



The Intersection of Arts Education and Special Education:

Exemplary Programs and Approaches

**Dance Partners:
A Model of Inclusive Arts Education for
Children and Teens with Different Abilities**

JENNY SEHAM

The Kennedy Center



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Dance Partners: A Model of Inclusive Arts Education for Children and Teens with Different Abilities

JENNY SEHAM

Let us think of education as the means of developing our greatest abilities, because in each of us there is a private hope and dream which, fulfilled, can be translated into benefit for everyone and greater strength for our nation.

John F. Kennedy

You would be amazed at what the kids around here do. I would describe that as 'incredible.'
Carolyn H., 12 year-old dance student with visual impairment

The “kids around here” to whom Carolyn H. refers, are 6-19 year-old students at her school who are blind or with visual impairments. Many have neurological impairments and mobility limitations, several are on the autism spectrum and some are gifted and talented.

The “incredible” thing they do is dance. They are highly proficient, passionately committed to the art, focused in the classroom and joyful in their performance. Despite their capacity to participate, a lack of appropriate and accessible arts programming for children with disabilities previously excluded most of these students from any kind of dance activity or education. They are dancing now through a partnership between National Dance Institute (NDI) and the Lighthouse International Music School in New York City.

This paper describes current partnerships between National Dance Institute (NDI) and three different school settings in New York City as a context for presenting strategies to develop and teach successful inclusion dance education programming in your community. The three settings include students with a wide range of special needs.

There are excellent arts organizations and schools across the country that can exponentially benefit from forming relationships based on mutually held educational goals. Among these goals is the teaching of skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and innovation, and facilitating creativity, increasingly considered necessary to prepare students for success in the 21st century and already imbedded in standards based arts education

(Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010).

The Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 protects the rights of children with disabilities to receive education that will prepare them “for further education, employment and independent living.” (Federal Individuals with Disabilities Act, 2004 p.5). It further states, “special education and related services should be designed to meet the unique learning needs of eligible children with disabilities, preschool through age 21.” (p. 5). Accommodating diverse abilities should not lessen educational experiences for any student, yet schools and teachers frequently do not have the support, staffing, experience, or training necessary to adequately teach each student at his or her maximum learning capacity (President’s Committee on the Arts and Humanities, 2011).

Partnerships and partner learning is the cornerstone for the construct of dance education presented here that is designed to teach excellence, support the arts educator or teaching artist, and enable all students, regardless of ability, to actively participate at their highest levels. To engage students in partner learning in an arts education classroom, the first partnership to establish is one between the school and the arts organization, teaching artist, or dance teacher.

Finding a Community Arts Partner

Anyone in the community can initiate outreach to arts organizations. The brief History of Programming for the three schools described later in this paper credits a principal, a physical therapist, and a parent group as distinct initiators at each location.

Research the arts programs in your community. Although expertise in teaching dance to special populations is increasing, organizations that specialize in arts education for children with disabilities are still rare. Do not rule out an organization that does not advertise expertise. They may be in the process of integrating special needs training for their teachers, or have access to teaching artists who have independently gained experience and training appropriate for teaching your student population. Search outside of your community, if necessary, and look to organizations that provide residency teaching and teacher training.

Exemplary Arts partner: National Dance Institute (NDI)

Founded 36 years ago, NDI currently serves close to 6,000 children in grades K-12 in 36 partner schools in the NYC metro area. The in-school program model encompasses every child in the grades served, including English language learners and children with special

needs. Staffing consists of a master teaching artist/choreographer, musician/composer, and an assistant teacher. In the public schools where most of NDI's programming occurs, twenty per cent of participating students have developmental or cognitive challenges that include wide-ranging autism spectrum disorders.

Since its very first class, in 1976, NDI has been developing and refining methodology to teach dance to children with different learning abilities. The unwavering expectation for each student is to participate at his or her highest possible level of effort and execution. The teacher models confidence, determination, and passionate commitment to the art of dancing, as much as he or she might model a specific step or body posture.

NDI dance teachers are professional artists. They come from different disciplines including contemporary, ballet, theater arts, and ballroom dance. The first common denominator among the teaching artists is a dedication in teaching and facilitating creativity and technique, with the same rigor and performance standards that define each individual as an artist. The second is a belief in their students' abilities to succeed.

