

ACCESSING PATHWAYS TO TRAINING FOR YOUNG DISABLED DANCERS

Research Report

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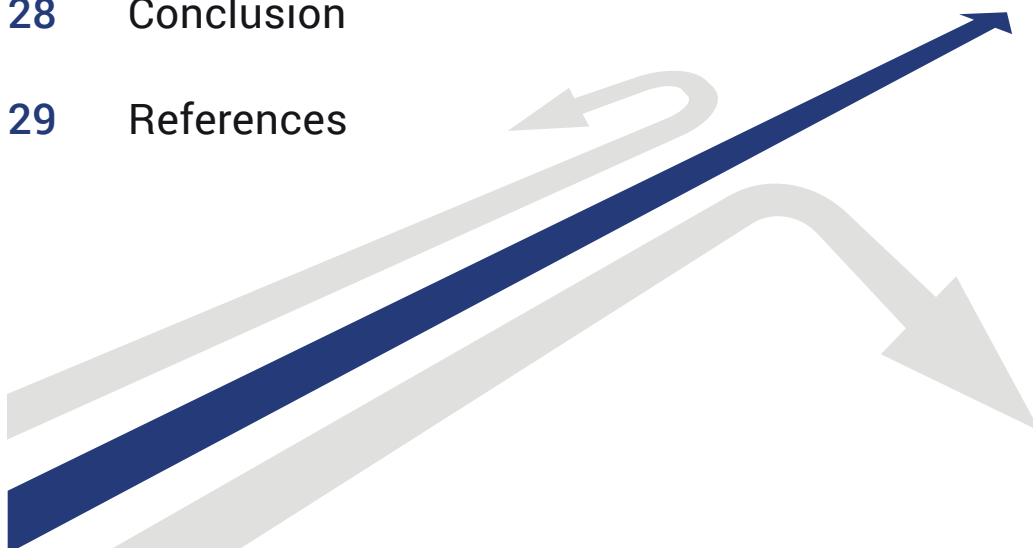


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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this project was to investigate means of translating Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) syllabi for young disabled dancers. There are numerous barriers to dance for disabled people but one which has received increasing attention in recent years is the lack of systematic training available. Many non-disabled young people join private dance studios which provide an established progression route using staged syllabi and assessments in a range of dance genres. The ISTD recognised that this progression route should be more accessible for disabled young people, and that it could play a key role in opening pathways to dance. The organisation recruited a number of teachers and specialists, and commissioned a researcher from the University of Bedfordshire, to explore how this could be done.

Three ISTD-registered teachers were matched with three specialists in inclusive dance to focus on either the ballet, modern or Latin and Ballroom syllabus with their groups of disabled learners. An action research approach was adopted whereby various actions and strategies were designed by the teachers and specialists, which were reviewed and revised over the course of the project. Data collection included class observations and visits by the researcher, interviews with the teachers, specialists, young dancers, and their parents, and online diary entries by the teachers and specialists after each class. Analyses revealed that while each group was unique in its characteristics and in the strategies applied, some commonalities emerged. For each group, regardless of genre, teachers needed to break down each exercise to determine its key principles before building up to the final movement goal.

Differentiation was crucial and an understanding of each individual dancer ensured this was effective. Setting high expectations of the dancers was important to raise aspirations and encourage the dancers to challenge themselves. Finally, the incorporation of free-flow movement and improvisation within a traditional syllabus class structure provided respite from physical and mental fatigue, creating a balance between hard work and play.

Multiple forms of improvement among the project participants were documented. The teachers reported increased confidence as a result of both the skills they had developed, and the reassurance they received about their practice. There were numerous examples of improvement in students' technical abilities, including balance, turning, dexterity and performance quality. The dancers were more confident in their abilities and took pride in their achievements. Improvements were also observed in focus, concentration, team and partner work. Some of these improvements extended beyond the syllabus classes, such as greater confidence in other sessions and interactions with non-disabled peers. Overall, the findings of this study contribute to a small but growing body of research attesting to both the viability and value of providing progression opportunities for young disabled dancers. The ISTD and other organisations like it are leading the way in opening pathways and changing the dance landscape to become more inclusive, accessible and diverse.

INTRODUCTION



The aim of this research project was to investigate means of translating ISTD syllabi for young disabled dancers, with a view to opening pathways to progression in dance in private studio contexts. For many young people, private dance studios form their first introduction to dance activity. However, disabled young people may be more likely to access recreational, community-based dance classes, as they are often specifically marketed as being inclusive. While these opportunities are undoubtedly valuable, there are limited options for young disabled people who wish to develop their skills beyond recreational classes. In the UK, a number of initiatives are now underway to improve access to dance training for disabled people, to help bridge the gap between recreational classes and the profession and to address the numerous barriers to dance.^{1,2}

Previous literature has reported four key categories of barriers to dance for young disabled people.² These include: aesthetic barriers, relating to exclusionary and restrictive notions of the ideal dancing body; and logistic barriers such as financial, transportation, physical access issues, and care and support needs. Attitudinal barriers include misunderstanding about dance being a viable activity for disabled people, low expectations of their potential and abilities, and well-intentioned discouragement from gatekeepers who may be trying to protect young disabled people from disappointment. Most critical in relation to this project are training-related barriers: the lack of systematic training routes for disabled dancers, a lack of teacher knowledge and confidence, and the content of sessions, which may not be appropriate for disabled dancers. This research project aimed

to address these training-related barriers by working with teachers and inclusive dance specialists to explore ways of translating ISTD syllabi.

Prior to commencing this project, the ISTD conducted a survey among its members to uncover additional barriers that were unique to private studio contexts. Survey responses indicated that current syllabi and examination procedures needed to be reviewed in order for private classes to be fully accessible, and that this may require additional teachers or assistants in the space which had financial implications. Respondents expressed concerns about the potential attitudes of parents of non-disabled children, who may believe that disabled dancers would hinder their own children's progress. There were also suggestions that the more highly codified, framework-based genres like Latin and Ballroom dance would be more challenging to translate, and that the competitive structure of this genre in particular may exclude disabled dancers.

Taking these initial findings into consideration, the ISTD began to consider ways in which it could play a role in addressing the gap in provision by making its syllabi more accessible to disabled dancers. A research project was devised to investigate ways of translating three of the ISTD's key syllabi: ballet, modern, and Latin and Ballroom. The current focus in inclusive dance is translation rather than adaptation: where adaptation implies that there is a 'correct' way of performing a movement task based on a non-disabled version, translation encourages each dancer to respond to tasks according to their own bodies. The aim is to achieve an equivalent outcome based on understanding of a particular movement principle rather

than simply mimicking an aesthetic.³ Although by its nature syllabus work is based at least in part on achieving aesthetic goals, the focus of this project remained on translation in order to fully explore the syllabi and to encourage the young dancers involved to reach their potential.

