INTEGRATING DANCE FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES

by

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A Major Research Project submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Teaching

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Abstract

This qualitative study looks at how dance can be used as responsive pedagogy to support students with learning disabilities. Studies show that students with learning disabilities struggle with traditional teaching methods and instruction. Dance taps into kinesthetic learning and provides them a different way to acquire knowledge and demonstrate their learning. Two experienced teachers participated in a semi-structured interview and shared their knowledge and experiences with dance as responsive pedagogy and the effects it has on students with learning disabilities. The results showed that students who had the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in authentic ways experienced more success. They also showed that dance creates an inclusive environment that promotes a community with equality at the forefront. Furthermore, many barriers arose that are common factors for why more teachers are not incorporating this pedagogy into their classroom. Additional research needs to be conducted to find out how these barriers can be minimalized.

Keywords: dance, learning disabilities, pedagogy, kinesthetic learning
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction to the Research Study

In Canada, more than half a million adults live with a learning disability and struggle daily in their post secondary education and/or career (Learning Disabilities Association of Canada, 2006). Although it is known that learning disabilities can not be cured or fixed (Learning Disabilities Association of America, 2015), it may be beneficial to look at strategies that can be implemented effectively to help support them in their learning journey. Research states that a primary cause of the deficiency in support for these children is the lack of funding available to the schools (Roulades, 2013). Another reason may be that many teachers feel underprepared to address the individual learning differences in the classroom (Roulades, 2013). These reasons may contribute to why students with learning disabilities are not being mainstreamed into the classroom more regularly. That being said, research is expressing how arts integration incorporates the whole learning process (Smith, 2010), which may directly affect the shaping of an inclusive classroom. A learning disability is any condition that interferes with a student’s ability to learn and it results in impaired functioning that is caused by difficulties in processing and integrating information (Roulades, 2013). There are many types of learning disabilities that will be introduced and briefly discussed in the literature review. Special needs children are disadvantaged in the capacity of a mental, emotional or physical disability (Roulades, 2013). I identify special needs children only in this instance solely to support clarification of a learning disability, which is what I am focusing on for this study. Overall, I am not particularly interested in studying why children with learning disabilities are not being supported, but rather what strategies can we use to support these students with learning
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disabilities to perform at their maximum potential. Overall, the end goal is to research how teachers can help students excel.

Research shows that LD students have limited educational opportunities and resources (Roualdes, 2013). Thus, the Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) was passed in 2004 to support equal access to education opportunities for all children with disabilities (Mumford & Chandler, 2009). Roualdes (2013) states, “Children have a right to an appropriate education that meets their needs and serves to enhance their future” (pg. 15). These ever emphasizing strives for equality require an immediate call of action. Commonly, educators and parents focus on what these children cannot do, but a shift in thinking to what they can do might be the beginning of something new for these children. Many of these individuals have powerful interests, increased creativity, and an ability to abstract think and problem solve; therefore, it is extremely important that both their gift and disability are addressed (Baum, Cooper, Neu, 2001).

Research has found that one avenue for responding to students with learning disabilities is through an integrated curriculum (Smith, 2010). While the same research has demonstrated the potential for arts education as holistic pedagogy (Smith, 2010), the arts continue to be undervalued and underfunded in the Ontario education system (Smith, 2010). Dance and creative movement may generally be regarded as simply a displacement of the body through space. However, there may be considerable potential in what LD students internalize cognitively, emotionally, and socially. Research shows that integration of kinesthetic awareness and visual cues facilitated through dance can accommodate children’s learning (Jobling, Virji-Babul, Nichols, 2006). The literature review will delve into if it can also be effective for meeting the needs of students with LD. It is important to understand that arts integration can have
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benefits to all children, with or without disabilities through expression (Burrill, 2011). It may become a greater and more significant tool to LD students compared to non-LD students who may have the capacity to adapt all other learning strategies. Many LD students are generally unable to process complex verbal information thrown at them (Carnahan, Musti-Rao, Bailey, 2009). Some LD students are also vulnerable to processing too much information at once because they attend to all stimulus’ around them and can not prioritize which is most important to focus on (Smith, 2010). Hence, this may be why they seem distracted in class. Therefore, some LD students gain immense benefits when interacting with the curriculum through dance integration (Carnahan, Musti-Rao, Bailey, 2009) because they discriminate through all the senses and engage in an artistic experience (Smith, 2010). The main research problem is that the needs of LD students are not being met partially because many teachers cater to auditory and visual learners, which are inadequate methods to teach LD students (Skoning, 2008). LD students have stronger skills in visual, musical, and kinesthetic intelligences (Skoning, 2008). To meet the needs of these kinesthetic learners, teachers often include movement activities between lessons and some fail to connect it to the curriculum in meaningful ways that provide a rich learning experience for the students (Skoning, 2008). Smith (2010) emphasizes the role of arts in education and states, “The arts can and should play a central role as tools to further academic learning” (pg. 11). In particular, dance and creative movement may be the vehicle to academic success for LD students. Why not let our whole bodies become receptive to information instead of isolating input to only our auditory systems? Moving is the first and most important way as babies that we all explore and learn about the world (Dow, 2010), but we do not need to grow out of this exploration as we get older.
1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study is to learn how a sample of junior/intermediate division teachers are integrating dance as responsive pedagogy for students with learning disabilities. At this stage in research, dance as a method for LD students will be defined as a form of kinesthetic learning. LD students often feel trapped and it is important to discover how a teacher can be a facilitator in their learning to maximize support (Baum, Cooper, Neu, 2001). This study is important to the education system because it opens up doors to new ways teachers can further motivate these group of students to participate and engage in learning. Some LD students are highly motivated but perhaps the arts may be able to strengthen and advance their capabilities. Smith (2010) eloquently discusses the development art provides and states, “The arts can develop learning-disabled youngsters to develop and strengthen the perceptual skills that form the foundations for further learning” (pg. 12). This study will challenge the normative structure within the education system and focus on the experience of freedom in learning through unconventional methods.

1.2 Research Questions

LD students may be consistently receiving attention in research about their place in the education system, however, through in depth research, it is clear to me that studies in authentic approaches are lacking. The primary question guiding my research is: How is a sample of teachers integrating dance instruction and creative movement as responsive pedagogy for students with learning disabilities? This central question will be studied through the focus of the following subsidiary questions:
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• What are these teachers’ beliefs about the potential of dance instruction for students with learning disabilities?
• What instructional strategies and approaches do these teachers use to enact dance instruction? Where do they locate this instruction in the curriculum?
• What do these teachers observe as outcomes of dance integration for students with learning disabilities?
• What resources and factors support and challenge these teachers’ work?

