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Dance and Disability

Can disabled people dance?



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1. Introduction: Why dance is part of human nature



Four dancers from the Independence Performance company.

Human nature, according to the wordreference online English dictionary¹, can be defined as the study of the “general psychological characteristics, feelings and behavioural traits of humankind.” Hence, for dance to be part of human nature, it should be a visible behavioural trait that can be observed in all eras, continents and civilisations. The anthropological study of dance is called ethnochoreology. This notion was first used in the institute of choreology in 1947 by Rudolf Benesh, also a pioneer in the field of ethnomusicology. These facts all lead to one conclusion: dance is part of human nature. I shall give a few examples of dance throughout continents, times and humans in several age ranges in order to clearly emphasize the above.

To begin with, dance is assumed to have always been part of mankind’s rituals. So far, we do not know of any human civilisation, culture or society where dance is not part of human life. Though one is not sure whether prehistoric humans danced, it has been the assumption of several scientists studying this fact. Moreover, the earliest documentation of dance in human culture is in the Stone Age cave paintings, but the precise beginning of dance is impossible to date, though it could be much older than that.

Dance can be observed worldwide and during all eras. To give a complete chronology of dance would not be very constructive and is out of the field of this work, so I will simply give arbitrary examples that illustrate this point. In North America, the aboriginal North American culture and

¹ <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/human%20nature>

dance was effective from the population's arrival (around 20,000 years ago) to the 19th century, and some traditional dances are still practiced by Native Americans nowadays. In Australia, old rock engravings and paintings representing humans dancing can be dated back to approximately 5,000 years ago. In Africa, dance was a major part of the Egyptian civilisation, and it can be traced back to between 3,500 and 2,700 years ago. In Asia, the earliest traces of dance were documented in an Indian book about stagecraft called the *Natya Shastra*. This book is assumed to have been written between 2,200 and 1,800 years ago. As regards more recent dances, in Europe for example, ballet became publicly known in 1489 and furthermore developed into a very important art form during the reign of King Louis XIV, "le Roi Soleil," the king who absolutely loved ballet. Finally, a more recent form of dance from South America is the Argentine tango, that can be dated back to 130 to 110 years ago. Of course, there are both many more ancient and many more recent dance forms, but this already shows the presence of dance in every continent and throughout the ages.

Dance is also accessible to people of all ages. Modern dance schools have classes for babies: initiation to dance, which is a parent-child class. Then ballet and other dance lessons can be practiced from age 3 or 4 to adulthood. There is also a recent boom of dance for elderly people, which is more and more popular. Lately, dance has also been used in therapy or for the prevention of further progress of disease, such as for patients with neurodegenerative disorders.

Now having illustrated how dance is part of human nature, independent of the culture, country, era or age of the dancer, the following question arises: Why should disabled people not be able to dance? Many factors influence the answer to this question: what is a disability; what is dance; how does society react to the concept of dance and disability? All these have to be considered and answered before deciding on whether or not disabled people can be said to dance.

2. What kinds of disabilities are there?

The notion of disability can be quite varied, but I will try to restrict it and define it in the most relevant way. According to the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary², a disability is "an illness, injury or condition that makes it difficult for someone to do the things that other people do." It is also defined by the wordreference online dictionary³ as "a physical or mental condition that limits a person's movements, senses, or activities." The most important aspect to keep in mind is that there are different types of disabilities, and that each has a different impact on the affected individual's life.

The first significant separation between the different types of disabilities is whether the disability is physical or developmental. Physical disabilities affect physical functions while developmental disabilities, as well as complex disabilities are lifelong mental and/or physical impairments, manifested prior to age 18. Within developmental disabilities, there can be another classification of emotional disabilities, as well as severe/multiple disabilities.

² <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/disability?q=disability>

³ <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/disability>

2.1 Physical disabilities

A physical disability has been defined by the world's largest wiki ⁴ as an "impairment which limits the physical function of one or more limbs or fine or gross motor ability. Other physical disabilities include impairments which limit other facets of daily living, such as respiratory disorders and epilepsy." In other words, a physical disability affects one or several physical functions of the body. The individual might not have all his limbs or have a disease which affects his/her growth at some point. One must not forget that physical disabilities also include all sensory disabilities (visual, hearing, olfactory, gustatory and somatosensory impairments, as well as balance disorders.) However, the cognitive functions of the individual are not impaired, which means that they act intellectually and emotionally just like fully abled individuals.

There are 3 types of causes attributed to physical disabilities: prenatal causes, perinatal causes and postnatal causes. Prenatal causes are acquired before the birth, during the development of the foetus. They can be due either to a disease during the pregnancy or to a genetic mutation such as the one that causes muscular dystrophy. Perinatal causes are acquired during birth, usually due to complications during the delivery. Some of the causes for these physical disabilities include prolonged lack of oxygen for the new-born, obstruction of its respiratory tract and damage to its brain by external causes during delivery (ex: misuse of forceps.) Another cause is premature birth. As the baby isn't always fully developed when delivered, it might not be able to complete its natural process of growth. The final type of cause is postnatal. They can occur at any stage of the life of the individual, and are usually due to accidents, infections or illnesses.



Neil Price and David Toole in an intense discussion during the Creative Lab.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Disability#Physical_disability

The section describing physical disabilities is shorter than the one about developmental disabilities (no appendix), as the focus of this work is on the concept of dance. A physically disabled dancer has the same cognitive functions as a fully abled individual; thus the concept of dance stays the same, though the method needs to be adapted to the disability. It is, of course, interesting to see whether and how dance has an impact on their disability, but this is common to most sports and activities. The hobby simply has to be adapted to the physical abilities of the individual. However, the aim of the hobby does not change: the aim of adapted basketball is still to score a basket. Likewise, the aim of adapted skiing is still to go down a slope on skis. This is the same principle in dance, which I will describe in the second chapter of this work.

2.2 Developmental disabilities

A developmental disability can be defined as a “lifelong disability, attributable to mental and/or physical impairments, manifested prior to age 18”⁵. In the attempt to fit all developmental disabilities into one definition, they have been defined as disabilities affecting daily functioning in 3 or more of the following areas:

- Capacity for independent living
- Economic self-sufficiency
- Learning
- Mobility
- Receptive and expressive language
- Self-care
- Self-direction

In the context of this work not all developmental disabilities can be described and analysed, thus only the most common ones will be presented. It is important to note that not only is research into these disabilities quite recent, but most of them have not yet been fully analysed and understood by scientists. This is why some of the information that follows might be true but not proven yet, a hypothesis or the latest of the research accessible to the public.

Developmental disabilities are further described in the appendix (A.1) since they are very important in this work, as most of them include in their symptoms mental retardation and/or communication impairment. These differences in cognitive functions, as well as the unusual communication process, make developmental disabilities interesting in the context of this work, as it is necessary for a dancer to have certain cognitive abilities and because dance is a way of expression and communication they may not have due to their communication impairment.

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Developmental_disability

2.3 Emotional and behavioural disabilities

An emotional and behavioural disability is a term used in the educational context. It is a condition that inhibits students' ability to focus, participate and follow lessons, and that cannot be related to any other sensory, intellectual or medical condition. In the perspective of this work, the term of emotional disability will be used in order to mark the difference between developmental disabilities and emotional disabilities. These differ from developmental disabilities, not only because they are strongly linked to the central nervous system's functioning, but also because their impact on the individual is quite different. In the context of dance, being mentally retarded or having difficulties expressing your emotions and feelings are two very different things. (See more in appendix A.2)

2.4 Severe/Multiple disabilities

Severe/multiple disabilities have been defined as "medical conditions traditionally labelled by severe or profound mental retardation, that require on-going extensive support in more than one major life activity in order to participate in integrated community settings and enjoy the quality of life available to people with fewer or no disabilities." Individuals with severe or multiple disabilities frequently have, as the condition's name emphasizes, more than mental retardation, including movement difficulties, sensory losses and behavioural problems.

There are many different combinations of disabilities and severities of the disabilities. While the severity of the symptoms differs according to the person's age, these are a few of the characteristic traits that the affected individuals may share:

- Limited speech or communication
- Difficulty in basic physical mobility
- Tendency to forget skills through disuse
- Trouble generalizing skills from one situation to another
- Need for support in the 4 major life activities (domestic, leisure, community use, vocational...)

In 40% of the cases, the cause(s) of the multiple disabilities is not identifiable. As for the known causes, they are usually prenatal biomedical factors, metabolic disorders, dysfunctions in the productions of enzymes or malformations of the brain.

3. What dance style is best adapted for each type of disability?

Before going into detail about how and why a different dance style is required depending on the profile of the dancer, one must consider an essential point of this TM: what is dance? It can be a very wide-ranging concept, but can also be very restricted and exclusive in its definition. This is why, before considering any more complex aspects of dance, I shall try to define it. I will start by trying to define it myself, using some personal experience (I am myself a dancer) and after I have given my personal definition, I will compare it to other definitions from a set of sources.



Exercise during an Independ-dance Performance company class. Second from the left is the principal dance worker Kelly McCartney.

3.1 What is dance?

The first essential aspect in dance is the fact that it is an art form. Among the many types of arts (Appendix A.3), it belongs in the category of the performing arts. The performing arts are specific in two ways. Firstly, they are presented in front of a public, though these arts can be practiced without this aim. Secondly, the human body becomes the instrument of the art, and thus has a very special value; not only is it the support used to express the art, but the human body also adapts and develops according to the art which is practiced. This means that the art has an influence on the body, and it can be observed that usually, this impact is positive and the body acquires new and prized capabilities due to the practise of the art.

To be more specific, narrowing from the performing arts to dance, there are other differences which appear. The main one I observed was the concept of motion of the body in a non-utilitarian purpose to express an artistic aim; the artistic aim is usually the expression of emotions (fear, anger, joy ...) or the expression of concepts such as beauty. However, these concepts are not restricted and can be diverse at any level. The motion of the body should also be voluntary and controlled by the dancer. Among other performing arts, dance is often accompanied by music, which is a source of inspiration in its beauty. However dance has the particularity of being inspired by rhythm, whether this rhythm comes from the music or whether it is an inner rhythm driving the desire to move. As a summary of this line of thought, my personal definition of dance is:

Dance is a performing art wherein the human body is the instrument. More specifically, the accent is put on the motion of the human body in a non-utilitarian purpose yet restrained by individual volition, and directed by an artistic aim. The aim is mainly the expression of concepts including, but not restricted to, emotional and aesthetic notions. This form of art is usually

accompanied and inspired by music, and its practice can be driven by the ambition of performing in front of an audience.

Here are some of the definitions of dance, starting with definitions from dictionaries and then quotes from choreographers:

“Dance: a series of steps and movements that match the speed and rhythm of a piece of music.” Wordreference online dictionary ⁶

“Dance: an art form that generally refers to movement of the body, usually rhythmic and to music, used as a form of expression, social interaction or presented in a spiritual or performance setting... It can be regarded as a form of nonverbal communication between humans.” Wikipedia ⁷

While the first definition is short and not very clear, the second opens a new trail of thought. What is missing, or at least not emphasized in my definition, is the social aspect of dance. It should be made clear that dance can be performed alone as in a solo, but that it is usually practiced in a group. Through a shared practice of dance, one learns and applies social skills which are fundamental, such as the respect of the other’s body and mind. The notion of dance being a nonverbal form of communication is also very important in the context of this work. Dance could become a way of connecting for a person with speech or communication impairments. Some of these ideas are further developed, or seen in a more metaphorical way, by some important choreographers of the 20th century:

“Dance is the hidden language of the soul.” Martha Graham ⁸

“Il y avait le sport, il y avait le cinéma. Il y avait le corps et le rêve : la danse allait proposer des performances sportives, mais en associant le mouvement physique, la performance, à une émotivité. Et en donnant des choses à voir. Des images.” Maurice Béjart ⁹

„Tanz weckt Erinnerungen, Gefühle, Hoffnungen. Das verbindet uns alle.“ Pina Bausch ¹⁰

(In the appendix A.8, all interviews answer to the question: *“What is your definition of dance and of a dancer?”* These answers are an interesting follow up of this chapter.)

3.2 Integrated dance

Now that the general concept of dance has been defined for the purpose of this work, one should more specifically consider: what is integrated dance? It is, for now, a field of dance which by definition was separated from the other dance styles. It is specific in its approach, but attempts not to restrict anyone from its classes, regardless of their abilities. Its aim is to “create opportunities for people with diverse abilities to enjoy, express and fulfil their potential through dance”, quoted here

⁶ <http://www.wordreference.com/definition/dance>

⁷ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dance>

⁸ http://womenshistory.about.com/cs/quotes/a/qu_graham_m.htm

⁹ http://www.dicocitations.com/auteur/786/Maurice_Bejart.php

¹⁰ <http://www.barmen2008.de/index.php/home/item/127-bausch>

as an example is the integrated dance company Indepen-dance¹¹. Integrated dance can be separated into different forms, such as adapted ballet and contemporary, or creative movement and improvisation. However, one must first very clearly define what it is not.