A number of factors make this project unique when compared to previous research. Firstly, the majority of research and writing on inclusive dance is focused on contemporary dance.⁴⁻⁹ There is a clear reason for this, as contemporary dance is generally perceived as being more open to interpretation, and therefore translation, than other more codified forms. As the goal of inclusive dance is typically about individual movement quality and potential, rather than replicating an aesthetic,⁴ contemporary dance could be seen as being ideally suited to this task. However, the principles of translation remain the same regardless of the genre and, crucially, in order for dance to become truly inclusive, young disabled people should have the opportunity to try any dance genre according to their own interests and aims. Furthermore, previous research has tended to focus on recreational dance from the perspective of the practitioners.⁵⁻⁸ Ideally, the perspectives of all involved in a dance project should be consulted to provide a comprehensive evaluation.⁹ The experiences of the teachers, specialists and dancers themselves were central to this project, therefore it was essential to ascertain their views and ideas, as well as to seek the opinions of the dancers' parents to provide further insight into the project and its outcomes. Accordingly, a short-term longitudinal study was designed with multiple forms of data collection which is described in the next section.

METHODS

Once ethical approval for the project had been received from the University of Bedfordshire’s Research Ethics Committee, three ISTD-registered teachers were recruited for the project and were matched with specialists in inclusive dance. The specialists had substantial experience of working with disabled young people in the dance genres of interest. Two of the three

teachers were already working with a mixed ability group at their own studio; the third was matched with a group at a performing arts Special Educational Needs and Disability college. The groups and their teachers worked with their specialist for one to two academic terms. The characteristics of the teachers, specialists and their groups are summarised in the table below:

Teacher(s)	Katie and Paige	Sarah	Suzie
Teachers’ experience of inclusive dance	Approximately 7 months	Approximately 7 years	5 years
Specialist	Georgia (founder of an inclusive dance education company and qualified dance movement psychotherapist)	Eleanor (extensive experience with two well-known inclusive dance and arts companies)	Maria (over 10 years’ experience of teaching dance in inclusive settings including Further Education)
Student characteristics	7 students, aged 8-16 years: 6 male, 1 female, all with a form of learning disability except for one non-disabled student. Three parents were also in attendance.	8 students, aged 8-13 years: 7 female, 1 male, 3 disabled (two with cerebral palsy, one with sensory difficulties and ADHD).	7 students, aged 19-21 years: 4 male, 3 female, all with a form of learning disability.
Genre	Ballet	Modern	Latin and Ballroom
Context	45-minute private studio evening class initially focused more on creative dance	45-minute private studio evening ‘enrichment’ class (additional to syllabus classes)	90-minute class in a specialist SEND performing arts college (residential)
Duration of work with specialist	12 weeks	16 weeks	9 weeks

Each group had its own particular focus, structure and needs, so the approach taken and strategies employed were unique to that group. These are described in detail in the Actions and Outcomes section. Prior to taking part, all participants including teachers, specialists, dancers (and their parents where children were under the age of 16 years, or where parents took part in a focus group) were given information sheets and signed informed consent to take part. All names used in this report are pseudonyms.

An action research approach was adopted for the project. Action research aims to effect change based on the needs of a particular community by employing cycles of planning, action, observation and reflection throughout the duration of a research project.^{10,11} Critically, participants are involved in the design and methods of an action research project;¹² here, the teachers and specialists devised and refined strategies based on the needs of their group, which were documented by the researcher. Data was collected in multiple ways. The teachers were interviewed at the start of the project to glean information on their background and experience in teaching disabled young people, motives for taking part and expectations of the project. The teachers and specialists completed a brief online diary at the end of each class, detailing how the session had gone, strategies implemented and their efficacy, and how these would inform the next class. The researcher observed each group at the start and end of the project, and where possible conducted additional observations depending on the length of time the group was working. Focus groups were conducted with the dancers at the end of each term, and focus groups or brief interviews were also conducted with some of their parents

at the end of the project. Finally, the teachers and specialists were interviewed at the end of the project to evaluate the process and to discuss their plans going forward.

Data were content analysed by coding each interview transcript, diary entry and set of observation notes into meaning units (relevant sections of text).¹³ Meaning units were refined and organised to create a series of key themes for each group. Data were triangulated so that themes were derived from a combination of different participant responses (e.g. teacher, specialist, and dancer). Finally, the key themes for each group were compared and contrasted to generate strategies and outcomes common across the groups. In the next section, the working methods, actions and outcomes of these for each individual group are explored in detail before being summarised in the Overall Findings and Implications section. Quotes from participants are used throughout to illustrate each theme.



ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES FOR EACH GROUP

KATIE AND PAIGE'S GROUP

STARTING POINTS

Katie had little prior experience of teaching disabled children but a real passion for this work. She set up her class as a response to a request from a parent of a child with Down's syndrome. At the start of the project, the group had been together for approximately 7 months and most its members were relatively new to dance. Katie wanted to be involved in the project to improve her knowledge and skills in inclusive teaching. She was working with another teacher, Paige, who would lead the group when Katie was on maternity leave. Part of the challenge was managing the transition between teachers to help the students cope without Katie. Paige was also relatively new to teaching disabled children, and she described "looking forward to improving my skill set".

As a result of these multiple factors, Georgia decided to take a broad-brush, holistic approach, using both pre-training and direct application of knowledge in the studio on her fortnightly visits. Collectively, Katie, Paige and Georgia decided that they wanted to focus on multiple forms of improvement for the dancers, rather than focus solely on specific exercises. This included, "being able to follow the sequence of the session; stand still when needed; listen to an instruction; join in with others; work as a team; work in partners; work as a group" (Georgia).

Georgia described the pre-training as "even more important than time in the sessions". The pre-training covered different types of disabilities and needs in depth and how these might affect movement, how to create a safe

environment, helping the dancers to access the space and engage with their bodies, care plans, and communication skills including learning basic Makaton. These sessions provided opportunities for the teachers to ask questions, discuss specific students' needs, and to reflect on the new information and how it could inform their planning and delivery. Katie commented, "it was nice to have a bit of reflective time and then go, 'right, how are we going to move it forward?' Because, actually, in the lesson, you don't always get the time to reflect and to have that planning time, and I think that was almost vital to us being able to make the leaps that we did, and to see the progression that we did."

A key part of the pre-training was understanding each dancer as an individual, and using differentiation to ensure each dancer's needs were met. For example, the wide range of ages in the group meant that some teaching strategies and cues were inappropriate for the oldest dancer. The pre-training was then applied in the studio, so that "the learning is happening in the moment" (Georgia). As a result of the pre-training and new knowledge they had accrued, Katie noted that she had "never planned so much" ahead of classes. Importantly, however, Georgia's approach was to enhance what Katie and Paige were already doing well. She did not set out to 'correct' the teachers or tell them to change their working methods. Paige explained: "I think that she came into it with really, sort of, no preconceptions... she watched one of the sessions, and then had a chat with us, and she led it from there. She would ask questions like, 'what's the reason you run the class in this order?'" After the pre-training, Georgia participated in the classes, asking questions or making suggestions, and working with students individually.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

In addition to the pre-training, Georgia encouraged Katie and Paige to implement a number of specific strategies and actions centred around the class structure, the breakdown of exercises, communication, and reducing students' dependence on their parents.