1.3 Background of the Researcher

I am a Fine Arts graduate specializing in dance with a copious amount of experience in the area of kinesthetic learning. I was never an exceptional student during grades K-12. I was always able to get through with average grades, however, never had any great successes in any certain subjects. This did not affect me until I entered my fine arts program at York University. I immediately improved academically and felt I had gained a greater academic capacity. It was not until recently that I realized I am a very specific type of learner who does not find success in traditional teaching methods. During my undergraduate years, I had learned the ability to acquire and solidify knowledge through movement. I was attaining a deeper level of comprehension through this method. I have conceptualized this self-discovered method as using my whole body to be receptive of information and allow multi-dimensional input versus only using my auditory system as I did during my elementary and high school education. Furthermore, using multi-dimensional modes of output to express my learning and myself. It is interesting because I always danced competitively in a studio when I was younger and was never able to transfer my ability to move my body into my education. Dance and school were two distinct parts of my life that did not correspond to each other. The way I viewed dance during
that period of my life has been revolutionized to a much deeper understanding of dance that goes beyond just the physicality of it. I was exposed to experts in the field of dance pedagogy at York University and it was these experiences that have opened up my interest about dance education.

I am a sister of two brothers with mild learning disabilities that struggled continuously in the education system. I reminisce on their experiences and realize how much they were lacking in the classroom in regards to actively supporting them to find success. I define actively supporting as teachers consciously making an effort to expand their teaching practice to be more inclusive of children with LD’s. I am certain that the use of dance and creative movement would have catered to them successfully, allowing them to absorb information and express ideas more efficiently. Beyond the academic learning, I am confident that dance would have exponentially increased their ability to socialize with peers who often were very different than them. I stand strong about the need for more research in this area because I am a living experience of the immeasurable success it provides to students. With the knowledge I have about dance pedagogy and the lack of success that may be commonly associated with LD students, I approach this study from the perspective that dance and creative movement may have more profound advantages for students with learning disabilities.

1.4 Overview

Chapter 1 of this qualitative study began with an introduction to dance and LD students and went on to identify the purpose of the study and the research questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature currently available on the effects of dance on LD students. There is a limited amount of research in this area, therefore, a review of literature for both LD students and dance are included
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independently to respond to the apparent gap in research that will be discovered through this study. Chapter 3 provides the methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the sample participants and data collection instruments. Chapter 4 identifies the participants in the study and describes the data as it addresses the research question. Since there is a gap in the research, the background of each participant is imperative in providing context to the data collected and analyses made. Chapter 5 includes limitations of the study, conclusions, recommendations for practice, and further reading and study. References and a list of appendices follow at the end.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas of learning disabilities, dance, and art integration. More specifically I review themes related to kinesthetic learning. I start by reviewing the literature in the area of learning disabilities and I consider various types of LD’s; delving deeper into non-verbal learning disability. I also introduce attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder because up to half of ADHD children also have an LD (LDA, 2015). Next, I review research on pedagogy for learning disabilities. From there, I review the benefits of art integration. Finally, I consider the barriers to art integration.

This literature review will respond to the present gap in research regarding LD students and the use of art as a means of supporting their learning and creating an inclusive learning environment. In my research I will be looking at dance as one component of arts education, and engaging the implications of dance as a form of kinesthetic learning for students with learning disabilities. It is common that early learning problems are not addressed at school and could lead to problematic learning in later grades (Roualdes, 2013). Many approaches may be required to support these students in their learning. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act passed the No Child Left Behind mandate in the United States (Parker, Allen, McHatton, Rosa, 2010). This legislative mandate has sparked researchers to closely study how the education system can better support students with learning disabilities. This literature review will now begin to examine different areas of research.
2.1 Learning Disabilities

“Learning Disability” may be an over used and misused term in society and it is important to establish the criteria of what makes a child be diagnosed with a learning disability. An LD is a neurologically based processing problem (LDA, 2015) where children encounter difficulties with speaking, listening, thinking, reading, writing, spelling, and/or mathematics (Mumford & Chandler, 2009). There is a disorder present in one or more basic psychological processes and problem areas may be evident in the temporal organization of the brain where rhythm and force is controlled (Mumford & Chandler, 2009). In simple terms, discrepancies exist between the child’s intellectual capacity and academic performance (Mumford & Chandler, 2009). That being said, many LD students may be average or above in regards to academics. Some children with learning disabilities are mainstreamed into general classrooms at school. I define general classrooms as spaces where both LD students and non-LD students are welcomed. Sousa (2007) expresses that “Students with learning problems comprise such a heterogeneous group that no one strategy, technique, or intervention can address all their needs” (pg. 2). Although students may have the same diagnosis, the support they require can vary from each other.

A research study completed by Roualdes in 2013 determined the ten stages of the diagnosis of a learning disability. This information is significant because it represents the cumbersome process of identifying a LD student. The first stage is pre-referral and is followed by referral, pre-placement evaluation, eligibility determination, IEP development, determination of placement, provisions of services, annual evaluation of progress, and finally, triennial reevaluation (Roualdes, 2013). IEP development and annual evaluation of progress strike me as most important because those are the stages where there may be most potential for these students
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to be supported. Evaluating progress may be undermined by the idea that this disability is incurable, however, the potential for these students to develop may be overlooked. The same research study also developed seven specific areas of disabilities in LD students. In no particular order, receptive language (listening), expressive language (speaking), basic reading skills, reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics calculation, and mathematical reasoning (Roualdes, 2013). Mumford and Chandler’s (2009) study also highlights the receptive language problems and difficulty with verbal directions. They expressed the need of visual cues for these students and to be aware that they may also have problems developing verbal responses (Mumford & Chandler, 2009). Below, the literature review will respond to this particular issue through the recommendation of dance as a different way for these students to express themselves.

A few LD children have a limited capacity to engage in social interaction and therefore, alternate ways need to be found for these children to express ideas (Baum, Cooper, Neu, 2001). It is imperative that LD children gain self-respect so they can acquire the ability to relate to peers (Baum et al. 2001). Consequently, this may increase their self-efficacy, which may directly impact their acting-out behaviours. Through visual and kinesthetic experiences, students can become enabled to overcome verbal communication by being provided an alternate way to convey abstract ideas and guide their mental processes (Baum et al. 2001). Non-verbal learning disability and attention-deficit hyperactive disorder are two disorders that will be identified and discussed in further detail in this literature review. Teachers need to be critical of the lens they portray these students with and understand that learning disabilities are presented on a spectrum of stages of diagnosis. Identifying where the students fall on the spectrum will help teachers be
more accurate with their mode of support and work towards an inclusive classroom with an adequate understanding of the students’ needs.

