategy that you use today isn't going to work tomorrow, and it's always about being on your toes, and always about having a bunch of tricks up your sleeve.

Three of the teachers felt that inclusion did not demand additional planning for teaching students with disabilities. They planned one set of activities for the entire class that was modified in response to student performance. Such modification had to happen instantly and required trying different teaching strategies for optimal results. For example, Cathy felt that she had to actively search for appropriate 'differentiation strategies' based on the demands of the learning situation:

> We don't sit there and necessarily articulate, "oh I changed this for Jonny, and I've sort of done this for Sally, and Joey does it this way…" … I look at it and I see they don't get it, that's when I try to find lots of ways to do my cuing. That's why I feel like I can't just sit there and talk, I have to do it. I have to show it, I have … sometimes I get them to work with a partner… I guess those are all in a sense differentiation strategies.

Julia constantly monitored her teaching practices when working in an inclusive setting and used varied instructional modes to ensure success. She explained that accommodations were beneficial for all of her students because any one of them may need some form of differentiated instruction depending on the activity:

> I think it (inclusion) just reminds me to slow down too, and breaking everything down and being clear, and so even my accommodations that I need to do for a student with special needs… Like me needing to use an FM system…, or using different kind of visuals…, or showing a step in a different way, or it's me facing them, or doing it against the mirror…, giving them an opportunity to practice the step, giving them opportunity to work with different kinds of students … all these different accommodations are good for every kid no matter what or who they are.

Regarding Children's Needs

All of the teachers emphasized that becoming familiar with their students' strengths, limitations, and needs was necessary to support learning. This theme connects to ideas expressed

in the previous themes of valuing student uniqueness, building relationships, and becoming increasingly aware of teaching practices. Janet, for instance, explained that accommodating students' needs is not difficult as long as the teacher understands what the student needs to succeed:

> If they need that knowledge of space or a specific prop to be able to get them to participate in dance.... It's not that hard to let them… carry that… whatever into the dance studio or have that specific spot... For the accommodation piece, it's just 'know that student, know what that student needs and go from there.

Janet learned the precise movement terminology her student experiencing visual impairment used with his educational assistant, to instruct him. She also needed to consider ways to modify any activity that involved use of visual stimuli (e.g., dance films):

> ... for our blind student, if I am showing a video or, doing something different that's outside of the routine, I'll talk to the educational assistant beforehand, send her the links for the video and ask her…do I need to have somebody word for word saying what is going on if it's a piece that just has no words, or no explanation with it? ... Sometimes it's just learning the language that she's used with him…. So instead of using downward dog, it's a bear walk. So I'll go "ok, now move into downward dog, (child name), it's a bear walk." And he'll know exactly which move it is because he's done it with his assistant.

Several teachers explained that some their students' behavioral difficulties stemmed from the physical dance environment. For instance, Erin described the feedback noise from the sound system in the gymnasium frightening one of her students:

> We have a sound system that does have microphone capabilities, but they've given feedback before… those big loud… noises, and for my one student that is autistic, he just

> cannot handle that and the one time it did that, he ran out of the room and it took him a couple of weeks before he was comfortable coming back into the gym. So I don't even bother with the microphone which is really unfortunate because then… when I'm playing music and I'm trying to give instructions, then sometimes I'm yelling over the music and talking really loud ….

Familiarity with the physical environment was particularly necessary for children with disabilities. Janet described a situation in which one of her students became overwhelmed in the dance room and she returned the children to their classroom to teach dance. In the familiar space of his classroom, the student was able to engage in the dance activity:

> He just didn't want to be there. And in my class, when one behavior starts to act out, it's a domino effect with the rest of them... and I'm by myself… and no phone in the dance studio. So I'd just like "ok, we're going back to the classroom." And instead of just going back to the classroom and getting our other work done, I'd be like, "ok, let's make this work." Let's move the desks out of the way, let's put the dance music on and let's dance in here. And that seemed to work because he knew that environment and the dance studio was a new environment for him.

Teaching Students about Responsibility

All four teachers understood that accommodating the learning needs of students with disabilities required involving classmates or, sometimes, older peers. All of the teachers described how other classmates helped students with disabilities to remain on task or to learn a dance step or routine. I also had opportunities to observe students help peers with disabilities numerous times without being prompted. In one of my observation of Julia's class, I noted that she asked children to choose a partner with whom to work who they thought they could help or

could learn from. Her guidance was not specific to supporting children with disabilities, but contributed to children being attentive to needing to help one another and not leaving any peers without a partner. In this way, student awareness of their mutual responsibility toward one another was supported.

For Janet, it was important that her students take responsibility for ensuring the physical safety of the environment, in connection to a classmate who had a visual impairment. As she explained:

> One of our little ones is blind. For me the hardest part was trying to get him to, visually, paint a picture in his mind to know what was around him, and to get the other students to understand that if we're moving backwards or … forwards or sideways, is it your job to find where he is and to give him space. Because… he doesn't use his cane when he's dancing. He uses his surroundings. Like he doesn't know that you're about to walk into him… So that whole class understood and it was a teachable moment that it is not his job to watch where he's going because he can't watch where he's going ... It's not the person with the disability making the accommodation, it's the students around him readjusting where they are or grabbing his hand in the dance number.

Having High Expectations

Although this theme was apparent in all teachers' practices, a focus on having high expectations was particularly evident in interviews with Cathy and Erin. These teachers both emphasized that accommodating does not mean lowering expectations for student learning. Erin explained that the idea of 'scaffolding' meant finding different ways a student can execute the same movement:

> I don't think there's ever opportunities where students need to sit out because they can't do something, cause it's maybe physically beyond what they are able to do. There's always something. That's the idea of scaffolding... and have high expectations… So I think that's truly important … knowing that they are very capable, and don't think that [any] label is an excuse.

Cathy felt that lowering expectations would indicate the teacher is being overly cautious rather than open minded. She strongly believed that lowering expectations would be unfair to the child because it limits opportunities to discover their abilities:

> Never underestimate what kids can do... if you go into a situation with a preconceived notion or you're going to set the expectations low because you don't want them to fail or because you think this will be safer for everyone, it's an injustice to the kid and it's an injustice to your program... If you set the bar high and you go in with an open mind, kids will always rise to the occasion and they will surprise you and you will discover and they will discover that they are able to do things that they never knew that they could do before.

Discussion

Ethical practice is about commitment expressed in the way practitioners relate to people under their care (Austin et al. 2003). In education, teachers' caring for children, a sense of responsibility, and openness to explore and discover children's abilities are essential for creating inclusive environments (Furman 2015). All teachers in this study clearly reflected their commitment to inclusion as a means for enabling participation of all children in a supportive learning environment. My interviews and observations demonstrated that teachers valued the uniqueness of each student and made effort to establish supportive relationships. Further, the

teachers respected individual learning needs, modeled responsibility to support one another, and maintained high expectations for all students. Importantly, these teachers reported that they did not feel that having children with disabilities in their classes changed their lesson planning or altered the way in which they managed their classroom environments. Thus, contrary to Morley, Bailey, Tan, and Cooke's (2005) findings in physical education, these teachers did not perceive inclusion as impacting their workload. Furthermore, contrary to experiences of teachers in professional dance training programs (Band et al. 2011), these teachers did not feel that the practice of inclusion lowered the quality of learning for other students. Instead, inclusion increased teachers' awareness of their practices, and consistent with Jordan and McGhie-Richmond's (2014) research, benefited all of their students. I now locate my findings within the four relational ethics constructs—mutual respect relational engagement, embodiment, and environment.

Relational engagement is an encounter between two or more people where one is present to the other(s) in the moment (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). These moments require what Aoki (1991) termed "curriculum improvisation" based on sensitivity to students' ongoing life experiences. van Manen (1991) called such situations "pedagogical moments" (40) that demand teacher action in some form, often in the spur of the moment. In my study, for example, Janet felt she had to be ready with "tricks up her sleeve" and Cathy felt she had to be in action with her students rather than guiding from the side. Such improvisational situations also demonstrate teachers' flexible and creative thinking to find ways to accommodate and include all of their students (Cone 2015). Furthermore, improvisational situations portray an interdependent relationship between the teachers and their students as teachers recognize the impacts of their

practices on student learning. Simultaneously, the teachers also recognized the impact of student learning and behavior on their teaching.

Teaching dance is a process that integrates body and mind in exploration and discovery of movement possibilities (Benjamin 2002). This integration results in embodiment, where practitioners may be able to see people holistically as human beings instead of individual parts (Bergum 2003). In my study, teachers were able to see their students holistically as having a range of abilities as opposed to seeing student disability as a 'lack' (Schwyzer 2005), or inability to dance. Teachers' perception of their students' abilities also reflects their respect for difference (Kuppers 2001) and contributes to their ability to have high expectations from all of their students. Furthermore, dance is lived and learned through the body (Horton-Fraleigh 1987) and thus, the teachers' personal experiences learning dance could have contributed to their understanding that every person has to adapt dance movement to their own body (Schwyzer 2005). Hence, needing to find different ways to modify movements for students with disabilities was perhaps a natural extension of the understanding that every person needs to adapt in some way.

Finally, mutual respect requires acknowledging individual knowledge, abilities, and needs as an important aspect in relationships (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). A regard for differences was apparent in the teachers' use of differentiated instruction, using principles from universal design of instruction (Jordan and MacGhie-Richmond 2014). A universal design of instruction acknowledges students' diverse learning needs, skills, and interests and provides multiple means for presenting content and encouraging student engagement (Jordan and MacGhie-Richmond 2014). Thus, for the participating teachers, the addition of a student with a disability was a natural extension to the diverse learning differences they were already

considering. Janet was the only teacher who found a need to engage in additional advanced planning to accommodate for her student who had a visual impairment. It is also possible that these teachers believed extensive modification was not needed because dance education at the elementary level emphasized creative movement. Consistent with the previous literature the teachers explained that creative movement offers opportunity for individual expression as opposed to technical training that emphasizes a "right" way to move (Peterson and Kaufmann 2002). Thus, creative movement is a dance form that accepts the multiplicity of movement expression modes that students bring with them into the shared dance space (Kaufnann 2006). Such values of acceptance are also core for mutual respect (Bergum and Dossetor, 2005).

Bergum and Dossetor (2005) explained that mutual respect enables empathic exploration of differences. In my study, Janet's acknowledgement of individual needs provided her an opportunity to teach students about their responsibility to modify their movement to accommodate their peer who had a visual impairment. Ferguson, Meyer, Jeanchild, Juniper, and Zingo (1992) described a situation in which the teacher and students modified the environment by wearing bright clothing to facilitate sight for a peer with severe physical disabilities in secondary school drama education. These examples demonstrate how, through shared action, teachers were able to create an environment based on mutual respect by accepting all classroom members as they are and by understanding student needs (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Mutual respect and care were also apparent in Janet's expression of her willingness to listen when students wanted to talk, as well as in Cathy's acknowledgement of each of her students' contributions to the creative dance process. Thus, a community was created in the different classes where student voices were valued, and students felt safe to share their movements and thoughts.

Conclusion

This study explored the perceptions and practices of four dance teachers to provide a window from which to view the inclusive dance education environment. The dance teachers in this study valued inclusion and appreciated dance as a means for exposing their students to different movement styles. My findings indicate that that through their engagement with students, the four teachers increased their pedagogical awareness and enhanced their teaching practices. Thus, the practice of accommodating varied learning needs contributed to the learning of all students by encouraging acknowledgement of and respect for difference.

Several of the teachers mentioned that professional development for inclusion is offered for academic subject areas but not specifically for dance. Cathy suggested that having a workshop on inclusion, specific to dance, arts, and physical education, would be helpful to accommodate the learning requirements specific to these settings. Existing research has found that music teachers prefer professional development in connection to inclusion that is discipline specific (Van Weelden and Whipple 2013). Similarly, professional development related to inclusion specific to dance may be warranted for dance teachers. Further research should explore professional development and resources that may be helpful to implement inclusion in dance. Finally, to more closely explore the complexities involved in the process of creating inclusive dance education environments, future research can investigate how children's experiences in these settings intersect with teachers' experiences.

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‘Dance Makes Me Happy’: Experiences of Children with Disabilities in Elementary School Dance Education

Abstract

This study explored the perspectives of elementary school children with disabilities in inclusive dance education classrooms in two large school districts in Western Canada. A qualitative interpretivist approach facilitated understanding of the experiences of eight children with different disabilities between the ages six and ten who participated in dance in general education classrooms. Two one-on-one semi-structured interviews, children’s art work, class observations and researcher field notes facilitated gaining access to the children’s experiences. Data were interpreted through a relational ethics conceptual framework. Data analysis followed the procedures of interpretive thematic analysis. Interview and observation data revealed three themes: (a) peer acceptance, (b) bodily learning; and (c) engaged support continuum. Relationships with teachers, educational assistants and classmates created a dance education environment that enabled these children to participate alongside their classmates, experience joy and success, and gain a sense of belonging.

Key words: inclusive dance education, elementary school children, children with disabilities.

