

How Can We Lead Creative Choreography? : Narrative Inquiry of Dance Educators' Teaching Experiences in Dance Class for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

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The learning goal of dance education for students with disabilities should not be limited to physical technique, but should encourage them such as thinking, expressing, and challenging new concepts. Therefore, it is more educationally meaningful and appropriate to draw creative movements and interactions from students than apprenticeship dance classes that simply follow dance moves. In this context, the study is a meaningful guide to the teaching expertise of future dance educators, including serious worries, trial and error, and new discoveries in creative dance classes in approaches to dance education for students with disabilities. This study was intended to provide an explanation of what happens in these creative dance and dance classes to foster the achievements of the possibility of students with intellectual disabilities. Based on the diversity and integration perspective, the study was designed to recognize the importance of integrated dance education for disabled students in schools and provide practical examples for the scalability of dance education currently being conducted. This study not only presents obstacles but also practical directions of dance education across boundaries and suggests implications for the role of dance educators in their expertise.

Key word: Creative choreography, Dance class, Student with intellectual disability, Narrative inquiry

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Introduction

Dance education beyond the boundaries of physical and intellectual disabilities is globally spreading with a perspective that anyone can dance. So far, research on dance education for the disabled has been mainly discussed in dance movement therapy (DMT). The concept of therapeutic effects of dance developed in the 1930s and aims to use dance to improve emotional self-expression and body image (Habousch, Floyd, Carren, & LaSota, 2006). The concept of community-based integrated dance emerged in the mid-1990s. The aim of integrated dance is to ultimately pursue social integration through the creation of collaborative dances among disabled and non-disabled people. These issues include the problem of embodiment and expression as challenging the perception of the general conventional wisdom of what dancing is and who can dance from the perspective of equity of access.

In the case of Korea, discussions on dance and disability occurred among dance educators in the 2000s under the influence of cultural policies emphasizing welfare, culture, and arts education (Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, 2018). Despite the discourse on equity, diversity, and integration in dance education, the practical approach to practice dance education for people with disabilities in the field was not specific and isolated (Kwon, 2017). Furthermore, it took a long time to recognize the possibility that people with disabilities could dance in society as a whole. This stereotype began to change gradually as support for sending artists expanded nationwide as part of the policy for cultural welfare. Since the Arts and culture education Support Act was enacted in 2005, it has been operated in the form of sending teaching artists to schools (Education institutions for disabled children and adolescents certified by the Ministry of Education) and various welfare institutions for the vulnerable (Korea Arts & Culture Service, 2019). In particular, the demand for creative dance education from dance artists has steadily increased. This phenomenon has spread in the context of community dances in Korea (Park, 2017). This is because community dance has been established in the form of top-downs—mainly by organizers such as theater management and performance planning—based on the support system, rather than being self-sustained by dance artists.

Due to this background, access to dance for the disabled was attempted for choreography cooperation and performance at the Disabled Dance Festival. This has become a network for dancers to share ideas about the possibilities of dancing. In fact, the number of dancers who continue to participate in the festival is extremely limited, and it is difficult to continue performing with the disabled unless it is in the form of a public-funded performance festival. To improve this situation and prioritize helping the disabled enjoy culture and arts actively, it should be preceded by continuous education rather than short-lived performances or festivals. In addition, dance education for the disabled should not focus on the goal of creating any artist, but on realizing “education through dancing” (Kim & Hong, 2019).

The educational environment and cases of attempting integrated dance education and DMT for students with disabilities are not yet active in Korea. What is hopeful, however, is that the direction of cultural policy toward cultural diversity and the direction of education policy for fostering creative convergence talent are moving toward an educational environment for integration. In addition, as the law has recently been revised to recognize dance teachers as state-qualified, it can be seen positively that the future change in dance education has included “special dance education” in the curriculum of higher educational institutions that train dance teachers. However, there are no academic concepts, theories, and exemplary models of special dance education and no fixed criteria for teaching and learning, such as learning modules, guidelines, teaching methods, and evaluation tools for this purpose.

Paradoxically, it can be assumed that dance classes of non-standardization and atypicalization have infinite potential. The learning goal of dance education should not be limited to physical techniques, but should encourage students with disabilities to cultivate creative power, such as thinking, expressing, and challenging new concepts. Therefore, it is more educationally meaningful and appropriate to draw creative movements and interactions from students than apprenticeship dance classes that simply follow dance moves. In this context, the study is a meaningful guide to the teaching expertise of future dance educators, including serious worries, trial and error, and new discoveries in creative dance classes in approaches to dance education for students with disabilities. This study was intended to provide an explanation of what happens in these creative dance and dance classes to foster the achievements of the possibility of students with intellectual disabilities.