Integrated dance should be clearly differentiated from physiotherapy and dance therapy. While the latter use art as a tool, their goal is clearly therapeutic. On the contrary, integrated dance is all about the art, and it just happens to have some great therapeutic side effects. Through the discovery of dance as an art, the individual involuntarily improves many body and mind functions. It seems very important to underline this difference, as for many disabled individuals, therapy and medicine are part of their daily tasks, while dance, and more generally art, suddenly seems like the one thing they do just because they like it, and for no other reason at all. Art becomes a synonym of freedom, and this is one of the arguments to explain what makes art and dance so special and important.



Youth Company class on Wednesday evenings.

As an attempt to better explain integrated dance, I will share my own experience. On my first day as an official intern at Indepen-dance, I was shocked and surprised by many things. The experience was so strong, so emotional. I am not sure in which order to write them. I shall try to retell it, as I believe it will be helpful for the better understanding of the continuation of this work.

When I walked into my first dance class at Indepen-dance, I felt nervous, uneasy. I somehow wasn't yet sure what I was doing in Scotland, much less working with disabled people, with whom I'd never had contact before. The dance worker welcomed me, but somehow it was all very confusing, not quite all right in my head yet. My mind kept on wondering what would happen next I did not have the answer to it; simply, I was scared by this new experience.

Then, one by one, the dancers arrived. They came in by groups, a few at a time, making themselves comfortable in the room and somehow making me more comfortable as well. As soon as

¹¹ <http://indepn-dance.org.uk/>

they noticed me, they came by to say hi, asked who I was, and if I was going to dance with them. It was all about smiles and greetings, and soon I was not worried anymore. The classroom was filled with laughter, dancers chatting and warming up. The atmosphere was reassuring, soothing me; I was slipping into this new world so easily I had not realised it yet.

Then, the class started. Indepen-dance classes always start the same way. All the dancers get into a circle, clap their hands and rub them together to warm them up. This class, my very first Indepen-dance class, started that way and continued very fluidly. Before I knew it, it was time to cool down. We had been dancing for an hour. The rest of the day went by quickly; meeting so many new people at once, and then having to find my way back by train. When I got home to my new host family, I sat down and wondered about all that had taken place. I couldn't say when or how exactly, but at some point, I felt so comfortable and already so integrated I thought I had been there for a considerable period of time, even though this, was my very first day.



Aaron, Linda and Bill doing a floor exercise (Indepen-dance Performance company.)

That night, letting my mind wander, I came to realize many things. The realisation which shocked me the most was that I admired the Indepen-dance dancers for something I did not really want to admit: their dance, or their way of expressing dance, was different, and it was so powerful, emotional, simple and true. It was a dance that came from the soul, the purest soul one could find, and it was expressed in such a beautiful way. It made me question everything that I had learned previously. I hated using the word different, as if there were a normal, and an abnormal or an out-of-the-norm. However, the more I wrote, the more I realized Indepen-dance dancers were different, not for their disabilities, but for their form of dance.

Their creativity, their lack of inhibition when it came to improvisation and sharing ideas seemed so courageous and so new to me. I had never seen this before. The dance worker would just suggest a

general idea, and all the dancers would develop it in their mind, and mould the idea into motion with their body. Somehow, although they all had different abilities, they shared a common enthusiasm which was contagious. I did not see their disabilities; I did not feel any distance separating me from them. All that I saw were dancers, great dancers, and I just felt the urge to dance with them. This is when I came to wonder, who can truly do this, give their passion and their feelings so freely, and dance in such a generous way? If I picked anyone in my dance classes in Geneva, could this person dance this way? Who could and would show his emotions like this, when such exposure in society makes us so vulnerable? I wondered, what gives them and not us this strength to believe in what they do? Is it maybe because they see life differently? Do they just try harder, harder than we ever needed to? All these questions truly showed me that there was a difference; they were different, but they fascinated me, their dance captivated me, and I wanted to be a part of it.

Integrated dance is different to mainstream dance in several ways, but its similarities should not be forgotten. The principle is the same, and my definition of dance is general and at the same time covers the field of integrated dance. Not all definitions do, but some include it naturally. To me, it is truly part of the art of dance, as its principles are the same - motion of the human body and expression - and it is definitely directed by an artistic aim. There are specific people who are the targets of this type of dance, but it is inclusive, for the non-disabled are widely encouraged to participate. Their presence is very important because this art promotes integration, as can be observed in its name, and rejects the ideas of separation or exclusion of the non-disabled, as well as from art.

Interestingly, I came to notice that there is a differentiation in this art which established itself naturally and that there was no urge to change this: physically disabled and mentally disabled people do not usually dance together. My hypothesis on this observation is based on two arguments: firstly, the techniques used are different, as they are usually better adapted to a specific type of disability (as will be seen later in this chapter), so mixing the two can seem odd. Secondly, (and this is an argument based more on psychological aspects rather than technical aspects,) is the fact that physically disabled people don't want the public to think that they have a mental disability as well. It is, I think, important to some of them to highlight that their disability does not impair their cognitive functions and that they have the same intellectual capacities average people have, perhaps sometimes even greater capacities.

Using the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary's definition¹², to integrate is to "to become or make somebody become accepted as a member of a social group, especially when they come from a different culture." This enhances the idea that integrated dance has an artistic aim and a social aim: the better integration of disabled people into our society.

3.3 Adapted dance styles

Adapted dance styles are the usual types of dance, such as ballet, jazz or contemporary, that are modified to better suit the disabled person. It is mostly practised by physically disabled people, who can fully understand and work out the principles of the dance style. This means that they apply

¹² <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/british/integrate?q=integrate>

very clear and defined movements to their bodies, and follow sets of exercises and choreographed routines given by a teacher or choreographer. The classes are organised like “normal” dance classes, follow the same rules and the only difference is in the ability of the dancers to do specific moves.

Specific moves mean that dancers can apply the given set of movement to their body in the way required by the choreographer. However, due to their abilities and disabilities, certain types of movements can be impossible or very difficult to realise. These movements are then adapted to each person specifically. A person in a wheelchair might lean or stretch instead of jumping, a one-armed person might have to change the movement for better suited equilibrium. All these are “minor” changes, in the sense that the choreographic intention will be adapted to their physical capabilities, but then the revised movement will be fully understood and applied by the dancer.

Adapted dance can initially appear to be a reduction of the dance styles in order to adapt it to the dancers, but this is, I believe, a wrong impression. Each dancer, disabled or non-disabled, is different and can be special, for they externalise feelings that are within them when they are dancing. What makes the difference between a good dancer and a great dancer is the capacity to communicate emotion instead of only doing the steps. The steps, given by the choreographer, are the trigger to the dancer’s expression, and allow him to fully convey his message. Coming back to the situation where the dancer has a physical disability, if he is talented, then his disability will not alter his gift for dance. On the contrary, his disability will be a part of his talent, of what makes him unique as a dancer. His capacities are different, but that does not mean that they are reduced, as they may be replaced by other qualities and capabilities that a non-disabled dancer could not have.



Stretching and balance exercise and its different interpretations.

Furthermore, the use of a crutch, a wheelchair or any other object makes it more than a set piece or an item added for choreographic purposes. It is specific to the dancer, he knows its use better than anyone else, and this gives the dancer a personal touch in his dancing that one cannot remove or artificially add. It is his entirely and that can empower his dance even more. This functions the same way for a dancer whose body is built differently from ours. There will be movements he

cannot do, but there will be steps that only *he* can do, steps that are his and that can be a great artistic and aesthetic asset.

After some reflection on what dance is for someone who, for example, uses a wheelchair, I have come to make a few observations. The difference between walking and dancing, is the aim of the movement. We walk in order to get somewhere, while we dance – here referring to my own definition – for an artistic and thus for a non-utilitarian purpose. This difference is what creates movement which is unusual, in that it was created for the way it feels rather than what it is for, and that can be pleasant aesthetically. I believe these observations should apply for wheelchair users as well. When then go somewhere, they simply use their chair to get there. While when they dance, they explore the set of movements they can do with their chair, and create their own dance vocabulary in that way. This is one clear and strong argument, which shows that if they move, turn, glide, draw curves in the air with their wheelchair, then they are dancing. This is simple logic, which applies to all disabled people who have mobility impairment. If they move with a non-utilitarian purpose, and rather with an artistic aim, then they are dancing.

3.4 Creative movement and improvisation



Indepen-dance Performance company's warm up.

Creative movement is a dance technique that is very well suited for people with cognitive disabilities. It is inspired by improvisation dance techniques such as contact improvisation or Body-Mind-Centering (BMC) and sets its priority on creative movement. This implies that the dance technique is very much focused on the mind. In comparison with the more usual dance styles mentioned above, the dancer uses his cognitive capacities not to imitate the choreographer's move, but to make his very own moves, using his creativity. In such a context, the teacher or choreographer gives a suggestion on how to express a feeling or an idea, and the dancers develop them, focusing their attention on their creativity and imagination, and on how to apply those mental images to their

body. The important process is not the movement anymore but how it came to life and by which means the dancer created it.

The advantage of this type of dance is that it is malleable. It starts from within each dancer, and thus is naturally adapted to his body and mind. It can be used with children, elderly people or disabled people, regardless of their type of disability. People with a *cognitive disability* understand and process information differently when given precise instructions. However, this difference becomes an advantage in the context of integrated dance. It broadens its possibilities which therefore allow even more diversity and movement to be explored. People with *emotional disabilities* gain a way of expression and learn how to express emotions, whether they feel them naturally or not. The instructions, given with some general examples, allow them to understand better the meaning of each studied emotion. They then try to process these examples, and use their creativity to find similar sensations. This research makes them question and observe emotions and feelings within their body, and they gain a much better understanding of them. Integrated dance is also a great tool of expression for people with *speech impairment*. They can feel their emotions, but they cannot always express them verbally. Through this very free technique of expression, and by observing movements and reactions from others, they understand which ways are the best to communicate their emotions. For a person with a *physical disability*, integrated dance allows them to fully explore the abilities of their bodies, without comparison to what the movement is supposed to look like on someone else's body.

This shows us not only how integrated dance can be adapted to any disability, but also how it allows disabled people to progress within their disability. Quite evidently, if someone is exploring movement in his body, paying close attention to it, and with an artistic aim, then to me they are dancing. It can seem too "interior" or subjective, but this is what I do when I dance. When taking a contemporary class, teachers scold us if we dare look at ourselves in the mirror. Not only is that because it makes us move our head in a very strange and unnatural way, but also because we are to feel the movement from within, and not try to make it look visually like the teacher's movement. The same can be applied to what I would call the strictest dance: ballet. We should correct, for example, our posture by looking in the mirror, and by listening to the teacher's corrections. Nonetheless, if one wants to be able to do it perfectly on stage, with no mirror or teacher correcting, then the movement needs to be understood, digested and incorporated into the body.

To come back to the field of integrated dance, we can recognise the same aim of moving with interior awareness. The difference is simply that every dance style focuses on different choreographic ideas: Ballet and its specific classical dance steps intended for performances in operas and famous ballets; contemporary and its set of steps, different from ballet in many ways, intended to fit best the choreographer's steps and ideas; and finally, integrated dance which mainly aims at developing the creativity of each dancer. All these are dance styles, and as seen above, integrated dance is "danceable" for disabled people.

3.5 Touchtrust

Touchtrust is a “creative movement education programme.”¹³ It is a form of dance that has derived from integrated dance, in the sense that it follows the same principles, but as it is a method launched by one company, Touchtrust (See A.2.) It has specific aspects which are easy to draw attention to, and that explain integrated dance in more detail. Firstly, this dance technique is malleable, as it is a subgroup, or specific company of integrated dance, with regards to the targeted participants: Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and dementia patients, people with complex needs and/or challenging behaviour, children and elderly people, and so on. It is quite close to being an activity that can be practised by the entire population.

Secondly, this method has an artistic aim to be fulfilled using movement, music and the senses. There are key themes used during classes, such as specific Touchtrust movement, and also use Laban’s movement analysis as a supporting structure of the lesson. Pedagogy is crucial, and sounds, music and musicians playing their instruments are also very important in the classes. More generally, all sorts of objects, materials and props can be used to promote creativity and movement as well as to motivate interaction between participants. These classes give the individual a sense of “self-satisfaction and soul happiness”¹⁴.



Indepen-dance Youth company’s warm up.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Touchtrust classes aim for a performance. Certainly, it is not like going to the “l’Opera de Paris”, but this is not the purpose of integrated dance. On the contrary, it wants to “share unique movement responses in an expressive arts and dance performance.” This means, that there is art, there is a study of movement, self-expression and art,

¹³ Touchtrust Info and Workshop Content

¹⁴ Touchtrust Info and Workshop Content

but it can seem to us, outsiders, to be on a different scale. We tend to compare their performance to performances we usually pay to go and watch but this is unfair. Firstly, the challenges confronted to create a piece cannot be seen. Secondly, we should always put the performance into perspective. What can the individual do? How does he/she usually behave and move? Only by knowing these things does it make sense. We never expect, when going to the annual performance of our children, nephews and grand-children, to see a perfect performance. However, we see progress, we see passion in their eyes, and we see that they are doing the best they can and fully enjoy it. This is what I am looking for when going to such a performance. After a few Touchtrust sessions, how could we expect anyone to dance like a ballerina? Nonetheless, we enjoy watching the performance and come out with many new thoughts, processing emotion that was communicated to us during the performance.