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‘Dance Makes Me Happy’: Experiences of Children with Disabilities in Elementary School Dance Education

Dance education is offered in some Canadian public schools as either a physical education component or as a stand-alone subject (Green-Gilbert 2005). When offered as stand-alone subject, dance education fosters appreciation of dance as an art form by engaging students as creators, participants, and spectators (Whyte 2013). Resulting from inclusive education policies that encourage placing children with disabilities to the extent possible in regular classrooms (Thompson, Lyons, and Timmons 2015), potentially many children with disabilities gain opportunities to experience dance alongside peers without disabilities. Inclusive dance education aims to celebrate individuality by teaching children to appreciate their own talents and those of their peers (Kaufmann 2006). However, beyond children learning together in the same environment, inclusion concerns the social context and personal feelings children with disabilities experience when interacting with others (Fitzgerald and Jobling 2009). Experiences described by children with disabilities can identify aspects that promote or hinder efforts towards creating inclusive learning environments (Barton 2009; Messiou 2012). Yet, in dance education the experiences of children with disabilities have not been explored extensively. To address this research gap, my study sought to investigate the experiences of children with disabilities in inclusive elementary school dance education. Inclusive dance in this study refers to an environment in which children with and without disabilities participate together.

Research investigating experiences of participants with disabilities in inclusive dance contexts has primarily focused on university or professional training programs (e.g., Band, Lindsay, Neelands, and Freakley 2011; Whatley 2007) or professional dancers with physical disabilities (e.g., Ashwill 1992; Quinlan 2009; Williams 1999). Additional literature that portrays

the experiences of individuals with disabilities in inclusive dance is in the form of personal anecdotal accounts written by the individuals themselves (e.g., Tool 2002). Generally, studies have found that adult dancers with disabilities felt empowered by the opportunity to learn and perform dance (Band et al. 2011; Whatley 2007; Williams 1999) and to demonstrate physical capacity that defies societal expectations of their bodies and abilities (Tool 2002). Moreover, dance provided adult dancers with disabilities an avenue for communication and advocacy for equal rights and access (Ashwill 1992).

Students in professional training programs in the study by Band et al (2011) enjoyed the opportunity the inclusive setting provided them to work collaboratively and exchange ideas with renowned choreographers and peers without disabilities. Whatley (2007) found that university students with physical disabilities in dance technique classes experienced learning as liberating and skill building. They preferred smaller class sizes and imagery based instruction over structured exercise repetition. However, they associated pain with previous experiences in physiotherapy and experienced difficulty understanding movement sensations described by instructors to know if they were executing movement correctly. Furthermore, students felt they progressed slower than their peers without disabilities in technique acquisition and performed differently. The negative comparison reported by participants with disabilities may be applicable to children in inclusive or segregated settings where the tendency to compare oneself to others can cause individuals to question their own competence (Bjorbaekmo and Engelsrud 2011).

Most dancers and dance students gain their first exposure to dance education during their early childhood years (Risner 2008; Stinson 1988). Zitomer and Reid (2011) explored perceptions of dance ability and disability of six to nine year old children with and without disabilities participating in a ten-week community based inclusive dance program. Children were

interviewed at the beginning and end of the program. Generally, interviews revealed that children with disabilities perceived themselves as able to dance and they desired to participate in the inclusive dance environment. They described their enjoyment of dancing and viewed it as providing a means for self-expression and an activity that was good for their bodies. Participating in the program allowed them opportunities to socially interact with peers without disabilities during dance activities and during free play time prior to or at the end of each class. Furthermore, the children gained a sense of competence in their dance skills as they learned of varied ways they could manipulate their bodies.

Within school dance education, there is a dearth of research that voices the experiences of students with disabilities. Stinson (1993) investigated the experiences of 36 secondary school students in school dance education. Some of the students were identified as at-risk or as having behavioral difficulties. These students expressed the importance of developing caring relationships with their dance teachers and peers. They reported teachers finding time to help with difficult to learn dance concepts and listening when they needed to talk. In some cases, teachers also called to check on them when they were absent. The dance program provided students a space where they could just be themselves, enabled self-expression, and allowed opportunities for getting to know more about themselves and their personal capacities. Despite the fact that this study took place in secondary school dance education, where dance was an elective course, some of the findings can be applicable to understanding experiences of elementary school students. For instance, elementary school students without disabilities have also described dance as a place where they felt they could just “be themselves” (Cheyene 2011). Furthermore, the importance of experiencing teachers’ care and support is described by Bjorbaekmo and Engelsrud’s (2011) study of four to eleven year old children with disabilities

participating in a rehabilitation setting dance program. The children in this study gained confidence and satisfaction with their own way of moving when they felt their teachers welcomed them. The idea of every person experiencing acceptance and recognition by others underlies a relational ethics approach to inclusive dance education.

Relational Ethics as a Conceptual Framework for Inclusive Dance

An inclusive dance education environment is a space where everyone has opportunity to access quality learning experiences and gain a sense of belonging (Kaufmann 2006). In practice, however, inclusion is complex and may represent multiple interpretations (Winzer 2008). Understanding inclusion through a relational ethics lens raises awareness of such complexity. Relational ethics is based on four intertwined constructs: mutual respect, relational engagement, embodiment, and environment (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). I now describe each of these in detail.

Mutual respect refers to unconditional acceptance, recognition, and acknowledgement of individuals (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). In dance education this means every student is accepted and recognized for the contributions they can make (Benjamin 2002). Dance education can foster mutual respect by inviting movement exploration through activities that promote student engagement, creativity, and problem solving (Bresler 2004). Acceptance also requires relational engagement through community connection. Engagement exists in moments when people find ways to collaboratively explore issues. Engaged action enables discovery of abilities not previously known (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). In dance education, engaged action may encourage children with disabilities to discover new abilities through collaborative movement exploration and problem solving activities (Zitomer and Reid 2011).

Embodiment relates to the idea of experiencing, living, sensing, knowing, and understanding one's world through the body (Markula and Silk 2011). Embodiment recognizes that people live in a specific historical and social context as thinking, feeling, full-bodied, and passionate human beings (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). It can facilitate creating dance spaces that allow individuals with and without disabilities to dance together in their own ways (Quinlan and Bates 2008). Finally, the relational environment is the space for ethical action and is created in each action (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Hence, it is possible to view mutual respect, relational engagement, and embodiment as together contributing to creating an inclusive dance education environment.

It is important to hear, listen to and celebrate voices of children with disabilities within education research and practice (Fitzgerald 2009). Further inquiry into children's experiences and perceptions of participating in elementary school dance can facilitate opportunities for children with disabilities to dance. Hence, the research question guiding this study was: How do children with disabilities perceive the elementary school dance education environment?

Methods

I chose an interpretivist qualitative research approach to gain access into the experiences and perceptions of children with disabilities participating in elementary school dance education. In doing so, I aim to "see big" (Greene 1995, 10): to view phenomena from the perspective of the children in the midst of what is happening in their school dance education environment. An interpretive approach holds that there are multiple angles from which to view and experience a dance education environment (Green and Stinson 1999). Similarly, relational ethics encourages reflection on how people relate to one another in environments when a right way to act is ambiguous (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Interpretive research, thus, aligns with relational ethics

to invite reflection and theorizing on ethical insights gained from practical situations (Bergum and Dossetor 2005).

Participants

Ethical approval was obtained from the university ethics review board. Criterion sampling (Patton 2002) guided recruitment. Children were recruited based on being identified as having a disability and participating in dance in general elementary school classrooms. Eight elementary school children between the ages six and ten with varied types of disabilities including autism spectrum disorder, neuro developmental disability, intellectual disabilities, and visual impairment participated in the study. The students were identified by their dance or classroom teachers and children's parents signed consent forms and the children either signed or indicated their assent verbally.

Study Context

The study occurred between January and June 2015 in five elementary schools located in two large school districts in a Western Canadian city. Six children attended one of the four schools that had dance as a curriculum subject and were taught by certified teachers who specialized in dance. Two children attended one school that had a residency program where they received six dance lessons from two visiting dance artists over a period of two weeks. All classes were between 30 and 45 minutes duration. In three schools, dance took place in the gymnasium while two schools had a room designated for dance. Five children had an educational assistant (EA) who accompanied them to each of their classes, while three participated without an assistant. With the exception of one girl who was taking ballet after school, the dance program in school was the only current dance exposure for participating children.

Data Collection

Authentic engagement with young students with disabilities demands careful consideration of data collection strategies that enable capturing student perspectives and experiences while recognizing children's social agency (Fitzgerald 2009). Multiple data collection methods were engaged in this study process (Eder and Fingerson 2003; Lewis and Porter 2004) including interviews, art work, observation, and field notes.

I observed five to ten classes in each school. The number of observations depended on class schedule and children's individual communication needs. Observations commenced before interviewing the children to allow them to become familiar with my presence in their classes and for me to build rapport. My observations enabled me to learn about children's communication modes (Eder and Fingerson 2003; Mactavish et al. 2000) and about the roles children played within the dynamic social context of the dance classroom (Clark 2011). In some cases, due to children's challenges with verbal expression, observation became one of the main strategies for me to gain access to their dance experiences (Clark 2011; Coates and Vickerman 2013).

All children participated in two individual semi-structured interviews. Interview structure was determined based on children's individual communication ability and needs. I used a semi-structured interview guide to attempt to address different aspects related to the children's experiences in dance education. Additional prompts enabled children to develop and express their ideas (Greig, Taylorand, and Mackay 2007). Interview guides were developed based on review of previous literature about experiences of children with disabilities in physical education settings, and were informed by relational ethics, and my experience as a dance student. Questions included: Can you tell me about your dance class? Can you tell me about something that makes you happy/unhappy in dance? Are there things that are hard in dance? Does someone

help you when things are hard? Who helps you, and how? If you were a dance teacher, what would you do to make dance fun for everyone? My choice to interview children with different disabilities was based on the assumption that these children have valuable perspectives to share regarding the dance education environment (Mactavish, Mahon, and Lutfiyya 2000). To gain access to the experiences of children whose verbal expression was limited, I sought advice from their parents, teachers, and EA to learn about children's communication modes and discussion topics that would best enable building rapport with them. At the same time, I ignored comments from teachers or educational assistants that seemed to underestimate children's ability to communicate (Davis, Watson, and Cunningham-Burley 2008). Interviews occurred in a quiet room at the school and lasted approximately 30 minutes and were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

During the interviews, some children created art work mainly through means of a drawing activity which facilitated their engagement in the interview (Clark 2011). The drawing activity involved, for example, asking children to draw a picture of something that made them happy or unhappy in dance. I then asked questions such as: What is happening in the picture? Why did this make you happy/unhappy? The children's reflections were then recorded along with the rest of the interview and transcribed. For two children with autism spectrum disorder, I used the drawing activity at the end to keep them focused on the interview questions, based on advice from their EA. Some children opted not to draw and preferred verbal conversation. For two children, I used pictures downloaded from Microsoft Word clip art (http://cliparts.co/dance-cartoon-images) to ask questions about their experiences (Coates and Vickerman 2013). I preselected these images based on my observations of dance class activities or in relation to

children's behaviors I had noted. Children pointed to pictures to reflect their responses to my question and then we glued their selected pictures in a sequence to describe their experience.

I recorded field notes throughout the data collection process. My field notes described the school setting, the dance classroom environment, student interactions with me as well as interactions between students with disabilities and their teachers, EA's, and peers. Furthermore, by taking reflective notes I was able to question my biases and assumptions during the research process.

Data Analysis

I followed interpretive thematic analysis procedures (Braun and Clarke 2006) to analyze interview and observation data. Interpretive thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible data analysis approach to provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of children's experiences and perceptions of their school dance education environment. Data analysis involved (a) familiarization by transcribing the data myself, reading and rereading, and making margin notes; (b) coding by reviewing data and marginal notes, identifying common patterns, and creating a "quotable quotes" folder based on codes; (c) evaluating how different codes may combine to create themes; (d) refining themes by ascertaining that themes reflect the data and then re-coding as needed; (e) defining and naming themes by writing an analysis and a description of each theme.

Research Quality

Reflexivity, credibility, and ethics (Zitomer and Goodwin 2014) are emphasized here as important for ensuring a rigorous qualitative research process. I acknowledge the potential impact my background and views may have on the research process and findings by sharing my position as a dance teacher and researcher (Darawsheh 2014). As a university dance student, I

participated in a project where I gained my first experiences teaching dance to children with disabilities. Working with these children awakened me to the limited opportunities they may have to participate in dance, and inspired my exploration of ways to create more possibilities. I believe in every child's right and ability to dance. As a researcher, I aim to help children share their dance experience to advance teacher reflection on professional practice.

To ensure credibility, I triangulated multiple data types that enabled viewing the school dance education environment from varied angles (Creswell 2012). Member reflections occurred by returning to children with additional questions that emerged during data transcription or analysis and enhanced dialogue with children (Tracy 2010). Further, direct quotations from the children helped illustrate themes and ground interpretive claims. Ethical considerations regarding participation of children with disabilities were made throughout the research process to ensure children were treated with respect and dignity during data collection and in the sharing of findings (Brendhal 2008). These considerations have guided my choice to avoid sharing children's disability label and to provide only general information regarding types of disabilities children experienced. Information regarding a child's disability was shared only if it was directly related to the specific learning experience they discussed. Further, children were invited to choose their own pseudonyms. I chose pseudonyms for children who were unable to do so or did not want to choose.