Literature Review

Dance is an effective tool for improving physical conditions and mental, sensory, and emotional conditions. In particular, it plays a crucial role in developing the physical and emotional abilities of people with disabilities (Hui, Chui, & Woo, 2009). This is because it stimulates communication as an expressive art form that relies on body movements through dance (Fitt, 1996; Habousssh et al., 2006) and facilitates memory with the need to recall different forms, repetitions, positions, and movements of rhythm movements (Keoh et al., 2012).

In this context, we can expect the effects of DMT for people with disabilities (Barnet-López, Pérez-Testor, Cabedo-Sanromà, Gozzoli, Oviedo, & Guerra-Balic, 2015). In particular, the recent decade of dance education studies for people with intellectual disabilities have sought to confirm its effectiveness through the intervention of DMT, which uses movement as a therapeutic tool to further the “emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual”(ADTA, 2013) and presupposes that the connection between mind and body is activated. It explains that this connection

facilitates the integration of people on emotional, cognitive, and physical levels.

This leads to several specific perspectives: First, DMT for adults with intellectual disabilities reveals that in addition to physical knowledge cognitive development and maturity factors have improved scores (Barnet-López, Pérez-Testor, Cabedo-Sanromà, Gozzoli, Oviedo, & Guerra-Balic, 2015). Second, it showed that DMT intervention increased the emotional well-being of adults with intellectual disabilities. A study on the effects of DMT interventions on emotional well-being and quality of life in adults with intellectual disabilities reported that DMT has a constant interaction between the body and mind and allows the person to be treated with an integrated approach (Barnet-Lopez, Pérez-Testor, Cabedo-Sanromà, Oviedo, & Guerra-Balic, 2016). Third, it emphasizes the importance of providing therapeutic and creative tools in the treatment of certain subjects' dance movements for people with intellectual disabilities. Tord and Iris Bräninger (2015) proposed the theoretical foundation and application of grounding in DMT using the clinical vignettes template. Grounding in DMT suggested that the connection between the body and the individual's reality could be strengthened at physical, emotional, sensory, and social levels, and was particularly useful in cases of depression, anxiety, stress, and trauma. In this regard, the development of a software program (Shih & Chiu, 2014), which aims to help children with intellectual disabilities walk by applying dance pads, and the development of an iPad application for application in DMT, can also be seen as a notable attempt.

As such, there is no doubt that dance education plays a positive role as a medium for social integration such as attitude, self-realization, interaction, and support of students with intellectual disabilities (Sooful, Surujlal, & Dhurup, 2010). It discussed pedagogical thinking with community contexts and mainly focused on emphasizing the importance of dance education and observing qualitative changes from the learner's point of view on the premise that dance for disabled learners can help their physical, emotional, and cognitive development. The common view gained from the literature review is that students with intellectual disabilities should consider that they have a universal desire for interaction with people without disabilities. Therefore, dance education for students with intellectual disabilities requires consideration of how dance educators should approach the field.

Method

The study was planned a dance program for adolescents with disabilities to support the middle school free semester program implemented by S University. The middle school free semester program is a project conducted by S University for 3 years with the support of the Korea Arts & Culture Education Service and the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. In 2019, various artistic experience programs were provided within the regular curriculum by supporting the middle school free semester

system for multicultural schools, special needs schools, and alternative schools that lack access to culture and arts in Seoul. This performs the role of supporting creative movement education by deploying art experts in school settings and helping students find their own dreams and talent. We received applications from multicultural schools, special needs schools, and alternative schools among middle schools within the Seoul jurisdiction from September to December 2019 and provided a dance program as a middle school free semester program.

The preparation and implementation of the research are as follows. First, we devised and developed the goal and content of the program for approximately 3 months from June to August 2019 to devise a dance class for the creative movement of students with disabilities. Second, we developed Green Narae, the arts and culture education program of the middle school free semester system for adolescents with disabilities, for 8 weeks, and then operated 2 two-hour classes in each school for 8 weeks.

Data for narrative research were collected through the class records and open-ended questionnaire of 3 main dance educators of the Green Narae program, and the observation of the researchers. The main dance educators visited two educational institutions each from September to December 2019 and conducted the class, and subsequently recorded the details and atmosphere of the class and notable characteristics of the students. After class, an open-ended survey was conducted on the teaching methods used to teach creative movement in class, creative dance for students with disabilities, and errors and discoveries in the process of leading choreography. Then, the main contents were categorized according to inductive data analysis.