2.1.1 Types of Learning Disabilities

Learning Disabilities vary in terms of how they affect individuals. It is important to gain insight to what each learning disability consists of to be able to better support the child in his/her learning environment. Each learning disability will be explained briefly. Auditory Processing Disorder (APD) affects how sound travels through the ear and is processed and interpreted by the brain (LDA, 2015). These children do not recognize subtle differences in sound and have difficulty finding the origin of sound, the order of sound, and also blocking out sound (LDA, 2015). Commonly known, dyscalculia is a disorder that affects the ability to learn math skills and understand numbers (LDA, 2015). These children will have difficulty telling time, counting, memorizing and organizing numbers, and overall poor comprehension of math skills (LDA, 2015). Next, dysgraphia affects handwriting ability and fine motor skills. This learning disability will become apparent with illegible handwriting, inconsistent spacing, poor spatial planning on paper, poor spelling, and difficulty composing writing (LDA, 2015). These children will struggle with thinking and writing simultaneously (LDA, 2015). This disability may be difficult to identify in younger grades because many children are still gaining fine motor skills. Another disability is known as dyslexia and it affects reading and language-based processing skills (LDA, 2015). The child’s reading fluency, decoding, reading comprehension, recall, writing, and spelling will be affected (LDA, 2015). Dyslexia will sometimes go as far as to affect the child’s speech (LDA, 2015), however this is an extreme affect. Subsequently, Language Processing Disorder is a specific type of APD and the child will have difficulty attaching meaning to language, consequently, affecting their expressive language and receptive
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language (LDA, 2015). Finally, Visual Perceptual or Visual Motor Deficit affects the understanding of the information a child will see (LDA, 2015). The child will struggle with drawing or copying from the board, as well as cutting, holding a pencil too tight, and poor eye/hand coordination (LDA, 2015). Non-verbal learning disability will be discussed in more detail in the following sub-heading.

2.1.2 Non-Verbal Learning Disability

Children with non-verbal learning disability represent one of ten children with a learning disability and their ability to read, speak, and listen is affected (Little, 1999). Biologically speaking, these children have a right hemisphere dysfunction where demyelination of white matter fibers is present (Little, 1999). Demyelination is damage to the covering of the nerve fibers (Little, 1999). This learning disability is predominately depicted by the child’s challenges to socially relate to others. Hahn (2004) describes it as the following: “The hallmark of non-verbal disabilities is problems with social cognition. Social cognition allows us to simultaneously perceive and understand words, sentences, tone of voice, facial expression, gestures, salient information about the speaker (adult, child, teacher, parent) and information about the environment (classroom, restaurant, grandmother’s house) amongst other components” (pg. 50). This statement encompasses the many challenges a child with non-verbal learning disability may experience. It also highlights how these children may have difficulty entering a conversation appropriately and subsequently may engage in nonreciprocal conversations that are boring and monotone (Little, 1999). Their conversations may also be characterized by a frequent change of subject (Little, 1999). Due to their poor social interaction skills, they have difficulty with relationships and are vulnerable to being made fun of due to not being able to interpret
social cues adequately (Little, 1999). Social competencies are one of five areas that children with non-verbal learning disabilities struggle with.

In (1999), Little created the acronym “SAVME.” It represents, social competencies, academic performance, visual spatial abilities, motor coordination, and emotional functioning (Little, 1999). Social competencies were touched on above and next I will discuss how their academic performance may be compromised. It is clear that these competencies will have an effect on the child’s academic performance. Their decreased academic performance is associated with their decreased ability to transfer learning from one situation to the next (Little, 1999). It is also important to highlight their strengths as students. They are predominately strong in word recognition and reading in an academic setting and out (Little, 1999). As a non-verbal learning disability student will be strong in these two academic areas, they struggle with comprehension (Little, 1999). Third under discussion is their visual-spatial ability (Little, 1999). In the classroom, this may be flagged when there is an inability to copy the board that may be due to their poor visual memory that inhibits them to engage in this day-to-day task in the classroom (Little, 1999). In addition, these children will have difficulty remembering faces and difficulty understanding spatial relationships (Little, 1999). An example of spatial relationships is students understanding how bodies move in space. This is a critical point in supporting the need to answer the research question presented. The fourth characterization of non-verbal learning disability being discussed is motor coordination (Little, 1999). These children are typically clumsy (Hahn, 2004) and have poor proprioception and kinesthetic awareness (Little, 1999). This poor kinesthetic awareness can be associated with their poor understanding of spatial awareness presented above. Often, attention to refine kinesthetic awareness is neglected in the classroom, however, it is a great weakness of students with non-verbal learning disability.
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Consequently, these students will have difficulty holding a pencil to write due to their poor tactile ability (Little, 1999), (Hahn, 2004). Emotional functioning represents the fifth and final letter of the acronym “SAVME” (Little, 1999). These children experience an inability to learn from past experiences and become frustrated very easily (Little, 1999). They have an overall increased risk of depression, isolation, and self-esteem (Little, 1999). Students with non-verbal learning disability frequently withdraw themselves from social contexts and inevitably are prone to be sedentary and avoid physical activity at any cost (Little, 1999). It is clear that all five characteristics of non-verbal learning disability are linked to a degree of social competency and there may be a significant need for a solution to help these students express themselves more comfortably in an inclusive classroom.

2.1.3 Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder

ADHD is not a learning disability, however 30%-50% of ADHD children also have a LD, causing the two conditions to interact and make learning very challenging (LDA, 2015) (Messina, Tiedemann, De Andrade, Primi, 2006). Due to this alarming statistic, it may be important to discuss ADHD in this literature review, as it may allow more teachers to connect to this research paper. Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder is a genetic vulnerability. In this disorder there is a dysfunction of the prefrontal cortex along with a deficiency in the dopamine neurotransmitter in this area of the brain (Messina et al. 2006). ADHD is characterized by inattention, impulsivity, hyperactivity, disorganization, and social inability (Messina et al. 2006). In addition, there are also deficits in the working memory (Messina et al. 2006). There is a clear link of similarity between ADHD and non-verbal learning disability. Two common characteristics they share are social competencies and poor working memory. They are both selected to undergo research due to their mild severity and their link to inadequate abilities to
relate to others socially. Research has been conducted to substantiate that the cause of ADHD can be linked to exposure to chemicals during pregnancy and long delivery (Messina et al. 2006).

ADHD is associated with many more than only learning problems. It is also linked to emotional problems and social problems (Brand, Dunn, Greb, 2002). Teachers and parents need to be aware and open to the multi-faceted challenges with an ADHD child. All ADHD children do not learn the same (Brand et al. 2002), however, they are all characterized with one general learning style that does not fit the traditional style. They typically learn more effectively in the afternoon with soft illumination and respond well to kinesthetic and tactile discovery (Brand et al. 2002). This is important to note because they need facilitators that will recognize their strengths and let them be leaders of their own learning. It is proven that these students can achieve higher scores with the appropriate instructional approaches (Brand et al. 2002). ADHD students do strive to achieve attention and impulse control (Brand et al. 2002) and we should support them in their learning through ways that are receptive to them.

2.1.4 Pedagogy for Learning Disabilities

I will begin this area of literature review with a description of what some LD students will go through on a daily basis.

“The learning-disabled child cannot make sense out of his senses. They are jumbled, scattered, all over the place. The pattern on the tablecloth and the food on his plate come through to him with equal intensity, and he cannot focus on either one. He cannot ignore the footsteps in the hall, the light tumbling in through the venetian blinds, the arm of his neighbor flinging her hair, or the jangling earrings of his instructor and still manage to focus on what the teacher is saying. Everything going on in the classroom
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distracts him from paying attention to what he is there to do-to learn. He is not yet equipped to filter out the irrelevant and the unnecessary automatically. He is indiscriminate: a characteristic of immaturity” (Smith, 2010, pg. 12).