Results

The children in the study all expressed their enjoyment of dancing including four who referred to dance as one of their favorite classes. For example, Thea explained: "I would say that it all makes me happy. I love dancing". Dance education provided these children an opportunity to leave their classroom space, engage in movement activities accompanied by music, and

interact with classmates. At the same time, difficulties with collaborative group work, and sometimes receiving more support than was needed contributed to negative experiences in dance. Three themes emerged from the interview and field note data: (a) peer acceptance; (b) bodily learning; and (c) engaged support continuum.

Peer Acceptance

> *"I liked being a leader because I remember them (the moves), and because people listen to me. And people don't always listen to me too much. But they do in dance" (John).*

Participants expressed experiences of peer acceptance in the dance education environment. This happened when they had opportunities to dance with their classmates and felt recognized and appreciated as part of the group. The quote from John, above, reflects his enjoyment of the opportunity to be a group leader in dance class. During my observation, John worked with a small group of peers to create a movement phrase. His leadership role involved writing down his group's movement suggestions and reading them out to the group during practice. John seemed able to remember the steps without always needing to read them off the sheet. It seemed as though his group members recognized his ability to memorize and followed his lead. As skills in dance class were different from those required in other class settings, where the learning is based on reading and writing tasks, John's classmates were able to see different strengths.

During my observation of Richard, the teacher asked the children to work in pairs for a mirroring exercise. Richard joined a girl he considered a friend. Richard at first appeared to have difficulty taking turns being a leader or a follower. His friend was patient with him and with initial support from his EA, she explained to him that he needed to follow her and told him when it was his turn to lead. His EA stood on the side and reminded him occasionally not to move too

fast so his partner could follow him. A sense of respect was evident between the two peers as they maintained eye contact and exchanged smiles throughout the exercise.

Mater, who had visual impairment, also felt accepted as part of the group when he was able to move freely and safely through the dance space due to his classmates' attentiveness: "My friends need to make the floor safe for me to dance on it. They need to watch out for me to not bump into me". A few children talked about how friends make them feel included in dance class. For instance, John explained "I feel I belong when I am with all my friends". Moreover, a sense of peer acceptance was apparent when most children who had an EA working with them preferred dancing with their classmates to dancing with their assistant. This preference was expressed either verbally, by pointing to a picture during interview, or in facial expressions of happiness during my observations. Aiden, for example, was able to point to pictures. I showed him two pictures, one of a boy holding an adult's hand with the title "dancing with my aid" and the other of a boy holding hands with a girl with the title "dancing with my friends". I asked him to point to a picture that indicated his preference and he pointed to the picture that indicated dancing with his friends. We then glued the two pictures side by side on a blank piece of paper. I asked him to draw a circle around the picture that showed his preference. He drew a circle around the picture that indicated the choice of dancing with his friends. The preference Aiden communicated in this nonverbal activity was consistent (Figure 1) with my observation of his class. Aiden's EA frequently danced with him and constantly moved his body to help him perform the movements demonstrated by the teacher. However, the day the EA stepped away and had two of his classmates take over, he appeared more relaxed and happy.

From my perspective as observer, it appeared that Aiden moved more freely and authentically when the adult supporting him stepped aside and allowed his peers to support him.

The absence of an intervening adult enabled Aiden to more easily blend into the group reducing the evidence of difference between himself and his peers. Thus, he seemed to be completely part of the group. In summary, the dance learning environment provided leadership and social interaction opportunities which contributed to experiences of peer acceptance. These experiences were potentially enhanced through the embodied learning in dance.

Bodily Learning

"Dance was hard, but now it's easier because I practiced lots all the time." (Richard)

The theme of bodily learning describes experiences children expressed or I observed, where children mastered movement or learned through their bodies in interaction with others or stimulus provided by their environment. A few children discussed challenging class activities they enjoyed. For instance, Richard and Thea both talked about enjoying the game of 'freeze dance' which some teachers in the study used as either a warm-up activity, or as a game at the end of class. The game requires listening to 'stop and go' cues the music dictates. When the music plays, children need to dance to the beat and when it stops they need to hold a pose. Richard found stopping and holding a pose challenging, but at the same time, he enjoyed the challenge and was very excited to demonstrate the game:

> Like freeze dance…when the music starts and you are running and moving like that (shows locomotive movement) and when the music stops you have to freeze and hold it (shows a pose and tries to hold it while talking excitedly). Every time it gets hard to do the freeze, but it's fun. I get happy when I can hold the freeze.

John felt challenged navigating his way through space while practicing locomotor skills and avoid colliding with peers. He drew (see Figure 2) and described with great excitement an activity in which his class was working on locomotion through space in varied forms:

> We were… practicing our moves like gallops, skip, run, and it was a time when it was running, and then we changed to different ones. Like there's one person running, one place and everyone else is going in the opposite direction. So that was quite fun when that happened to me. I liked it. It was quite of a challenge because I had to dodge everyone.

Richard talked about his experience trying to learn the box step. The movement was taught as part of a fast-paced musical theater piece. In his interview, Richard was enthusiastic about showing me the step in a fast pace while singing the song. He added that it was hard for him at first and his EA helped him learn the step by breaking it down for him:

> Sometimes dance is hard because the movement is fast. Like we were doing this (shows box step). Miss (EA) helped me she did this (he demonstrates) step over, step back, step side, step side.

In my observation of this class, Richard appeared to struggle with learning the step and complained that the step was difficult. His assistant showed him the movements slowly while explaining each step. He followed her movements and practiced several times and soon mastered the step and increased his pace. It appeared as though the step became a natural part of his body movement repertoire. In summary, bodily learning encompassed mastery of movement skills, increased spatial awareness, and ability to respond to music cues. These experiences were also made possible through the support children received from teachers, EAs, and their peers.

Engaged Support Continuum

> *"Dance is harder when Miss (EA) isn't there cause I don't know what we are doing. I don't really understand the moves. She helps me with the dances by showing me the moves and telling me what we are doing."* (Mater)

The theme of engaged support continuum represents the idea that children experienced the support they received as either unwanted, engaged, or needed but not received. Generally the children appeared to appreciate the support they received from their teachers, EA's, or classmates. However, my interviews and observations revealed the existence of a continuum of engaged support, where engaged support was help that was provided when children needed it. On each end of the continuum were experiences when children received "too much" help that they did not wish to receive, and experiences where children needed help but did not receive it.

Mater experienced difficulty learning dance steps at times due to his visual impairment. In the quote introducing this theme, he described his EA helping him by explaining what the class was doing, using movement terms that he knew, and offering him tactile guidance. In one of my observations of Mater, his EA was late in joining him, and the dance teacher offered Mater tactile guiding while explaining the movements to the rest of the class. He seemed comfortable with his teacher's guidance as he occasionally asked her questions about what they were doing and did not appear to resist her touch.

Mater's EA knew him well and was able to identify when he needed her support and when it was time to encourage him to dance with his classmates. When dancing with his classmates, Mater felt competent as he no longer needed his EA or teacher to learn the dance. He explained: "dancing with my classmates makes me feel happy because I am dancing with my friends and it makes me feel that I know the dance". In my observation of his classes, the EA danced with him every class until he was familiar enough with the steps that he could perform them independently. Then, she suggested he ask a friend to dance with him. When I observed Mater dancing with one of his friends he appeared extremely happy and proud with a wide smile

on his face. Perhaps this was an indication of a sense of accomplishment, as he was now able to dance with a peer, like any of his classmates.

In another situation, Geoff was bothered by loud music. For him loud sound could become overwhelming to the point that he could not remain in the dance room. In such cases, the EA would leave the room with him so that he could calm down. As Geoff shared, “sometimes the music gets too loud for me. I leave the gym and Miss (EA) leaves the gym with me. It helps me calm down. When the music gets lower I come back to the class”. Geoff appeared to feel safe in dance when his EA understood his need to leave the room when environment noise was overwhelming for him.

Assistance was not always necessary, and occasionally came when children felt they could perform tasks independently. This experience was particularly evident in Mater and Molly’s cases. Mater explained, “sometimes people help me when I think I can do things by myself. It makes me feel not sad, but not very happy. Sometimes I say to them, can I try?”

Molly could not verbally articulate her experience. However, in my observations, I noticed that too much support from her EA impeded rather than facilitated her participation in dance. During one of my observations, the teacher demonstrated the warm-up at the beginning of the class and Molly appeared to be following her lead, but had her own version of some of the movements. She appeared happy until her EA physically held her arms to manipulate Molly’s body to replicate what the teacher was showing. At first Molly’s resistance appeared subtle as she attempted to evade her EA’s grip. But after a few minutes when the EA did not let go, Molly became irritated and began yelling at her to stop. The EA reacted by taking Molly out of the room. In another observation, her regular EA was not present, and the person who was replacing her just stood nearby but did not touch her or provide much direction. Molly’s classmates took

over the role of helping her by telling her to come with them and she followed, with a smile on her face.

Sometimes it seemed that children needed help, but did not receive it. For instance, in one of my observations of Geoff, the teacher asked the children to form groups of three and Geoff was left without a group. The teacher then asked a couple of boys if he could join them. They agreed, but they appeared to be working on their own and Geoff wandered off exploring his own movement. The EA was on the side working on something else. When she noticed he was not working with his group, she took him by the hand and mistakenly brought him to a different group from the one he was assigned. The children knew where he was supposed to be and told the EA. The EA then left him with the correct group and walked away. It seemed in this case that Geoff needed help remaining on task and the children working with him were not able to provide support without adult direction. In summary, engaged support helped children participate in dance activities and socially interact with peers whereas too much or too little support impeded such opportunities.

Discussion

Relational ethics emphasizes the importance of interdependent relationships within a community. These are understood to be relationships that enable acceptance of individuals as they are and recognition of the unique knowledge and background each person brings (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Although the children in my study did not clearly articulate the idea of being accepted as they are, the experiences they shared, along with my observations of their classes, show that they enjoyed participating in dance alongside their peers without disabilities. Children felt competent in their ability to participate, and generally valued the help they received from teachers, EAs, and peers. Their experiences in dance class appeared to contribute to

children gaining a sense of belonging, which is one of the aims of inclusive education (Kaufmann 2006). Furthermore, consistent with findings from physical education, relationships with teachers, EA, and peers impacted children's positive and negative experiences (Butler and Hodge 2004; Coates and Vickerman 2010; Fitzgerald 2005; Fitzgerald and Stride 2012; Healy, Msetfi, and Gallagher 2013; Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, and Van den Auweele 2002; Spencer-Cavaliere and Watkinson 2010).

The notion of mutual respect emphasizes self-respect, respect for others, and respect from others (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). This was particularly pertinent to John's experience where he felt that in dance he was "heard" and respected by his group members who enabled him to take on a leadership role in a group activity. Similarly, Richard's experience of taking turns with his friend in leading and following each other's movements reflected the extent to which respect was mutual between the two peers. Consistent with findings of Spencer-Cavalier and Watkinson (2010) in physical education, both John and Richard's cases illustrate that through positive interactions with peers, children were able to feel like legitimate participants in dance. Mutual respect can only exist within interdependent relationships, where people depend on one another and at the same time, they are independent (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). This sense of interdependence was particularly apparent in Mater's experience when he understood that his peers needed to see where he was located in order to create a safe space for him to dance. His ability to move independently in the dance space depended on his peers adjusting their movement and use of space in response to his movement.

Embodied knowledge is among the main knowledge forms fostered in dance education. In my study, embodied knowledge became apparent in learning experiences that enhanced what Ehrenberg (2015) described as a "kinesthetic mode of attention" (44). This kinesthetic mode of

attention was developed in activities such as freeze dance, practicing locomotive movement while being attentive to others to avoid collision, and work in pairs where students were modeling and mirroring movement. Kinesthetic attention made children conscious of themselves, their body movement, as well as that of their peers, connecting the relational ethics constructs of mutual respect and embodiment in children's interaction and learning with their peers. Furthermore, embodiment was apparent when Richard mastered a difficult step to the point that it became part of his bodily repertoire (Bergum 2003).

Similar to Stinson (1997) who found that middle school children without disabilities felt their group members were not as invested in working on tasks as they were, the few negative experiences that children shared related to challenges of working with peers. Their experiences perhaps indicate that it would be helpful for teachers to establish clearer expectations for group work and to emphasize the importance of dialogue and working collaboratively on problem solving. Furthermore, given the young age of the children, perhaps they required additional adult supervision during group work (Suomi, Collier, and Brown 2003; Zitomer and Reid 2011).

Educational assistants can provide valuable support for students with disabilities in inclusive education settings (Giangreco 2010). Five children had EA support on a one-to-one basis. However, consistent with previous findings, children's experiences continued to illustrate the fine line between becoming independent and being over dependent based on the quality of support (Egilson and Traustadottir 2009; Giangreco 2010; Mortier, Desimpel, De Schauwer, and Van Hove 2011). However, regardless of the quality of relationships with their EAs, most children preferred opportunities to partner in dance with their peers. The reason for this preference may be the stigmatizing nature of having adult assistance exclusively throughout the school day (Mortier et al. 2011). Relational engagement and mutual respect were apparent when

assistants were able to step back and just be present in case the child needed support (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Knowing that they had support if they needed it, children were more fully engaged in the class and enjoyed positive interaction with peers and the dance teacher.