Structure and pace

Georgia asked Katie and Paige to evaluate the structure of their classes. The teachers needed to think more about the process of achieving a movement rather than focus solely on the final outcome, and to consider over a longer time period what they wanted the students to achieve and how this could be done. Katie created a scheme of work to cover the whole term which allowed her to think this through and to plan more firmly who would lead which exercise so that, over time, Paige was taking on more teaching. Preparatory and warm-up exercises were included in the scheme of work to help students progress through a session and work towards more challenging movement goals. Katie noted how important the consistency of the class structure was, and that this enabled them to increase the pace of the sessions and to have higher expectations of what the students could achieve: "it was a structured lesson, so they knew what to expect and who was in charge ... The behaviour massively improved because they knew what they were focusing on, and they knew what was coming next. That helped, in turn, the concentration and, actually, what we got out of them."

Breaking down and building up

Within this more consistent structure, the focus on process as well as outcome meant breaking down exercises in order to build up to a specific movement goal or exercise. Georgia asked the teachers to consider the principles of, or reasons behind, particular movements and exercises to help them to understand how they could be translated for their dancers. This detailed approach allowed for more differentiation within the group in order to meet the dancers' varied needs and challenge them accordingly. Katie explained, "we spent quite a lot of time discussing their different needs and why, particularly for some students, they find certain positions like first position harder".

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ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

KATIE AND PAIGE'S GROUP

With their new understanding, Katie and Paige were able to try different starting points, such as second position for pliés to provide a more stable base, or parallel as the students could attain better alignment. By adopting this approach, Katie explained that, "By the end of term, we were achieving a demi-plié in first position". It was notable how the students rose to these new expectations once the exercises had been broken down: "initially, for me, it was understanding why they couldn't achieve it, and understanding what I had to do to input that...we just kept doing [the exercises] and we kept making them a little bit harder each week until it was that really exciting moment where it just happened" (Katie).

Communication

Georgia was keen for the teachers to communicate more clearly, and a challenge that both Katie and Paige reported was that by trying to simplify their instructions, they also slowed down their speech in a way that was inappropriate for the group. It took some time to practice and get used to a new style of communication, but they "realised you can make a sentence shorter without slowing your speech down" (Katie). Georgia explained that with time this would start to come more naturally.

Georgia also wanted the teachers to become more playful and natural in their interactions with the students. She noticed that as Katie and Paige became focused on implementing new ideas and strategies, the classes started to feel a little "stiff". Georgia explained, "they were feeling a bit stuck and a bit lacking in personality.

I said to them, 'how are you in mainstream dance classes?' And they have far more playful relationships with their other dancers, where here they're a bit scared and tentative...The last session was the best session we've ever had, because they were able to relax. And then that allows the young people to be themselves."

Reducing dependence on parents

Typically, parents who attended the classes joined in with the session and assisted their child or children. One of the goals that Katie, Paige and Georgia identified was the importance of helping the dancers to become more independent from their parents. Katie had sensed that the parents were initially a little reluctant about this; building their trust was an important part of the project. Katie explained that "we deliberately said 'right, the parents are going to watch now, it's your turn to dance'. And actually, because it was an instruction, it got the parents to take a step back".

Teacher observation

Katie was able to visit Georgia's company and spend a day observing a variety of classes for disabled learners. This provided her with both inspiration and reassurance: "I came away feeling reassured that we were doing an OK job – I'd been so worried about 'are we doing the right thing'." Private studio teachers may feel somewhat isolated in aspects of this work; opportunities to visit and observe established inclusive groups may prove invaluable.

OUTCOMES

The above strategies yielded a number of positive outcomes. These included increased teacher knowledge and confidence, student progress, and increased parental trust.

Increased teacher knowledge

Katie described the project as a “really eye-opening experience”, while Paige noted that it had “changed our thinking around how we plan the classes...it was a huge, like, eureka moment.” Katie commented that taking part in the project helped her to better understand her dancers: “It’s about how you adapt what we have to be right for the people that are in front of you”. The working relationship between teachers and specialist was particularly positive. Katie said, “we’ve absolutely loved working with her. I hope that she’s felt we’ve responded to what she’s given us”; Georgia confirmed this by noting how she and Paige were “just so willing to take on strategies”. The teachers’ increased knowledge enabled them to create a consistent class structure and to increase the pace of sessions. In her diary, Georgia noted that the dancers were able to focus for longer periods of time, teachers were better at managing behaviours, and that the faster pace was working well. Furthermore, the teachers had begun to think about how they could use their increased knowledge to train others. Although a volunteer teaching assistant attended the classes, Georgia identified the need to further train her to take on more responsibility. Paige also hoped that by training some of the older students in their school, they could act as volunteers to assist with the class.

Increased teacher confidence

As a result of their new knowledge and its application, by the end of the 12 weeks, Georgia noted in her diary that both teachers were more confident, Katie was being more ambitious in what she was asking of the students, and that there was a “more playful, active energy” in the sessions. Paige reinforced this, saying, “I feel more confident with the students, and with how I’m speaking to them, and what I’m asking them to do. I was quite nervous to begin with – I was always second-guessing myself”. Paige’s increased confidence in turn helped the students to cope with the idea of transitioning teachers, as she explained: “one of the little boys is a lot happier with me in the room. We got to know each other more and we’ve been able to get used to it”. It was clear from observations that the teachers were also more confident in managing the students’ behaviour by the end of the project. In fact, the teachers’ confidence had increased so much that Paige expressed a desire for the class to grow in numbers, and both teachers were interested in introducing aspects of other dance genres, and including a barre section in the classes.

Dancer progress

As there were multiple aims for the class, so there were multiple forms of dancer progress and improvement. These included technical progression, but also improvements in focus, concentration, behaviour, independence and confidence. While progress was observed in every dancer, perhaps the most striking example is Elliot.

ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

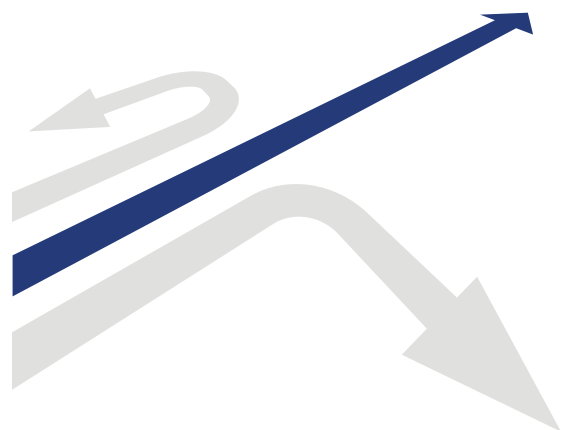
KATIE AND PAIGE'S GROUP

SPOTLIGHT ON ELLIOT:

Although he was the oldest dancer in the group, Elliot was previously being given the same teaching cues as the younger members. As a result of the differentiation strategies implemented during the project, his confidence soared and Georgia described him as being “transformed”. Elliot had previously tended to look down when dancing; one of his main corrections was to lift his head and elongate his posture. He said, “Georgia taught me to have my head up, that was really good.” Katie further explained that “by treating him as a young man, he became this confident dancer that really came out of his shell. He was leading lines, and he had his head up, and was almost taking a leading role”. Paige noted how these benefits went beyond the class to increase his confidence in the musical theatre class that she taught, where he was happier to work with non-disabled students. Similarly, Georgia commented that he had progressed “not just in a sense of skill, but in his self-confidence and how he feels about himself”. As a highly motivated student, Elliot relished the challenges set and enjoyed the new leadership roles he was given.

Increased parent trust

In the first session of the project, three parents attended and joined in the whole class. By the last session, there were several instances where parents were sitting out. This was an important goal for Katie, Paige and Georgia, and required the parents to trust in the teachers and their ability. It seemed that this process was already well under way by the end of the 12 weeks. Katie explained, “I think if the trust is there, they trust us to care for their child and to be safe with their child...for them to feel like they can step back...it’s been just as important to build the relationship with the parents as it has been with the students”. A long-term goal for the class is that parents do not have to attend at all, but can instead ‘drop and go’.



SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

Despite the numerous improvements described above, there were two particular challenges for this group that are ongoing.

Attendance

One of the key issues was inconsistent attendance from some of the students. Unsurprisingly, the greatest improvements were observed in the students who attended each week; however, young disabled people often have complex family lives which can affect attendance.

Not all strategies work for every dancer

Balancing the various needs in the room while implementing new ideas was certainly a challenge for all involved. A good example of this is two brothers in the group.

One responded very well to imagination-based cues and creative work; as the classes became more focused on ballet and technical instruction he found this difficult and his behaviour became increasingly challenging. His brother, however, preferred the technique-based cues and began to thrive on the new expectations these created. As the class progresses and becomes more challenging, Georgia noted that some students' behaviour would become more difficult to manage, and that the teachers may need to think about which types of classes they were offering and for whom they were accessible. One of the parents also highlighted this theme, saying that for her son, focusing on ballet technique had "highlighted perhaps some of the bits he finds more difficult, so he doesn't like the knee bends, he really struggles to hold that position, so he plays up in that because it's too hard". Positively, Georgia did feel that this could be managed, but that it would require additional support and planning.

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ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES FOR EACH GROUP

SARAH'S GROUP

STARTING POINTS

Sarah already had several years' experience of teaching disabled students. Her main motivation for taking part in the project was her and her students' desire to take part in examinations. The disabled students in her class had been dancing for several years and participated in multiple classes per week alongside non-disabled students. However, the two students with cerebral palsy (CP) had never taken an examination; the student with ADHD and sensory difficulties found examinations stressful and became very anxious during them. Given that both Sarah and her students had considerable experience, Eleanor saw her role more as being an "outside eye", adding layers to Sarah's existing practice. She noted, "she already has a great understanding, and she was already thinking in translation terms". Sarah wanted advice with two specific challenges: jumps and turns, as these movements were difficult for the students but feature prominently in the modern syllabus. In relation to this the goal was to enhance the students' movement confidence to enable them to tackle increasingly challenging and complex exercises. The working relationship was collaborative in nature; Sarah explained, "it's been nice to have that input and work through things together...it's been nice to bounce off and get her input". Eleanor visited every fortnight and had a phone or Skype meeting with Sarah on the intervening weeks to discuss ideas for the next class. Interestingly, there was a sense of mutual learning. Eleanor was impressed by Sarah's teaching style which was positive and motivating, while still being disciplined:

"I've learnt a lot from Sarah...she has fun with the kids but they still have a huge amount of respect for her and they really listen".

Although Sarah was already working with her dancers well, it became apparent during the interviews that one of Eleanor's roles had become reassuring Sarah and bolstering her confidence. Eleanor noted that there was a sense of needing 'permission' to try different strategies that may have been perceived as being 'against the rules', such as allowing the students with CP to wear ballet shoes to enable them to create momentum for turning (modern classes are traditionally performed barefoot). More broadly, Sarah felt that, "It's been nice to have a bit of reassurance...I've just kind of been winging it almost, and hoping that I'm doing the right thing with them."

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

The key strategies introduced by Eleanor included breaking down and building up exercises, trying different versions of exercises, raising expectations, and differentiation.

Breaking down and building up

The process of breaking down exercises to then build them up was common to all groups. Incorporating preparatory exercises was important to prepare students for more challenging technical sequences later in the class. For example, Eleanor used a foot dexterity exercise to help the students understand floor pressure for split runs. The effectiveness of this approach was reinforced through "lots of repetitive stuff...doing that over and over again, each week...I can really see it in them, so it has obviously clicked" (Eleanor).

Trying different versions of exercises

Another of Eleanor's key approaches was introducing different versions of exercises to help students play with an idea or movement principle without the pressure of having to perform a syllabus exercise 'correctly'. This included balance games and tasks, and introducing pirouettes to help students understand momentum. Sarah was initially unsure about the introduction of pirouettes, assuming they would be too difficult for the students, "but actually, it's been really nice to see them really have a go and not worry about getting everything completely right. Because they know they're not going to get it completely right because everybody's struggling with the pirouettes." The incorporation of different exercises enabled the dancers to enjoy themselves while working on a challenging movement; one of the students commented that she enjoyed "learning new stuff". Eleanor explained that providing opportunities for each student to demonstrate their competence, and balancing difficult material with fun exercises, was crucial: "you can't overload them...I don't want to put too much pressure on them having to be perfect".

If there had been more time on the project, an additional element Eleanor considered implementing was improvisation. She explained: "I would have really liked to have built the children up to using improvisational tasks to explore different elements. If you're learning how to be in your body, one of the best ways to do it is to do it organically... using improvisation to access technique".

She wanted to use improvisation to explore balance, but also was interested in helping the dancers with CP to relax their muscles more and felt that improvisation would be an effective way of doing so.

Raising expectations

Although the students had been dancing for several years, Eleanor was still keen to set higher expectations for them. Relating to the above theme, Sarah commented that, "[Eleanor] did quite a lot of things which I must admit I have avoided slightly, because I know they struggle with things like that. But it's actually been really, really positive because they've just gotten on with it... [I've been] worried about them hurting themselves. But it's been nice to have Eleanor to go, 'no let's just do this and give it a go. See what happens'. It's been nice to see them really attacking things that I, perhaps, have been a little anxious about trying." This theme reinforces the idea of reassuring teachers and encouraging them to further push their dancers within sensible limits.