Research participants and dance teachers A, B, and C are all females who majored in Korean dance and have at least 10 years of experience working in arts and culture education settings. Their backgrounds and educational philosophies are as follows.

- (1) Narrative of dance educator S (24 years of experience in dance, 14 years of experience in education, master's degree, 30s, female)

As Confucius said, "Learn as if you can never master, and own as if you fear losing," I like to learn things. What makes me enjoy my life is learning dance, languages, music, and leisure sports, and small wisdoms in life such as how to efficiently tidy up a room. However, my ultimate life goal is to 'learn and share,' not learn just for myself. Teaching what I have learned and sharing it with someone else is how I learn again and truly own it. The students I teach are of a great variety. They all have different backgrounds, thoughts, behaviors, or special needs, as well as different skills of acquisition, comprehension, or judgment. Therefore, it is necessary to plan a style of class or lesson suitable for individual students. However, before setting the teaching style, the most important thing is the dance educator's patience. Like the old adage, "After rain comes fair weather," it is an

indescribable joy and happiness to see that fair weather after rain. I think that is why I continue along this path of being an educator.

- (2) Narrative of dance educator A (25 years of experience in dance, 20 years of experience in education, master's degree, 40s, female)

I majored in Korean dance and taught dance to students and adults in many institutions as soon as I graduated. Due to the nature of this major, I taught students mostly preparing for college entrance examination. As for adults, I taught them the genre of Korean fusion dance, because it is shameful that Korean dance, which I majored in and enjoy so much, is not widely popular. As Korean fusion dance is a strange genre, I also wrote my master's thesis about that class. Because I taught various people of various ages, I think there is a difference in my educational view as a teacher depending on who I am teaching. I fundamentally think that the ideal image of a teacher is someone who tries his or her best to teach students what he or she knows.

- (3) Narrative of dance educator J (25 years of experience in dance, 18 years of experience in education, doctoral degree, 30s, female)

I started dancing in middle school and majored in dance in high school for the arts and in college. During college, I prepared to join a national or public dance company in Korea after winning multiple dance competitions. However, as I was disqualified by many dance companies after failing to meet the desired physical requirements, I began my own individual dance activities. I participated in choreography at Korea Dance Association and various dance performances such as Seoul Dance Festival, while also gives lessons to students preparing for middle and high school for the arts. I came to understand that I should learn more systematic theories about education, which is why I went on to a graduate school of education and the doctoral program in physical education. That was how I got to study education of dance or movements. At present, I am applying the positive education methods and contents of dance education and studying dance education focused on professional dancers with focus on developing dance programs for schools and the underprivileged.

Creative dance class: An encounter with a new language called choreography

1) Thoughts in the planning stage: How to approach creative dance

In the planning stages, it was decided that the creative dance program would be differentiated from other dance programs for middle school students by targeting students with disabilities. We

organized contents that stimulated imagination through creative movement and enabled participants to express themselves freely based on the results of previous studies on dance for disabilities, thereby setting the goal of education as helping students with physical and emotional expressions and the development of intellectual abilities.

The program was called ‘Green Narae’, which in Korean means “wings so beautiful, they look like they have been drawn.” The dance program aimed at providing opportunities for children and adolescents with poor access to culture and arts, and to those who had never had the chance to freedom and creative expression of various emotions and feelings such as beauty, freedom, and naturalness. Details of the program are reported in <Table 1>. With the overview of the program set up, the dance educators assigned to each school were to conduct the class according to the level of the students.

Table 1. *Contents of Creative Dance Program ‘Green Narae’*

| Session | Topic | Content |
|---------|--|--|
| 1 | Giving wings as beautiful as if they are drawn | Imagining and drawing my wings of dance, introducing the body |
| 2 | Wings of freedom | Expressing my thoughts freely to music |
| 3 | Wings of imagination | “What can I become?”: Expressing myself in imagination |
| 4 | Wings of softness | Expressing the image of softness and curves |
| 5 | Wings of strength | Expressing the image of strength and straight lines |
| 6 | Wings of naturalness | What is it like to be “myself”? Expressing natural daily movements |
| 7 | Wings of beauty | Expressing the standard for what is beautiful and ugly |
| 8 | Spreading out ‘Green Narae’ | Freely expressing how I want to dance and what I want to express |

2) Trial and error as well as discovery in the implementation stage: Implementing natural choreography through movements rather than language and technique

There were many trials and errors in the process of conducting a creative movement class for students with intellectual disabilities. Moreover, teachers had a chance to discover the students’ talent and the teaching method to approach movement to bring out creative movement. Students who had been passive and afraid at the beginning of class for bringing out creative movement slowly began to open up and enjoy themselves.