Relational engagement requires practitioners to invest time in getting to know those under their care and understanding individual strengths and needs (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Engagement was evident in experiences shared by Mater where his teacher and EA invested time to familiarize themselves with his needs and devised appropriate terminology to help him understand the dance moves his class was learning. In his interaction with his EA, Mater acquired certain terminology that represented movements he could identify and execute with limited support. Mater's teacher and EA invested time that enabled them to present Mater with meaningful curriculum by connecting class content to his life (Greene-Gilbert 2006). An investment in time was also evident when I observed teachers placing certain children with disabilities in close proximity to them for support as needed. For instance, when working with balance Geoff's teacher would stand near enough for him to hold her arm. She possibly knew from talking to him or observing him that he was frightened of falling.

Buber (1947) explained that children naturally desire to create. They want to take part in production rather than depending on others to produce for them. Children's desire to produce can perhaps explain some of the reactions I observed when assistants were trying to make children move in certain ways against their will. Situations where EAs were manipulating children's bodies might have contributed to children's experiences of unwanted or unneeded help (Mortier et al. 2011). Thus, beyond the notion of taking part in production of their own movements, situations where the EAs were unnecessarily manipulating children's movements draw attention to power concerns (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Children may have felt powerless when they

were not able to control the way they wanted to move their own bodies. Horton Fraleigh (1987) referred to the idea of having one's body observed and controlled by others as the body becoming "set over against me" (p. 17). This can lead to a sense of alienation from self and others. There is no doubt that EAs and teachers have positive intentions to provide the best support they can to the children under their care. However, from a relational ethic perspective, understanding the child as a whole person connected to the EA or teacher as a whole person is key (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Contrarily, providing too much support may indicate a focus on the child's disability rather than seeing the child as a whole person in a relationship. Understanding students holistically connects the elements of mutual respect, engagement, and embodiment and requires integration of dualistic oppositions of body, mind, and spirit (Bergum and Dossetor 2005). Too much EA support may also indicate the existence of confusion regarding how best to provide support as an educational assistant (Bryan, McCubbin, and van der Mars 2013). Teachers and EAs may benefit from teaching children how to ask for help when they need it and then honoring children's desires to try movements independently. Providing help when requested would contribute to establishing care relationships between children and EAs and/or teachers (Noddings 2005).

Conclusion and Professional Practice Implications

Greene-Gilbert (2006) explained that emotion, thought, and learning are linked and need to be considered in planning of each dance lesson. Hence, children's joy of dance points to teachers' invested efforts to create a safe, positive, and engaging learning environment. However, the findings from this study indicate that the extent and type of support children received could be experienced as facilitating or impeding participation opportunities. Given that five children in my study had one-on-one EA support, it would be important to further

investigate EA's perceived roles and actions in facilitating children's participation in dance, as well as children's perceptions of such support. The dance education environment offered children with disabilities opportunities to explore and discover their movement possibilities and to socially interact with peers without disabilities. These opportunities allowed children to experience peer acceptance and bodily learning.

Based on the experiences shared by the children in this study, I suggest two key considerations for elementary school dance teachers and staff working with children with disabilities. First, some teachers may purposely decide to allow children to choose their own group members in setting up group work. However, as Geoff's case indicated, this practice can result in experiences of exclusion. Setting up groups based on knowledge of children's strengths and ability to collaborate with others is likely to avoid exclusion and may result in more successful learning experiences for all students. During group work, it is important for an adult to monitor interaction between children, particularly in elementary grades. An assistant, if available, can also monitor interaction while remaining 'on the side' to the extent possible. Second, EAs need to not only understand their role, but also have an in depth knowledge of the child they are supporting and the goals the teacher has for the varied exercises in dance class. Open communication with teachers and the students can assist EAs in knowing how they can best support both during each class.

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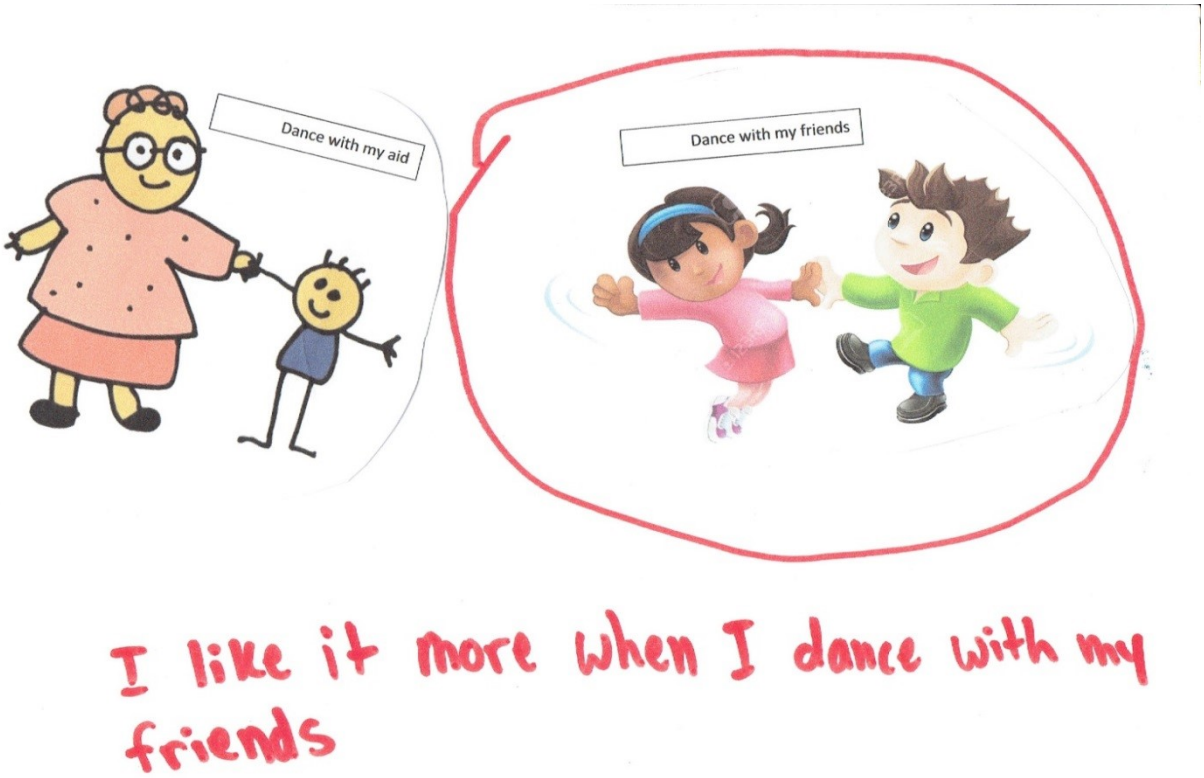

Figure 1: Aiden showing his preference to dance with his classmates over his EA.

*Figure 2***:** John's drawing of a happy day in dance when his class was practicing locomotive movement and he had to avoid colliding with classmates.

Chapter 4: Children's Perceptions of Disability in the Context of Elementary School Dance Education

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. 14 children between the ages 8 and 11 from five elementary schools participated. A qualitative interpretivist approach guided the study. Data collection involved two small group semi-structured interviews, a drawing activity, class observation, and researcher field notes. Data analysis followed thematic analysis guidelines. Findings are 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 these 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.

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

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; Kuppers, 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. Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore elementary school children's perceptions of disability within their dance education environment.

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; Kuppers, 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 and situated learning 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, these 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, they 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. Jellison 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 (Buergum & Dossetor, 2005), developed for exploration of ethical practice in nursing, as a lens through which to view the inclusive dance education environment. I suggest that, ideally, an inclusive dance education environment is one that is relationally ethical.

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. 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

I used an interpretivist qualitative research approach because it provided an effective way to gain understanding of the dance education environment from the children's point of view. Interpretive research aligns with relational ethics because it strives to understand and interpret meanings of children's lived experiences in dance (Stinson & Anijar, 1993). Similarly, relational ethics encourages 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. Participants were identified by their dance teacher or their classroom teacher. 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 fifth grade 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

I used multiple data collection methods to gather information from the children (Eder & Fingerson, 2003) including group interviews, art work, 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 and 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. Group interviews contributed to reducing the inherent power dynamic that exists in adult-child interaction as children often feel more comfortable interacting with adults in the presence of their peers (Eder & Fingerson, 2003). The small group setting provided an intimate environment for individual

voices to be heard (Clark, 2011). These groups created a natural context for discussion, in which children stimulated each other to comment and collectively constructed their meanings (Eder & Fingerson, 2003; Graue & Walsh, 1998). 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. Interview guides were developed based on review of previous literature about children's attitudes and perceptions of disability, and were informed by relational ethics, and my experience as a dance student. 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. Furthermore, I took reflective notes that allowed me to question my biases and assumptions during the research process.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis procedures based on Braun and Clarke (2006) and Creswell (2012) guided analysis of interview transcripts and field notes. Thematic analysis is an accessible and theoretically flexible data analysis technique that can potentially produce a rich and detailed, yet complex account (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of children's perceptions of disability within their school dance education environment. I began data analysis at the start of data collection (Creswell, 2012) and followed six phases: first, familiarization, which involved data transcribing, reading, and making notes on margins. The second phase was coding, in which I reviewed each transcript, highlighted text segments that reflect identified codes, and identified common patterns. Third, I created a "quotable quotes" folder based on the codes I had developed. The fourth phase was identifying themes, in which I gathered and grouped codes based on commonalities to describe the children's perceptions. Fifth, I refined themes to ensure they accurately reflected the data and re-coded as needed. Finally, I defined and named themes through describing and comparing them to theory and previous literature.

Research Quality

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 have been dancing since my childhood and completed an undergraduate degree in dance. My desire to see every child gain the opportunity to experience dance drove me to graduate studies in inclusive dance education. I chose to interview children because I believe that their knowledge, experience, and perceptions can inform teachers' professional practice efforts to make dance education enjoyable and inclusive for all children. To enhance the credibility of this study process, I used triangulation which

entailed collecting multiple data sources. These sources enabled me to view the school dance education environment from varied angles, thereby providing a deepened account of elementary school dance education (Creswell, 2012). Furthermore, I engaged in member reflection by returning to participating children with additional questions that emerged in data transcription or analysis (Tracy, 2010). I performed a pilot test of the interview guide with children of a similar age who were dancing in private studios, and adjusted questions based on the response they elicited. Further, direct quotes from the participating children illustrate themes and ground interpretive claims (Creswell, 2012). I also addressed ethical concerns 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 I am a student, working on a homework assignment about their experiences. I stressed 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 functions 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 Cortney 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. Cortney demonstrated her appreciation of unique way 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 two children were inspired by the chairs on which they sat during the interview. 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 connected to 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 team work.

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 he was challenged by the movement. Cortney'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).

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 team work, 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 finding is consistent with previous research 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 a 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. Cortney 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 to 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, Magnesio, & 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; Kuppers, 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 could respond thoughtfully to questions.

Finally, based on my findings, the practice of inclusive dance education in these schools followed the main principles of relational ethics. Embodied learning, mutual respect, and relational engagement were apparent in children's expressed understanding of their peers' needs and in the advice they had to offer teachers. 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).