A child with *complex disabilities*, who cannot move his body in an extended way, and cannot communicate with his peers, is dancing when exploring the movements he can do. The movements seem small and inexpressive, but it is only because we compare them to “normal” dance steps. However, the family and the carers notice the difference right away. This child, who usually has very few tools to express himself, such as sounds, facial expressions or hypomotoric behaviour, observes and listens to the dance teacher. If the child, as a reaction to what the teacher is requesting, moves and interprets what he has understood to create his own movement, then to me he is dancing. He shows interaction, attention to what others did, and expresses his feelings through a movement which responds to the teacher’s movement.



Rehearsal of the Indepen-dance Performance company: a “newspaper-inclusive” performance.

However, one has to be extremely careful on one point. The dancer, whether he is disabled or not, should give all he can - attention, concentration and determination - to his art. When he does,

then he will make progress, without doubt, and this progress can and should be shown at a performance. The opportunity to perform is not only a reward or an encouragement for the dancer, it also is the opportunity to show to family and peers what the individual who is dancing is capable of. One thing common to all dancers is that all enjoy performing, and performing is an important aspect of dance.

We make a natural and logical separation between professional dancers, and people who practice dance as a hobby, as seen in the example of when we go to a performance. We understand the amount of time and preparation is not the same for a dance company touring the world with a piece it has prepared, and the gala of a public dance school. We acknowledge that the dance company has selected dancers who have a special talent and who are well-trained in their field of dance, while the dance school's aim is to allow everyone to participate and give the best performance possible. I believe it is strictly the same for dancers with a disability. Some do it for pleasure and freedom to dance while others are talented and dedicated to it, and can be so-called *professional* dancers.

As an example, I will explain the organisation of integrated dance classes at Independ-dance. The weekly dance classes are open to anyone who would like to participate. However, Independ-dance also has a performance company, with specifically selected dancers from the general classes who are talented and experienced. These dancers train on Wednesdays for a total of three hours, and prepare performances that will be shown in several venues, festivals and countries. To be a part of the performance companies, the dancers have to fulfil many requirements, such as being present at every single class. Therefore, the dancers of Independ-dance's performance company can be considered as, at least, a very good amateur company, if not a professional company. There also exist "real" professional integrated dance companies, such as CandoCo¹⁵ and StopGap¹⁶, which employ professional disabled dancers. As such, integrated dance is not only a community dance field, but also a dance field with its own set of professional dancers and choreographers. Integrated dance companies are struggling to advance in the professional field, and one of their aims, to have their own educational centres where they can train dancers to become professional in their field directly, will hopefully soon be available.

I strongly believe that whether the disabled individuals dance for pleasure or whether they do so with the aim of professional carriers, they all truly dance.

4. What benefits can one gain from dance?

Dance has many benefits that contribute to lead a better life. One could even say that dance leads to a better life or even a more fulfilled life. These could be called side effects as its principal aim is still artistic. These benefits can be organised into four groups: health benefits, cognitive benefits, emotional benefits and social benefits. Of course, all are linked and cannot always be easily separated, but this classification aids the explanation of the wide range of positive impacts dance can have.

¹⁵ <http://www.candoco.co.uk/>

¹⁶ <http://stopgap.uk.com/index.html>

4.1 Health benefits

Dance promotes health in many ways. Certainly, there is the physical aspect of dance. Through a wide range of movements, dance helps build and strengthen muscle, increases flexibility and stimulates cardiovascular exercise. Commonly, people argue that it is bad for health, and that it destroys the body, especially the joints. I disagree with them, as all activities should be done within the limits of the body. If we do not force the exercise and respect our body, then it can only be good for us.

Additionally, dance makes people feel fit and full of energy. This encourages people to do regular physical exercise, whether it is dance or another form of exercising their body. From a more general point of view, the object of this art being the body, we tend to pay more attention to it. By that, I mean that dancers are usually more aware of their weight and pay closer attention to their food, eat more simple, healthy and nutritive meals. This could be taken to the extreme, such as in disorders like anorexia but these occurrences are not common. In fact, I have noticed more “health freaks” in 24-hour gyms than in dance classes.

4.2 Cognitive benefits

Dance also has many cognitive benefits. The brain is constantly stimulated, through perception, information processing, memorization and application or practice of movement. To begin with, concentration is required during a dance class. One has to listen to the teacher and observe his movements to understand the instructions given. Then, one has to analyse these instructions, think of how they could be applied to one’s body safely, without any risk of injury. Furthermore, choreographed sequences of steps have to be remembered, at the same time as applying the first two tasks. Finally, the dance has to be corrected by removing any superfluous movements and making sure that all the above is respected, especially the intention and aim of the teacher or choreographer.

(A more scientific approach of the stimuli in the brain linked to the practice of dance is developed in Appendix A.5)

4.3 Emotional benefits

Dance has many of the so-called emotional benefits as well. On the one hand, dance is a way of expressing one’s emotions. It can be very helpful for those with speech impairments, as it might be their only way of expression. More generally, to have new ways of expression is always positive, and gives us a better understanding of emotions. We learn how to process emotions within our body in two ways: the ability to express an instructed emotion, as well as to the ability to set aside or emphasize our own emotions to better respect the instructions given.

Moreover, dance boosts self-confidence and self-awareness at different levels. First of all, in the context of a dance class, one usually senses satisfaction after physical achievement and exercise. The concentration required by a dance class also helps deal with stress, as focusing on the dance

class allows one to stop worrying for a while. To stop thinking about stressful things allows us to take a step back, and this usually more objective point of view enables us to get through situations without being subjected to stress. Even sore muscles the next day bring a feeling of satisfaction and accomplishment due to the physical exercise. The scientific proof of the above is that physical exercise stimulates the “secretion of endorphins lead[ing] to feelings of euphoria, modulation of appetite, release of sex hormones, and enhancement of the immune response.”¹⁷



Martha and Ruth dancing together, sharing a precious moment.

Second of all, dance helps us overcome shyness and gain self-confidence, especially when we perform in public. The success of a performance also allows people to accept themselves, to live with their body and mind just the way they are, as they have proven they can still succeed. This leads to the third and final point, that dance has an emotional impact on everyday life. The self-confidence gained during a dance class, as well as the ability to overcome stress or shyness, especially in a social context, reflect on a daily lives. Not only does confidence and awareness motivate and lead to improvement in dance, but it also improves our quality of life by creating a feeling of contentment about oneself.

¹⁷ <http://www.medicinenet.com/script/main/art.asp?articlekey=55001>

4.4 Social benefits

Dance also has a wide range of social benefits. It gives people a new approach to social interactions. The act of getting together and practicing dance as a group creates a feeling of belonging to a social circle, and allows each member of this circle to establish his role in it. This unity also leads to group dynamics, and enhances motivation as well as determination to achieve given objectives.

Dance classes are also opportunities to meet new people, to bond with them through teamwork and break social or behavioural barriers in order to make new friends. Performances add another benefit. Dancing in front of a public gives the individual who is performing an additional social status: the one of a dancer. It is linked to the emotional benefit of having a role in society. Defining one's social status can be difficult, especially for someone who has a disability, dance allows them to overcome this.

4.5 Case study

There have been many studies on the benefits of dance for patients such as those with Parkinson's disease. These studies have shown a lot of positive impact. Dance enables the training of joint mobility and muscle power. It increases strength and flexibility. Through dance steps, one learns specific movement strategies: how to walk briskly forwards and backwards or how to fall without harming oneself. Balance is exercised spontaneously and dynamically, not only one's personal balance, but also the practice of responding to environmental factors, perturbations due to lack of space, or the proximity of other dancers who need to be avoided while dancing and so forth.

A study of two groups, one taking physical exercise classes and the other the Argentine tango, had very definite results about the advantages of dance: the latter showed definite improvement in balance, gait and walking speed, as well as in cognitive capacities of the participants (A.5). All this resulted in a positive impact on their quality of life, and when questioned, approximately half of the participants wanted to continue taking Argentine tango lessons after the study, and some of the physical exercise group even wanted to join the tango lessons.

5. Is all this realistic?

All the above is rather theoretical. It is based on facts, science and logic, and I would like to breathe some life and meaning to this by illustrating what integrated dance companies really are, when and why they emerged, how they function and so on. Then, I will use my experience at Indepen-dance to exemplify the functioning of an integrated dance company, by interviewing two carers and their dancers on their experience. Finally, a few pictures selected from my photographic research on dance that were taken during Indepen-dance classes and which are spread across this work, will hopefully illustrate my point and clarify what is being said all along.

5.1 Integrated dance companies

The eight dance companies I interviewed – Indepen-dance, DanceAbility, DanceDetour, Touchdown Dance, Axis Dance Company, Karen Peterson and dancers, Full Radius Dance and Dansehabile - are integrated dance companies based in the United Kingdom, the United States and in Switzerland (Geneva). They were created between 1979 and 1996, all sharing the objective of opening a new dance field that is accessible to disabled people. Derived aims of these companies include integration, involvement, influence and outreach into the community to create public awareness. These aims can be achieved through performance.

(These interviews are found in appendix A.7.)



Jackie happily looking around during a warm up exercise.

Some points of these interviews worth emphasizing are, first of all, their unanimity to the answer: “Do you believe that anyone can dance?” All answered that they believe anyone can dance, insisting on the importance of this answer in the nature of their work. An interesting twist in the answer was brought by the company Full Radius Dance, specifying that “Anyone can dance; however, not everyone is a ‘dancer.’” This is important, as it differentiates capacity and talent. It is a sharp reminder that while all of us are able to dance and take pleasure in it, most are not and never will be professional dancers. This difference is also noticeable in the definition of a dancer according to the Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary: “person who dances or whose job is dancing”¹⁸.

The companies’ dance styles were defined as “modern”, “contemporary”, “personal/movement improvisation” or “creative dance/movement.” Herein emerges another interesting line of questions brought about by the interviews. When asked “Are the choreographies influenced by the disabilities of the dancers speaking artistically and not just technically?”, the answers were

¹⁸ <http://oald8.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/dictionary/dancer>

mixed, from “absolutely” to a plain “no” and this was due to a misinterpretation of the question. In fact, all choreographies are influenced by the dancer who performs them: whether the dancer in question is disabled or not, two aspects must be considered. Firstly, the choreography is always restricted by the abilities of the dancer’s body. An absurd example would be a choreography created to be danced for someone who can fly, when obviously no dancer can. Hence, the choreography is bound to the dancer’s abilities. Secondly, I believe that all choreographies have a higher aim than simply exploring a dancer’s abilities. This is the distinction I make between sports and art: while sports fully explore the abilities of the human body and mind, art - and more specifically dance - explores these abilities and stages them in such a way that the result is at a higher level of accomplishment. The goal is to use the dancer’s abilities in order to reach the artistic aim through choreography and means of expression.

One further issue referred to in the interviews is the public’s opinion and reaction to integrated dance. Some of the problems the companies have encountered, especially at their beginnings, were a “sympathetic” applause at the end of a performance, or critics confusing their art with social work and dance therapy. Many people also had trouble understanding that these were professional and not community dance groups. A member of staff from the AXIS Dance Company explains the evolution of public opinion about their company in a very clear manner: “I believe that public opinion evolves when the quality of the work is more than the fact that some are disabled”. This issue will be further addressed in the last chapter of this work, which endeavours to clarify, among other concerns, the issues raised by public opinion on integrated dance.

5.2 Two dancers and interviews



Ruth and Sara stretching legs at the end of a class.

For these interviews I have picked two carers and their respective dancers. The carers, Wils and Ruth, are freelance workers for Indepen-dance. They have been involved in dance and disability for several years, and are both very fond of this field of dance. Their dancers, Sara and John, are long time Indepen-dance dancers, and therefore are part of the performance company. This company, which meets every Wednesday for altogether three hours of practice, has allowed them to tour the U.K and even perform in some countries in Europe.

The interviews (in appendix A.8) are long, full of information and speak for themselves. I would however still like to emphasize one point about the changes and progress in dance and everyday life Indepen-dance brought them. I was very surprised and still wonder about how dance can make such drastic changes to one's life, as, for example, with John Hunter. When I met him and danced with him in Indepen-dance classes, he was always very nice, usually in a good mood, keen to dance and always said hello, how are you and so on. Later on, his carer, Wils, told me that John did not speak when he arrived at Indepen-dance. In the interview, Wils also explains there were some random aggressive outbursts John was subjected too. I could never have imagined him in either situation, and believe that John really changed, thanks to dance. Sara was also always charming and motivated, always enjoying dance and accomplishing more every day.

These are two fulfilled individuals who have found a passion in dance. After meeting them and many more Indepen-dance dancers, after having danced a number of times with them, and having learned so much from them, there is no way for me to say that what they do is not dance.