This excerpt is powerful in that it illuminates the struggles and challenges that LD students experience. A learning disability is regularly referred to as a hidden handicap, however, what is also hidden is their talent (Smith, 2010). These students need to be given more credit for the strengths, and regarded less in terms of their weaknesses. Smith (2010) expresses, “Through the arts, a child can order his world, make sense of what he knows, relate past experience to present, and turn muscular activity into thought and ideas into action” (pg. 12). Art must be central to education and not peripheral because the arts integrate the whole learning process (Smith, 2010). Understanding sequences is vital for LD students, as illustrated in the passage above, and fortunately, the artistic creation has order that commonly offers a beginning, middle, and end (Smith, 2010). The same research by Smith (2010) also states, “For many learning disabled children, academic content – mathematical functions, grammar, syntax, spelling – can be taught and made to stick through the arts” (pg. 14). Skoning (2008) conducted a study to find the effects of integrating dance in math and the results revealed that the integration of dance in math increased positive attitudes toward the subject area. In addition, the creation of movement provided a basis for developing written elaboration of the student’s own stories, demonstrating that dance integration had positive effects for literacy as well (Skoning, 2008). The teacher of an LD student needs to be the focusing agent for them and through modeling, emphasize their teaching of the approach to the task than the actual task itself (Smith, 2010). Smith (2010) notes “Artists who can laugh at themselves in an easy, accepting way are important models for children who see themselves only as a source of worry to others” (pg. 13). Teachers need to
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invite students to make mistakes in artistic expression (Smith, 2010). Through giving them this permission, teachers are creating opportunities for competence and mastery to be achieved, which subsequently increases self-esteem (Smith, 2010).

Children with learning disabilities need programs that offer an inclusive environment that honours diversity, and different strategies to help them compensate their weaknesses (Baum et al. 2001). Although there may be some of these programs being implemented, many may only be proposed, and the rest may have not even considered an inclusive environment for children with learning disabilities. Every child who has been identified with a learning disability has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that sets out accommodations and modifications to help them succeed. However, it is evident that this may not be enough. Many of these IEP’s provide students with computers so they can accommodate their poor handwriting through keyboarding (Hahn, 2004). Other IEP’s may recommend the student use a checklist to manage tasks and chores (Hahn, 2004). These pedagogical alternatives to learning do prove their benefits and are widely used across the province.

Given the research documenting the limitations of IEPs, it is important to also consider the potential impact of differentiating instruction to meet diverse learning style preferences. Sousa (2007) recommends “Just changing our instructional approach may be enough to move these students to the ranks of successful learners” (pg. 4). Teachers need to engage students by creating meaning and making it relevant to themselves (Sousa, 2007). In doing so, there will be an increase of retention in LD students and a transfer of material from their working memory to long-term storage (Sousa, 2007). This will be achieved by switching the emphasis to why they need to know the concepts (Sousa, 2007), which go beyond simply presenting the concepts. Teachers will find it effortless to explain the why component by engaging students through real
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world inquiry that allows them to be transformed from passive to active creators (Baum et al. 2001). Developing active creators can be accomplished through collaboration and teamwork with other peers, which directly increases social interaction (Baum et al, 2001). Through engaging in this active process, the students with learning disabilities gain a sense of empowerment because they feel they have something to contribute (Baum et al. 2001). Teachers need to consistently find opportunities for these students to solve authentic problems that have real impacts on the world (Baum et al. 2001).

“Students with learning disabilities need more time and guidance than others to rehearse new learning in order to determine sense and recognize meaning” (Sousa, 2007, pg. 14). This statement emphasizes that children with learning disabilities need to be given adequate time to process their learning (Sousa, 2007) and it is the teachers responsibility to ensure they create this opportunity for the student. In addition to processing time, teachers can further engrave learning through the use of sensory-motor integration for students with learning disabilities (Safavi, Faghirpour, Salehi, 2013). Research shows that sensorimotor integration methods can make effective changes to the motor skills and visual spatial perception of children with learning disabilities (Safavi, 2013). These effective changes consist of increased motivation and increased self-confidence, which overall lead to an increased academic level (Safavi, 2013). Beyond increasing academic level, perceptual motor practice as well increases physical image and self-concept (Safavi, 2013). As mentioned earlier in the literature review, this will have a positive effect on the child’s self-efficacy. It is important to integrate this type of learning for these students because although they have normal intelligence, they will experience failures due to sensorimotor perception because of their defects in work memory and mental image (Safavi et
al. 2013). Teachers need to regularly find ways to strengthen their weaknesses so they can move forward in all domains: social, emotional, and learning.

### 2.2 Benefits of Art on Learning

Thus far, the literature presented has reviewed what defines LD students and more specifically, how non-verbal learning disabilities and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder relate. A common characteristic that needs to be highlighted is that these children experience social perception weakness (Hahn, 2004). Research suggests that dance can facilitate these children in expressing inner emotions more effectively and support them in growing and evolving when they face adverse situations (Ridler, 2014). Furthermore, they can develop relationships through creative self-expression that allows them to form their own identity (Zimmerman, 2010). Identity formation must be established before a child can engage in developing relationships. The child must have an idea of who they are first so they can understand what they can give in a relationship and what they can take from a relationship.

Creative movement allows all children to participate because each child approaches movement in different ways (Dow, 2010). “Dance is important to incorporate into our inclusive classrooms if we want to meet the needs of more diverse groups of students” (Skoning, 2008, pg. 9). This statement by Skoning (2008) reminds us that there are positive outcomes for students with and without disabilities when integrating dance and movement activities to general education lessons. This occurs because the teacher is providing a new alternative for each of the students to interact with the concepts in their own way. Dance also facilitates an inclusive space because inappropriate behaviours decrease when all students have the ability to move during learning (Skoning, 2008). Additionally, dance provides an inclusive assessment method, as it is
useful to evaluate expression of student’s understanding of the content (Skoning, 2008). “Dance is beneficial for students who have difficulty expressing themselves orally or in writing” (Skoning, 2008, pg. 5). It accommodates kinesthetic learners, which will be touched on later in the literature review. “When creative energy is aligned with learning objectives, a positive environment is created” (Skoning, 2008, pg. 4). Skoning’s (2008) study commits to demonstrating the potential dance has to create an inclusive classroom.