During the 2002-2003 school year, Dr. Rob Horowitz, Associate Director of the Center for Arts Education Research at Teacher's College, Columbia University, conducted an external evaluation of NDI's in-school program. Horowitz' multi-method research design involved both quantitative and qualitative data collection through observation of classes and performances in three schools, structured and unstructured interviews with teaching artists, assistants, musicians, classroom teachers, in-school coordinators, and principals, and surveys of participants. The evaluation demonstrated student gains in various domains with 88% of teachers reporting that the program helped students work creatively, stay focused, and concentrate on difficult tasks, and 91% reporting that students showed self-discipline and perseverance in NDI dance classes (Horowitz, 2003, p. 2). In addition, Horowitz demonstrated a positive impact of the program on classroom teachers and school climate. His report on student learning includes the following assessment:

NDI engaged students in higher order thinking skills tied to cognitive, affective and kinesthetic domains of learning. Students learned complex dance patterns and sequences and then learned to re-arrange or reverse the patterns. Students learned that they needed to be fully engaged, physically and cognitively, in order to participate effectively in class (Horowitz, 2003, p.1).

The pedagogy, as in all dance education, requires students to master basic movements in order to progress to more complex dance patterns and sequences. The process of physical mastery combines repetition with an engagement in problem solving, imagination, and other 'higher order thinking skills' as students are asked to do the same step or sequence in different ways: Facing the other side of the room, facing each other, doing it faster, slower, as if they were in a swamp, in a windstorm or stepping on hot coals, closing their eyes, dancing in two teams, four teams, dancing alone, competing for fastest, slowest, highest, lowest. The teacher, observing the entire class, can see which students need extra help or modifications.

Peer partner learning serves as a dynamic and integral classroom component, especially where learning abilities vary widely. Guided by the lead and assistant teachers, partners learn together and confront and negotiate physical, cognitive, and emotional challenges.

Exemplary School Partners: Current Programs and History of Programming

To illustrate successful teaching strategies with a wide range of students with special needs, examples are drawn from experiences at three NDI partner schools in New York City. These examples serve to represent specific student disabilities and learning needs. Each class receives one weekly dance period throughout the academic year. Classes are generally 45 to 55 minutes long, depending on each school's class period scheduling. The following is a brief description of the current programming and history at each of the three sites:

1. Public Elementary School, PS 199

Current Program: Fourth grade special education students with severe physical, cognitive, and emotional disabilities partner with fourth grade general education peers. Typically learning partners volunteer to be part of a "Special Forces" inclusion dance class.

Program History: PS 199 introduced NDI programming to their general education curriculum in 1998. A physical therapist working in special education at PS 199 approached NDI founder, Jacques d'Amboise, proposing a class for her students, many of whom were wheelchair users. Programming was developed with multiple consultants and collaborators including dance teachers, special education teachers, a physical therapist, and a professional wheelchair-using dancer. After one year of teaching in a self-contained, special education classroom, the "Special Forces" model was launched with general education students dancing and learning together with their differently-

abled partners.

2. International Lighthouse Music School

Current Program: Students ages 6-19, who are blind, visually impaired, or losing their eyesight, partner with sighted students ages 14-19. Some of the visually impaired students are on the autism spectrum, others have mobility limitations, and others have neurological impairments. There are two classes organized primarily by ages, 6-11 and 12-19. Some exceptions are made collaboratively between the dance teacher and the music school to accommodate scheduling, ability, and special needs. Typically learning partners include graduates from NDI's advanced programming, Lighthouse teen volunteers, and other youth volunteers from affiliated dance and music programs.

Program History: NDI has a long partnership history with the International Lighthouse. Classes began in 1989 and were held weekly until 2004 when changes in state funding for the organization and restructuring at the Lighthouse made it untenable to continue the partnership. Parents of students attending the Lighthouse International Comprehensive Music Program for Young People (CMPYP), having no success in finding dance or movement education for their children, appealed to the Lighthouse to include dance classes in the music education curriculum. The CMPYP Executive Director reached out to NDI, a new Lighthouse partnership was formed, and programming began again in the fall of 2008.

3. Public Elementary School, PS 347

Current Program: PS 347 is the only public elementary school in New York City offering curriculum in American Sign Language (ASL) and English. Seventy-three percent of the students are from homes where ASL or Spanish is the first language and 70% have parents whose primary language is ASL (PS 347, 2012). Although statistics indicate that only about nine per cent of the students are Deaf or Hard of Hearing (PS 347), administrators estimate about 90% are Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs). Since the dance program began in 2009, there have been one to five students who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing in each class. All students in the third, fourth, and fifth grades, participate in weekly dance classes and peer partnership learning is part of the dance curriculum. In addition, classroom teachers partner with Deaf students who arrive from foreign countries with neither English nor ASL language, so that students can remedially

learn and reinforce language skills while participating in dance.