I remember one of the first Indepen-dance people I danced with was John, during an improvisation exercise. He was dancing across the room, and I was still shy about improvising in front of so many people that I did not know. I had never done improvisation before, and it was something that scared me. Then John was next to me, dancing, and holding out his palm for me to make contact with him. It was instinctive, there was no reflection involved: I held out my hand. And like this we danced. I had no idea what to do or not do. There was no need to. John, who did not know I had never improvised before, simply guided me through it, and then kept on dancing in the space.

Improvisation requires many skills, especially when it is practiced as a duo or a group. At the time, I already had a fair share of experience in dance: 10 years of rhythmic gymnastics, 12 years of ballet classes and many dance workshops and summer schools. However, I still felt uncomfortable with improvisation. I did not have the skills necessary to improvise freely. To my surprise, this was not the slightest problem for anyone in the room. They seemed not to mind at all the process of improvisation, of sharing their ideas in dance. Thanks to John and other dancers who came to me, I was soon included in the group, dancing with them.

This experience has changed me: my dancing, as well as my character. When I was young, I was a very shy girl. Then I started to hate being shy but had no choice. Through multiple experiences I was forced to go and speak to people and show that I had confidence in myself. I was, however, still not convinced by my self-confidence, it was a pretence that I did not believe in. As for my dance experience before leaving to Scotland, I had gained confidence throughout the years, dancing in front of the class instead of hiding at the back, but I was still scared by many things. After only two months at Indepen-dance, I had changed more than in all those years of struggle to be who I wanted to be.

When I was there, there was no reason to be shy or scared. Dance was intuitive, direct, and so was my everyday life.

This year, back in Geneva, I started a contemporary dance class where improvisation and creativity play an important role. I see all those who are scared like I was before, and who feel shy about revealing themselves in front of others. I am not that shy anymore, and it is thanks to Independance and to their dancers. I followed their example and learned from them. So yes, to me their disability is present and affects their lives, but it matters so much less than what they have taught me, how much they made me progress in dance. Dance “overcame” the status of disability. I don’t think any teacher or dancer in my dance school here in Geneva could have taught me what I have learned with them.” It is a different approach that is needed, and it was Independance that brought it to me.



John Hunter, Independance Performance company.

So my answer to this work is clear; yes, disabled people can dance. If not, how could they have taught me? How could they have given me so many new skills? And how could they have danced with me?

6. Why is dance and disability a problematic?

After reading all this, it could sound as if everything about integrated dance was clear and defined. After all these justifications and examples, one could even come to wonder why it was set as a problematic in the first place. There are many reasons for this. First of all, it is because this work is

my personal point of view. Not everyone agrees with what I have written, and probably most people will have some parts they agree with, and other parts that they refute. I was trying to put together several points of view to give an objective answer to this question. However, my extra muros in Glasgow, Scotland, spent with the company Indepen-dance, influenced my thoughts and reasoning, as well as my discovery of the company DanseHabile when I returned to Geneva. In addition to this, there are many reasons why people question the ability of disabled people to dance: some are unaware of what is going on, others believe it is only therapeutic and not artistic. Furthermore, the fact that disabled people are set aside of our society today and the discomfort some people feel with regards to contemporary arts enhance their doubts.



Dancing and improvising across the studio (Indepen-dance Performance company.)

I chose this topic for many reasons. One of them was *a priori* from my internship at Indepen-dance. I myself was not convinced of why and how disabled people danced. *A posteriori* from my internship, I had definitely decided that they could dance, and that I wanted to develop my answer in this work. Finally, the difference in the integration system between Geneva and Glasgow surprised me and shocked me so much that I wanted to make people in Geneva more aware through this TM. This can seem utopian, and I do not expect the whole population to read my work and agree with me on this matter, or to decide after reading this work to declare a revolution in order to change the current situation of disabled people in Geneva. Nonetheless, I felt that writing this TM would at least make me more aware, and that was already a small step forward.

6.1 Why isn't it widely accepted?

By this question I mean, why does dance and disability, this "innovation" of the late 80's, get such little feedback? By little, I do not mean that it is non-existent, but rather that it can seem like a big change in the field of dance, so why was the media so slow and distant with regards to it, and

why is it still this way? This field of dance is growing bigger and bigger, and is forcing its way into our society, but why does it struggle to do so? Shouldn't it be applauded and supported by all of us?

I believe that there are many reasons for this, and the first is that integrated dance is still quite recent. For the latest contemporary choreographers, it has been very difficult to enter the restricted sphere of the "greatest artists of the world," and the few who made it recently such as Pina Bausch and Maurice Béjart, died soon after. One can say that it took their entire life of dedication to dance for them to become truly world famous. So if compared to them, the founders of dance and disability such as Adam Benjamin or Alito Alessi still have a way to go but could possibly achieve it later on.

This supposition is based on the recent success of Pina Bausch. She was a pioneer of dance who, just like Adam Benjamin with disabled people, broke a taboo of dance. She believed that dance was not only for young, fit and highly trained dancers, so her company employed dancers of all ages, mostly closer to retirement age than adolescence. Her dance style was called *Tanztheater* and it shocked the public at first. Gradually, her work gained success and she is now internationally recognised as one of the "most significant choreographers of our time", according to Wim Wenders, director of the movie *Pina*. Nevertheless, there were and still are people, dancers and non-dancers, who criticize her work and say that it is not dance. This form of progress could be a possible route for integrated dance. Of course no one can tell for sure, but I believe that integrated dance should have the same odds, or maybe slightly diminished odds, as *Tanztheater*.

6.2 Why similar odds?

If the parallel between *Tanztheater* and integrated dance should be maintained, then I would say that some of the difficulties both dance forms encounter are the social status of the dancer they employ. Elderly people are set aside in our society, maybe not as much as disabled people, but there is a feeling of unease when the topic of "getting old" is mentioned. There are established clichés, such as elderly people being senile, and more generally, people tend to believe that elderly people cannot drive, use a cell phone or a computer. Some that I have the feeling I hear too often have to do with the "safety" of letting elderly people drive or their ability to use a cell phone or a computer without breaking it. Concerning dance, the image is always the old couple happily fox trotting in rhythm with the orchestra. Well, Pina Bausch decided that they could do more, and I, personally, agree with her. I find her pieces incredibly fresh and new, full of great ideas, and performed by amazing dancers. There are however people who find these pieces too abstract, or just plain bizarre, with nothing more to it.

This brings me to the second common difficulty *Tanztheater* and integrated dance encounter. People rarely have a proper objective or subjective judgment of the piece. Many will say that it is only dance therapy, which "sure, is good for them, but no point in paying for that". Others will not actually see the piece. They will take interest only in who performs the piece, and judge its quality with more pity than artistic taste. The condescending "Oh! This was great, disabled people (or elderly people) can do things, amazing..." They focus so much on who performs the piece that they forget that this piece actually has an artistic aim and that is not just about who the performers are. This incomplete observation of the performance is a very difficult matter to overcome. When getting the reviews from critics, a big part of these were influenced by this blur between performer and

performance. These are the two similarities between Tanztheater and integrated dance, with regards to the odds of the latter to obtain the success of the former.



Dancing with the white parachute, Indepen-dance Youth company.

6.3 Why diminished odds?

Even though from this point of view, it seems that Tanztheater and integrated dance have the same odds of being successful, I believe it will be even more difficult for integrated dance to really make a break into “society’s accepted contemporary art”. This is due to arguments linked to the above. On the one hand, the comparison between the isolation of elderly people in our society and the isolation of disabled people in our society is too generalised. It has to be agreed, that while elderly people are still integrated in our society on a daily basis because they are a part of the family, disabled people form a much smaller and more separate unity that is linked to a minority of families, who do not always want to expose their disabled son, cousin or nephew, in order to protect them from being judged—By “them”, I voluntarily left the doubt as to whom the pronoun refers to, not only the disabled person, but also the family can sometimes be put aside from their friends or social circle because of their disabled family member. This discrete or almost invisible social status of disabled people makes it even more difficult for integrated dance to succeed. If one is looking at a larger scale, let’s say the economically developed countries, then I still believe that however integrated disabled people are, the fact that we need to use the term integration already gives an indication of the situation, and the taboo that is associated with it. This taboo is what makes it difficult for dance and disability to break through. Following this logic, as the taboo is even more present for disabled people than elderly people, it makes it even more difficult for integrated dance to emerge.

This difficulty to emerge is bigger for the field of integrated dance than for Tanztheater due to the variety of disabilities there are. Of course, there are different “types of elderly people”, but we are familiar with them, unlike the wide range of disabilities that exist. In addition to that, physical disabilities are better accepted in society than cognitive disabilities, and motor impairment is regarded as odd, although not as odd as speech impairment. All these nuances lead to a great variety

in integrated dance. Of course, Tanztheater or contemporary dance can be very varied, but their dance vocabulary forms a unity, a style, that cannot be reached by integrated dance. The dance vocabulary of the physically disabled can be so varied depending on the disability and personality of the dancer, and to add to this the variety of the completely different vocabulary of the mentally disabled, which also varies according to their disability and personality, creates this greater variety in integrated dance. The vocabulary is so rich, dense and still widely unexplored, that I can fully understand why it could scare spectators. I believe that once this first shock has passed, one can fully enjoy this rich vocabulary, but it seems that this step is not an easy one to take. Thus, the variety of integrated dance and of its vocabulary is almost a disadvantage for its growth and expansion. To improve these odds, the solution is outreach: to educate the population for a better understanding. This is one of the aims of most integrated dance companies.



Martha dancing for herself on the floor.

6.4 The big monster: contemporary arts

My last argument as to why integrated dance is having difficulties being accepted is the big fat monster that is scaring our society: contemporary arts. This massive field of arts is characterised by the fact that it is mostly unrestricted. The interest lies in the process the artist went through to produce his piece, and the result is only important because of the approach used to create it. People do not know how to react to this form of art, which sometimes produces very bizarre results. One tends to wonder where art is going, when animals submerged in formaldehyde by the British artist Damien Hirst were sold for two hundred million dollars. There might be an artistic aim and logic behind his actions, but they are not always evident for the public. This is where the problem lies: when people do not agree with one thing, they tend to look down on everything that is linked to it. For those who dislike aspects of contemporary arts such as the previous example, they sometimes

end up saying that contemporary art is a club for crazy and lunatic artists who sell things, not art, but *things*, for millions of dollars. Of course, they differentiate the fine arts from the performing arts, nevertheless they remain sceptical.

Therein lies the problem: they are already dubitative about what they will see. They tend to confuse the distinction between performer and performance, they get overwhelmed by this distinction and worry about the “who?” and not the “what?”, and they are surprised by the contrast of this dance vocabulary compared to any known previous one. Hence, people are not sure whether disabled people can dance or whether what they do is art, and this is what I have tried to answer in this paper.

6.5 Economic considerations

A different problematic of dance and disability is of an economic nature. Paying dance teachers and carers to accompany disabled people in a dance class is extremely costly. Just as dance is not a hobby that everyone can afford, apart from the new move of community dance, the costs of dance for disabled people has to be within a limited budget. Besides those who have a personal income allowing them to pay the classes themselves, disabled people rely on government funding and donations. This requires a given budget per year and per person where priorities must be set. The matter is then to decide whether dance should be given budget priority, or whether it is a hobby that disabled people should provide for themselves. The answer varies among institutions, and many find some solutions that are helpful to the problem.

As a first example, the well organised volunteer system in Scotland is useful for getting additional assistance in classes. People who are interested in dance participate in and assist the classes, and benefit from it greatly: the interaction and the contact with disabled people has many benefits and integrated dance offers a satisfying and innovative experience for the volunteers. They also get a certificate that attests to their experience as volunteers, and this can be extremely important for young students like me, for future university and job applications.

Another economic solution for dance and disability could be imagined, based on what has been done in France with a group of theatre actors having mixed abilities. Performances, for them as well as for any other performers, are very important and rewarding. However, finding a stage for them to perform on is not easy and can be very costly. To resolve this matter, a theatre venue in France agreed to have an open night once a month when anyone, professionals or not, can perform on stage, including the disabled. This I think could be applied to dance and disability, and would help develop public acknowledgement of this art form.

7. Conclusion

To summarise the different aspects discussed in this work: dance and disability is a social problem because today's society has not yet accepted integrated dance. My answer to the question – *Can disabled people dance?* – was clear after my internship with Indepen-dance:

Dance *is* part of human nature and among humans are disabled people. In order to have a dance that can be practiced by all, disabled or not, integrated dance was created. Its method enables people with mixed abilities to dance and gives them freedom, for example, from the medical field that is sometimes omnipresent in their daily lives. However, I think one should very clearly mark the difference between people who simply enjoy dancing as a hobby and people who have a great talent and ambition to train for a high level in dance. In all fields of dance, including integrated dance, those who simply enjoy dancing as a hobby, perform for enjoyment, acknowledgement and integration for themselves and their community, such as an end-of-the-year school gala. For those with talent who train to a higher level, it is possible to join a dance company where performances are professionally organised.