Dance helps children to learn to control their bodies and develop awareness of moving in space with other bodies (Dow, 2010). Intrapersonal relationships begin to be developed. “Creative movement is an art form whose medium is the human body in motion” (Dow, 2010, pg. 30). The children manipulate their bodies using the five elements of dance; relationships, space, time, body awareness, and energy (Dow, 2010). With these five elements, children who are unfamiliar with moving their bodies can find comfort in these guidelines that establish dance. Dow expresses what dance has to offer by stating, “Creative movement gives children opportunities to move in new ways and helps them learn that there can be more than one solution to a question, a problem, or a task” (pg. 31). Through the five elements of dance, students can discover a solution that is unique and adaptable to them. “Limiting the child’s world to help him create does not mean limiting the child’s ability to express himself” (Smith, 2010, pg. 13). It is important that teachers give parameters and borders to help organize what they wish to express (Smith, 2010). As mentioned previously, teachers need to teach the approach to the task (Smith, 2010) and let the children’s creativity take over following that.

Dance is bimodal in that it provides physical activity and a vehicle for self-expression (Dow, 2010). Lessons become enriched by dance and movement (Dow, 2010) as students use self-expression to demonstrate their understanding of concepts. In Smith’s (2010) study, he
claims “The arts lend themselves to the imaginative use of concrete materials and experience to teach perceptual skills as well as abstract concepts” (pg. 15). The perceptual skills component is crucial for LD students because many of them may struggle with fine motor skills. Movement and exercise can spark the growth of new brain cells and enhance learning (Dow, 2010).

Exercise is an evident component of dance that is commonly concealed by the artistic quality. Research shows that exercise improves learning through neurological adaptations (Down, 2010).

“In the arts, a child can see success with his own eyes and experience that exhilarating feeling of ‘I can do it!’” (Smith, 2010, pg. 16). An inclusive classroom is when everyone can share that statement.

2.2.1 Movement Education

Rudolph Laban (1879-1958) was a movement theorist who developed Laban-based movement education (Jobling, Virji-Babul, Nichols, 2006). He analyzed movements through re-conceptualizing elements of dance. Through his experimentation and engagement in movement, he established four core concepts. Laban’s core concepts are space, weight, time, and flow (Jobling et al., 2006). It is important to review this area of literature because it provides teachers with an established theory that supports analyzing movement. Perhaps teachers fear incorporating dance into their classroom due to an apprehension that they cannot partake in assessment or provide the students with valuable feedback on their movement. Laban-based movement education provides a framework for the uncertainty surrounding movement education.

“… movement learned in this way could become a language of expression and communication for young children…” (Jobling et al., 2006, pg. 36). Providing LD children with an ability to move increases their accessibility for exploration and learning (Jobling et al., 2006).
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Jobling et al., (2006) posed four concepts to be used when incorporating movement education. The first concept is awareness development of the body, space, and effort (Jobling et al., 2006). The second concept is language movement development (Jobling et al., 2006). The third concept is time for exploration and practice and the fourth concept is communicating and interacting with others (Jobling et al., 2006). There needs to be an effort in making practice a positive experience with movement education through providing rhythm with the body itself (Jobling et al., 2006). With practice, the students can be challenged to incorporate more body parts (Jobling et al., 2006). Adding content in a non-linear way through integrated experiences (Baum et al., 2001) is what makes this pedagogy unique and powerful.

One of the four concepts presented above was space and effort awareness. With practice, space awareness creates relationships with the body and space, and body and others (Jobling et al., 2006). Effort awareness teaches the children sustainment of movement and self-awareness that allows them to pay attention to the feelings of movement (Jobling et al., 2006). There is an opportunity for the students to reflect on the sensations of movements. Movement education furnishes communication and interaction with peers and offers them an opportunity to express themselves creatively within these relationships (Jobling et al., 2006). “They can use their developing movement language to communicate with others and formulate their ideas” (Jobling et al., 2006, pg. 38). Movement education goes beyond moving bodies in space and postulates social and emotional development. Moreover, it facilitates a healthy active lifestyle.

2.2.2 Kinesthetic Learning

A component of learning may be reflective of being able to relate to the external world (Burrill, 2011). This component of learning may be accomplished through motor-sensory and
perceptual integration into the curriculum (Burrill, 2011). According to Burrill (2011), the foundations of the natural learning process are freedom of movement and expression. Students present their inner states through outer expression (Burrill, 2011). However, the problem stands that children are not comfortable with expressive movement and consequently, are not expressing themselves, causing learning to be hindered. “… formal activities required that the children use a level of motor-sensory and perceptual organization, through the direction of ego-conscious control, which they have not yet adequately developed” (Burrill, 2011, pg. 125). This statement highlights that formal activities commonly used in the classroom are not developmentally appropriate and consequently are causing the students to focus their energy internally to defend against inappropriate, spontaneous movement (Burrill, 2011). More attention on movement education needs to be made to create more opportunities for children to move in the classroom. Movement is an innate intelligence that is not being fully utilized (Burrill, 2011). As a result, interrelationship skills are as well not being fully utilized in the learning environment (Burrill, 2011). It is clear that the natural learning process is being hindered by age-inappropriate learning environments (Burrill, 2011). Therefore we must encourage students to engage in spontaneous and improvised movement and with time, they will be able to take in sensory information and make learning of it (Burrill, 2011). Overall, dance allows for more instinctual and emotional expression that engages students in creative problem solving and complex social relating (Burrill, 2011).

2.2.3 Social Emotional Learning

In (2007), Russell and Hutzel researched social emotional learning (SEL). SEL uses interdisciplinary learning to acquire social and emotional competence (Russell & Hutzel, 2007). It prepares students for life effectiveness by encouraging the students to create artworks for
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others and with others (Russell & Hutzel, 2007). SEL is successful through art integration and teachers are encouraged to explore how they both enhance each other. Art allows for less pedagogical structure and more personal discovery. Students can really become lost in their own work and can produce art that they are willing to share in a social setting. I am speaking to all arts in this section of the literature review. During social emotional learning, students’ artistic expression of emotions and social issues are the focus (Russell & Hutzel, 2007).

2.2.4 Bringing Back Play

Research has found that there is a common belief among teachers and parents that play is a form of learning that should be reserved for the kindergarten program, and that as students get older they requires less opportunities for play (Rivera, 2009). Rivera (2009) challenges these misconceptions and states “Play can enliven a depressed or withdrawn student, help them belong, advance creativity or critical thinking, and release tension” (pg. 52). All these elements are what will help a teacher create an inclusive classroom. The withdrawn students may include LD students or students without a diagnosis that are merely not engaged. Play is a very general term and in Rivera’s (2009) research, she establishes criteria of what she denotes as play. “…play needs to be collaborative, interactive, reciprocal, and genuine” (Rivera, 2009, pg. 57). These are all four significant elements in achieving successful play. Teachers need to be cautious of the use of technology because screen time takes away from creativity, which is explored within play (Rivera, 2009). Rivera (2009) shares a powerful statement, “For each, mastery is the goal. Competence is the reward. And play is the means” (pg. 50). Play is the process students engage in to master many skills in and outside of the classroom. Play is a natural process all children engage in from babies and it seems dehumanizing to inhibit it once a child enters a classroom. Teachers need to support play and find ways to create opportunities for
play through kinesthetic learning. Children with learning disabilities strive on these opportunities. Supporting strengths of these students is imperative.