Program History: The principal of PS 347 contacted NDI in December 2008. She was urgently seeking visual arts instruction for her students and found NDI's name on the New York Department of Education website. Although it was not the visual arts partnership she was seeking, after learning that NDI had previous experience teaching dance to Deaf students, this administrator decided to add dance to her plan to infuse arts education into the school curriculum. She found a visual arts partner elsewhere, and initiated NDI programming with a half-year residency in the spring of 2009. NDI's programming was expanded to the full year model in September 2009.

Whole Child Education and Arts Integration

The mission statements of all participating partners described here reflect principles of whole child education compatible with the goals of maximizing the potential of each child through peer partnership learning and performing arts experience. Following is a mission statement from another NDI partner school that recently adopted a "Special Forces" model to serve the needs of their students with disabilities:

The mission of the Yung Wing School (PS 124) is to enable students to achieve their full potential as productive, caring, informed human beings by providing them with a rigorous, comprehensive education suited to their unique needs and abilities. To achieve this, we provide programs that address the intellectual, physical, emotional and social needs of all our students. Decisions affecting our students and our school are arrived at with the fullest participation of administrators, teachers, parents and students (Yung Wing School P.S. 124).

Finding the right arts and school partnership is a giant leap towards implementing a successful inclusion dance program. The next step is preparing the school, the arts organization, and all participating partners for the rigorous commitment and abundant rewards of collaborative arts learning.

Planning and Structuring the Inclusion Dance Class

Prepare the School and Arts Partners

Begin the culture of partner learning in the planning stage and maintain those relationships throughout the teaching process. Bring as many team members to the table as possible: Classroom teachers, principals, assistant principals, occupational therapists, physical

therapists, speech therapists, paraprofessionals, parents, sign language interpreters, Braille music teachers, dance teachers, musicians, program administrators, and any other stakeholder who can contribute to a successful collaboration.

The dance teaching staff should become familiar with students' special mobility needs and the school's accommodation of those needs including wheelchair accessibility, sighted guide requirements, and any issues of concern for medically vulnerable participants. Learn from the experts, including the children themselves, about existing successful strategies to manage physical, cognitive, emotional and social challenges.

Train the Teaching Artist

Teaching artists should receive training in teaching students with disabilities. Fortunately, expertise in this area is growing. Ideally, training can be found in your community. Alternatively, look into scholarships for travel and study, on-line training, and training opportunities in other communities that address the specific disabilities and learning needs of the student population you serve. One training opportunity deserving special mention because it might otherwise be overlooked, is the Parkinson's Dance Training Institute affiliated with the Mark Morris Dance Company, based in Brooklyn, New York, and with workshops throughout the country. Although the work is with adults, training includes hands-on experience that gives teachers an idea of how to work as professional teaching artists, require a professional standard, and teach people with significant cognitive and mobility impairments.

Go to performances by dance companies that include dancers with disabilities. If that is not possible in your area, watch taped performances or videos on-line. Dance performances by mixed-ability companies offer inspiration to the teacher for conceptualizing the infinite dance capacities of his or her student. They also demonstrate creative partnering possibilities that can be transferred to or adapted for the classroom.

Prepare the Student Partners

Prior to the first class, spend time with the typically learning students who have volunteered or are potential dance learning partners. Explain the structure of the dance program, disabilities of the participating partners, and the nature of a partner environment classroom. Although classroom teachers can identify and assign appropriate participants, the very act of making a decision to join ignites a powerful participant attitude. Ongoing programs have created environments in which it is a joyful privilege to participate. The creation of

this culture begins with the attitude of the participating arts and school partners. Graduates from these programs usually are the most enthusiastic and powerful representatives of the experience. It is useful to have peers talk to peers about what it is like to dance and learn with a differently abled partner.

If it is relevant to your student population, introduce partners to procedures for assisting wheelchair users or guiding blind and visually impaired students. All partners are clearly taught before the first class that this may be a different way of learning and that the focus is teamwork and partnership. Encourage them to ask their partner what he or she needs or how they can help. Some students find this easy to do, for others the teacher will need to model asking a child what they can do to assist. Encourage partners to bring questions, concerns, or ideas to the teacher and let them know that there will be time for discussion during or before and after classes. Orienting participants is important so that when the partners meet they can interact, talk, choreograph together, and dance.

Peer Partner Learning in the Dance Class

Researchers Doug Fuchs, PhD and Lynn Fuchs, PhD of Vanderbilt University's Kennedy Center developed a system of peer partner learning for reading and math known as Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) (Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes & Simmons, 1997). They continue to contribute to the field of research in special education by expanding the student population ages of study and refining the empirical rigor with which they initiated their work (Fuchs, Fuchs & Burish, 2000, IES, 2012). PALS outlines strategies for reciprocal learning partnerships in which each peer partner in turn is either the teacher or the student with activities assigned by the teacher. In addition to positive outcomes on a variety of math and reading outcomes, benefits of PALS include:

- Increased opportunities for students to practice skills
- Expanded instructional resources in the classroom
- Increased access for students with disabilities to general education curriculum
- Promotion of positive and productive peer interaction
- Engagement in enjoyable activities (Institute of Education Sciences, 2012)

There is a growing interest in studying dance and what dance can teach us about learning (Grafton, 2009). Studies like the PALS research (Fuchs, Fuchs & Burish, 2000) provide evidence that support existing dance partner learning and encourage further programming and

evaluation.