Differentiation

An important aspect of translation and differentiation is understanding the individual dancer and what they need in that moment: "it's a lot about prioritising and working out what will be really useful for them" (Eleanor). Sarah was already using differentiation effectively but her involvement in the project meant that Eleanor could provide one-to-one support for the disabled students, "helping us when we get stuck" (dancer). Eleanor often used imagery to help students understand

ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

SARAH'S GROUP

different movement principles, such as 'goeey melted chocolate' to encourage softness in the knees. She noted that this did not work for all students, so a balance between imagery and technical cues and instruction was important. Additional examples of differentiation suggested by Eleanor included allowing the students with CP to wear ballet shoes for turning, and using a combination of syllabus and pop music to help the student with ADHD remain focused. Having Eleanor dance with this particular student also helped her to stay relaxed and focused when the dancers were asked to perform solo travelling steps.

OUTCOMES

The key positive outcomes for this group were the dancers' technical progression, and increased confidence and focus.

Technical progression

There were several examples of technical progression; most markedly in the dancers with CP who initially were unable to run or jump, but by the end of the project were performing these movements alongside their peers, which was "so exciting to see" (Eleanor). There were much clearer distinctions in the students' turns and their footwork was more articulate. One of the students, Gina, progressed markedly in both her technique and confidence over the course of the 16 weeks.

SPOTLIGHT ON GINA:

Gina was an extremely motivated student with ambitions to work in dance, saying she would "probably be a dance teacher" in the future. Having recently had an operation, she was anxious at the start of the project but over time was approaching turns with greater attack and had improved her balance. She worked hard on the foot dexterity exercise and her clarity of footwork increased in this and later exercises. These examples of progression were related to her growing confidence. For instance, in a diary entry about halfway through the project, Eleanor noted that Gina's "confidence and 'going for it' are the best I've ever seen!" Gina herself was very aware of the progress she was making, saying that it made her "feel really happy".

Increased confidence

The dancers enjoyed the extra attention they received and, like Gina, were conscious of their progress which had a positive effect on their perceived competence. One dancer was especially pleased about the focus on "jumps and turns 'cause I couldn't do that before, now I can do it". The sense of pride and accomplishment was evident in the dancers over the course of the project and helped them to tackle increasingly challenging goals.

Sarah commented that there were benefits to all of the students in the class, saying, “Having Eleanor there has definitely helped boost all of the children’s confidence, I think, because they generally have a bit more one-to-one contact”.

Increased focus

The presence of an additional teacher in the space was helpful for all students to have extra attention, feedback and support, but this was particularly true for the dancer with ADHD. Eleanor explained that “occasionally she’ll drift...if you’ve got an extra person you can just draw her back in...when there’s been two of us it’s been great”. The use of varied music also helped this student to remain on-task.

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

There were two particular issues for this group that will continue to provide challenges in the future. These were alignment and balancing the content of sessions.

Alignment

A key challenge for the students with CP was alignment. Eleanor highlighted that what was aesthetically ‘correct’ may not be safe or appropriate for the individual dancer. She said, “acknowledging that people have different physicalities – is it worth really pushing somebody to get it right, is that the way that their skeleton wants their body to move?” With regards to one student in particular, Sarah and Eleanor had to choose whether to prioritise foot or hip and pelvic alignment for an exercise, debating which was more important for the dancer. These sorts of issues have been commonly discussed in sports science but are only recently being addressed

in dance. For example, femoral anteversion, where the femur is rotated forward in the hip socket, leads to internal rotation and ‘in-toeing’ (the feet being turned in); this can cause additional postural problems such as lumbar lordosis, patellar problems and excessive foot pronation.¹⁴ Importantly, there may also be asymmetry in these factors, which can cause dancers to further compensate for bilateral differences in alignment or range of motion.¹⁵ Given the numerous anatomical interactions and compensations that may manifest in an individual dancer, appropriate translations for a particular exercise may vary. As an illustration, in sport it is recognised that squats (a movement similar to a plié) may have to be performed with the feet in either parallel or turn-out in order to reach optimal depth, depending on the amount of anteversion or retroversion (where the femur is rotated backwards in the hip socket). Therefore, decisions may need to be made as to what is considered ‘correct’ for a particular movement or exercise: what is aesthetically desirable, or what is safe or effective, causing the fewest compensations, for the dancer.

The balance of content

Eleanor often commented on the importance of balancing hard work with enjoyment, to offset “very technical challenges with fun to help students feel good about what they can already do”. She was also cognisant that students responded to different types of cues in varied ways; the student with sensory difficulties and ADHD responded better to technical instruction while imagery was very effective for the dancers with CP to find particular movement qualities. Therefore, balancing content and appropriate cues remains important to help meet the different needs of the students.

ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES FOR EACH GROUP

SUZIE'S GROUP

STARTING POINTS

Suzie had been teaching disabled groups for five years and wanted to take part in the project due to her passion for helping to “open the door to everybody who wants to learn”. Unlike the other two groups, Suzie was not working with her own group; instead she was matched with the specialist's group. The group was enrolled full-time in a SEND performing arts college where they had experience of dance in the curriculum but most had never learned any Latin or Ballroom dance. In fact, the students were more accustomed to creative work and choreography than specific technique classes. Because this was a specialist college, there were teaching assistants and volunteers providing several opportunities for one-to-one work. The length of the classes was 90 minutes, which was twice as long as the other groups. Interestingly, Suzie felt this was too long for the students and that 60 minutes would have been ideal; Maria believed that the class length was appropriate and that the structure they used (which included a break in the middle and some unstructured free-flow movement) worked well to ensure students remained motivated and on-task.

The working relationship between Suzie and Maria was similar to the other groups: Suzie led the classes with assistance and input from Maria, who saw her role as helping Suzie to embed strategies for different learning styles, and “policing and managing the students to make sure that [Suzie] can impart the knowledge”. They also discussed the content and progress of classes before and after the sessions. The working relationship between teacher and specialist was again very positive. Suzie explained that the project had been

“very enriching...[Maria] added ideas, how to help them learn”. Importantly, this sense of learning and development was mutual. As noted above, the college curriculum was focused on creative dance and choreography: “communicating a story and communicating a feel, rather than displaying technical proficiency” (Maria). This was partly because Maria wanted her classes to be “completely accessible, completely inclusive, where everything is valued”, and there was no right or wrong. However, observing how well the students coped with learning codified technique, she reflected, “it's been a completely different approach to dance than what we normally do...it's been really fascinating to see how the students have engaged with a set sequence of steps and footwork.” As a result, she decided to incorporate more technique into the curriculum going forward.

STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

Similar to the other groups, key strategies centred around breaking down and building up exercises, resources and differentiation, and raising expectations.

Breaking down and building up

For Suzie, the key to working with the dancers was to help them find the essence of the movement. She would explain the story behind each dance and its country of origin to help the students' recall, and tended to build up each exercise in the same way: they began learning the rhythm by clapping, then transferring this to stamping the feet, and then learning the footwork. Footwork was learned facing and travelling the same way, and once this had been achieved, partnering was added, before finally building in turns and travelling.

A key strategy for consolidating this learning was, as Suzie put it, “endless repetition”.

Maria was surprised at how well the students coped with this repetition, having worried that they would become bored. However, observing the students in the sessions, she reflected, “actually it can be slowed down a lot. They’re not going to get bored. They will actually gain a lot more out of this if we slow down and repeat, repeat, repeat.” One of the reasons that students did not lose interest may have been due to their sense of achievement in working towards particular steps, which is explored further in the Outcomes section.

Resources and differentiation

During class observations, it was striking how many different strategies and resources Maria incorporated into the classes. To ensure a range of learning styles were engaged, she explained that, “usually, in all my classes, I would have a visual support aid, a kinaesthetic way of doing it, and an auditory way of doing it, and the students would all have a choice.” Examples of these various strategies included using sheets of newspaper on the floor to learn the box step, coloured beanbags on the floor to show the step pattern in the Cha Cha Cha, imagery for finding the correct ballroom hold, and visuals projected on to a large screen on the wall. Visuals showed either the step pattern for different dances, or an image of a ballroom with opulent chandeliers to evoke a particular atmosphere.

There was a wide range of learning speeds among the students, so while some continued to work on finding the essence of the movement, others were given directions for extending the dance such as working on the ballroom hold. One student in particular struggled, so Suzie worked with him individually to help him find the correct rhythm, commenting, “You can’t just drag them into your movement... You have to basically adapt, and be in this world. Try to feel it, to sense it, and then take it from there.” It is important to note

that this individualised work was only possible because of the number of additional staff in the space. Suzie was very conscious of this, saying, “I couldn’t have done it without them”.

Raising expectations

As with the other groups, having high expectations was crucial. Suzie was surprised by the discipline, structure, and number of rules that were set by Maria in the first class. She thought, “wow, that’s very strict. But actually, it absolutely made sense and it made it easier, basically, for the students to learn”. The rules and discipline were important as there were some behavioural issues to manage, and two students in particular had to be monitored throughout the classes. Maria was equally surprised by how well the students coped with the repetition and learning of a set technique. Given how much the students enjoyed it, and how much they had progressed, she said, “I think there should be more of this really... If you raise the bar, they step up, don’t they? It’s just giving them that opportunity”.

OUTCOMES

Although this group worked together for a shorter period than the other two groups, the work was more intensive: Suzie visited every week and the classes were longer. As a result, similar types of improvement were documented which included technical progression, increased confidence, and improved socialising and communication among the dancers.

Technical progression

Suzie had decided to focus on learning dances rather than figures, and in just nine weeks, the students had learned the Cha Cha Cha, Viennese waltz, rhythm foxtrot, slow waltz, jive, and samba. Improvements were noted in their footwork, turning, balance, and ballroom hold,

ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES

SUZIE'S GROUP

while they were moving more independently and becoming more focused. They had learned to coordinate with a partner and move simultaneously; another layer of learning of which few dancers had prior experience. One of Suzie's comments summarises the success of this work: "I was amazed about how well the students got on, how focused they were. I did six dances and I did more than what I would have usually done with a beginners' group."

Additionally, Maria highlighted that the students' performance quality had also improved. While she appreciated that "you could argue that the performance quality isn't that important, let's get the feet right", she felt that having a sense of performance and style was important, and gave the students pleasure. They took pride in their work once they were confident they had achieved the steps. Maria noted that the students could often be seen practicing and performing the steps outside of sessions and on different days of the week.

SPOTLIGHT ON LIAM:

Of all the students, Liam struggled the most to learn and recall the material. For him, the most effective teaching method was one-to-one work, often with Suzie or Maria. Suzie would work to find his particular "body rhythm", then use that to guide him to the correct rhythm. Although he did not progress to the same extent as the other students, Liam was able to learn some of the rhythms and steps which was an important achievement for him. Liam would often verbalise his thoughts; in the early weeks he could often be heard saying, "I can't do it. Oh, that's hard." In the final week, he said, "I'm doing it. I can do it!"

Sense of achievement and increased confidence

Both Suzie and Maria noticed how the students' confidence had increased and they were less hesitant with trying the steps. The students were motivated by their achievements, and in turn wanted to learn and achieve more. This sense of achievement and resultant confidence was in part due to learning a codified technique. Maria noted that there was a right and wrong way of performing the steps, which, rather than discourage them, motivated the students to "really aspire to be accurate, it gives them a real sense of pride". Learning a sequence of steps rather than generating their own material gave them, "confidence in themselves, knowing that they know it, as opposed to doing something and being told it was good. They know they've got it, which is great" (Maria). Indeed, one of the students said, "When we're dancing we feel proud of ourselves. We're happy. I'm learning to concentrate, focus, be independent". As a result, all of the students agreed that they wanted to continue learning Latin and Ballroom.

Improved socialising and communication

Suzie was keen for the dancers to change partners regularly. Initially this was a challenge for the students, who might only want to work with a particular peer, or were shy of working with others. However, they soon became accustomed to it and began to communicate better with one another about technical elements such as directions or who was leading. Maria noticed how the students were all "really familiar with each

other right now, because they've had to change partners...they're all happy to dance with each other now. Changing partners so frequently has actually developed a real sense of teamwork". The students also enjoyed this aspect of the classes, with one of them commenting: "I like dancing because we work all together – team work. We connect our bodies". Partnering is unique to this group but presumably the benefits of doing so could also be yielded in other genres and in mixed groups.

SPECIFIC CHALLENGES

The two ongoing challenges for this group were the experience of fatigue, and the wide range of abilities and learning rates among the dancers.

Fatigue

The main challenge for the group was fatigue. Learning the footwork, incorporating turning and travelling, and working with various partners required a large amount of concentration and focus, which was "new to our students" (Maria). It appeared that the students found the cognitive effort more fatiguing than the actual physical movements. Maria commented in her diary that, "Students are concentrating hard and demonstrating a real eagerness to get the steps right. I can see that dancing and focusing so intently makes them tired and there have been some behavioural issues or an unwillingness to continue. We have discussed resilience and 'pushing through' as well as professional behaviour". She felt that there was a noticeable improvement towards the end of the nine weeks, which

may in part be due to Suzie and Maria's decision to incorporate some free-flow movement into the classes. This could be halfway through the session or at the end, depending on how the students were coping. Energetic music was played, and students were encouraged to dance however they wanted; as a result Maria commented that they "forgot all about being tired or exhausted!" Interestingly, during this section some of them would then start practising the dances they had learned from Suzie, indicating their enjoyment of the work.