2.3 Barriers To Art Integration In The Classroom

With any benefits to education come barriers. Presumptuously, there are barriers present to art integration in the classroom. In a research study conducted by Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden in (2000), teachers identify class size, inadequate resources, and inadequate teacher preparation as factors that would affect their ability to incorporate inclusivity in their classroom. However, teachers that successfully incorporated active inclusivity in their classroom had positive attitudes about inclusion and teachers who did not participate in inclusion had negative feelings (Avramidis et al. 2000). These results will presumably carry forward to any chosen teacher today. The level of professional development is related to a teacher’s attitude toward inclusion (Avramidis et al. 2000). Overall, teachers with more training will demonstrate increased confidence in meeting Individual Education Plan (IEP) requirements (Avramidis et al. 2000). If teachers find challenges in meeting IEP requirements, they may struggle with finding opportunities to integrate art. Art integration may carry a preconceived notion that it requires more planning than traditional pedagogy. It may commonly be misunderstood as additional work but in reality, it is simply a different type of work that involves trial and error to see what works best with the group of students. Teachers need to break the barriers of art integration and have faith and patience that this integration has an immense potential in creating an inclusive classroom for students with learning disabilities.
2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review I looked at research on dance and learning disabilities. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to children with LD’s. It also raises questions about the lack of success students with learning disabilities are experiencing and points to the need for further research in the areas of dance as a means of creating an inclusive classroom for LD students.

It is clear through the review of the literature that there is evidently a gap in research. The research question aims to respond to this gap and provide insight into this area of research through two semi-structured interviews completed with educators engaged in art education. These interviews aim to provide insights on how to better support LD students in the classroom. It is recognizable that dance integration leans away from formal structures in the education system. However, formal structure is not the only way to help children succeed. As it may work for some, it may also hinder many. Dance offers continual exploration without structure or repetition (Jobling et al., 2006). It is this absence of structure and repetition that might spark learning in many children. Society values normal and labels anything not normal; for example, students with learning disabilities. Dance can be used to break self-imposed barriers that society labels as normal (Ridler, 2014). Furthermore, dance may be the outlet for LD students to experience what normal is with a new way to relate to others through movement. The focus needs to shift from the student’s inabilities to the student’s uniqueness (Jobling et al. 2006). Students with learning disabilities may all have hidden gifts that are seldom discovered. Dance may provide them with a new perspective of what it means to have learning disabilities.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology used to conduct this research study. I begin my methodology with a review of the overall research approach and then move forward to the procedures and data collection instruments. Following, I expand on participant sampling and recruitment where I state criteria created to guide this aspect of the methodology. Subsequently, I explain procedures for data analysis as well as carefully review the ethical considerations that are relevant to my research study. Evidently, methodological limitations exist and they are identified in conjunction with the methodological strengths. Conclusively, I end the chapter with a brief overview of the research methodology as a whole and how it is pertinent to my research purpose and questions. In addition, I discuss what is to follow in the next chapter.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study will be conducted using a qualitative research approach involving a literature review and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Qualitative research investigates different aspects than many other types of research. It creates opportunity for authentic experiences of individuals to be studied and therefore allows for a different analysis of data to occur. Qualitative research allows for a research problem to be explored in a complex manner that can only be established through talking directly with people (Creswell, 2013). It is suitable for research problems that do not fit a quantitative approach. As Creswell (2013) explains, “To level all individuals to a statistical mean overlooks the uniqueness of individuals in our studies” (pg. 48). Given my research problem, the qualitative approach opens up opportunities to
empowering individual differences and allows for exploration. Students with learning disabilities are all very unique and therefore, the responsive pedagogy integrated by the teacher will vary immensely. Feldman (2003) discusses educational research to have an existentialist orientation that leads educators to focus on who they are as teachers and the decisions they make. This type of research encompasses a form of self-study (Feldman, 2003). Qualitative research provides a more effective approach for the research problem posed.

In this research, I reviewed literature that was pertinent to the research problem and will conduct face-to-face interviews with two teachers that are selected based on a specific set of criteria. The interviews will be done in natural settings to attempt to make meaning of what people bring to these settings (Creswell, 2013). This component of the research process is essential as it is a common characteristic of qualitative research. During the interview, I will ask open-ended questions that will allow me to gather authentic data and provide me with an opportunity to make meaning of the information during my interpretation and analysis. Following the interview, I will code all the data collected and analyze it using themes. Creswell and Miller (2000) articulate that “…qualitative researchers use a lens not based on scores, instruments, or research designs but a lens established using the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study” (pg. 125). I will end this research process with questions and problems that still remain unanswered and unsolved in addition to the implications of the research brought to light.

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection:

The primary instrument for data collection that will be used in this study is the semi-structured interview protocol. The semi-structured interview is lead by initially building a rapport with the participant to ensure quality data is being shared (Creswell, 2013). The
questions are open-ended and leave room for elaboration in a non-linear fashion. When I speak of non-linear, I intend to emphasize the immense opportunity for the questions to be answered and revisited as the interview goes along. This is appropriate given my research problem and question because it demonstrates that the instrument of data collection being used is providing the participant an opportunity to elaborate on their lived experiences. It creates a space where there are no wrong answers and everything shared is valued to the interviewer. Inviting this re-visititation of previous questions is crucial in collecting data. It contributes to the creation of a natural setting and building of rapport. Thornsen and Devore (2013) state: “Reflective practice is also an integral part of evaluating one’s own teaching performance and preparation, learner outcomes, and the ability to promote learning, social interaction, and self-actualization in students” (pg. 89). Semi-structured interviews encourage an immense amount of reflection due to its lack of structure and makes meaningful contributions to educational research.

3.3 Participants

In this section I examine the sampling criteria I determined for recruiting participants for the research study through many sub sections. I examine sampling procedures I will use for teacher recruitment and include a section where I will introduce each of the participants I select. A brief biography of both teachers will give insight into where the teacher’s experiences are rooted. For the time being, this sub section remains blank.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

In this sub section I review criteria that will be used to select participants. They will be listed in bullet form and followed by a rationale for each criterion.

• Teachers need to have worked with children who are diagnosed with a learning disability.
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- Teachers need to have worked with LD children for a minimum of five years with an opportunity to document progress.
- Teachers need to have worked with children aged 5-13.
- Teachers need to have demonstrated commitment to incorporating opportunities for dance/creative movement in their everyday teaching practice.
- Teachers do not need to have any formal dance training.