The peer partner learning described in this paper occurs between same-aged students as well as mixed-age students, as in the case of some of the student partnering at the Lighthouse. In addition, reciprocal partnerships are formed between classroom teachers and dance teachers, as each supports the other's teaching and lesson plans.

At PS 347, "Ms. T," a Deaf classroom teacher, formed a dance partnership with "Henry," a Deaf third grade student, newly arrived in the United States, without language skills in either English or ASL. Henry entered the auditorium, where dance class was conducted, holding the classroom teacher's hand. He sat down in the front row of seats with the rest of his classmates but seemed scared and started to cry, curling himself into a ball and covering his face when his classroom teacher began moving away to allow the dance class to begin. She quickly sat back down next to him. The dance teacher immediately started a counting exercise, having students stomp four times with the right foot, then four times with the left. Ms. T tapped Henry's leg with one hand, following the physical movement of the other students, and showed him ASL signs with the other, repeating new words that went with the movement, "right leg, one, two, three, four, left leg, one, two, three, four." Henry watched her, watched his peers, and slowly started the class exercise. His expression changed from fear to delight as he connected the language to the movement, demonstrating understanding by signing and dancing as the sequence changed from four stomps to two stomps to one. Henry took his turn to perform the sequence by himself and received the enthusiastic applause of his peers.

The classroom teacher became a partner for this student's learning, and for the dance teacher in teaching. Unable to meaningfully communicate, Henry had been painfully isolated from the world. This shared active, dance learning experience connected him to others and to language, and Henry has been able to continue in dance class with a peer partner. Similarly, the speech teacher for a fourth grader at this school brings her student to dance class and uses the lessons to reinforce the language skills she is teaching.

Goals and Structure of the Dance Class

Goals and lesson planning. The goals of each class are to give students an increased sense of body awareness and control, and the experience of success and accomplishment. As the year progresses, the class will increasingly connect the active experience of dancing with exploration of the curricular theme. Throughout the learning process, the teacher will guide

students to relate their learning experiences to their personal stories. The teacher creates a lesson plan utilizing the following structure.

Structure of the Class

Call to class. Unify the class and set the tone with a call and response game. The teacher or musician claps, stomps, sings or otherwise beats out a rhythm and the class copies the action or sound, becoming an ensemble before class has even begun. The teacher can assess and model different abilities from this pre-class activity, stepping up to one student and doing this exercise according to the student's ability, vocalizing, for example, if students have disabilities that prevent them from clapping or stomping the rhythm.

At PS 347, with a student body that includes students who are deaf and hearing impaired, students engage in this activity from the front row of the auditorium before they take their places on stage. They use gesture and simple movement as the initial call and response. One game that third grade students enjoy is a "standing up" competition, in which they attempt to follow American Sign Language for "stand" and "sit" the fastest and be the first partner team to "win" the privilege of taking their place on stage.

Entrance. Students take their places, whether in the classroom, gym, or on the auditorium stage, to counts with a drum beat or music: "sixteen counts to get to your spot, jump on '15,' pose on '16.'" Possibilities for entrances are limitless, varying mood, music, imagery, or counts. For example, entering like a Zombie in 8 counts, entering low in 12 counts, entering as quietly as you can in 15 counts, entering like a hurricane in 11 counts. Making an entrance is a good way to set the tone and practice for performing but is not necessary for every class time or setting. At the Lighthouse, class begins in a different way. Sighted students guide their partners to place, and the teacher calls the class to attention with rhythm exercises. Entrances are practiced later in the class, after students have safely stowed canes, braillewriters, and other personal items, and have been re-oriented to the classroom space.

For all students, the entrance exercise is great for partner planning and interaction and can be used at any point in the class, especially when they are practicing choreography. Partners may be given counts and an image and asked to strategize how to move slithering like a snake, bouncing like popcorn, or marching in a Mardi Gras parade, for example, or choose their own image and number of counts.