Furthermore, all dancers get great benefits from dance, not only health benefits, but also cognitive, emotional and social benefits. These are of course great “side effects” of dance that are important for everyone, but maybe even more for disabled people, as they do not often get the opportunity to benefit from so many things at once.

My view is that disabled people can dance; some of them are talented in this field while others simply share the joy of dancing, and all of them benefit greatly from it. However, integrated dance is a challenging field for two main reasons: the social acceptance of such an art form and the economic question of how to fund integrated dance. The nature of the problem is at a social level that I cannot solve, though I suggested some minor solutions in the last chapter of this work which I believe should be seriously considered, including here in Geneva.



Dominic and Wils practicing somersaults.

8. Appendices

A.1 Developmental disabilities

Developmental disabilities have a wide range of causes and factors. This is a non-exhaustive list of the most common etiologic factors:

- Brain injury
- Infection before, during and after birth
- Growth or nutrition problems (prenatal, perinatal or postnatal)
- Abnormalities of chromosomes and genes
- Extreme prematurity
- Poor maternal diet and absent or minimal health care
- Drug abuse during pregnancy, including alcohol intake and smoking
- Severe physical maltreatment (child abuse)

1.2.1 Mental retardation

The definition of mental retardation is “a level of intellectual functioning (as measured by standard intelligence tests) that is well below average and a result in significant limitations in the person’s daily living skills (adaptive functioning).” In addition to this, aggression, self-injury and mood disorders can be associated to mental retardation. It is often apparent from infancy. Here is a list of the factors that can cause mental retardation: (NB: in 40% of the cases, the cause cannot be found.)

- Genetic factors: fragile X syndrome, Down syndrome...
- Prenatal illnesses: foetal alcohol syndrome, maternal infections or illnesses, or physical deforming of the central nervous system, such as Spina Bifida, frequently cause mental retardation
- Childhood illnesses and injuries, such as meningitis, encephalitis and traumatic brain injuries
- Environmental factors such as malnutrition, unhealthy living conditions, abuse, improper or inadequate medical care, as well as exposure to lead and mercury increase the risk for mental retardation

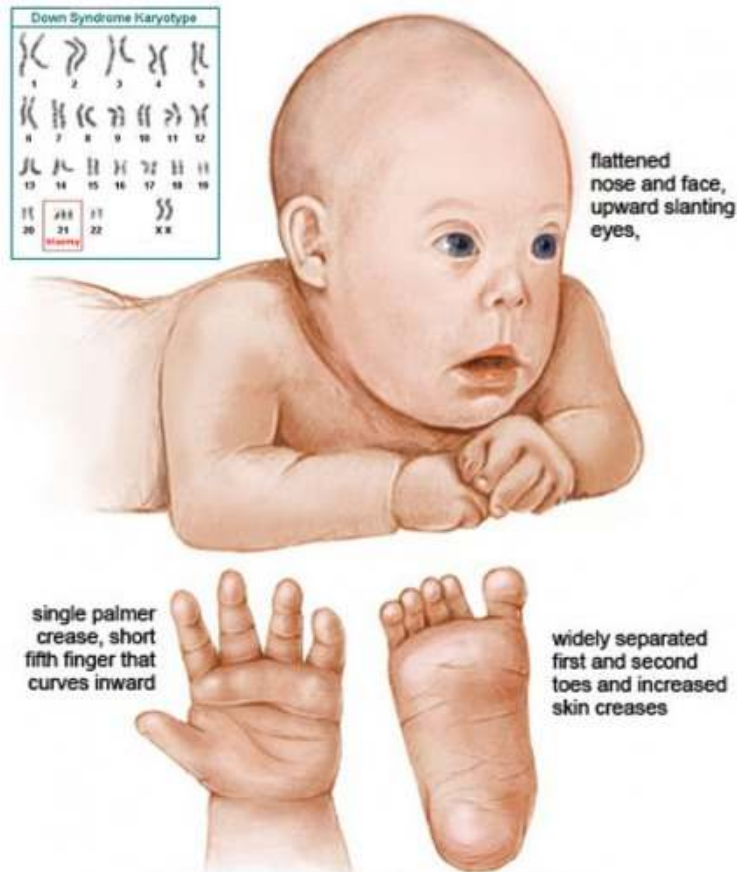
Prevalence: 10 in a 1,000 births.

1.2.2 Down syndrome (trisomy 21)

Down syndrome is “a genetic condition in which a person has 47 chromosomes instead of the usual 46”. It can be recognized by certain distinctive physical characteristics (figure n°1) and mental retardation is common, though the degree of expression is variable. Down syndrome can be associated with a number of medical conditions, including hearing deficiency, congenital heart disease, thyroid problems, obesity, atlantoaxial instability and early onset of Alzheimer’s disease.

There also exists a higher risk of leukaemia. In addition to these conditions, persons with Down syndrome may have some level of speech impairment. Down syndrome is caused by chromosomal defect (presence of three chromosomes 21 instead of two, therefore the medical name trisomy 21).

Figure n°1: The physical characteristics in Down syndrome



Prevalence: 1.4 in 1,000 births.

1.2.3 Cerebral Palsy

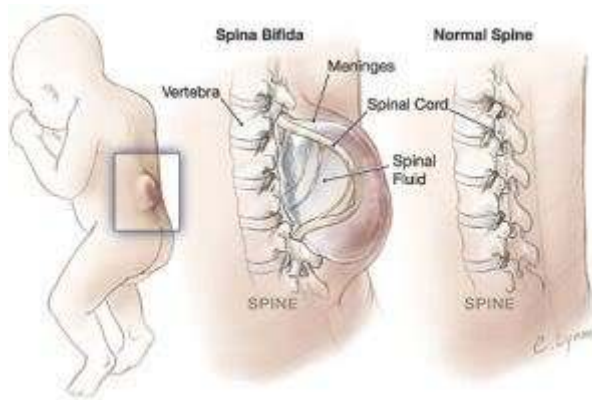
Cerebral palsy is an “umbrella term for a group of non-progressive, but often changing, motor impairment syndromes, secondary to lesions or anomalies of the brain, arising in the early stages of its development”. Hence, individuals with cerebral palsy have a motor disability that originates in the central nervous system, and might or might not have mental retardation. However, speech impairment being a quite common symptom, some individuals may have normal or above normal intelligence but may not be able to communicate it. There are two types of cerebral palsy: congenital and acquired cerebral palsy. The first one is the most common form (90% of the cases). This type of disability can be caused by inadequate blood or oxygen supply to the foetus, premature birth, birth trauma... Acquired cerebral palsy is much rarer (10% of the cases) and often appears in the first few months after birth, due to head trauma, infections such as encephalitis, meningitis, herpes simplex or cytomegalovirus. Other probable causes are exposure to toxic substances, severe malnutrition, child abuse...

Prevalence of cerebral palsy: 2 per 1,000 births.

1.2.4 Spina Bifida

Spina Bifida is a “defect in which the backbone and spinal canal do not close before birth”. This often results in: paralysis, hydroencephalitis, learning disabilities and swallowing problems. Of the four major developmental disabilities mentioned in this work, it is “the least likely to affect speech and cognition, though some degree of learning disability is fairly common). It is caused by the “failure of the spine to close completely during the first month of pregnancy”.

Figure n°2: Spina Bifida’s characteristic spine



Prevalence: 0.3 per 1,000 births.

A.2 Emotional disabilities

2.1 Autism spectrum disorder (ASD)

Autism spectrum disorder has been defined as a pervasive developmental syndrome “characterized by a distinctive group of behaviours and cognitive differences”. It is often associated with other conditions, genetic or acquired, that affect brain development. Several factors such as mental retardation and/or fragile X syndrome, influence the degree of expression of autism. This expression of autism is also strongly related to age. It is typically strongest at the age of four or five, and symptoms often improve after the child learns to “control” his environment through the development of language. Individuals with autism are very sensitive. Their sensory stimulation processing may be altered, causing hypersensitivity to touch, smell, hearing and taste. Thus their perception may be very different from any other individual.

Autism Spectrum disorders is, as can be understood from its name, a spectrum of several disorders which differ from one to another but are similar enough to be related. There are five categories of this pervasive developmental disorder:

- Autism
- Asperger's syndrome
- Rett syndrome
- Childhood disintegrative disorder
- Pervasive Developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDDNOS)

This is a non-exhaustive list of the symptoms a person with autism spectrum disorder. The quantity and significance of the symptoms vary from one form of autism to another:

- Impaired development of social skills
- Impaired development of verbal and non-verbal communication skills
- Ritualistic and perseverative behaviour
- Resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines
- Gaps in intellectual development
- Poorly developed play skills
- Pronominal reversal
- Labile mood (liable to change)
- Unusual responses to sensory experiences
- Poor motor coordination may also be present, especially in individuals diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome

Its causes are unclear, though it is suspected that it has a big diversity in its aetiology (causes), due to its complexity and spectrum of autism function. One hypothesis is that the individuals' brains demonstrate "abnormal microarchitecture and /or disturbances in the neurotransmitter metabolism. This condition has a strong genetic implication, and the risk for a child to be affected by ASD is higher if a sibling already has it.

Prevalence: 1-2 per 1,000 birth

2.2 Angelman syndrome

Angelman Syndrome is a "neuro-genetic disorder that is often misdiagnosed as cerebral palsy or autism. Characteristics of AS include; developmental delay, lack of speech, seizures, and walking and balance disorders. Individuals with Angelman Syndrome will require life-long care." It was named this way because affected individuals process all emotional stimulation into a smile or laughter, and thus, as they smile all the time, they tend to have an angelic look. The consistent symptoms (100% of the cases) are:

- Developmental delay, functionally severe
- Movement or balance disorder (can be mild)
- Behavioural uniqueness: frequent laughing, smiling, apparent happy demeanour, easily excitable personality often with uplifted hand-flapping or waving movements, and hypomotoric behaviour
- Speech impairment: non/minimal use of words, non-verbal and receptive communication skills higher than verbal ones.

Other symptoms are so-called frequent, 80% of the cases:

- Delayed and disproportionate growth in the head circumference (microcephaly by the age of 2)
- Seizures commonly onset by the age of three; their severity usually decrease with age
- Abnormal EEG, with characteristic pattern

There are also other associated symptoms, but they are less frequent (20-80%). It is interesting to know that, although there is a type of seizure associated with laughter, it is not the case for individuals with Angelman syndrome. It seems to be an “expressive motor event”, meaning that when stimulated, mentally or physically, their response will be accompanied by laughter or laughter-like facial grimacing. Interestingly, it seems that they can feel and experience a wide range of emotions, but can only express one: apparent happiness.

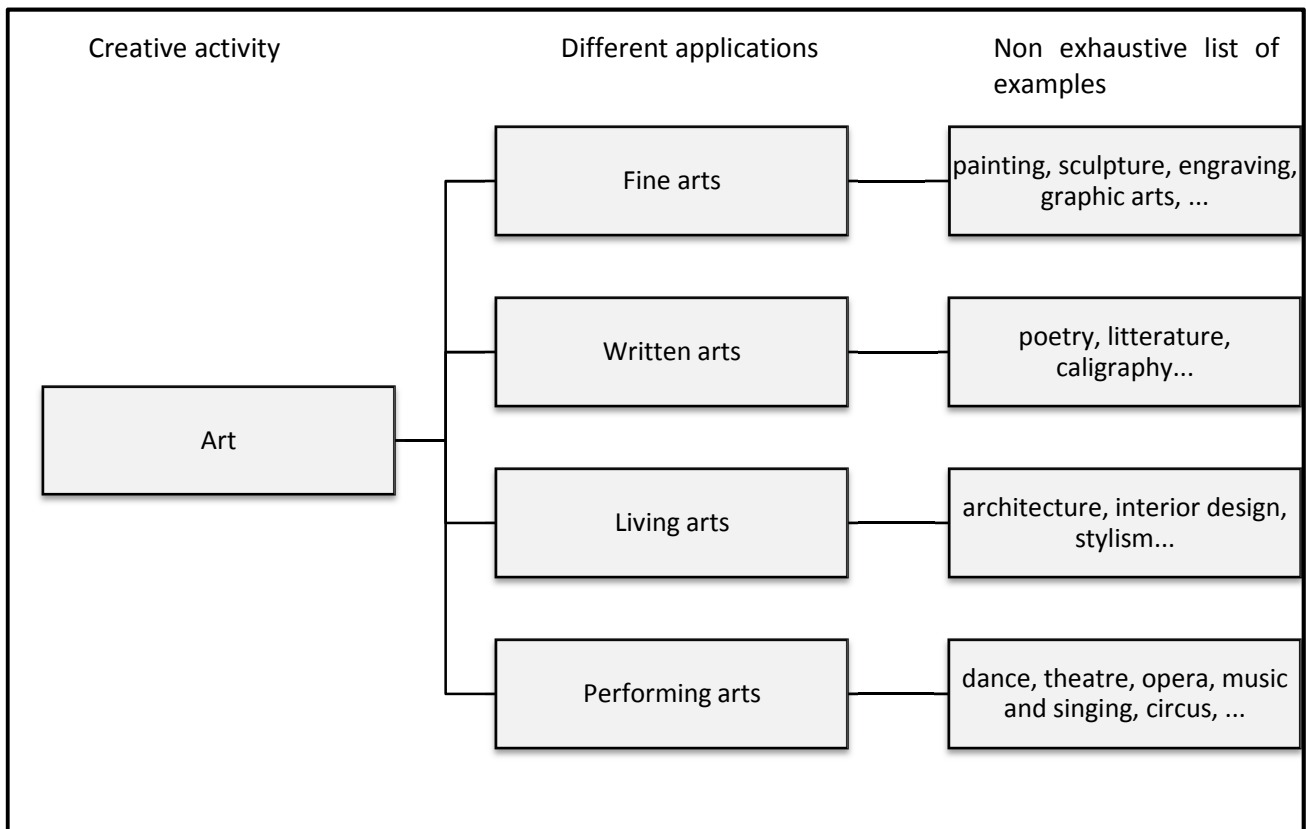
Other medical conditions that can be associated to Angelman syndrome are hyperactivity, difficulties with communication and speech, mental deficiency (depending on whether there is a chromosomal deletion or not), as well as autism and autism related traits. It was observed that chromosomal deletion positive individuals have greater symptoms than the others, as well as for those which have co-morbid autism, but that all individuals display symptoms associated to autism such as: repetitive behaviour, sensory interests, stereotypic motor movements, exhibit of compulsions and rituals and repetitive interests/playing with unusual objects.