My literature review focuses on fostering success to children with learning disabilities; therefore establishing criteria ensures that the research problem is being closely cogitated in the interview. It will be adequate if a teacher is able to speak to experiences working with one type of learning disability. A teacher with experiences working with numerous learning disabilities is an advantage. In addition, the teacher needs to be able to establish how the pedagogy impacts the learning of the LD child. This minimum time requirement ensures that the experiences being shared are of highest quality and provides me with the opportunity to draw on their experiences over a period of time. The research study focuses on elementary children, therefore the teachers recruited will need to have experience with that particular age group. The pedagogy will affect elementary students differently than high school students. In efforts to avoid making this research study too broad, I choose a specific age group to refine the study. Another criteria crucial to teacher recruitment is the use of responsive pedagogy on a regular basis. My research question raises the idea of integrating dance and creative movement to increase engagement and participation in learning. Learning should occur on a daily basis, therefore teachers will be selected that are using the responsive pedagogy daily. It is important to stress that teachers are not required to have dance experience. I am more interested in the leadership and level of creativity that a teacher encompasses versus their training in dance. In my literature review
where I define dance, I highlight the creative component versus the physicality and rigidity of dance training. These five criteria were carefully chosen to ensure effective teacher recruitment that will be reflective in the data collected.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

To recruit participants I attended workshops at OISE as well as professional development days during my placement block. PD days are a great opportunity to network with other teachers besides your associate teacher. Workshops at OISE commonly bring in guest teachers to share experiences and this is another great opportunity to meet potential participants. Additionally, I will contact school boards and ask them to send out the criteria of my research study to teachers with my contact information for them to be in touch with me if they are interested. Some of these individuals might include teachers who work in a school with an arts program. To ensure that ethical procedures are always being respected, I will give them the opportunity to contact me instead of asking for their information. This warrants the voluntarism of the teachers. Furthermore, I will contact Fine Arts professors at University of Toronto and York University to discuss my criteria and inquire if they are able to share the information with teachers they think would be most suitable. Moreover, I will contact CODE (Council of Ontario Drama and Dance Educators) in hopes that they can connect me with leaders in this area of pedagogy. All in all, these sampling procedures should help me find success in my teacher recruitment.

There are different types of sampling used to recruit participants. A common type in qualitative research is purposeful sampling. “This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2013, pr. 156). Both types of purposeful sampling, random
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purposeful and stratified purposeful have greater credibility than convenience sampling which “saves time, money, and effort, but at the expense of information and credibility” (Creswell, 2013, pg. 158). The research study will also be relying on convenience sampling due to the small-scale nature of its parameters.

3.3.3 Participant Bios

I carefully selected two participants for my research study that met my criteria and provided insights into my research questions. I will refer to them as Participant A and B. Both participants had very different backgrounds that I thought would offer different perspectives into my research study. Their different experiences add depth to my study that I critically analyze in chapter four. I will share some important background information about each participant that is relevant to the study and provides an opportunity to distinguish between the two.

Participant A is a middle-aged female who grew up in Toronto. She does not teach in Ontario but rather teaches in Calgary where she resides. She began teaching at Saint Augustine in Calgary Catholic School District in the fall of 2014 and currently still teaches there. She teaches Grade nine English and Religion in addition to Dance for Grades seven to nine. Prior to moving out west, for several years Participant A substitute taught with some short-term contracts in grades five and eight in Ontario schools. Additionally, she taught dance in the private school sector where she very much enjoyed her experiences which she took with her when moving out west. Participant began her education career by completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a major in Dance at Ryerson University in Toronto. Subsequently, she earned her Bachelor’s degree in Education at the University of Ontario Institute of Technology. Prior to receiving both her university degrees, she trained at a residential ballet school for eight years and danced with a
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contemporary ballet company in Montreal. She has a vast amount of experiences in dance and is bringing this passion into her education career.

Participant B was also a middle-aged female who took a different path than Participant A and pursued research in dance education. She is currently finishing up her doctorate with anticipated completion in 2016. She has not worked as a school teacher but has a vast amount of experience working with children from birth to thirteen years of age for over twenty years. Participant B considers herself an educator and arts specialist. She began her education career at York University where she completed an undergraduate degree in Fine Arts studies with a minor in dance. Following, she pursued a master’s degree in dance at the same institution. Her research focused on dance education in an elementary school with Grade two students. She developed a curriculum and worked with the students to see the effectiveness of some of the ways she was utilizing dance as a way of approaching character education. She went on to open up her own creative arts center for several years that had music and movement programs. Participant B joined OISE faculty in 2009-2010 where her focused switched to teacher education.

3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

I will use the data analysis spiral to make meaning of the data collected (Creswell, 2013). First, I will organize the data briefly and then I will begin by reading and rereading the transcribed interview data where I will memo and make notes in the margins during the process. Next, I will use my research questions as an interpretive tool for classifying the information into categories. As Creswell (2013) explains: “The process of coding involves aggregating the text or visual data into small categories…” (pg. 184). Coding is a very timely process that is essential in
analyzing data. I will use tables to organize the information into categories and then identify themes that were commonly evident throughout the data. I will begin by identifying many themes and afterwards synthesize these themes to only a few major themes that can summarize my research findings. Another component of the data analysis spiral is interpreting the data, which allows the researcher to find the larger meaning of the data by an abstraction process that goes beyond the codes and themes (Creswell, 2013, pg. 187). Finally, I will represent and visualize the data in a table (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, I will use different coloured highlighter markers to underline important insights that struck me while analyzing the data. These analysis methods will help me to have a discussion of my research findings in the next chapter.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Regardless of what approach is chosen in a qualitative study, ethical issues will always arise when it comes to the data collection and dissemination of information (Creswell, 2013). To begin with, all participants will be assigned a pseudonym to ensure their identity remains confidential. Additionally, names of schools and students will also be excluded. Subsequently, they will also be given the right to withdraw at any stage of the research study. Participants will also be reminded of their right to not answer a question. Following the interview, the participant will have an opportunity to review the transcripts to clarify or retract any statements that they made. This will ensure that the participant is comfortable with all the data I will be using to move forward in conducting the data analysis component. Furthermore, all data will be stored on my password-protected laptop and will be destroyed after five years. Prior to any commencement, the participant will sign a consent letter that will outline all their rights and highlight how I as a researcher will look out for their best interest and protection. They will be
advised that there are no known risks to participation. Overall, I will follow the ethical review approval procedures for the Master of Teaching Program where the interview data will only be stored on my computer but my final MTRP will be uploaded on T-space, which is publicly accessible.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

Methodological limitations and strengths are apparent in this research study. I will speak to the methodological limitations first. To begin with, the ethical parameters are specific to the MTRP and the uniformity throughout everyone’s research studies makes it difficult for each study to be unique. For example, participants are only allowed to be teachers and cannot include parents or students, and the only research method that can be used are semi-structured interviews. Subsequently, classroom observations or surveys are as well not permitted under the ethical parameters. Additionally, each researcher is limited to the number of teachers that they are allowed to interview. This as well falls into the ethical parameters. Although the interview will inform the topic, the findings are not generalizable to the broader teaching population.