Introductions. In the first class, use a game to introduce all of the participants to their

partners and the rest of the class. The teaching artist models patience, mutual respect and problem solving. The first problem to solve, often, is uneven number of participants or absent partners. This is an opportunity for the dance teacher to set a problem solving culture and have the participants figure out what to do, but in the initial classes, the teacher should facilitate this by putting three students together, having the assistant teacher or musician (if there is one) become a partner, or enlisting a participant observer, physical therapist, sign language interpreter, classroom teacher or other available partner, depending on the needs of the class. There are many ways to make introductions. The following are two examples:

1. **Dyads or triads to full class.** Partners get three minutes to learn each other's name, and 1-3 favorite things about the other person: favorite food, favorite music, movie. When time is up, each partner team introduces each other to the class. A nice variation of this is deciding on a movement based on the first letter of the partner's name: "This is Josie, and Josie likes to jump." Demonstrate the movement, with accommodated movement according to the partner's ability, and have the class respond: "Hi Josie" and jump.

2. **Full class circle.** With similar prompts, have each member introduce him or herself and say a favorite color, food (food is a favorite), etc. The next student repeats what the first one said, and adds on: "This is Bryan. His favorite color is blue and he likes pizza. I'm Sarah, my favorite color is purple and I like chicken noodle soup." This is a good opportunity to model accommodation of differences as well as expose ability and common interests. In a class introduction at the Lighthouse, for example, the teacher prompted students by saying the next name, when necessary, to assist those who could not rely on visual cues for recall. At the end of the exercise, a student with no vision perfectly recited the name, favorite color, and favorite music of each of the twenty participants, surprising many of the sighted partners, who had needed assistance with their recall.

Warm-up and stretching. It is important, with mixed ability classes, to establish a warm-up routine so that participants feel comfortable and utilize this time to practice challenging physical movements to the best of their abilities. Following the warm-up, and as the year progresses, all of the students are increasingly challenged with greater complexity of sequences and choreographic story. The warm-up becomes a grounding time. Partners assist partners with physical needs for balance or stretching, but this is also a time in which all students should experience a sense of independence, as each becomes familiar with the

routine and knows how he or she will express the movements. In the next section, one “first step” is described in detail to illustrate this idea.

First step. First steps in the NDI curriculum include the “front/home” sequence. The student begins in a standing position, arms at the sides of the body. He or she lifts the right knee high then places the foot on the floor a short distance in front of the body (“front”). That step is then reversed: Lift the knee high, and place the right foot back in its starting position, next to the left foot (“home”). This is then repeated with the left leg.

There are infinite ways to change this and other basic movements to accommodate different abilities. A student can move his or her wheelchair, chin, hand, or finger and still be fully engaged in learning direction, rhythm, sequencing, pattern recognition and pattern changes. He or she can move half as fast, or tap a rhythm, keeping pace with the class while expressing movement mastery in alternative ways that have been guided by the dance teacher. Essential to the learning process is that each student participates to the best of his or her ability. It is up to the teaching artist to assess and identify each student’s potentials and convey the highest expectations.

Partner work. Partner work occurs throughout the class as determined by the teacher. The teacher will initiate partner work for many reasons, generally teaching a step or a sequence to the whole class, then telling the class to work on something with their partner:

- **Partners work together to modify movement and accommodate different abilities.**
- **Partners work together so that learning can occur at different rates.** This is according to the needs of the individuals in the class.
- **Partners work together to adapt choreography within their partnership and express each partner’s ability.** One partner might have the capacity to clap or beat a simple rhythm, while the other doubles the rhythm and runs around his partner.
- **Partners work together to appreciate each other’s creativity and ability.** Dancers do mirroring exercises, with one partner taking the lead, and the other copying the movement, then switching the leader and follower.
- **Partners work together to create new choreography.** The teacher might give partners a prompt to play with known movements and change the sequence or pattern to create new movements, or play with a theme and create a dance. For example, one year’s curricular theme was the music and life of Stevie Wonder. Students at PS 199

participated in choreographing a dance about the Grammy Awards, with wheelchair using dancers and their partners arriving at the red carpet in a conga line of wheelchair stretch limos.

Across the Floor/Runs and Leaps. A signature NDI choreographic strategy, and one that can be adapted for any class, is the “runs and leaps” aka “runs and jumps” entrance. Students line up and each in his or her turn runs across the stage, executes a leap or jump center stage, runs to place, and dances in place until all students have entered and are dancing in place. Four beats (generally) are played as the signal that all are in place, and the opening dance begins.

This requires practice and becomes part of the class structure, generally closer to performance time, but sometimes earlier in the year. Students who know the routine request it frequently. Students who need assistance make the run across the stage with a partner.

While movement across the floor, or traversing from one side of the class or stage to the other, is certainly an option, it is not routinely part of the NDI general education class structure, for practical reasons of space and classroom management. Many students with mobility challenges, however, rarely have an opportunity to move freely and safely. At the Lighthouse, for example, running, galloping, and even cartwheeling and somersaulting across the floor, is an aspect of the class structure, with partners providing the safety necessary for exuberant and unencumbered movement.