(1) Environment of unfamiliarity and curiosity

For students with disabilities, it was extremely meaningful to spend time moving in a space like the dancing room. It was a multi-purpose room or a classroom that they could enter every day, but it might have been strange and interesting for them to sit around in a circle warming up with music, or moving around using teaching aids or tools they had never seen before.

When I first faced the students, I felt that they were definitely more uncomfortable and unfamiliar with moving than others. (Dance educator J)

In the class using body socks to teach movements, the students wanted to express themselves in that space (closed space), and once we had been able to elicit what they wanted to freely express after taking off the body socks, some students revealed their fear of a closed space. (Dance educator S)

(2) Specific tasks and challenges

Students with disabilities grasped and understood various concepts through specific experiences. Some students were found to lack abstract thinking skills even for things that others could easily be understood through the dance educator's story, picture book, slides, or textbooks. In such cases, it was more stimulating and easier for these students to accept help, such as when the dance educator held their hand and led them toward the left to guide them instead of walking on their own of being told to walk to the left while holding hands in pairs. Sometimes, the dance educator had the students hold a balloon and let them release it instead of telling them to fly the balloon. Presenting specific tasks and providing various textbooks and teaching aids in each class gave the dance educator a sense of challenge.

It was effective to explain as specifically as possible to students and actually have them do the things they understand or think. (Dance educator S)

(3) Concentration and change

It was not easy to explain free movements to students with disabilities and have them think creatively. Above all, a change of atmosphere was needed to have them concentrate on the dance educator's words and actions and move on from what interested them in another task.

It seemed that students had a hard time with big movements, motions that required balance, or classes that made big sounds. Surprisingly, they showed good coordination in activities of freely

creating, and enjoyed classes in which they used instruments while sitting down or making and expressing things in groups. (Dance educator A)

(4) Creative expression has no correct answer

As in general creative dance classes, it was necessary to emphasize that there is no correct answer to bring out creative movement from students. To give them the confidence that how they move their bodies can be an expression of movement, the dance educators had to deliver the message that each and every movement is valuable.

I think the most important outcome of teaching dance to those with disabilities is helping students deliver their thoughts, ideas, and emotions through dance—not just perform certain movements and techniques. (Dance educator S)

(5) Unpredictable improvisation

The biggest obstacle to running the creative dance class was improvisation. Other students also cannot control themselves if they have strong desires for movement or are excited. For students with disabilities, actions they had been vulnerable to in daily life could stand out even more.

There was a student who was doing just fine, but then suddenly, ran out and started screaming. Other classmates were familiar with this, while only the teaching assistant and I were surprised at first. Now, we can conduct the class indifferently in such instances. (Dance educator A)

On the other hand, expression of emotions and use of music became important in the process of expressing creative movement, which resulted in occasional creative improvisation. Some students showed remarkable originality in the view and expression of movement, perhaps because they had not moved much before.

(6) Minimizing evaluation and maximizing empathy

Dance educators of students with disabilities prioritized building relationships with students. Thus, rather than evaluating the function of dance or level of creativity, the dance educators helped students participate actively in the activities and concentrate in class, thereby showing improvement. To minimize evaluation and maximize empathy, the dance educators made every effort to read related books or articles and seek advice from experienced teachers.

The kids are more sensitive and responsive to the fact that they are receiving attention and being loved. They enjoyed that I addressed each of them by name and remembered their responses from the previous class. It is slightly dangerous when they scream, but important to look them directly in the eye and let them know when they do something wrong. (Dance educator J)

3) Introspection rather than measurement of creative outcomes

It was challenging to observe remarkable changes from experiencing creative dance in an 8-week program for arts and culture education. Moreover, due to the nature of the dance, it was difficult to objectively rate the creativity and originality expressed by students. However, the main dance educators of the program, authorities in charge of the handicapped school, and assistant dance educators discussed the positive outcome of the program and expressed that they hoped for another movement program if the opportunity was provided.

(1) Becoming familiar with dance

The creative dance program helped students with disabilities open up and become familiar with the artistic activity of dancing. They got closer and friendlier with classmates and teachers by dancing and could examine what force is given to each part of their body and how they should move to produce unique movements.