This disease is caused by mutations in a gene on the maternally derived chromosome 15. Angelman syndrome can sometime occur due to a chromosomal deletion but it can also affect individuals with a normal karyotype, but with a disrupted or inactivated gene.

Prevalence: 0.7 per 1,000 births

A.3 Table of the arts

A simplified table of the arts



A.4 Cognitive benefits (4.2)

From a more scientific point of view, dance stimulates the activity of multiple sectors of the brain such as:

Cognition

Body orientation

Memory

Concentration

Memory -> information retrieval

Visual reception area

Elaboration of thought

Auditory reception area

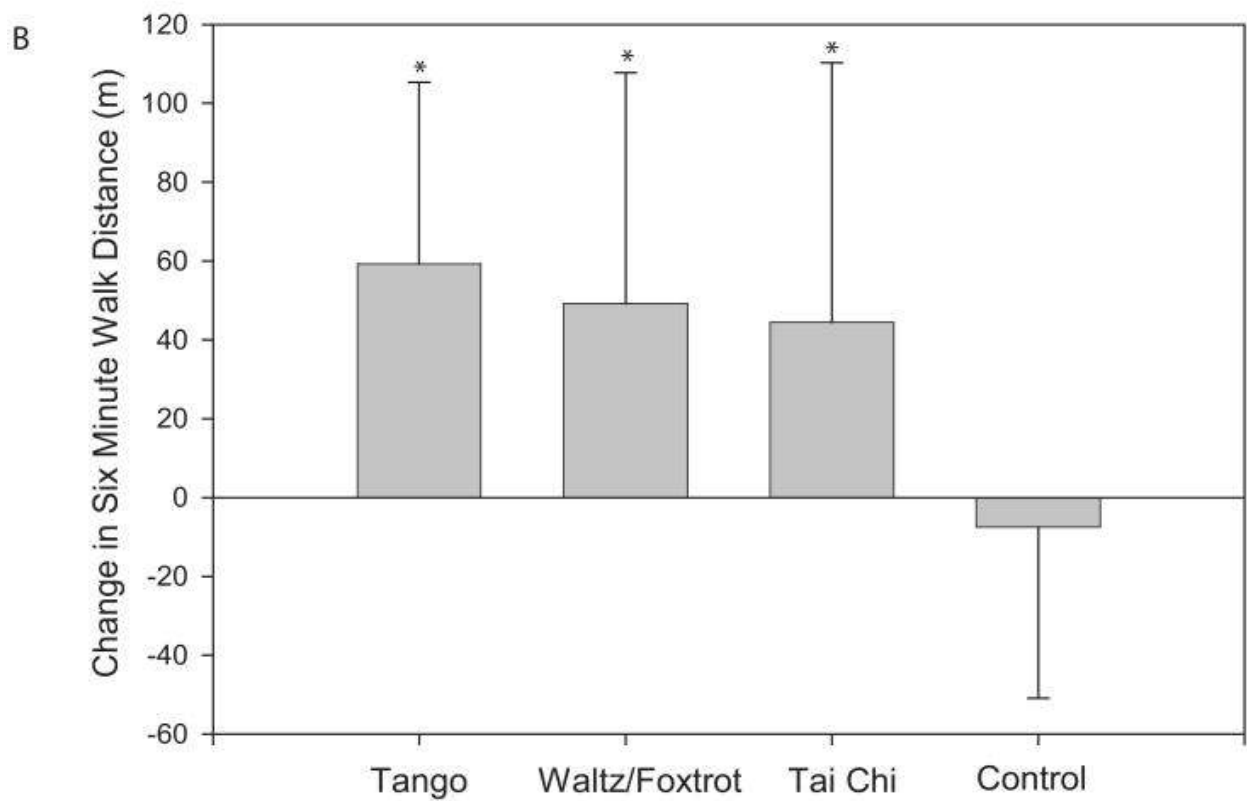
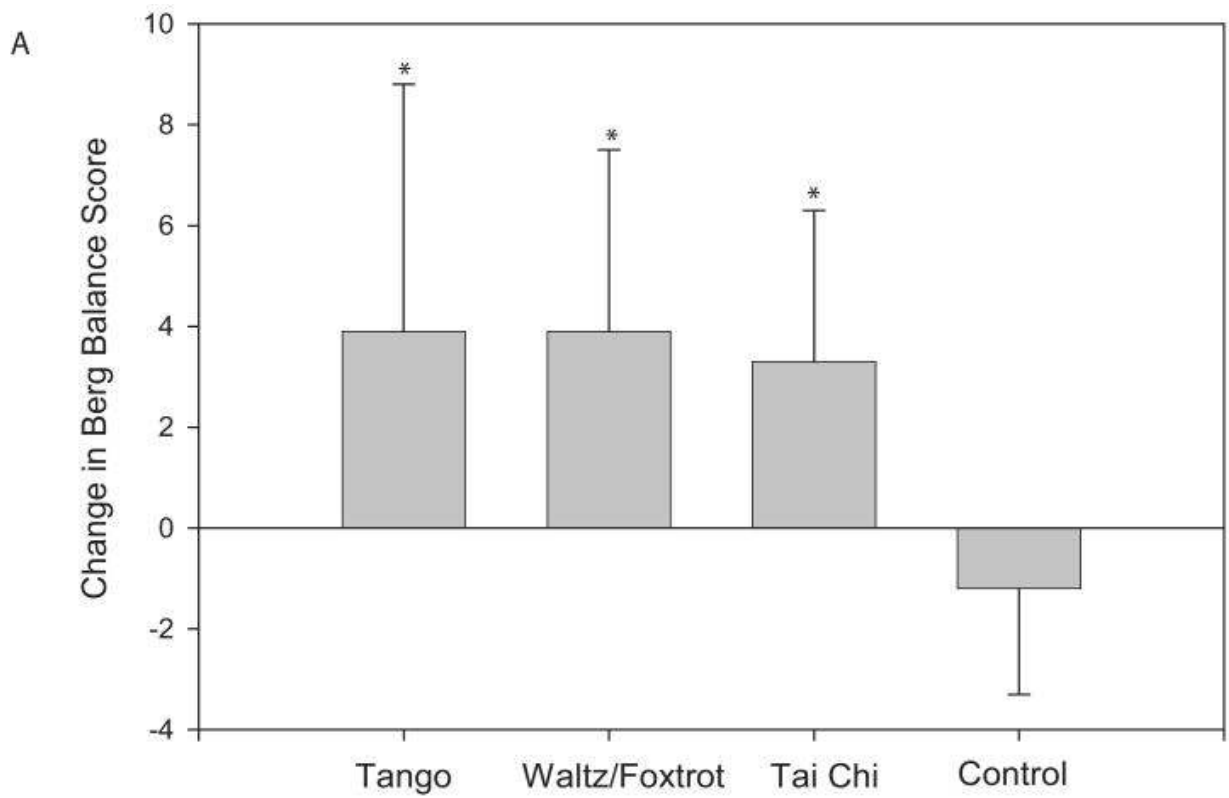
Voluntary motor activity

Balance

Processing of sensory input

Postural reflexes

A.5 Benefits of dance for PD (Parkinson's disease) patients (4.5)



“Graph showing changes in performance on the Berg Balance Scale (A) and Six Minute Walk (B) in individuals with PD who completed 20 twice weekly, one-hour sessions of tango, waltz/foxtrot, Tai Chi, or no exercise (Control). Asterisks denote significant improvements from pre- to post-intervention as determined using two-way repeated measures ANOVAs with group and time as factors. All three interventions resulted in improved balance and walking performance, with dance having larger effect sizes than Tai Chi. (Portions of these data have been presented previously in a different form 36,37, however the statistical analysis presented here that compares all four groups has not been reported elsewhere.)”

A.6 Interviews of dance companies

Interview of *Dance Ability*

What is the name of your dance company?

Joint Forces Dance Company/DanceAbility International

When was it created and by whom?

1979 by Alito Alessi and Karen Nelson

For what reason was it created? What are its aims and objectives?

Joint Forces Dance Company was created to study diverse ways of moving, to research improvisation and choreography. DanceAbility International was created to encourage the evolution of mixed-abilities dance by cultivating a common ground for creative expression for all people. The mission is accomplished through performance, educational programs, teacher training and workshops. DanceAbility also helps decrease prejudice and misconceptions about diversity in the field of dance, and by extension in society.

What is your definition of dance?

Dance is the study of movement that deepens your relationship to yourself, the community and the environment.

Do you believe that anyone can dance?

I believe all people can dance. Every impulse is an expression of the language of the body. Every person can interpret any movement and every part of the body can express all emotions.

What kind of disabilities do your dancers have?

I work with people with every kind of disability and those without disabilities. The only exclusion I have is I do not work with people who commit conscious violence to themselves or others.

How would you define the dance style of the company?

Contemporary dance

Where would you place your dance style in the field of dance? (Close and/or different to ... style(s))

It grew out of the post modern dance period

Are the choreographies artistically speaking, and not just technically, influenced by the disabilities of the dancers?

Absolutely, all movements grow out of the bodies of the dancers, we do not try to shape people to be like others but try to help them find their own natural expression.

Do these disabilities have an impact on their dancing? (Positive and/or negative)

Only positive

What reactions did you first get from the public and from the critics?

The reactions are mostly positive from general public. Critics often think it is social work or therapy unless they are a bit educated about the value of diversity in dance.

What reactions do you get now? Has the public opinion on dance and disability evolved?

The reactions now are mostly positive because we do different types of performances for different situations. Examples of the various types of performances done are demonstrations, informances, street parades, urban interventions, and high level contemporary dance performances. The public opinion has developed as they have been educated and the quality of the work has evolved.

How do you foresee the future of dance and disability?

I see the work growing internationally into a movement that has a social impact about educating people about equality for all in dance, life and art.

Interview of *Dance>Detour*

What is the name of your dance company?

DANCE>DETOUR (I named my company Dance>Detour because we are "*dancers who take an alternative route*")

When was it created and by whom?

The company was founded in 1885 by the current Artistic Director, Alana Wallace.

For what reason was it created? What are its aims and objectives?

I was inspired to create Dance>Detour because I was “wowed” when I witnessed my first physically integrated dance performance by Dancing Wheels. As a person who uses a wheelchair, I never thought the world of dance could include me or others with disabilities. My mission with dance is to enlighten people about what dance truly *IS* and *WHO* can be involved -- regardless of age, body type or range of physical ability. For me, getting a message out through dance is often times more powerful than the hour-long speeches I have given. Dance showcases our capabilities rather than our limitations. Thus, integrated dance is a great tool to get across to others positive messages about people with disabilities . . . that everybody is different and yet they can move in harmony ... and that should be a formula for how the real world ought to be.

What is your definition of dance?

Dance is an expression of your soul that is demonstrated with movement! Thus, all movement is valid – even if it is only an eyelash blink. Dance is universal and has the ability transcend our expectations.

Do you believe that anyone can dance?

YES INDEED! “Everyone Can Dance” is our company motto!

What kind of disabilities do your dancers have?

Dance>Detour has seven company members and three apprentices: Four of our dancers use wheelchairs. One of our dancers is legally blind. One of our dancers has a degenerative joint condition. Other types of disabilities among our members include: post polio; spinal bifida, spinal cord injury; and conditions that come from the natural aging process. So five of our dancers have disabilities, five do not (yet).

How would you define the dance style of the company?

We are probably considered a modern dance troupe – but we incorporate many different dance styles into our choreography: African, Jazz, Tap, Ballet, Hip Hop, Latin, and Modern.

Where would you place your dance style in the field of dance? (Close and/or different to ... style(s))

I like to be defined as a “physically integrated dance company” – a company that incorporates dancers with and without disabilities who collaborate as EQUALS.