Show Gratitude and Reverence. In many cultures, dancers perform a ritual demonstration of appreciation to the teacher and musician at the end of class. A “reverence,” for example, is the last routine in a ballet class in which the ballet dancers thank and acknowledge the teacher and the pianist. Reverence usually includes bows, curtsies and ports de bras (graceful arm movements) and is a way of celebrating ballet’s traditions of elegance and respect. The NDI class ends with a lively call and response “thank you and good-bye” thanking the dancers, the teachers, the musicians, the partners and other participants, for being in class and working together.

Structure of the Year

The year begins by introducing students to the building blocks of dance: How to focus on the teacher, on their partner, on the music, on their effort, how to count rhythmically, control one’s body, respond to stage directions and execute basic steps.

Equipped with fundamentals, students are challenged with increasingly difficult combinations at a variety of tempos. Students then learn how threads of choreography weave together to create a story that they perform for the entire school community and family members in a mid-year assembly and year-end performance. Each year's curricular theme imbeds the dance teaching in contexts of history, culture, science, music, art and other subjects. The 2012-2013 theme for example, is the music, history, and culture of New Orleans.

Strategies for Teaching an Inclusion Dance Class

Create Routine and Consistency

Use carefully crafted lesson plans, coupled with a daily routine. Prepare the students by introducing the lesson : "(1)Warm-up, (2) learn new choreography, (3) practice learned choreography, (4) work with your partner on story and choreography, (5) do the across-the-floor dance, and (6) say 'thank-you,'" might cover the basics for an NDI class, with specifics as to what dance sequences they will be practicing.

Use every tool available to support the class. Write the day's lesson on the board, using clear language or symbols for each activity e.g. a figure kicking his leg up for the "warm-up". Students on the autism spectrum experience a high level of stress and anxiety when something new is introduced and benefit tremendously from visual cues. Train the partner to refer to the written chart, or come up with additional symbols that will aid focus. The routine of the dance class, music, movement, and visual learning inherent to dance ultimately have a mood regulating effect, but it is best to plan for success and remove obstacles to learning at the outset. The following story exemplifies the use of routine and consistency:

"Joseph" came to his first dance class early. He was experiencing anxiety about the start of this new class and negotiated with his aide to bring him to the room. His aide knew that introducing Joseph to something new would be important to his ability to behave appropriately in class, and intended merely to show him the classroom. Joseph burst through the door, however, and ran around the room several times, before he could be stopped and led outside. This happened again the next week, but the dance teacher found an alcove next to the room, where Joseph could wait, and let him know exactly how many minutes before class began. Joseph registered this on his watch, and waited. This became Joseph's pre-class routine for several months. Eventually, on his own, Joseph established a new routine, depositing his backpack in the classroom several hours before his class, announcing "First!" (as he was

unequivocally the first to arrive), and then going about his daily schedule until dance class actually began. In the dance class, Joseph had a specific place to go and the same partner every week.

Teach partners to be mindful about absences. Brian, a dance student on the autism spectrum, informs the teacher when he will be absent, sometimes weeks in advance, with meticulous detail. He has trained his partner to do the same and has inspired other students to follow their example.

Often partners make arrangements for coverage among friends in the class who step in for each other. Their arrangements are generally thoughtful and helpful and the teacher can monitor this for appropriateness.

Be mindful of student places in class. Since dance is usually conducted in an open space, without the structure of desks and chairs, maintaining consistency of space and placement is important. Teach partners who guide their partner to places, to take responsibility for placement. Structure the open space by identifying where each student will stand when they are at their home base or starting position. Form student rows with team names and have the participants name their team using a category such as colors, foods, musical instruments, or something related to the theme, e.g.: "first row is the 'French Quarter,' second row, 'Mardi Gras,' third row 'crawfish,' and fourth row is 'the bayou.'"

Create and Nurture the Culture of Discovery and Learning: Every Participant is a Teacher

"Ana," a non-verbal dance participant with little mobility was assisted by her physical therapist, who held and manipulated each of her hands so she could clap the rhythm of the music and dance steps. The physical therapist knew her diagnosis and special needs: Cerebral palsy, spastic athetosis, dependent on others for her daily living needs, requiring familiarity and great concentration to really understand her speech. One day, the musical accompanist noticed what no one else had, that this student was dancing with her eyes, blinking the complex rhythm with perfect timing.