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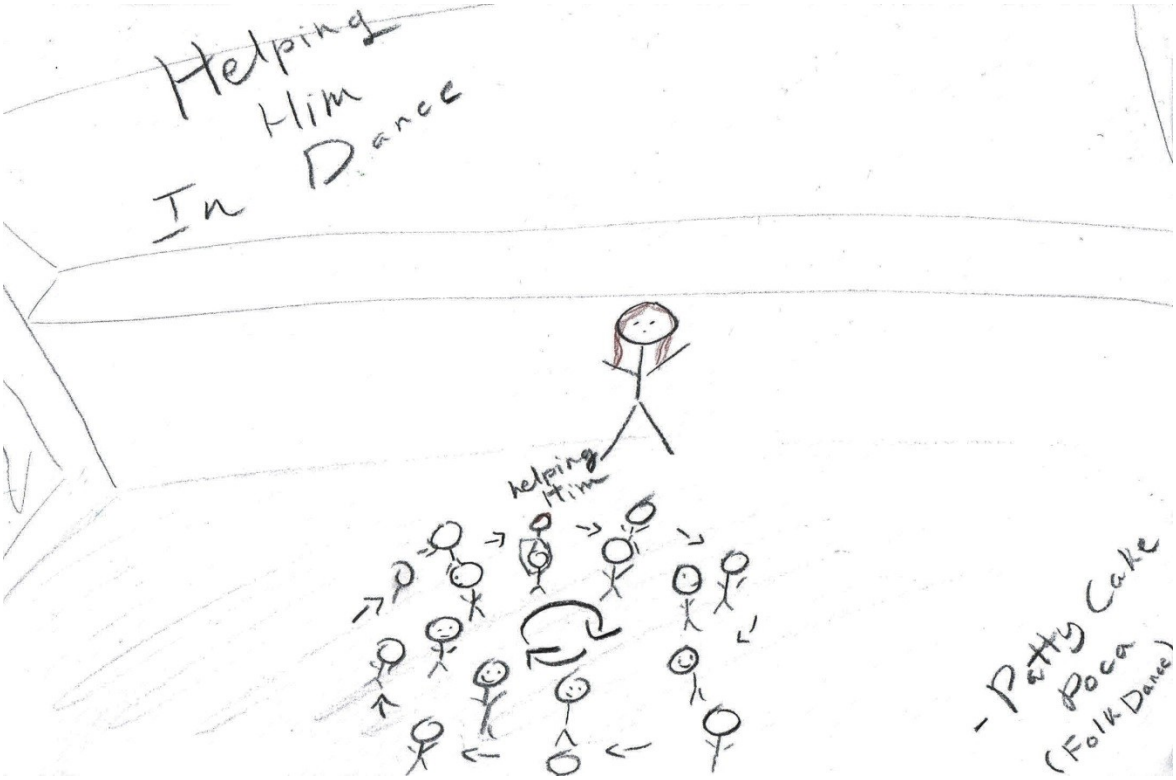

Figure1: Diane's drawing of her classmates and her helping their peer with a disability in dance.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

Inclusive Dance Education in Elementary Schools: The Full Picture

My dissertation research sought to explore how inclusive dance education environments are created for elementary school students with disabilities. An inclusive education environment can only be successfully created when teachers, students, and families share in the responsibility of creating it (Alberta Education, 2013). However, there has been relatively little past research that explored the perceptions of each of these stakeholder groups of inclusive dance education. My dissertation used the conceptual framework of relational ethics (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) to learn about the perceptions of four dance teachers, eight children with disabilities and fourteen children without disabilities who participated in dance education in five elementary schools. Relational ethics is based on four interconnected constructs: mutual respect, relational engagement, embodiment, and environment (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Together, these constructs facilitated my reflection on interactions between teachers and students and between students and their peers that contribute to creating inclusive dance education environments. My study was guided by three questions: (a) How do dance teachers perceive inclusion and their roles and actions in creating inclusive dance education environments?; (b) How do students with disabilities perceive the elementary school dance education environment?; and (c) How do students without disabilities perceive disability in the context of elementary school dance education? Each of these questions was addressed in the individual papers shared in this dissertation. In this chapter I synthesize my findings from all three papers to answer the main question of my dissertation study: How are inclusive dance education environments created for elementary school students with disabilities?

Creating Inclusive Dance Education Environments

Inclusive education aims for all students to learn values of mutual respect, caring, and support for one another as members of an integrated society (Stainback & Stainback, 1992). These are core values of relationally ethical environments (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Merging the findings from the teachers and students illustrates that an environment of openness and acceptance does generally exist in elementary school dance education, in the participating schools. Relational ethics relies on practitioners' ethical commitment toward those under their care, and practitioner openness to discover their strengths and support their needs (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Similarly, inclusive education relies on teachers being open to allow all students to explore the curriculum from varied perspectives depending on their individual backgrounds and needs (Furman, 2015). In my study, teachers who valued inclusion demonstrated their commitment to it by recognizing the strengths and needs of each of their students. My observations and interviews with students found that students with and without disabilities all appeared to enjoy engaging in challenging learning activities and experienced success. Drawing all themes from the three studies together and searching for commonalities revealed three overarching themes: accepting all students, support, and embodied learning.

Accepting all students. A core value in creating inclusive dance education environments is respect for individuality (Kaufmann, 2006). In a relational ethics perspective, respect for individuality implies respect for people's lived differences (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). This value was apparent in all three studies when teachers and classmates expressed acceptance of children with disabilities as unique human beings comprising the plurality of their classroom community, and children with disabilities expressed feelings of being accepted. One clear indicator for acceptance was Mia and Emily's assertion that everyone belongs in their school.

They were not even aware that any of their classmates had disabilities (chapter 4). Diane, Aria, and Cortney all commented that difference is normal and thus, expressed strong acceptance of individual lived differences. My observations of each the teachers also demonstrated clear respect for individual difference. In my observation in Julia's class, she asked children to choose a partner to work with and Cortney chose to work with Richard (who in chapter 3 described her as a good friend). Cortney demonstrated a great deal of acceptance when she patiently explained to Richard that he needed to follow her and informed him when it was his turn to lead. The two exchanged numerous smiles as they were working together.

A relationally ethical environment includes everyone within a community rather than segregating individuals into separate groups (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). When the teachers offered the same set of activities for all children, they were able to demonstrate that a dance education environment can include and accept everyone. This was particularly evident in chapter 4 when Lisa, Aiden's classmate, spoke of their dance class as offering dance moves that everyone can do, as opposed to physical education classes where Aiden was not considered to understand activities and thus, was assigned separate ones. Lisa's comment aligns with several physical education studies in which teachers who were committed theoretically to inclusion experienced difficulty including children in practice. As a result, children with disabilities ended up receiving separate activities (Haycock & Smith, 2010; Smith, 2009).

Accepting individuals as part of the classroom community depends on recognition of interdependent relationships. In these relationships one person's actions impact another person's reactions (Bergum, 2003). When teachers described how their increased awareness of their teaching practices emerged through their attention to student learning, they engaged in interdependent relationships. For example, Julia in chapter 2 carefully paced her teaching to

ensure children with disabilities were able to follow her instructions. She also realized that such pacing was helpful for all of her students regardless of ability. Among student peers, interdependence was apparent in collaborative group work between children with disabilities and their classmates (Chapters 3 and 4). For example, in chapter 3 John described his experience of being a group leader for creating a short dance sequence. He further explained that people listen to him in dance but are not as attentive to him in other contexts. In chapter 4, Cortney described that when she was a leader, she ensured that Richard was given an opportunity to suggest movement ideas to the group. Bergum and Dossetor (2005) explained that in a relational ethics perspective, personhood is established by virtue of one's relationship to others. In my study, (chapter 2) dance teachers Cathy and Erin spoke of making time to acknowledge individual students for their work and their contribution to the creative process. In Chapter 4, Cortney discussed the importance of accepting and treating peers with disabilities like she would any other person, and in chapter 3 students with disabilities felt recognized by classmates. Although the children with disabilities did not directly mention their teachers in connection to their experiences of peer acceptance, the teachers' acknowledgement of their skills could have made their contribution more visible.

Interdependent relationships emerge when people recognize one another as autonomous individuals situated within a community (Austin, Bergum, & Dossetor, 2003). In Chapter 4, Aria and Diane recognized their peers with disabilities as autonomous when they spoke of the importance of refraining from helping unnecessarily to enable experiences of independence. Only Mater and Molly (Chapter 3) talked about unwanted help, but seemed to refer mostly to unwanted help from educational assistants. In fact, several children with disabilities would rather dance with their classmates than with their educational assistants. This was evident in the smiles

on their faces when they paired up with their fellow students and when they expressed their preference during the interviews. Perhaps this preference was also related to students feeling more independent when dancing among other children as opposed to working with an adult.

Support. Ideas connected to the provision of support were evident in each of the papers in the dissertation. The teachers supported the students by accommodating their needs during each class. They demonstrated relational engagement in their encounters with their students as response to student specific learning needs (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005; van Manen, 1991). Teachers used a variety of differentiation strategies in their attempts to create a supportive learning environment for all of their students. Differentiation strategies included for example, Julia seeking different ways to model movements. Janet used alternative instructional cuing, and tactile guidance to support Mater who had a visual impairment. She invested time communicating with Mater's EA to learn how she could best support this student. However, like most children with disabilities in my study, Mater experienced most of his support as coming from his EA (e.g., dance was more difficult for Mater in his EA's absence). I observed, however, that when the EA was absent, Mater appeared comfortable with Janet and his participation in the class was not inhibited. Janet stayed near him and provided him tactile guidance while she was explaining the movements to the rest of the class. Occasionally she also explained specifically to Mater what they were working on using language his EA used with him. When Mater asked questions, Janet offered him reassurance. Relational engagement requires an investment of time in building trusting relationships (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005) between teacher and student. It is possible that Mater needed more time to get to know Janet who had been teaching him less than a year, while his EA had been working with him for two years. Moreover, dance teachers only

saw students for a half hour to 45 minutes per week, while the EA would remain with the child for the majority of the day.

Teachers also supported the students through their lesson planning and response to various situations that emerged over the course of each class. However, teacher support may have not been as visible to students with disabilities as the support they received from their EAs. For instance, Julia placed Richard in the front row right near her during each class, so that she could see him and help him as needed. Richard acknowledged that his teacher reminds him what to do, but mostly acknowledged his EA as the person who breaks down complicated movement for him. Another teacher, Erin, modified the environment specifically to support Geoff by remaining near him in warm-up exercises that required balancing, and by not using the microphone because he was frightened by the feedback noises the sound system produced. When Geoff discussed his fear of the noise in dance class, he acknowledged his EA as the person who leaves the room with him to help him calm down. At the same time, he also acknowledged Erin for giving him a hand to help him balance. Perhaps because Erin did not announce that she was no longer using the microphone because of Geoff, neither he nor his classmates noticed the change. Further, Erin mentioned that the EA helped manage behavioral issues that emerged during the class while she would continue with her teaching. Through this team approach, Geoff possibly knew his EA as the person who helped when the music was too loud and Erin as the one who helped with balancing exercise.

The classmates I interviewed and observed also expressed desire to help peers with disabilities and perceived themselves to be in a helping role (chapter 4). Children with disabilities in my study, however, did not speak of their classmates as their helpers. For them, opportunities to dance with their classmates appeared to contribute to feelings of acceptance and

belonging. One situation emerged in my observations and interviews in chapter 3 with Aiden (with a disability) and in chapter 4 with his classmates Lisa and Ashley. Aiden expressed a clear preference for dancing with the girls over participating with his EA (by pointing to a picture and then drawing a circle around his picture of choice that indicated dancing with his friends). Ashley and Lisa demonstrated their positive intentions to help Aiden participate in dance. From my perspective as an observer, Aiden appeared to be more engaged in the activity when he was dancing with these two girls. But the girls felt it was difficult for them to communicate with him and that he was not "cooperating". This situation demonstrates some of the complexity involved in cooperative creative work with students who have limited verbal expression. Based on my observations, the girls showed respect for Aiden by asking him what movements he wanted to contribute to the group creative process and by negotiating the order of movements the group chose, so that he was able to perform them. Aiden appeared comfortable with the girls. But he was occasionally a few counts behind in his movement execution, which could perhaps be a reason they felt he was not cooperating. The girls were new to dancing with Aiden, and perhaps needed more modeling on how to communicate with him and support him, along with additional opportunities to practice (Noddings, 2005). In summary, teachers and classmates perceived themselves to make efforts to support participation of children with disabilities in dance education. However, perhaps since EAs were more closely involved in every aspect of schooling, children with disabilities seemed to consider their EA support as help, while peer interactions were experienced as acceptance, and teachers were barely mentioned. Supportive and accepting environments were also facilitated through embodied learning experiences.

Embodied learning. Embodied learning is gained through 'body in action' that enhances awareness of self, others, and the common lived space (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005).

Teachers offered diverse activities which required students to explore their own movement and learn about movements from different cultures and genres. All of the children in chapters 3 and 4 expressed their enjoyment of dance activities and the opportunity these activities offered them to learn different dance moves. Resulting from their exposure to a rich curriculum, children without disabilities were able to appreciate dance as unique form of expression. Children in chapter 4 spoke of varied ways that individuals with disabilities are able to dance that may not be possible for individuals without disabilities. This appreciation also contributed to their acceptance of their peers with disabilities as thinking, feeling, passionate, and knowledgeable human beings (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). As Cortney explained, she understood Richard was frustrated if he was not able to execute a movement suggested by a fellow group member. Through her appreciation of diverse ways to execute movement, Cortney was able to help Richard adapt the movement to his ability, thereby helping him calm down. Children with disabilities appeared to enjoy the challenge of learning new steps, responding to instructional and music cues, and working on spatial awareness. Beyond just enjoyment, these children also appeared to master new skills through working on challenging tasks. This was particularly evident when Richard in chapter 3 mastered 'the box step' but stated in his interview that at first he had a hard time learning it. In his interview he enthusiastically demonstrated the step in a fast pace while singing the song that he learned with it.

Collaborative activities offered in dance class encouraged embodied dialogue between children with and without disabilities by means of touching as well as mirroring, and modeling movement to each other (Anttila, 2007). For example, Julia and Cathy used mirroring activities in which children worked in pairs and had to maintain close eye contact as one student led the movement and the other followed. These activities also encouraged children with disabilities to

engage in social interactions with their classmates and practice turn taking and listening. Other activities such as learning a folk dance in a circle where partners alternate offered opportunities for classmate collaboration in learning the dance for themselves, and in helping their classmate with a disability learn the dance. The children helped their classmate by verbally telling him what to do, forming eye contact with him, and by gently guiding him with a hand to where he needed to be for his next step.