Wide range of abilities

The wide range of learning speeds in the group made it difficult for Suzie to decide when to progress to another dance or figure. She was impressed by the students' improvements, but their retention of the material held them back. She often questioned herself: "Shall I progress? Shall I add another figure? A third of the group would have been able to learn more figures, but then I would have lost two thirds". The differentiation strategies described above helped to overcome this challenge although Suzie was conscious that some students could have achieved more. Furthermore, the different learning rates meant that moving as one with a partner could be challenging. Students were partnered with those at a similar level, but Maria noted in her diary that this meant some students "have not had the same amount of experience dancing with different people".

OVERALL FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS



The aim of this research project was to investigate means of translating ISTD syllabi for young disabled dancers.

The project is aligned with a number of new initiatives in the UK seeking to create greater access to progression and talent development programmes for disabled young people, but is unique in its focus on private dance studio contexts as a key training route. Although the three groups involved were very different, there were common experiences and strategies that can be drawn together. Firstly, it is noteworthy that all involved in the project including teachers, specialists, students and their parents, found the experience to be extremely positive. Teachers and specialists alike agreed how worthwhile the experience had been, highlighting the value of such projects and how enjoyable it was to share their passion

for the area. Words like “exciting” and “joyful” were used by students to describe the sessions, with one commenting, “I’ve learned so much”. Suzie discussed “this joy of dancing and dancing together with a partner. This group – they were looking forward to it, and they were very excited after”.

The positive working relationships between teachers and specialists were the cornerstones of the project’s success. For each group, the teachers and specialists worked in similar ways in terms of regular visits and interim planning, with the teacher leading each class and the specialist assisting, adding ideas, asking questions, and offering one-to-one support to particular students. There was a sense for each group that the specialist was adding to what the teachers were already

doing well, rather than telling them how to teach their class. It also often seemed that a key part of the specialists' role was to reassure the teachers that they were doing a good job, and allowing them to break with certain conventions: Eleanor encouraged Sarah to push her students to try movements that she had previously avoided; Georgia reassured Katie and Paige that their sessions did not have to resemble the traditional structure of a ballet class. This reassurance played an important role in enhancing the teachers' confidence and mirrors recent research into experienced dance artists working in inclusive settings, who reported that self-confidence came from experience, reflection and a willingness to continue learning.¹⁶ Moreover, there were several examples of mutual learning between teacher and specialist; such as Maria noting the benefits of codified technique which she had previously avoided using with her students, and Eleanor observing the extremely positive but disciplined atmosphere Sarah had created.

STRATEGIES

Common strategies across the groups are now described. Although the way these were applied varied according to the needs of the individual dancers, they may offer some guiding principles for inclusive work in private studio settings. However, each specialist emphasised how work of this nature is an ongoing process. As Georgia explained: "I don't think there's ever any clear, set answer. I think sometimes you just have to see, and unfold, and play".

- **Breaking down and building up**

A focus on identifying the key essence or principle of the movement was common

to each group and provided the foundation for successful translation.^{3,4} Teachers considered long-term movement goals in order to devise appropriate preparatory work so that students could build their skills. For example, rather than have a plié in first position as the starting point, Katie's group explored using a more stable base for the students to understand the principle of a plié. In her diary Eleanor explained that eventually, the aim of translation is to give the dancers "tools to progress independently rather than having to rely on teachers", which could be a long-term goal for the groups.

- **Differentiation and understanding the individual dancer**

There was a wide range of needs, abilities, learning rates and preferences in each group, therefore allowing flexibility in exercises, and considering individualised goals, can help teachers to meet these needs. As Georgia put it, "if you're inclusive, then you work with where the dancer is at". The use of varied teaching strategies is valuable here: for example, Maria encouraged Suzie to incorporate visual, kinaesthetic and auditory cues to help the dancers access the material.

- **High expectations**

A recurrent theme in much of the literature on dance and disability, the teachers in this project also came to appreciate the importance of having higher expectations of their students.^{4,9,16,17} The fact that the young dancers in this project achieved so much in such a short period of time is testament to the fact that given high-quality training, encouragement and support, disabled young dancers are capable of progressing in multiple ways.

- **Structure**

Free-flow movement and improvisation were included in the structure of Katie and Suzie's classes to give the students a rest from physical exhaustion and mental fatigue. Georgia explained that if the students continued to respond well to the sessions, "the logical response would be to reduce some of that. Or just do a little bit at the end". Eleanor, too, would aim to incorporate some improvisation in the future so that Sarah's students could explore movement principles in a pressure-free way. The use of free-flow movement reinforces the idea of balancing hard work and repetition with play, so that students remain energised, motivated and focused.⁴

OUTCOMES

Many of the positive outcomes of the project were similar across the groups. It is noteworthy that these improvements occurred within a short time period. The key improvements across the groups were:

- **Increased teacher knowledge and confidence:** teachers were given new ideas, insight, and reassurance about their practice
- **Technical improvements in student performance:** dancers improved in several areas including balance, coordination, dexterity, and performance quality
- **Increased student confidence:** students were more confident to try new exercises and push themselves; those in Katie's group also became more independent from their parents
- **Additional improvements:** increases in focus, movement retention, partner and team work were observed

- **Improvements beyond the classes:**

there were several examples of where the benefits of students' improvements (e.g. increased confidence) extended beyond their dance sessions. These included their interactions with other students and peers, their willingness to perform material, and their interest in trying different classes.

While some literature exists highlighting the benefits of dance participation for disabled people it is often focused at recreational level.^{8,17} The results of this project and recent research highlight the specific benefits of progression in dance.⁹ Students and their teachers reported a sense of pride and satisfaction in learning new material and making tangible improvements. For example, whereas Maria had previously tended to focus on creative movement, she recognised how beneficial learning codified technique was for her students in understanding when they had performed a movement correctly and being motivated to learn more. These findings are supported by mainstream psychology theory which states that individuals are more motivated, and may experience improved wellbeing, when their basic psychological needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness are met.¹⁸⁻²¹ Progression provides dancers with evidence of their competence; positive feelings generated from this are likely to encourage them to set higher challenges for themselves and work towards new goals. High levels of perceived competence may also help dancers to have positive self-perceptions more generally.

Alongside improved competence, the classes also provided opportunities for autonomy and relatedness. Dancers were often afforded autonomy through teachers

asking them questions, giving them choices about music or which exercise to perform next, and encouraging problem-solving. Finally, relatedness refers to a need for social connection with like-minded peers and significant adults. The students' relationships with their teachers and specialists were clearly important to them and provided care, motivation, and understanding, while friendships among the dancers were evident. Furthermore, in Suzie's group, the students were encouraged to forge new bonds with each other by frequently changing partners.