"Samantha," another non-verbal dance participant, presented with significant muscle rigidity, deficits in movement initiation, and significant cognitive processing delays. Her partner, Emily, worked patiently with her, reveling when Samantha finally executed a "front home" step (described earlier), in half-time with the music, while the rest of the class was doing sequences of four and eight steps in different directions. Emily often found extra time to work with

Samantha, using the hallway as their classroom. One day, Emily asked if she and Samantha could demonstrate a step they had discovered. The two held hands and galloped across the classroom, surprising all that witnessed this explosion of movement ability and delight. Galloping became a routine movement exercise for Samantha and all of her classmates.

Joseph, whose story exemplified use of routine, liked to run from place to place. His running ability and interest shaped the class and running choreography was included in weekly exercises. Joseph learned to run to counts of the music. He worked with his partner on his character for the script of the show the students performed. The year's theme was science, and students had decided that they would write about the destruction of the earth from littering and toxic waste. Joseph became an Olympic runner who ran around the world warning people to escape Earth's destruction by joining a space mission in search of another planet.

Give each student the opportunity to demonstrate. Emphasize what they can do. Create opportunities in every class to observe, listen, and appreciate effort and accomplishment. Encourage and model applause, being mindful of potential noise sensitivity of some participants.

Incorporate Therapeutic Exercises into the Class Warm-Up and Choreography

Incorporate classroom exercises and choreography that is therapeutic and addresses participant needs. Occupational therapists, physical therapists, and parents know about the therapy exercises and physical needs of the students. Consult and incorporate their knowledge and expertise to integrate stretching and massaging motions for muscle lengthening and stretching. When working with visually impaired students and their partners, include goals to improve balance, posture, spinal alignment, coordination, mobility, relaxation of tense neck and shoulder muscles, and address loss of spinal rotation and reciprocal arm swing.

These exercises serve the goals of the dance class and may also motivate children to engage more readily in strenuous exercise necessary for their physical health. In addition, physical improvements can lead to general confidence and competence overall.

Eight-year-old "Jessie," blind, in a wheelchair, with partial paralysis on her left side, is told repeatedly by the teacher to sit up straight, "like a dancer." Jessie lifts her head, stretches her torso, and giggles delightedly. Her parents had tried everything to get her to stop slumping over and improve her posture. "Now," they say, "we just tell her to go to 'dancer position.'" This is also the verbal signal that her sighted dance partner uses. Jessie engages in

an important spinal strengthening exercise without protest, shows improvement in strength and stamina, and proudly performs, sitting up straight and rhythmically moving with the rest of her dance class.

Incorporate Other Arts Activities to Highlight Student Strengths and Interests

Welcome partners from the school community to introduce, teach, or enhance your work through other art forms, such as storytelling, theater, singing, and visual arts activities. Art teachers and music teachers as well as willing and talented parents can be wonderful, collaborative teaching partners.

Hold Students Accountable

Have as high expectations for children with disabilities as you do for their typically developing peers, holding them accountable for their performance in class, with their partner, and on stage. If Ana can blink her eyes to the music and Jessie can maintain a strong postural alignment, it is the teaching artist's job to require that of them, clearly showing all participants that each must give their maximum effort. Set the bar high and give the partners the tools to achieve their goals. The expectation must be that all students, regardless of disability, engage in exceptional effort.

Share the Stage

At the final performance held at the end of the school year, one dancer with spinal bifida pops a wheelie and spins around in the opening entrance, while his typically learning partner executes a grand jeté leap across the stage. A student with visual impairment cartwheels next to his partner, while others hold hands to dance across the stage. They take their on-stage places, and begin the show. Valuable social interactions occur backstage, as friendships are fortified through the shared exhilaration of accomplishment and performance.

Reverence: Final partnership Notes and Next Steps

"Julio," a blind student with significant rigidity in his muscles and severe limitations in movement initiation and processing, was further locked away from learning and peer interaction due to a lack of English language proficiency. He had recently arrived in the United States, his family seeking services for his disabilities. His partner was determined to teach him, but made little progress in the first class. In the second class, when Julio was asked to clap the rhythm instead of doing the movement with his legs and feet, he demonstrated musical precision, and the ability to follow complex musical rhythms. Julio connected to his partner

later, as they discovered a mutual interest in singing, and Julio demonstrated a superior vocal talent. This discovery and their connection seemed the key to Julio's learning block, and he started progressing rapidly through the dance curriculum.

"David," a blind student with Asperger's syndrome, graduated from the Lighthouse dance program and is a freshman at an elite college where he wants to "shock" people by demonstrating that blind people can dance. David joined the Lighthouse class, initially as an alternative to his gym class, where his special needs were not accommodated. Already a gifted musician, David, at age 16, discovered a passion and talent for dance he had not previously known and is now looking for ways to study dance, along with his studies in neurobiology, at his college. He invited his sighted former partner, Meghan, to attend last year's senior prom with him. They enjoyed dancing together as friends at the event, but Meghan was dismayed at what she perceived as a lack of awareness of David's ability, intelligence, and special needs. Meghan enters college next year and intends to study special education with a focus on disability rights.