Are the choreographies artistically speaking, and not just technically, influenced by the disabilities of the dancers?

No – our disabilities do not influence or dictate the type of choreography that we create. However, our disabilities and varying range of skill and movement ability often influences our choreography. We incorporate and highlight the unique capabilities of all of our dancers with and without disabilities in creating our pieces. For instance, if a dancer has great wheelchair handling we find ways to showcase it. If a dancer can sing and act, we may include that into a work. If a dancer is good with leaps and jumps we use that too!

Do these disabilities have an impact on their dancing? (Positive and/or negative)

Depending on the type of disability, it sometimes dictates some restrictions in a dancer’s movement. However, the flip side of that is -- our dancers are always more amazed by the discoveries of what they CAN do! We push our dancers to limits they never thought possible.

What reactions did you first get from the public and from the critics?

Initially, many arrived sceptical, curious, and with low expectations of our dancing.

What reactions do you get now?

Once anyone has the opportunity to witness great professional physically integrated dance – they can’t help but to be “wowed” by the overall experience. They discover the artistry, creativity, dedication, skill, polish and passion that go is exhibited in our work.

Has the public opinion on dance and disability evolved?

Somewhat. The more exposure we have, the more we will be able to affect the opinions of larger audiences. Those who have seen the work of great integrated dance performances, usually leave the theatre with better recognition of our talents and abilities.

How do you foresee the future of dance and disability?

It will take some time – but ideally I would like to see the day that companies like Dance>Detour will not have to exist because all dance companies would routinely incorporate folks with disabilities, those with different body types, and people of all ages. YES – I dream BIG!

Submitted by:

Alana Wallace

Founder and Artistic Director

Dance>Detour

Chicago, IL

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Interview of *Touchdown Dance*

What is the name of your dance company?

Touchdown Dance

When was it created and by whom?

1986 Steve Paxton and Anne Kilcoyne

For what reason was it created? What are its aims and objectives?

To provide dance for blind and sighted people through touch based movement processes.

What is your definition of dance?

Movement expression of inner states, feelings, memories, dreams, or for the body to express itself and so me.

Do you believe that anyone can dance?

In my experience.

What kind of disabilities do your dancers have?

Varied. Autism, blind, visually impaired. Learning disability

How would you define the dance style of the company?

Improvisation, structured improvisation, dance theatre.

Where would you place your dance style in the field of dance? (Close and/or different to ... style(s))

independent dance sector.

Are the choreographies artistically speaking, and not just technically, influenced by the disabilities of the dancers?

Very much so and couldn't be otherwise.

Do these disabilities have an impact on their dancing? (Positive and/or negative)

Don't like this question... impact – negative is not about disability, anyone can be affected physically or emotionally in their dancing.

What reactions did you first get from the public and from the critics?

Encouraging and positively critical, supportive and celebratory.

What reactions do you get now? Has the public opinion on dance and disability evolved?

Generally yes but people extend conformism and homogeneity which is not what we are interested in.

How do you foresee the future of dance and disability?

A Tough up hill struggle as in the current climate we have to be resilient and determined.

Interview of *AXIS Dance Company*

What is the name of your dance company?

AXIS Dance Company

When was it created and by whom?

AXIS began in 1987 when founding Artistic Director Thais Mazur had the great idea and creative vision to gather a group of dancers with and without disabilities to explore dance and create a performance piece. This first piece premiered in 1988, receiving a standing ovation. With Thais as a driving force, AXIS quickly took off from there, receiving offers to perform and requests for classes and other education programs.

For what reason was it created? What are its aims and objectives?

AXIS Dance Company's mission is:

- to create and perform contemporary dance that is developed through the collaboration of dancers with and without disabilities
- to teach dance and educate about collaboration and disability through community education and outreach programs
- to promote and support physically integrated dance locally, nationally and internationally

Our vision is to remain a leader in the field of contemporary physically integrated dance by setting high artistic and educational standards. Likewise, we aim to be a contender in the field of contemporary dance by commissioning renowned choreographers, composers and designers to create an exciting, innovative touring repertory. We want our work to challenge traditional definitions of 'dance' and 'dancer' and to expand dance to include an entire community that has been virtually left out of the performing arts. Our goals are 1) to continue to create and present work by AXIS members, commissioned choreographers and other artists that inspire us to grow artistically as individuals and as a company; 2) to continue to develop and expand our education/outreach programs to meet the growing demand for our services; 3) to continue to develop our relationships in the dance, disability and arts education communities and 4) to continue to strengthen our administrative infrastructure and organizational capacity in order to accomplish these goals as a healthy organization. At AXIS, our biggest dream is to make a lasting contribution to contemporary dance and disability culture.

What is your definition of dance?

Movement in time and space—at it's simplest;

Do you believe that anyone can dance?

If you're in a body you can dance.

What kind of disabilities do your dancers have?

AXIS has both disabled and nondisabled dancers. Our disabled dancers have physical disabilities that have included spinal cord injuries/disease, spina bifida, polio, amputation, muscular dystrophy.

How would you define the dance style of the company?

AXIS is a physically integrated contemporary repertory company, meaning we have dancers with and without disabilities and we do works by living choreographers.

Where would you place your dance style in the field of dance? (Close and/or different to ... style(s))

Contemporary dance.

Are the choreographies artistically speaking, and not just technically, influenced by the disabilities of the dancers?

Choreographers are influenced by ALL of our dancers and the unique ways we have of partnering, doing ensemble work and moving as individual dancers. The potential for creating a dance vocabulary is radically expanded when you add in disabled dancers and the way they move--be it in wheelchairs, on crutches, with spasticity, with or without various prosthetics.

Do these disabilities have an impact on their dancing? (Positive and/or negative)

In the same way that nondisabled dancers are impacted by their bodies, so are disabled dancers impacted by theirs.

What reactions did you first get from the public and from the critics?

Our first work premiered at the 1988 "Furious Feet Dance Festival for Social Change" produced by the Dance Brigade. We received a standing ovation and a lot of encouragement to continue working. Early on there was some confusion about whether we were doing art or therapy. When we started commissioning internationally respected choreographers the quality of work skyrocketed and we were taken seriously as a force in contemporary dance.

What reactions do you get now? Has the public opinion on dance and disability evolved?

Mostly people are very receptive and many are blown away by our—not because there are disabled dancers, but because the work is strong. I believe that public opinion evolves when the quality of the work is more than the fact that some are disabled.

How do you foresee the future of dance and disability?

I believe this dance form will continue to grow and expand worldwide.

Interview of Karen Peterson and Dancers Inc

What is the name of your dance company?

Karen Peterson and Dancers Inc

When was it created and by whom?

In 1990 by Karen Peterson

For what reason was it created? What are its aims and objectives?

It was created to give choreographic challenge to my work from a dance makers and audience point of view.

What is your definition of dance?

Movement

Do you believe that anyone can dance?

Yes

What kind of disabilities do your dancers have?

Spinal injuries, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy

How would you define the dance style of the company?

Integrated contemporary dance based on personal movement improvisation

Where would you place your dance style in the field of dance?

(Close and/or different to ... style(s)) Close to contact improvisation

Are the choreographies artistically speaking, and not just technically, influenced by the disabilities of the dancers?

All artistic decisions are based on what the dancers can and cannot do and that comes from personal improvisation

Do these disabilities have an impact on their dancing? (Positive and/or negative)

Yes in both ways

What reactions did you first get from the public and from the critics?

Skeptical

What reactions do you get now? Has the public opinion on dance and disability evolved?

In 22 years integrated dance is shown all over the world. I was the original person who developed, created and presented mixed-ability dance in the State of Florida in 1990.

How do you foresee the future of dance and disability?

A place where anyone can train and perform if they are willing to put the work into it.

Interview of *Dansehabile*

What is the name of your dance company?

Dansehabile (association and company)

When was it created and by whom?

1991

by Marc Berthon and Nathalie Tacchella

For what reason was it created? What are its aims and objectives?

Pour développer des projets culturels et sociaux, favorisant la rencontre entre danseurs avec ou sans handicap.

In order to develop sociocultural projects favouring gatherings between dancers with and without disabilities.

Stimuler une approche inédite du corps et des sens invitant à l'ouverture à l'autre, tant pour les danseurs que pour les spectateurs.

To stimulate a new approach of the body and the senses, prompting openness towards the other, for the dancers as much as for the audience.

What is your definition of dance?

Un mouvement vivant, habité ≠ seulement mécanique ou purement technique

An inhabited, living movement, not only mechanical or purely technical.

Do you believe that anyone can dance?

Yes

What kind of disabilities do your dancers have?

Mental / moteur / sensorial / polyhandicap

Cognitive / motor / sensorial / complex-multiple disabilities.

How would you define the dance style of the company?

Danse créative, "intégrée, intégrative, inclusive, "singulière", intégrant des artistes singuliers avec ou sans handicap. Danse-théâtre.

Creative dance, "integrated, integrative, inclusive, singular", integrating singular artists with or without disabilities. Dance-theatre (Tanztheater).

Where would you place your dance style in the field of dance? (Close and/or different to ... style(s))

Danse contemporaine, danse Contact Improvisation, danse expressive.

Contemporary, Contact Improvisation, expressive dance.

Are the choreographies artistically speaking, and not just technically, influenced by the disabilities of the dancers?

Yes

Do these disabilities have an impact on their dancing? (Positive and/or negative)

Yes

What reactions did you first get from the public and from the critics?

Emotion

What reactions do you get now? Has the public opinion on dance and disability evolved?

Emotion .

How do you foresee the future of dance and disability?

Evolution lente lente vers un regard qui dépasse le handicap pour s'intéresser à l'artiste et l'artistique.

A very slow evolution towards a judgment that goes beyond the disabilities to take interest in, to focus on the artist and the art.

Interview of Full Radius Dance

What is the name of your dance company?

Full Radius Dance

When was it created and by whom?

Company has been in existence since 1991. Artistic Director and founder Douglas Scott began working with dancers with physical disabilities in 1993. Dancers with physical disabilities were integrated into the company in 1995.

For what reason was it created? What are its aims and objectives?

To create, commission and perform modern dance within the field of physically integrated art.

What is your definition of dance?

Movement that displays thought, form, structure and technique.

Do you believe that anyone can dance?

Anyone can dance; however, not everyone is a 'dancer'.

What kind of disabilities do your dancers have?

Spinal Cord Injury, Osteogenesis imperfect

How would you define the dance style of the company?

Modern Dance

Where would you place your dance style in the field of dance? (Close and/or different to ... style(s))

Same as Modern Dance

Are the choreographies artistically speaking, and not just technically, influenced by the disabilities of the dancers?

No more or less than the influence of the 'standing' dancers. Our work is not disability-centric.

Do these disabilities have an impact on their dancing? (Positive and/or negative).

No.

What reactions did you first get from the public and from the critics?

Enthusiastic response, but some potential audience members were reluctant to attend a performance as they were very unfamiliar with physically integrated dance.

What reactions do you get now? Has the public opinion on dance and disability evolved?

We are garnering critical acclaim. Public opinion remains the same.

How do you foresee the future of dance and disability?

Unsure.

Interview of *Indepen-dance*

What is the name of your dance company?

Indepen-dance

When was it created and by whom?

1996, by myself, Karen Anderson

For what reason was it created? What are its aims and objectives?

Indepen-dance is an integrated dance development company, which provides creative movement classes for people with disabilities, their carers and volunteers. Throughout the year the company performs work of high artistic quality created in collaboration with professional choreographers and dancers. Indepen-dance enables individuals with learning disabilities to participate in and benefit fully from a high quality arts provision.

Indepen-dance was founded in 1996 by Karen Anderson on the principle of access, participation and integration. At that time, Karen had been Dancer in Residence for Strathclyde Regional Council as a

job share with Jamie Armstrong, as Dance Development Workers. They worked together on a project named, 'Disintegration', where they brought together young people with and without disabilities to dance together.

The outcome was an overwhelming success and Karen set up a weekly dance class specifically aimed at people with disabilities at the Strathclyde Arts Centre, Glasgow. Regular attendance from people across the city established a core group of 12 performers. Karen introduced many professional musicians, dancers, artists and choreographers to work with and teach the company.

Over the years this list increased to include well known established practitioners in the field, enabling the sharing of information, experience and practice with participants and teachers alike.

In 2002, Karen brought together a Board of Directors to form Indepen-dance whose Mission Statement is the main aim of **to create opportunities for people with disabilities, and their carers, to enjoy, and fulfil their potential through dance**

Indepen-dance acquired charitable status in July 2002 and became a registered company Limited by Guarantee in December 2005, forming its first Board of Trustees.

Indepen-dance fully subscribes to the principles of social justice and social inclusion as set out by the Scottish Government, implemented by Glasgow City Council, and meets the criteria of the Social Model of Disability.

Indepen-dance creates opportunities to build stronger communities, promotes inclusion and tackles the barriers that prevent individuals with learning disabilities from participating in and benefiting fully from a high quality arts provision.

Indepen-dance believes that all its work contributes to these objectives, with a particular focus on the social inclusion of people with learning disabilities.