Taken together, the results of this research demonstrate that learning and progressing in codified dance genres have a number of positive benefits for young disabled people. This project provides evidence of the importance and value of opening pathways to disabled young dancers, to ensure that they

have equal access to opportunities where they can develop their skills and progress to further training and the profession.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEACHING ENVIRONMENT

As noted previously, the specialists' role was to enhance what the teachers were already doing well. One striking element of good practice across all teachers involved in the project was the positive and motivating environment that they created. This can be best conceptualised within theory on motivational climates. A motivational climate is the psychological atmosphere in an achievement context (in this case, a dance class) which is predominantly created by the teacher.²² Two types of climate have been established in the literature: task-involving and ego-involving, which are outlined in the table below.

Task-involving	Ego-involving
Emphasises personal progression and improvement	Emphasises social status and superiority
Promotes peer collaboration	Promotes comparison and competition among peers
Accepts mistakes as part of the learning process	Mistakes are not acceptable
Focuses on effort and hard work	Focuses on objective ability

Numerous studies indicate that task-involving motivational climates are associated with positive outcomes such as enhanced enjoyment, performance, and wellbeing; while ego-involving climates undermine wellbeing and may result in dropout.^{23,24} Moreover, creating a task-involving motivational climate helps to meet the basic needs of competence, autonomy and relatedness, which can then further increase motivation and confidence.²⁵ In this project, there were several examples of how the teachers created a task-involving climate in their studios: differentiation was often used to encourage self-referenced learning, mistakes were seen as learning opportunities, and students were encouraged to work together where appropriate. The teachers were remarkably positive, motivating and encouraging while maintaining discipline and setting high expectations.

Importantly, a task-involving climate encompasses many of the important principles of teaching in inclusive settings. The emphasis on personal goals and improvement is essential when translating movements and phrases in ways that are appropriate and effective for the individual dancer. Comparisons with other dancers in inclusive settings must be avoided, as the focus is on creating and appreciating new ways of moving that may be unique to each dancer while adhering to the key principles of the exercise.²⁶ Peer collaboration is particularly important in integrated groups, as both disabled and non-disabled young people benefit from this form of socialising.²⁷ Indeed, Eleanor commented of one of the disabled students in Sarah's group, "she adds such a wonderful element, like an energy, to the class...I think it's just a real testament to diversity being a good thing, because she

just brings such joy to the class." Making and learning from mistakes through problem-solving should form an important part of any class focused on progression, while the focus on effort and hard work is crucial, as effort is under the dancer's control. While teachers in any setting should strive to create a task-involving motivational climate, this appears particularly important in inclusive contexts focused on progression.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

The results of this project yielded many positive and applicable findings, but there are some challenges to be taken forward for future consideration. These are assessments, undisclosed disabilities, and resources.

Assessments

All of the teachers and specialists felt that at least some of their students had the potential to be assessed on the material they had learned. For example, Suzie felt that over half of her group would be ready for a medal test after just nine weeks of working together. Although Eleanor pointed out that "exams don't make a good dancer", the participants agreed that the students deserved an opportunity for their achievements and hard work to be recognised. As a parent explained: "they're part of that whole rush, of preparing for the exam. That learning, the way of standing outside the studio waiting to hear the bell to go in, and then doing your work, and then coming out...you're either happy or sad, but you think you're done with your goal. And then you get your certificate." Her daughter mirrored this, saying, "I've never actually done a proper exam, it would be nice to actually be able to do one." Previous research has outlined how assessments

and qualifications can provide evidence of abilities which may be required in order to access further training and opportunities.² Moreover, given the importance of competence in relation to progression in dance, passing an assessment may represent an important source of competence information for young disabled people in relation to both themselves and their non-disabled peers.

However, as Paige noted, “it just has to be done the right way”. Georgia felt the exam would need to happen “in a room that is inclusive...with an examiner that understands disability and is flexible and open to seeing them where they’re at and how they’re approaching it, and can be friendly and open”. Suzie agreed that examiners would need to be open and the environment appropriate, and specifically for Latin and Ballroom believed that more medal tests or awards may be needed between the social dance test and bronze medal test. She also felt that the criteria were too focused on the feet which would be a barrier to wheelchair users for example. These comments led to broader discussions around where the responsibility lies for making decisions about which translations are acceptable. Given how fundamental exams are to the ISTD structure, the accessibility of its assessments requires both consideration and action in future.

Undisclosed disabilities

The challenge of meeting a wide range of needs in a classroom can be exacerbated when parents do not fully disclose information about their children. Gleaning information about students’ needs from parents can be difficult at times, as some parents may

be reluctant to volunteer information that may result in their child being treated differently. However, by choosing not to disclose disabilities, parents may inadvertently hinder their child’s progress as teachers will not be able to fully understand the needs of the dancer. A standardised form could be created that is given to parents of all new starters to prevent parents of disabled children from feeling that they are being ‘singled out’.

Resources

The use of various resources was striking in Suzie and Maria’s classes, ranging from visuals projected onto a screen to coloured beanbags. Maria emphasised the importance of using different resources and cues to help students with different learning styles to access the material. Although projectors and screens may not be practical or available for private studio teachers, small, low-cost materials like beanbags, scarves and newspapers could be used for similar purposes.

Another resource implication is that of teaching assistants. Except for Sarah’s group, there were often teaching assistants and volunteers who worked one-to-one with the dancers or provided additional support to the lead teachers. This may be particularly important when working with students with learning and behavioural difficulties. Paying for assistants may not be viable for private studios, but example alternatives include recruiting volunteers, approaching colleges and universities to explore internship opportunities, and training older students to assist in classes.

CONCLUSION

For many young people, their first introduction to dance is in private studio contexts. These contexts are a key means of improving access to progression in dance for young disabled people to help bridge the gap between recreational classes and the profession. There are challenges to this work, so teachers require commitment, patience and support in order to implement the specific strategies outlined in this report. There is clear value in doing so: the results of this project suggest that opening pathways to dance is important in addressing barriers to training and the profession, and can provide multiple benefits including technical progression, improved confidence, focus and independence. The working model adopted in this project, whereby an inclusive dance specialist worked closely with a teacher, was successful in enhancing the teachers' skills, knowledge and confidence, while also allowing for mutual learning by the specialist.

As awareness of the benefits of progression in dance become better understood, the ISTD can play a key role in provision of opportunities for young disabled people. By opening the pathways to dance, the industry will only benefit from the talents, creativity and passion that young disabled people can bring.

“The results of this project suggest that opening pathways to dance is important in addressing barriers to training and the profession, and can provide multiple benefits including technical progression, improved confidence, focus and independence.”

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ACCESSING PATHWAYS TO TRAINING FOR YOUNG DISABLED DANCERS

Research Report

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