Research Surprises

As I shared in the introduction to chapter 1, a few years ago, I encountered a situation in a class I was taking where a man with autism was excluded from the class by a teacher. As far as I could tell, she simply did not know how to support him in class without constantly isolating him from the rest of the group. Her practices created an environment of "us versus him", as opposed to "all of us together" (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). The man was eventually required to leave the class, and nobody in the class appeared to question the reason for his departure. This experience made me to realize just how powerful a teacher and her actions can be in creating (or not creating) an inclusive dance education environment. Because of this experience, I assumed that dance teachers would have certain ideas of what dance is, how it is taught, and who can dance; ideas that would inevitably impact their teaching practices. After reading about physical education teachers' perceptions of inclusion (Conroy, 2012; Fitzgerald, 2012; Grenier, 2006; Morley, Bailey, Tan, & Cooke, 2005) and interacting with friends who are school teachers, I was certain that dance teachers would perceive inclusion as a difficult and time consuming task. Thus, one of the pleasant surprises from my study was that the four teachers did not experience inclusion as a burden on their busy schedule. On the contrary, despite having to cope with student behavior challenges, inclusion practice appeared to make these teachers more aware of

their actions. Hence, these teachers experienced inclusion as not impeding the progress of their classes.

Previous research demonstrated that children with disabilities tended to be excluded from participation in physical education activities and ignored, under estimated, or bullied by classmates (Berg-Svendby & Dowling, 2013; Coates & Vickerman, 2010; Fitzgerald, 2005; Fitzgerald & Stride, 2012; Healy, Msetfi, & Gallagher, 2013; Hutzler, Fliess, Chacham, & Van den Auweele, 2002; Suomi, Collier, & Brown, 2003). I expected to learn of similar experiences in dance education in school contexts. However, the children in my study described mostly positive experiences. I only observed one situation in which a child with a disability was excluded from a group. The teacher had the child join one group as an extra person, but did not supervise the group interaction very closely, and the child ended up working on his own until his EA brought him back to his group. According to previous literature, some children with disabilities were offered unwanted help (Mortier, Desimpel, De Schauwer, & Van Hove 2011). In my study, only two children reported experiences of receiving unwanted help. Mater, for example, knew how to ask people to allow him to try movements independently. Although classmates seemed to be helping peers frequently, the children I interviewed never made any comments about receiving unwanted help from their classmates. On the contrary, I witnessed John taking on a group leader role in dance class and his classmates respecting his leadership. John indicated that he does not receive such attention in other contexts. Neither did the physical education research comment on experiences like John's leadership role. It is possible that physical education includes more competitive games placing students with disabilities at a disadvantage (Coates & Vickerman, 2010).

One of the most pleasant research surprises was that the children without disabilities expressed such open minded thinking about difference. In my Master's work the children did not reach this level of understanding and acceptance, as most of them did not have much previous experience interacting, let alone dancing with children with disabilities and consequently, I speculated that perhaps the children needed more time dancing together (Zitomer & Reid, 2011). My current findings reinforce that speculation, as most of the children in my dissertation research have been dancing with peers with disabilities for over a year. These surprises from each of my participant groups provide me a sense of hope for inclusion in dance because positive inclusion models do exist in the five school that I visited. When teachers approach teaching inclusive dance with an open mind, they create an environment that is open for movement exploration and discovery of abilities. When children are exposed to such open thinking, they emulate it in their acceptance of their peers.

Limitations

My dissertation study offered a qualitative exploration of inclusive practices in elementary school dance education contexts. The study explored the perceptions of four elementary school dance teachers who volunteered for the study. There were two more elementary schools that offered dance programs, but teachers in the programs did not express interest in participating in my study. It is possible that the teachers who agreed to participate did so because they were confident in their dance program and teaching practices and perceived themselves as able to contribute from their experience and knowledge.

Qualitative research tends to produce in-depth description and interpretation that is situated within a particular social or cultural context, and thus cannot be generalized. However, knowledge obtained from qualitative studies can still be transferable to other settings (Tracy,

2010). It is thus important to consider a number of limitations related to the research context in relation to transferability of findings from this study. Inclusion policies are implemented differently across Canadian provinces (Thompson, Lyons, & Timmons, 2015), resulting in potentially different findings from teachers and children in each province based on the extent to which inclusion values are taught at their schools. Differences across provincial and education jurisdiction inclusion policies can also be one reason for a difference in children's understanding of disability between this study and my Master's thesis study which took place in Quebec. A second consideration in respect to the study context relates to the teachers' educational backgrounds. The four teachers in this study all held education degrees and had varied levels of training and exposure to ideas of inclusion. Furthermore, to be the dance specialists in their schools these teachers also were required to have some training in dance. Dance in many schools is taught by physical education or regular classroom teachers without significant dance background (Kiley, 2010). The combination of lack of expertise in dance along with the need to accommodate diverse learning needs may pose different concerns for teachers and accordingly, have a different impact on their perceptions of inclusion. Similarly, due to technical skill acquisition, and in some cases, demands of competition in private studio settings (Green-Gilbert, 2005), dance teachers outside of school contexts, who do not necessarily hold education degrees, can experience inclusion in a different manner.

Lastly, children without disabilities were chosen by their teachers to participate in this study. It is possible that teachers made their choices based on these children having positive attitudes toward peers with disabilities and being strong leaders.

Research Implications

Relational ethics embraces complexity by making it more apparent (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). What can the voices of teachers, and of students with and without disabilities, tell us about factors that facilitate or hinder the creation of inclusive dance education environments? My hope is that the participants' insights of inclusive dance create opportunities for reflection for both teachers and policy makers. Teachers may gain ideas to solve specific practical problems. Policy makers may gain insights into reasons behind some of the difficulties teachers experience with inclusion and how policies can be adjusted accordingly. Insights gained from the experiences of teachers and children in this dissertation can also contribute to developing teacher education and professional development programs that address inclusion specifically in dance activity. For instance, insights from teachers and the students can contribute to learning about differentiated instruction options in dance that enable each student to access the curriculum. Further, insights from children with disabilities can contribute to discussion regarding the role of the educational assistant and ways to establish communication and collaboration to better support student participation, learning, and independence within a dance context.

Promoting or Hindering Factors for Inclusion: Implications for Practice

In chapter 2, I found that dance teachers valued inclusion and made efforts to accommodate and support all of their students. However all of the teachers mentioned that they did not receive training specific to inclusion in dance. Most of the teachers only had one inclusion course in their university teacher education and two teachers explained that their course covered information on different disabilities and writing an individual program plan (IPP). IPPs are the individualized programs mandated by Alberta Education for students identified as having disabilities (https://education.alberta.ca/admin/supportingstudent/diverselearning/ipp.aspx). The

teachers further pointed out that professional development opportunities tended to address strategies for inclusion in core curriculum subject areas, not in dance. Research with music educators indicated that teachers preferred coursework and professional development on inclusion that were discipline specific (Gooding, Hudson, & Yinger, 2013; Van Weelden & Whipple, 2013). Similarly, dance teachers would likely benefit from receiving specific training to support inclusion practices in dance education.

An additional concern for dance teachers is the amount of time they may have for each class. Three teachers in my study had only 30 minutes for each class session. The teachers were concerned with the transition between the classroom and the dance room taking up at least ten minutes of their class time which did not leave enough time to teach a full lesson. I observed that two teachers picked students up from their classrooms and then waited for children to line up, and be ready to walk quietly down the hall to the dance room. In the dance room, the children had to take shoes off and sit in a given seating arrangement. On some days the students were particularly rowdy, and the teachers had to return them to their classroom to wait for them to be quiet enough to walk down the hall. Classes had to end five minutes early so that the children had time to put their shoes back on and line up at the door to return to their classrooms. Inadequate class time can be problematic if teachers do not have sufficient time to establish relationships with students and learn of their strengths and needs. All four teachers, however, expressed how grateful they were to be able to offer their students exposure to dance even if it was just for a short time. An extra 15 minutes for their class time would have enabled teachers to offer a fuller curriculum and richer learning experience for their students. Additionally, class sizes differed significantly between each of the schools I visited. The class size could also impact

the extent to which teachers were able to invest time individualizing instruction and providing appropriate learning support for each of their students.

An additional concern for teachers is the lack of a specific curriculum for dance in the province of Alberta. A number of school districts have their own locally developed curriculum (Robinson, 2008), while the Edmonton Public School's locally developed curriculum is adopted by other districts that have not developed their own curriculum. The lack of an Alberta mandated curriculum resulted in different dance material being covered in different schools. For teachers trying to set certain standards for achievement at a given grade level, the diversity within the curriculum can become problematic. Furthermore, lack of consistent standards can also pose challenges for evaluation of children with disabilities.

In my study, five out of the eight children had an educational assistant (EA) who accompanied them to all of their classes. This number continues to echo Giangrenco's (2013) concern that in recent years the provision of EAs has become a key support to inclusion in general education classrooms for children with disabilities. EAs can be a great resource for supporting children and teachers. However, consistent with previous research investigating children's experiences of their EA support, the quality of the relationship between the student and the EA impacted the child's ability to participate independently in activity and interact with teachers and peers (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005; Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009; Mortier, Desimpel, De Schauwer, & Van Hove, 2011; Tews & Lupart, 2008). Although I did not interview EAs about their experience, findings from my study of children with disabilities (chapter 3) raised some important concerns. It would be important to ensure that EAs receive professional development and initial training specific to supporting children in movement

activities that require different types of learning from those necessary for reading, writing, and numeracy activities.

The children without disabilities (chapter 4) expressed a desire to help their peers with disabilities participate in dance. However, in some cases students may lack guidance as to how to communicate with and support their peers through activities. Some schools have official peer tutor training programs, but the children I interviewed never mentioned being involved in such programs. It is possible that students who took on supporting roles did so based on examples they saw from the teachers and EAs. It may be valuable to have peer tutor programs in each school and to set some guidelines for program length and content.

I was concerned when I learned that four children not only knew they had a peer with a disability, but they also knew their peer's disability label. After learning about this, I asked dance teachers if they explained the disability to classmates in their settings. As dance teachers, they did not explain the disability to classmates. However, in her role as a classroom teacher, one teacher explained the disability for children to understand why their classmates act the way they do and receive certain supports. The extent to which disability should be explained to classmates is debatable. Some teachers feel explaining helps foster tolerance and understanding among classmates, while others think it just emphasizes difference (Becket & Buckner, 2012). It may be important to bring this debate into professional development and university teacher preparation. Such discussion can also enable finding the most appropriate way to explain the disability without putting a "spotlight" on it (Beckett & Buckner, 2012, p. 883).

Implications for Future Research

Research addressing inclusive dance education is scarce, particularly regarding the experiences of children with disabilities. In my study, children with disabilities emphasized the

instrumental role EAs seemed to play in facilitating their participation. Future study that explores more deeply how children with disabilities experience their EA support, and how EA's perceive their roles and actions in facilitating equal participation opportunities for children with disabilities in dance education, can illuminate the issue of support.

Furthermore, parental involvement can potentially influence children's inclusion experiences in dance. Research should explore the roles parents of children with disabilities play in their child's dance education experiences and their perceptions of their child's learning and engagement in dance. Information that classmates of children with disabilities receive from their parents may influence attitudes and interactions with peers with disabilities. Parent perceptions of inclusion in school dance education may also be worthy of exploration.

In chapter 4, I learned of children's positive attitudes toward their peers with disabilities and desire to help them in dance. Peer tutoring research has taken place extensively in core curriculum settings, but less so in physical education (Jenkinson, Naughton & Benson, 2014), or in dance. These settings require a different form of peer support due to the physical nature of activities and the physical environment in which learning takes place. It would be valuable to implement a peer tutor program specific to dance and physical education to explore children's perceptions and experiences of the program. Exploring such perceptions and experiences would facilitate evaluation of the quality of preparation children receive to act as peer tutors specifically in settings that require bodily movement.

It was difficult to tell if the students without disabilities awareness of a peer's disability label had an impact on their understanding and acceptance of their peer. Three children did not have previous experience interacting together with children with disabilities in dance. As Lisa, a classmate without a disability mentioned, her classmate Aiden cannot participate in all of the

physical education activities and many times has activities separately. Based on what Lisa and her two peers said in their interview, these children did not seem to have too many opportunities to interact with peers with disabilities in any contexts. Although one boy knew his classmate's disability label and had been dancing with him for over a year, he did not seem more understanding toward his classmates with disability, than the five other children who were not aware of such information. Research should explore the extent to which children's knowledge of disability labels influences their understanding and interaction with peers with disabilities in dance.

Children's perceptions and attitudes towards peers with disabilities are also influenced by their exposure to ideas of disability and dance ability in the media. Exploring how exposure to television shows such as "Dancing with the Stars", "So you think you can dance", "Dance Moms", and "Glee" as well as other popular media such as YouTube clips, may influence children's perceptions of dance ability, could also be valuable for future study.

Chapter 2 explored elementary school teachers' perceptions and practices of inclusion. These perceptions may be different for secondary school teachers or studio teachers due to differing demands for specific technical skills. Research should, thus, explore the impact of such demands on teaching practice. In addition, teacher preparation and professional development needs in relation to inclusion in dance education contexts are important topics for future study. This can help evaluate what coursework and practical experiences teachers may need to feel better prepared to accommodate learning needs of all students in dance.