The company's programme of work is planned to offer all its participants a range of creative experiences from the recreational weekly classes through to the challenges of rehearsing, performing and touring new dance pieces.

The **Mission** of Indepen-dance may be stated as follows:

'Indepen-dance creates opportunities for adults with disabilities and their carers to enjoy, express and fulfil their potential through dance'.

The Aims:

- To provide a dance experience that will enhance and enrich the lives of people with disabilities and their carers.
- To create performance opportunities for people with learning disabilities – and continue to provide opportunities for their lifelong learning.

- To promote an appreciation and understanding of movement and dance work with integrated groups.
- To improve and increase the provision of specialist dance teachers for people with disabilities within Glasgow and Scotland.
- To bring dance to a wider spectrum of people, through classes, workshops and performances.
- To demonstrate how dance can improve the quality of people's lives, in health, self-awareness, self-confidence and creative expression.
- To develop a wider audience for dance and disability; and to build continuing awareness of the possibilities for people with learning disabilities to become involved in, and have access to, the arts, through performance and workshops.
- Influence policy-makers regarding good quality arts provision for people with disabilities.

OBJECTIVES: In order to achieve these aims, we will:

- Provide regular weekly classes for adults and young people with learning disabilities and their carers.
- Work with internationally acclaimed choreographers to produce performance opportunities for our users to take part in. Performances will be shown at a central venue, which will be accessible to a diverse audience.
- Run training events in dance and disability for carers, social work staff, teachers in main stream and special education and community dancers.
- Attend conferences for arts and disability to highlight the work of the company and the achievements of the users.
- Hold open days and fund raising events in public spaces to highlight the work of the company and encourage new members to join.
- Invite the MSP for Culture & Sport and appropriate MSP's with portfolios in access, disability, Glasgow City Councilors to our performances.

What is your definition of dance?

To move rhythmically usually to music, using prescribed or improvised steps and gestures.

Do you believe that anyone can dance?

Absolutely, if I didn't I would not have set up the company in the first place!

What kind of disabilities do your dancers have?

No one is excluded from participating in our core programme of activities – people who attend the weekly classes come with a variety of disabilities from those with very profound/complex learning disabilities to those with a very mild learning disability who are able to travel independently to our sessions. Each person that attends is valued the same for their contribution in the class. Some can only dance with their eyes and others share very intricate movements and great skill and ability but we do not judge one from the other, our class are about sharing the diversity that everyone brings to the class.

How would you define the dance style of the company?

The dance style we use can be described as Creative Movement or self expression of movement.

Where would you place your dance style in the field of dance? (Close and/or different to ... style(s))

I'm not sure I fully understand this question but if you mean which dance genre our dance style is closest to I would say contemporary (Laban) or contact improvisation.

Are the choreographies artistically speaking, and not just technically, influenced by the disabilities of the dancers?

The choreographers I select have to have not only the skill to choreograph but have the ability to create work with a diverse group of people with different abilities, I often ask the choreographers to find the beauty and skill in the individual dancers as opposed to set choreographic moves which can restrict our company members.

Do these disabilities have an impact on their dancing? (Positive and/or negative)

As mentioned previously, of course the dancers disability will have an impact on their ability to achieve intricate moves for some of the dancers as their bodies may effect they're physical ability to complete a set of phrases, but I believe it is the job of the choreographer to work with the tools he/she has and that is the dancers who are in our company regardless of their ability.

What reactions did you first get from the public and from the critics?

On the whole we have always had good publicity, albeit at first in the early days it was more of a sympathetic applaud from our audience, now 15 years on the company has grown and developed it's body of work and we are critiqued by professional journalists and external evaluators from Creative Scotland on the quality of our performances which you will be able to see from our website is

normally also ways really positive. We are however still battling with the idea of community versus professional and there would be some that would put us in the category of a community performance group, it is my ambition to dispel this continue to develop a body of work that will be seen as professional as opposed to community based work.

What reactions do you get now? Has the public opinion on dance and disability evolved?

Indepen-dance and similar other companies within the UK are beginning to dispel the myths around dance and disability performance companies. Some like Candoco for instance but they don't include people with a learning disability but StopGAP Dance Company have really pushed the boundaries and I think they are really leading the field in inclusive dance performance. For us performing to very young audiences (school children) I feel is about educating our audience for the future.

How do you foresee the future of dance and disability?

I hope it continues to grow but what I feel is really lacking is the access to a formal dance training for people with learning disabilities to access a dance career so unless companies like Indepen-dance don't continue to exist then unfortunately it will become extinct.

As I am ever the optimist I would however believe that the future will be bright for inclusive dance and with continued support from Creative Scotland our work will grow and continue to develop – creating new an exciting choreography for another generation to behold.

Karen Anderson

Artistic Director

A.7 Interviews

Interview of Ruth and Sara

1. Carer

Name: Ruth Massie

Age:42

Occupation: Support Worker/TouchTrust Leader

What is your personal definition of dance?

Freedom of creative movement.

How would you define a dancer?

Someone who feels dance in their heart.

How did you find out about Indepen-dance?

Through an open information day at Ability Fest.

What prompted you to work/volunteer there?

I had previous experience as a dancer and seeing how much everyone enjoyed themselves I felt I wanted to be part of helping in some way.

How long have you been with Indepen-dance?

4 years.

With regards to your personal experience, why do you continue volunteering/working with Indepen-dance?

I see how much joy people get from the classes/performances.

Independently from your dancer, do you think that some people disabled or not, are not capable of dance? Why?

No, i think everyone is capable of dance if they feel and want to do it.

What's your view on dance and disability, as of it being organized and provided by private companies instead of an opportunity offered by the government?

I am happy that there are private companies that provide this service, but I do think the government should be more involved and provide opportunities in dance and disability.

2. Who are you dancing with at Indepen-dance's performance company?

Name: Sara Deitch

Age: 31

Disability: Cerebral Ataxia, Osteoporosis.

What impact, positive and negative, do you think his/her disability has on his/her dance?

Dance has helped Sara positively by building muscle strength and stamina, the negative is Sara gets tired after long rehearsals and performances, although she does not see this as a negative.

How long has he/she been at the company? Was that his/her first dance experience?

Sara has been with the company for 4 years. Her first dance experience was at the open day where there was a taster workshop, from that day she wanted to join the company.

Do you know how he/she found out about it?

She got an information leaflet through the post.

If you were there with him/her, how was the first class? What feeling came out of it?

I was with her, it was great to see how much Sara got out of it and how happy she was expressing herself through movement.

Would you say he/she likes dancing?

I would say Sara loves dancing.

Have you noticed any progress or change in his/her dancing?

I have noticed lots of progress in her dancing throughout the years.

Have you noticed an impact on his/her everyday life? Changes in habits, abilities...?

It has made a huge impact on her everyday life, Sara has made lots of new friends and it has helped her self confidence grow which has helped in her everyday life.

Do you know of any negative experience of dance he/she had? (ex: injury, any negative issue originating from the dance experience...)

None.

Is there an event/experience related to dance that was important for your dancer that you would like to share? (or more than one? Feel free to develop)

I think all the performances have been important to Sara, especially when the performance company has travelled to other countries to perform. Also the first time Sara's family came to see her on stage in Glasgow, they were all so proud of her and she enjoyed showing her family what she could do.

3. Public performances

How is dance and disability perceived in Glasgow? How aware is the public?

Dance and disability is still something the public are unsure about, I don't think there is enough publicity on the subject for the general public.

How do you, as a carer, feel about the public performances?

As a carer I see how much the performers get out of it, regardless if there are 100 or 10 people in the audience, they are professional and enjoy themselves.

How do you think your dancer feels about performing in front of a public?

Sara loves an audience, and gets a real buzz from being on stage.

What has been so far the public's general reaction at the end of a performance?

So far there have been positive reactions.

What would you like the future of dance and disability, let's say in ten years, to look like? (with regards to the public awareness, opportunities in giving classes and performing...)

Hopefully more awareness, more opportunities, and dance and disability to be regarded the same way all other performers/artists are.

Do you think this future is feasible?

Yes, if people work together.

If not, how do you think (more objectively) dance and disability will have evolved?

4. Internationally

What do you know about dance and disability around the world? Do you know any companies similar to Indepen-dance outside the UK?

Yes there are many companies like Indepen-dance. I believe everyone has the same goal, to provide equal opportunities for all dancers.

Do you think that people in other countries are as aware of disabled people as they are in Scotland? What about the public knowledge of dance and disability?

Yes, from the companies I know of I think so. I know that in some other countries there are not the same opportunities, and public awareness is non-existent.

5. For my Theseus

Do you think disabled people can dance?

Yes.

Do you think that anyone can dance? If not, who can't dance?

I think that anyone who wants to dance can!

"Bonus" question:

If you had money and power, what would you try to establish in regards of dance and disability?

I would provide more classes so that everyone who wanted to dance could.

Interview of Wils and John

1. Carer

Full Name: Wils McAslan

Age: 31

Occupation: Dancer, dance leader and choreographer.

Carer.

What is your personal definition of dance?

Dance can be many different things to people with or without disability, for me, this is a strong supporting network mentally and physically, feeding positive energy and emotionally keeping me grounded.

How would you define a dancer?

A dancer can be anyone that is moved or touched by music and movement.

How did you find out about Indepen-dance?

I have always been in touch with the company from age of 11... Introduced by social work support.

What prompted you to work/volunteer there?

The amazing people that access Indepen-dance

How long have you been with Indepen-dance?

7-8 years

With regards to your personal experience, why do you continue volunteering/working with Indepen-dance?

I choose to work with Independence because of the wonderful and creative opportunities it has offered me. An inspirational company.

Independently from your dancer, do you think that some people disabled or not, are not capable of dance? Why?

I believe that dance is not always the right choice for everyone! But also believe that if dance is for you, then nothing will stop you... being mental or physical.

What's your view on dance and disability, as of it being organized and provided by private companies instead of an opportunity offered by the government?

I think dance should be accessed and provided by Government as part of education! Early on as a support and release therapy.

2. Who are you dancing with at Indepen-dance's performance company?

Full Name: John Hunter

Age: 45

Disability: Down syndrome

What impact, positive and negative, do you think his/her disability has on his/her dance?

I have always seen dance as a positive release for anyone I have worked with. Dance is a form of exercise, and exercise creates endorphins! And endorphins make people happy 😊

How long has he/she been at the company? Was that his/her first dance experience?

Ten years (John says) dancing with indepen-dance

Do you know how he/she found out about it?

? NA

If you were there with him/her, how was the first class? What feeling came out of it?

The feeling of self-expression and acceptance.

Would you say he/she likes dancing?

John says: I love dancing with indepen-dance and my best friend Wils.

Have you noticed any progress or change in his/her dancing?

John has become more confident and vocal. Also, his technical dance skills, and motor skills have improved his way of living day to day.

Have you noticed an impact on his/her everyday life? Changes in habits, abilities...?

John did not speak for many years before joining Indepen-dance, and suffered from random aggressive outburst... He now chats to anyone and can control his anger and is more independent.

Do you know of any negative experience of dance he/she had? (ex: injury, any negative issue originating from the dance experience...)

No!

Asked John and he loves to dance with all his friends.

Is there an event/experience related to dance that was important for your dancer that you would like to share? (or more than one? Feel free to develop)

Indepen-dance had done a production called "Whistler" which John had a fantastic main par created on his own character. .. John also loves to travel with the company.

3. Public performances

How is dance and disability perceived in Glasgow? How aware is the public?

Growing on a daily basis.

How do you, as a carer, feel about the public performances?

I think performance can be an opportunity for individuals to shine and integrate with other cast members. Also the chance to educate others that have not blended with disability.

How do you think your dancer feels about performing in front of a public?

John loves to perform, and becomes more confident with each performance.

What has been so far the public's general reaction at the end of a performance?

An overwhelming mix of emotion and surprise, that educates te sometimes ignorant way of blocking things out.

What would you like the future of dance and disability, let's say in ten years, to look like? (with regards to the public awareness, opportunities in giving classes and performing...)

I would like to see dance Introduced as early on as nursery to benefit that individual's life expectation and growth. Also for dance training to be provided via education.

Do you think this future is feasible?

YES!

If not, how do you think (more objectively) dance and disability will have evolved?

NA

4. Internationally

What do you know about dance and disability around the world? Do you know any companies similar to Indepen-dance outside the UK?

Dina 13, Amicci (Wolfgang Strungi), Roystar Maldoon, Candoco, Sunduza...

Do you think that people in other countries are as aware of disabled people as they are in Scotland? What about the public knowledge of dance and disability?

I think that awareness of dance and integration is growing massively on daily basis.

5. For my Theseus

Do you think disabled people can dance?

I have seen many people dance with eyes, head and with their voice. Yes.

Do you think that anyone can dance? If not, who can't dance?

Everyone can dance!!! If given the option. Yes.

Bonus question:

If you had money and power, what would you try to establish in regards of dance and disability?

A degree in dance for people with disability and awareness that anyone can dance.

A dance center for excellence!!! With Indepen-dance 😊

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