Researchers are finding ways to empirically study the benefits of dance participation and powerfully advocate for dance as an unassailable core subject in K-12 education (Blasing, Puttke, & Schack, 2010, Deasy, 2002, Grafton, 2009, Ruppert, 2006). We should all be prepared to deliver the education that each student deserves, insisting on standards of excellence in our teaching and for each individual according to his or her ability. To achieve and maintain this level of excellence, let us look to the creation of meaningful partnerships at the intersection of arts education and special education.

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Resources

Funding, Grants, Research and Educational Information

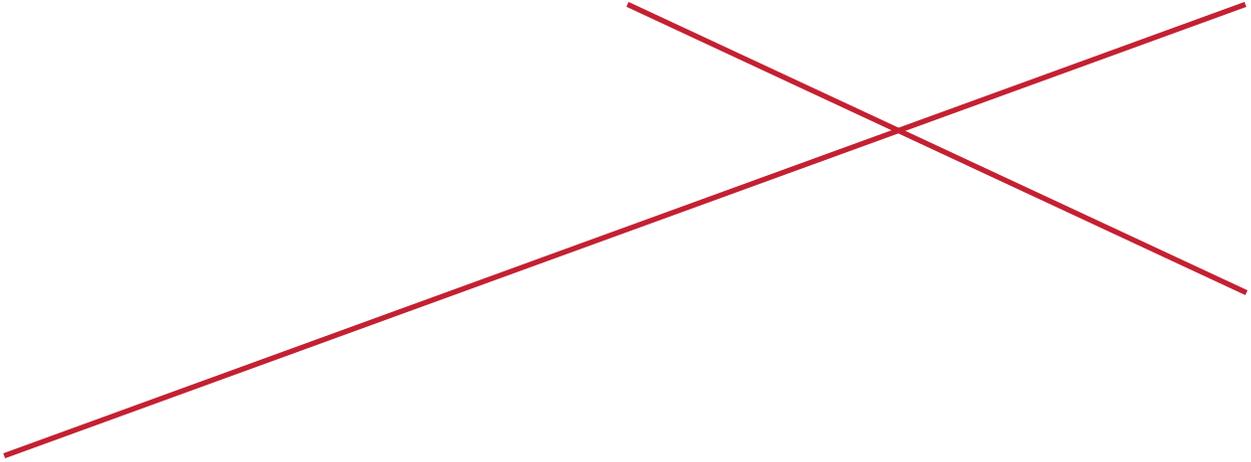
1. ArtsEdge, Kennedy Center Arts Education Network, <http://www.artsedge.kennedy-center.org>
2. American Dance Association, Division of American Alliance for Health, Physical Education and Dance, <http://www.aahperd.org>
3. Arts Education Partnership, <http://www.aep-arts.org>
3. The Dana Foundation, <http://www.dana.org/>
4. The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts – Very Special Artists (VSA), <http://www.vsa.org>
5. National Arts and Disability Center, <http://www.semel.ucla.edu>
6. National Assembly of State Arts Agencies, <http://www.nasaa-arts.org>
7. See also, website for your state’s arts council, e.g.: New York State Council on the Arts, <http://www.nysca.org>
8. National Dance Education Organization (NDEO), <http://www.ndeo.org>
9. United States Department of Education (search for “arts” or topic of interest), <http://www.ed.gov>
10. See also, individual state departments of education and search for “arts education”

Dance Companies, Performances, Classes and Teacher Training

1. Axis Dance Company, California, <http://www.axisdance.org>
2. Candoco Dance Company, London, UK, <http://www.candoco.co.uk>
3. Dancing Wheels Company and School, Ohio, <http://www.dancingwheels.org>
4. Full Radius Dance, Georgia, <http://www.fullradiusdance.org>
5. Gallaudet Dance Company, Washington, D.C.
http://www.gallaudet.edu/gallaudet_dance_company.html
6. Heidi Latsky Dance Company, New York, <http://www.heidilatskydance.net/>
7. Infinity Dance, New York, <http://www.infinitydance.com/>

Teacher Training

1. The Center for Arts Education, New York, <http://www.cae-nyc.org/>
2. Dance for PD, New York and national workshops (see website) <http://www.danceforparkinsons.org/>
3. Marquis Studios, New York , <http://www.marquisstudios.org/>
4. National Dance Institute, New York, <http://www.nationaldance.org>



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