Being a Relationally Ethical Researcher

Being relationally ethical requires the researcher to be mindful of their interactions with participants and the impact such actions may have on establishing relationships with participants

(Tracy, 2010). It was important for me to establish relationships where power was shared between participants and researcher. This started with informed consent (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). The teachers consented to participation prior to my entering their classrooms. However, upon entering the classrooms for observation, it was important to me that children knew I was watching them dance, but did not know I was there to study inclusion, unless they were participating in the study. The teacher or I explained to the students that I was visiting their school because I was a student learning about dance in schools. Only children who were selected by their teachers and agreed to participate knew I was studying inclusion. The reason for not explicitly informing children that I was studying inclusion was that I did not want children to draw assumptions about who I was observing, and potentially place a spotlight on children with disabilities. Once children were recruited to participate in the study, I began asking them if they consented to me watching them dance or interviewing them.

Specific to my interaction with children, I had to be considerate of the power relations inherent to interaction between adults and children (Graue & Walsh, 1998). The process of empowering children to share their experiences with me required expressing my appreciation for their knowledge and the ways it can help teachers improve their practices. Further, it required positioning myself to their level by explaining that I was a student just like they were, and that I was working on a homework assignment with which they could help me. Some of the children responded with a nod and a smile when I told them they knew some things that can help their teachers. Children also seemed to feel empowered when I allowed them to choose their pseudonyms. Some of the children selected a name without any hesitation, whereas others wanted more time to think of a name.

The word “interview” originates from the word entrevu, which means “to see each other” (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). To allow the teachers and students to see who I was, I had to be open to also sharing some of my own experiences as a teacher or a student in inclusive environments. Sharing my experiences seemed to enable more dialogue and further sharing of their experiences with me.

Mutual respect can only exist in a space that is equally attentive to needs, expertise, and experiences of both parties in relationship (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In the beginning of my research, I intended to be an observer “from the side” and not to join in the dance to avoid potentially impacting the environment. However, out of respect for teachers’ need to feel less self-conscious due to an outside observer sitting in their classes and taking notes, I occasionally joined classes when asked to do so. Teachers were respectful of my need to gather material for my study, as they found time to inform me either right before the class or together with the children at the start of the class what they were going to be working on that day.

Relational engagement is achieved in shared moments when people find ways to explore topics together (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). In the process of recruiting children with disabilities for my study, I wanted to find ways for every child to share their dance experiences regardless of their verbal expression abilities. Occasionally, this meant having to ignore comments from teachers, administration, or educational assistants such as: “he will not be able to tell you anything because he is not verbal”, or “I don’t think you will get much from him/her”. Dialogue does not need to be restricted to the spoken word (Bergum & Dossetor, 2005). Therefore, I refused to accept notions of the child’s lacking ability as reasons to not engage in some form of dialogue. With two children, Aiden and Molly, who did not have extensive verbal ability, I found ways to ask questions through use of pictures I downloaded from Microsoft Word clip art

(http://cliparts.co/dance-cartoon-images). My use of pictures was based on my experience working at an early intervention center with children who were not verbal, and learning from a speech therapist how to use Picture Exchange Communication. I downloaded pictures based on observed activities and children's participation behaviors. I then asked children to choose pictures to help respond to questions about their activity preferences. Further, I had "embodied dialogue" with Molly by playing movement games with her in the hall before her classes. Molly always seemed happy to see me when I came. She would always greet me with a hug and start showing me some of her dance moves. There were a couple of observations in which she came in with a toy she would refuse to let her EA hold onto for her, but she would give it to me. This may have been her way of sharing with me and showing trust that I would give her toy back to her at the end of her class.

Final Thoughts

Through the lens of relational ethics I explored how inclusive dance education environments are created in elementary schools. Relational ethics provided an appropriate conceptual framework as its core values of mutual respect, engagement, and embodiment contribute to creating an environment that includes everyone as part of the community. One hesitation I had around the use of relational ethics as a framework evolved around ideas of mutual respect between teachers and students given the inherent power issues in such relationships. However, in my work I focused more on how teachers demonstrated their respect for their students' needs and established environments of mutual respect between students. Hence, teachers' power became instrumental in their role in creating inclusive dance education environments. Teachers also acknowledged the impact their students had on their own actions, thereby recognizing their interdependent relationship with students (Bergum, 2003; van Manen,

1991). Although teachers did not describe themselves as role models for appropriate interaction with students, the classmates' interactions with peers with disabilities seemed to mirror their teachers' actions. The idea of teachers as role models was evident in interviews with children without disabilities when they offered suggestions for teachers: "our dance teacher does this all the time…." Thus, teachers created the inclusive dance education environment through the activities they planned for each lesson and their interactions with students. The environment was inclusive because the children were encouraged to engage in activities together rather than having students with disabilities working on skills in a separate part of the room. Through participation in this shared environment, all students experienced embodied learning. Children without disabilities learned to regard uniqueness as an ordinary aspect of their classroom diversity, and students with disabilities gained a sense of belonging and acceptance.

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Appendix A

Notification of Approval

Date:	June 09, 2014
Study ID:	Pro00047010
Principal Investigator:	Michelle Zitomer
Study Supervisor:	Linda Laidlaw
Study Title:	Creating accessible dance education environments for school aged children
Approval Expiry Date:	June 8, 2015

	Approval Date	Approved Document
Approved Consent Form:	09/06/2014	INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM parents.docx
	09/06/2014	INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM teachers.docx

Sponsor/Funding Agency: SSHRC - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

William Dunn, PhD

Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

Appendix B

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM (teachers)

Study Title: Creating Accessible Dance Education Environments for School Aged Children

Research Investigator:
Michelle Ruth Zitomer
Department of Elementary Education
University of Alberta
11210 - 87 Ave
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
Email: zitomer@ualberta.ca
Phone number: (780) 492-8906

Supervisor:
Dr. Linda Laidlaw
Department of Elementary Education
University of Alberta
11210 - 87 Ave
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
Email: llaidlaw@ualberta.ca
Phone number: (780)492-0884

Dear Teacher,

My name is Michelle Zitomer and I am a PhD student in the department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta. I hold an undergraduate degree in dance education and a Master's degree in kinesiology and physical education focusing on inclusion in dance education. My dissertation research seeks to investigate the experiences of dance teachers and students with and without disabilities in inclusive dance education offered in public schools. You are being asked to be in this study because of your dance teaching experience within the school curriculum or within sport/performing arts academy programs, or as an artist in residence. The results of this study will be used in support of my dissertation.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how an accessible dance education environment is created. Specifically, it aims at understanding the experiences, perceptions, and practices of dance teachers teaching students with and without disabilities in their classes, as well as the experiences and perceptions of the students. Understanding these experiences will enable gaining insights into the complexities involved in the process of teaching students with diverse abilities within the same learning environment. Furthermore, learning about these experiences may enable suggestions of teaching practices that may facilitate teachers' ability to provide meaningful dance learning experiences to children with disabilities alongside their peers without disabilities.

Study Procedures

This study will take place over the period of time starting January 1st 2015 and ending April 3oth 2015.Your participation however, will only be required for a small portion of that time. Procedures for this study will include two one-on-one interviews, 5-10 class observations (to be negotiated with you based on your schedule and school requirements), review of your school website, and review of any teaching material you wish to share with me. In addition, I may provide you with a short recruitment letter to send home to parents of your students.

Your participation in this study will involve the following:

- You will be asked to participate in 2 one-on-one interviews. Each interview will last about forty minutes to an hour and a half (depending on your time availability). The first interview will take place prior to the beginning of my observations and the second toward the end of my observations. The first interview will enable you to reflect on your teaching experiences,

perceptions, and practices while in the second interview I will ask follow-up questions that emerge from my review of your interview transcripts and observation notes. This process will also enable you to clarify ideas you brought up in the first interview and verify my interpretations of your experiences. Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interviews will take place in a quiet location within the setting in which you teach or at a different location of your choice. I will reimburse you for any potential costs that may incur as a result of the time or location of the interview (i.e., parking or child care).

- I will conduct 5-10 observations (less than 5 is also possible if that is all that your schedule will allow) which will last for the entire period of a dance class. These observations will enable me to observe the dance class and interactions among the class in the process of a lesson. Prior to each observation, I will check with you and your students to ensure you all feel comfortable with my presence in your class. I will observe lessons from the side in order to not interfere with your class routine unless you prefer for me to participate more actively within the dance environment.
- I would also like to collect copies of any teaching material you may like to share with me This material will provide me with background that will enable my understanding of the context of the dance class in relation to my observations.

I will share my findings with you to verify the information you shared as well as my emerging understandings during the second interview. In addition, you will be able to ask to see any data I collected from you at any point during the study and withdraw anything you may not feel comfortable with me using for this study.

The benefits of your participation in this study include the following:

- Participation in this study will provide you an opportunity to reflect on your professional practices in relation to teaching inclusive dance.
- Your participation will also enable you to share from your experience and expertise and thus provide advice and guidance for teachers who are new to teaching inclusive dance.
- Given the limited research on the topic of inclusion in dance education, this study will contribute to extending knowledge in the fields of dance education and special education.

There are no foreseeable risks to you that may arise from your participation in this study that exceed beyond what you would encounter in your daily routine.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate. Furthermore, you are not obliged to answer any specific questions if they cause you discomfort or distress for any reason. You can also at any point during the study inform me when observing your class is inconvenient for you. Even if you agree to be in the study you can change your mind and withdraw at any point up until 30 days after the second interview. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, data collected prior to your withdrawal will be used only if you give me permission to do so.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

- This research will be used for my dissertation, research articles, and presentations. None of your personal information will be shared in any form.
- Data will be kept confidential. Only I will have access to the data. My supervisor and other supervisory committee members may see some of the data, but your name would not be affiliated with any of the data you share in order to protect your anonymity. You, your students, or your school

will not be identified in the dissemination of the research. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms.

- The University of Alberta Research Ethics Board requires data to be kept in a secure place for a minimum of 5 years following completion of a research project. Electronic data such as interview recordings, typed interview transcripts and observation notes will be stored in a password protected external hard drive, and when appropriate destroyed by deleting the hard drive and shredding any printed material.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact myself by phone: (780) 492-8906, or by email zitomer@ualberta.ca, or my supervisor, Dr. Linda Laidlaw by phone: 780-492-0884 or email: llaidlaw@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Consent for participation in research

I consent to participate in the study entitled "Creating accessible dance education environments for school aged children". The purpose, procedures and duration, and potential benefits of the study have been clearly described to me. I acknowledge the fact that I have been provided the opportunity to obtain any further information regarding the study, and any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Moreover, I am aware that I am free to withdraw consent at any time during the study without any prejudice to myself.

Participant name (please print): _____

Phone number: _____ email address: _____

Participant signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix C

Brief Introduction Letter to Parents

Creating Accessible Dance Education Environments for School Age Children

Dear Parents,

My name is Michelle Zitomer and I am a PhD student in the department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta. For my dissertation research I would like to learn about the experiences of school age children and youth (ages 6-18) with and without special needs in inclusive dance education. I would appreciate the opportunity to learn from your child about his/her experience as a dance student. Your child can help by participating in two interviews accompanied with an art activity, and allowing me to observe a few dance classes. If you are interested in having your child participate in my study or would like to find out more about it, please contact me at (780) 492-8906, or by email: zitomer@ualberta.ca

About myself:

I hold an undergraduate degree in dance education and a Master's degree in Kinesiology and Physical Education focusing on inclusion in dance education. My Master's work looked at children with and without special needs' perceptions of dance ability and disability as a function of their participation in an inclusive dance program I ran. I am also a dance teacher with 10 years of experience teaching in community centers, after school programs, and a private elementary school. I have also worked for four years as an educator at an early intervention center for children with special needs.

Appendix D

INFORMATION LETTER and CONSENT FORM (parents)

Study Title: Creating Accessible Dance Education Environments for School Aged Children

Research Investigator:
Michelle Ruth Zitomer
Department of Elementary Education
University of Alberta
11210 - 87 Ave
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
Email: zitomer@ualberta.ca
Phone number: (780) 492-8906

Supervisor:
Dr. Linda Laidlaw
Department of Elementary Education
University of Alberta
11210 - 87 Ave
Edmonton, AB, T6G 2G5
Email: llaidlaw@ualberta.ca
Phone number: (780)492-0884

Dear parents,

My name is Michelle Zitomer and I am a PhD student in the department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta. I hold an undergraduate degree in dance education and a Master's degree in kinesiology and physical education focusing on inclusion in dance education. My dissertation research seeks to investigate the experiences of dance teachers and students with and without disabilities in inclusive dance education offered in public school settings. Your child is being asked to be in this study because of his/her experience as a dance student. The results of this study will be used in support of my dissertation.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how an accessible dance education environment is created. Specifically, it aims at understanding the experiences, perceptions, and practices of dance teachers teaching students with and without disabilities in their classes, as well as the experiences and perceptions of the students. Understanding these experiences will enable gaining insights into the complexities involved in the process of teaching students with diverse abilities within the same learning environment. Furthermore, learning about these experiences may enable suggestions of teaching practices that may facilitate teachers' ability to provide meaningful dance learning experiences to children with disabilities alongside their peers without disabilities.