They did not have many constraints in physical movement or activity, but they were not very enthusiastic—some of them hated to move or were shy about moving their bodies. (Dance educator J)

(2) Confident expression

The dance educators gave unbiased praise to students with disabilities. They said that complimenting students making big movements or participating with bright faces during warm-up exercises or dance routines remarkably changed their attitudes.

Even though I did not think it mattered, receiving applause from friends and listening to compliments gave them great confidence and changed their attitudes. (Dance educator A)

(3) Promoting self-efficacy

During the program, students' expressions changed and they could display the will and confidence that they can do it in other classes as well when giving presentations or participating in group activities. They cooperated with others when building a castle with paper cups or inflating a parachute, while also using various methods to do things better on their own.

I think the most important outcome of teaching dance for disabilities is helping students deliver their thoughts, ideas, and emotions through dance, not just performing certain movements and technique. Help them think that they can move and dance like that. (Dance educator S)

(4) Respecting others and accepting diversity

Even though it was a dance class, the dance educators taught the students with disabilities to respect the teacher, teaching assistant, and friends in class. They were asked to avoid dark, provocative ways of speaking or exaggerated expressions, excessive physical contact, or actions that caused tension or conflict. The dance educators had an understanding of the learners, shared honest communication, and provided consistent and immediate compliments and rewards.

I needed to actually show them that I was expecting these expressions from them or set guidelines for behaviors they must maintain. I built a trusting relationship between students and the dance educator during class so that various expressions are respected while avoiding undesirable behaviors. (Dance educator S)

(5) Encountering a new language called choreography

As many students never had the chance to use their bodies much and were thus stiff, the movement class was a new attempt, whereas creating simple and innovative dances led by the students' lead was like learning a new language.

Watching each student's movement from different angles and showing helpful tools for better expression or stimulating with various sounds (music) helped result in more diverse forms of choreography. (Dance educator S)

Offering various tools and turning on movements that matched the movements for students who may feel awkward about creating movements and presenting them to other classmates helped the dance educators bring out more diverse movements.

Discussion

With policies and systems emphasizing cultural welfare, diversity, and integrated education, dance educators' efforts and interests should be supported so that professional dance education programs for disabled students can be promoted in earnest. In this context, this study began as part of an effort

to enable middle school students with intellectual disabilities to engage in choreography in new languages in creative dance classes. So far, the majority of studies on dance for the disabled explained the positive effects of physical, emotional, and social factors. However, most of the research has attempted to demonstrate the therapeutic potential and effectiveness of dance, concerns about what and how to teach in dance education for students with disabilities have not been sufficiently shared.

Therefore, this research was intended to lend meaning to the most basic elements, characteristics of choreography, and aesthetic experiences that can be experienced through dance. The narratives describe dance classes from an educator's point of view, in which students with intellectual disabilities are introduced to dance in a new language and lead creative movements and choreography with free expression.

Based on the process and results of this study, the following implications could be presented. First, in the planning stage, how to approach creative dance was a common concern. In this course, students who participated in the dance class were asked to lead motivation. This required a combination of linguistic and nonverbal elements that could naturally elicit movement. In the process, certain elements of rule and change had to be considered, such as attention focus, internal synchronization, imitation, and the use of tools. In particular, it was useful to plan a constant flow, change, and feedback throughout the introduction, main activities, and finishing of classes, including music and sound, props, and audiovisual materials, including paintings. Second, in the implementation stage, it was possible to reflect on the trial and error experienced by the professor, modify it, and present the future direction. In this process, we found several elements that elicited natural choreography through movement rather than demonstrating verbal explanations and techniques. This includes evoking curiosity through "unfamiliar things," adopting concrete approaches to new motion tasks and challenges, leading attention and appropriate transitions, praising and giving feedback on creative expressions, allowing the enjoyment of unpredictable improvisations, and minimizing evaluation and empathy. Third, it was important to have self-efficacy through the process of choreography by allowing people to have a perspective of reflection rather than measurement of creative performance. In this process, it includes learning about relationships with dance, familiarizing with confident expressions, and learning to respect diversity and consideration for others through collaborative choreography.

In the diversity and integration perspective, this study was designed to recognize the importance of dance education for students with disabilities and provide practical examples for the scalability of dance education currently being conducted. This study not only presents disabilities but also practical directions of dance education across boundaries and suggests implications for the professional roles of dance educators.

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