Study Procedures

This study will take place over the period of time starting January 1st 2015 and ending April 30th 2015. Your child's participation however, will only be required for a small portion of that time depending on the length and timing of your child's dance program. Procedures for this study will include two small group interviews, 5-10 class observations (to be negotiated with your child's teacher based on his/her schedule and school requirements), and an art activity.

Your child's participation in this study will involve the following:

- S/he will be asked to participate in 2 small group interviews. Each interview will last about 20 minutes to a half hour depending on the children's engagement. The first interview will take place after I have been observing a couple of classes in order for your child to become familiar with me and comfortable with my presence. The second interview will take place at the end of my observations. The exact location and time for the interviews will be determined between you and me based on you and your child's availability. Group interviews will enable your child to more comfortably speak to me in the presence of one of their friends. If your child is more comfortable in a one-on-one situation, I will conduct the interview with him/her individually in order to accommodate for his/her comfort level. The first interview will enable your child to reflect on

his/her experiences, perceptions, and participation practices in dance while in the second interview I will bring up questions that emerge from my review of his/her interview transcripts and observation notes. This process will also enable your child to clarify ideas s/he brought up in the first interview and verify my interpretations of his/her experiences. Interviews will be audio recorded to ensure accurate footage of my conversation with your child.

- I will conduct 5-10 observations of your child's dance class which will last for the entire period of a dance class. These observations will enable me to see what the dance class environment is like and the different types of interactions that occur between your child and his/her teacher and peers in the process of a lesson. Prior to each observation, I will check with your child and his/her teacher to ensure they all feel comfortable with my presence in their class. I will observe lessons from the side in order to not interfere with the class routine unless your child's teacher prefers for me to participate more actively within the dance environment.
- During the interviews, children will also be invited to engage in an art activity that will involve drawing or collage making to enable them to express their thoughts and feelings about their dance classes through their art work. This will facilitate the initial engagement of the children in the interview process and help sustain their involvement. I will ask prior to beginning the art activity if your child likes to draw and will seek alternatives if the response is negative. Alternatives may include a dance/movement activity, role-playing, or other forms of play based on your child's comfort level and choice. In addition, some children may prefer to share artifacts such as photos or certificates earned for dancing, special dance clothing items etc. rather than creating their own art work.

I will share my observation of your child's class and his/her interview findings with him/her to verify the information s/he shared as well as my emerging understandings in regards to his/her dance education experience during the second interview.

The benefits of your child's participation in this study include the following:

- Participation in this study will provide your child an opportunity to reflect on their experiences and share their thoughts and opinions about their dance classes.
- Given the limited research on the topic of inclusion in dance education, this study will contribute to extending knowledge in the fields of dance education and special education.

There are no foreseeable risks to your child that may arise from his/her participation in this study that exceed beyond what s/he would encounter in their daily routine.

Your child is under no obligation to participate in this study. The participation is completely voluntary. Furthermore, s/he is not obliged to answer any specific questions if they cause him/her discomfort or distress for any reason. Your child can also at any point during the study inform me if s/he prefers I do not observe their dance class on a particular day. Even if you agree for your child to be in the study you can change your mind and withdraw at any time. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, it is important that you inform me of this decision. Any data collected prior to your withdrawal will be used only if you give us permission to do so. The only exception to this condition would be if data your child shared with me was already analyzed and published prior to your withdrawal.

Confidentiality & Anonymity

- This research will be used for my dissertation, research articles, and presentations. None of your child's personal information will be shared in any form.
- Data will be kept confidential. Only I will have access to the data. My supervisor and other supervisory committee members may see some of the data, but your child's name will not be

affiliated with any of the data you share in order to protect his/her anonymity. Your child, peers, teacher, or your child's school will not be identified in the dissemination of the research. All names will be replaced with pseudonyms.

- The University of Alberta Research Ethics Board requires data to be kept in a secure place for a minimum of 5 years following completion of a research project. Electronic data such as interview recordings, typed interview transcripts and observation notes will be stored in a password protected external hard drive, and when appropriate destroyed by deleting the hard drive and shredding any printed material.
- I will be happy to share details related to what I am learning from your child in my research process. Please feel free to contact me at any point during the research process to request reports on my progress and findings in relation to what your child shares with me.

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please do not hesitate to contact myself (phone numbers: 780-492-8906, or email: zitomer@ualberta.ca) or my supervisor, Dr. Linda Laidlaw by phone: 780-492-0884 or email: llaidlaw@ualberta.ca.

The plan for this study has been reviewed for its adherence to ethical guidelines by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. For questions regarding participant rights and ethical conduct of research, contact the Research Ethics Office at (780) 492-2615.

Consent for participation in research

Child name: _____

I consent for my child to participate in the study entitled "Creating accessible dance education environments for school aged children". The purpose, procedures and duration, and potential benefits of the study have been clearly described to me.

I acknowledge the fact that I have been provided the opportunity to obtain any further information regarding the study, and any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Moreover, I am aware that I am free to withdraw consent at any time during the study without any prejudice to myself or my child.

Parent name (please print):_____ Phone number: _____

Email address: _____

Parent signature: _____ Date: _____

Child acknowledgement (recorded if verbal assent is given)

I am okay with sharing my experience and art work with the researcher to help her learn more about what children like or don't like to do in dance classes.

Child name/signature (or drawing):_____

Appendix E

Assent Form

Project Title: Creating accessible dance education environments for School aged Children

Principal Investigator: Michelle Ruth Zitomer

My name is Michelle and I am a student at the University of Alberta. I want to tell you about a research study I am doing. A research study is a way to learn more about something. I would like to find out more about how you feel about your dance classes. You are being asked to join the study because I want to learn from you about what you like and don't like about your dance class and what you are learning about in dance.

If you agree to join this study, you will be asked to draw pictures and talk to me about your dance class together with one or two other children from your school. I will also visit your dance class and watch how you dance with your friends and your teacher. We will talk two different times during a time that will be good for you and I will visit your dance class 5-10 times.

You might feel uncomfortable talking to an adult you don't know or afraid of giving wrong answers to questions. I am here to learn from you about your dance classes, so all your answers are good. You can also ask me questions about me if there is anything you want to know. You might also worry that I will tell other people about things you tell me. I will not tell your parents or teachers what you said. I will tell people about what I am learning from you, but I will never tell anyone who said what. You will have a different name (not your real name) for this study and you can choose a name you want me to use for you.

This study will help me learn more about how you like your dance classes and how we can make them better for you and for other children just like you.

You do not have to join this study. It is up to you. You can say okay now and change your mind later. All you have to do is tell me you want to stop. No one will be mad at you if you don't want to be in the study or if you join the study and change your mind later and stop.

Before you say **yes or no** to being in this study, I will answer any questions you have. If you join the study, you can ask questions at any time. Just tell me that you have a question.

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact me any time by email zitomer@ualberta.ca, or phone, 780-492-8906, or when you see me at your school.

If you agree to be in this study, you can say it on my recorder, sign or print your name or draw a picture under your mom or dad's signature in the letter your parents got from me.

Statement of person obtaining assent

I have discussed this research study with _____ using language which is understandable and appropriate for him/her. I believe that I have fully informed him/her of the nature of the study and its possible risks and benefits. I believe the participant understood this explanation and assent to participate in this study.

Signature of person obtaining assent: _____

Appendix F

Interview guide for teachers

1. Can you tell me about your dance background?
2. Have you taken any coursework on inclusion or teaching students with disabilities?
3. Have you attended any dance teacher conventions or seminars? Have any of these conventions/seminars addressed inclusion? To what extent do you think it would be important for inclusion to be addressed in these settings?
4. How long have you been teaching dance in this school? Have you taught dance in other settings as well (i.e., after school program, community center, private studio)?
5. What do you think about the dance education program in school? How do you find the dance education curriculum to be similar or different between studio dance education and the school?
6. Can you describe your teaching philosophy?
7. What does inclusion mean to you?
8. What would you describe as ability to dance?
9. What does disability mean to you? How do you experience your students' disabilities in the inclusive dance classroom?
10. Describe the classroom environment in your dance setting. How is it similar or different from other classroom environments in which you teach or have visited?
11. Can you describe how you build relationships with students with disabilities attending your classes? How do you think your actions make them feel welcome and supported?
12. Can you tell me how you would describe successful inclusion in the dance class? Can you share a success story from your dance classes?

13. How would you describe your teaching practices in inclusive dance? Teaching methods, lesson planning, use of equipment, curriculum materials, evaluation and grading.
14. What are some critical issues you find in including students with disabilities in your dance class?
15. How do you find meeting expectations of curriculum, parents, and students impact your inclusion practices?
16. To what extent are you involved in planning for inclusion of students with disabilities participating in your dance class? Does your school have IPP meetings? Do you participate in IPP meetings?
17. What expectations do you have of students with disabilities attending your class? How are these expectations similar or different from those you have of students without disabilities?
18. How do students seem to experience your teaching practices?
19. Can you describe a situation in which you have encountered difficulty including a student with disabilities in your class? What was the nature of the situation, what actions did you take? How did the student react? How did you feel about your effort to include the student? How would you have handled the situation differently in retrospect?
20. What did you learn from your experience teaching inclusive dance? about children with disabilities, about inclusion, about dance ability.
21. What advice would you offer dance teachers who are new to teaching inclusive dance?

Appendix G

Interview guide for students with disabilities

I want to talk to you about your dance classes. I go to school and am learning about dance and I want to learn from you about how you like your dance classes. There are no right or wrong answers. So you can tell me anything you would like about your dance classes. We will also do an art activity if you like while we talk.

1. Can you tell me about your dance class? (draw me a picture of your dance class)
    - What do you think about your dance class?
    - Do you enjoy your class? Why?
2. How is your dance class similar or different from other classes you have in school?
    - What do you do in dance that is different from other classes?
    - How would you describe your dance class to someone who does not go to your school?
3. Have you taken any dance classes before?
    - Were these classes the same or different from your dance classes? How?
4. Do you take dance classes in other places? Where? What kind of dance do you do?
5. Can you tell me about your participation in the dance class?
    - What is your favorite thing to do in dance class?
    - Are there activities you don't like doing? Why?
    - Do you feel you can do everything in dance class?
    - How important is it for you to be able to do all the activities?
    - Are some things you do in dance hard for you?
    - What activities do you find hard or easy? Why?

6. Do you need help sometimes in dance class?
    - What kind of help do you need?
    - How do people help you?
    - Who helps you?
    - How do people know you need help?
    - How do you feel about the help you get?
7. What have you learned in dance?
8. Can you tell me about an experience in dance that made you feel happy? (draw a picture) What was special about that experience? What were you doing? Who were you dancing with?
9. Can you tell me about an experience in dance class that made you feel unhappy? (draw a picture) Why did it make you feel that way? What could have made it better?
10. If you were a dance teacher, what would you do to make dance fun for everyone?
11. If you had a choice, would you choose to take dance in school? (Meant for elementary school kids who do not get to choose to take or not to take dance if it is part of their school curriculum).
12. What advice would you give to a friend who is coming to the dance class for the first time?

Appendix H

Interview guide for students without disabilities

I want to talk to you about your dance classes. I go to school and am learning about dance and I want to learn from you about how you like your dance classes. There are no right or wrong answers. So you can tell me anything you would like about your dance classes. We will also do an art activity if you like while we talk.

1. Can you tell me about your dance class (draw me a picture of your dance class)?
    - What kind if dance do you do?
    - What do you think about your dance class?
    - Do you enjoy dancing? Why?
2. How is your dance class similar or different from other classes you have in or out of school?
    - What do you do in dance that is different from other classes?
3. How would you describe your dance class to someone who does not go to your dance class?
4. Have you taken any dance classes before?
    - Were these classes the same or different from dance classes you have in school? How?
5. Do you participate in dance classes in other places? Where? What kind of dance do you do there?
6. What have you learned in dance?
7. (I will show a number of pictures of children with different disabilities i.e., a child with a walker, a child with Down syndrome, a child sitting in a wheelchair) from a

magazine or the internet - this questioning format would be used with younger elementary school aged children if needed)

- Have you been in dance classes, now or in the past, with children who have had disabilities or might be like the children in the photos?
- How have you danced together with them?

8. Can you tell me what you think disability is (this question format would be used as applicable for elementary school aged children)?
    - Do you have classmates with disabilities in dance?
    - How do you dance together with them (i.e., you are working together in a group, how do you share in decision making in the process of creating a dance together?)
    - What suggestions would you make for dance teachers (or for me, if I was going to teach dance) to include students who have disabilities in a dance class?
9. Can you tell me about an experience in dance that made you feel happy (draw a picture)? What was special about that experience? What were you doing? Who were you dancing with?
10. Can you tell me about an experience in dance class that made you feel unhappy (draw a picture)? Why did it make you feel that way? What could have made it better?
11. What advice would you give to a friend who is coming to the dance class for the first time?