There are also several strengths to this methodology. First, the ability to sit down with teachers and engage in conversation opens up opportunities for experiences to be shared. It allows you to hear from them in more depth than a survey permits. The interviews validate teacher voice and provide them with the opportunity to make meaning of their experiences. Next, the interviews provide teachers with a chance to reflect on their teaching practices and to articulate how they conceptualize concepts into practice. Therefore, this is an immense methodological strength evident in the research study. Overall, all the above methodological limitations and strengths will be reflective of the data that will be collected.
3.7 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research methodology, which includes many details pertinent to how the research study will be conducted. It began with a brief introduction and quickly went into the research approach that was determined to be a qualitative research study that use semi-structured interviews as the research procedure. Next, it touched on the instruments of data collection where the details of the semi-structured interviews were discussed. In this section, the natural setting of the interviews was emphasized. Following, the sampling criteria and procedures were established. The participant bios were left blank for the time being. Then, the data analysis spiral was introduced as the approach being used for data collection and analysis. Finally, the ethical review procedures were stated and how they influenced the methodological limitations and strengths of the research study. Next, in chapter 4, I report the research findings.
Chapter Four: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter I report and discuss the findings of my research question pertaining to using dance as responsive pedagogy for students with learning disabilities. I identify five themes comprised of numerous codes from the data that my participants provided through a semi-structured interview. My five themes I will critically analyze are teacher and student background, beliefs of teachers, students, and parents, instructional strategies used, observed outcomes for LD students, and finally, factors that support and challenge this approach. I will conclude the chapter with a discussion around how the themes compared and if my data confirms what I found in my literature review.

4.1 Teacher and Student Background

My first theme I will discuss is teacher and student background. This theme encompasses participant’s professional practice, professional development, and education. It as well encompasses the demographics and passion of both the teachers and students. Both my participants came from a Fine Arts background where their dance experience began at a very young age. Furthermore, they both expressed a passion for dance that began at a very young age. During the interview, Participant A shares, “And I was sold the moment I stepped into the dance room. For me it was an escape from reality. I could be free, I could express myself, I could feel, I could be seen, I mattered. I was good at it, I felt that my body knew what to do. It was just love. Absolute love.” These statements highlight her passion that drives her to do the work she does in the arts. Participant A articulated that she is self-taught and how important it is for her to be constantly thinking about new ways of looking at the arts. Her current experience teaching
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Arts Education with her PHD dissertation supervisor has helped her transform her thinking around the arts and education in general from a more theoretical lens. She has an abundance of practical experience in the classroom and outside the classroom and her teaching experience has allowed her to really think more deeply and theoretically about the work she does. Another experience she speaks to is becoming certified in Kinder Music where she was an educator in this capacity for fourteen years and subsequently became a trainer for the pedagogy. The program was based on curriculum and had a particular philosophy that she loved. It bridged her creative movement training with music that she now brings into the classroom. The students she worked with had many developmental delays and verbal acquisition delays where she was able to use movement and music to work with these students over a long period of time. A lot of the students she worked with were from the Toronto and Durham region in affluent areas where they could afford to bring in an arts specialist like herself. Her class was a diverse group that was comprised of IEP’s, LD’s, and other challenges. This speaks to her ability to accommodate different needs within one classroom. It also speaks to her openness and commitment to the work she does and demonstrates that no challenge could deteriorate her from sharing her knowledge about dance education.

Participant B spoke to her teaching experiences at the junior/intermediate level. She works in a Fine Arts school that prides itself on enriching all curricular areas through the arts. Participant B studied English and Dance in her undergraduate degree following extensive training for eight years in residential ballet school. She has experience working with students with dysgraphia, dyslexia, non-verbal learning disabilities and she highlighted that many of these students also were diagnosed with ADHD. The experience she has had with LD students in mainstream classes is usually one to two LD students in each of her classes. The students
enrolled in this school have chosen to be open to arts enriched curriculum and this may contribute to the participation and openness to the arts approaches Participant B uses in her class.

Through analyzing data in this theme, some comparisons between participants arose. Participant A had a more creative arts background where Participant B went through a strict technique regime in ballet which led her to dance professionally for a couple years. In the beginning of her career, Participant A took the direction of completing her Master’s degree in dance and studied the effectiveness of some of the ways you can utilize dance to approach character education. This experience led her to open up her own creative arts center where she facilitated music and movement programs with young families. Participant B began with a more practical approach, which she supported with theory during her career through professional development sessions. Her undergraduate degree in dance as well contributed to her ability to think deeply about the arts. Another comparison that is noteworthy is how Participant A has experience working with younger children and Participant B has experience working with children at more of an intermediate level. The responses from students that Participant B receives are distinctly different than the responses Participant A receives simply because they are different students. These responses may very well reflect instructional strategies used that will be analyzed in a later theme in this chapter. Every teacher comes from a different background and this variety is what creates richness in the student’s experiences and how they are exposed to the arts.

This data relates to my literature review in a few ways. To begin with, Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden (2000) assert that the level of professional development was related to teachers’ attitudes toward inclusion. Both the participants in this study come from extensive dance backgrounds and this may relate to the success they achieved with their students in
implementing dance education. That being said, I presume that they have also encountered challenges implementing dance education. As the literature supports, their professional development has contributed to their experiences in the classroom positively. Secondly, it was mentioned in the literature review that ADHD is not a learning disability, however 30%-50% of ADHD children also have a LD (LDA, 2015). Participant B highlights that this was very common in her classroom and research supports that these two conditions interacting together make learning very challenging (LDA, 2015). Participant B expresses the importance of openness to this interaction of two conditions and committing to the student no matter how many conditions have been diagnosed. Participant A has more experience as an educator and Participant B has more experience in a traditional classroom. Both their perspectives offer insights to this research.

Through analysis of this data, the most significant information that surfaces is the importance of engaging with arts education at a professional development level and as well at a personal level. It highlights the importance of the teacher background being the starting point to any successful arts education program. It also illuminates the idea that the demographics of the students also play a part in the level of engagement the teacher will observe through this approach. Further data needs to be conducted on how teachers without an extensive background in dance are integrating an arts education approach with an emphasis on dance for these LD students.

4.2 Beliefs of Teachers, Students, and Parents

My second theme I will discuss is the beliefs of teachers, students, and parents. This theme was evident throughout both interviews and contributed significantly to the lack of
research supporting arts education. Parents of their two year old child reached out for Participant A in addition to all the medical help she was receiving for her syndrome because they themselves felt that the arts would be a great support for their child. Other parents brought their children to the creative arts center because they felt that being in a music movement program would really support their growth and development. In addition to committing their child to these sessions, the parents also committed their time and participated in the sessions with their child to watch the growth. The beliefs of the parents may have stemmed from a sense of trust they placed in the teacher to do this work with their child. In addition to the parents beliefs, the teachers also expressed their beliefs and Participant A expressed the importance of working with the parents with where they were at. It is important to recognize what the parent is willing to accept and not willing to accept and continue to meet the child where they are in their development regardless of what was going on at home or the emotions surrounding the child. Participant A passionately shared that teachers need to learn to teach the child, love them, embrace them, and support them through making their own goals for where they want them to go. Some preliminary proceedings might be open up that discussion with the parents and talk about what they are noticing at home. Both participants clearly displayed that they are true advocates for dance education for all students, particularly for students who learn kinesthetically or have an attention deficit and have difficulty focusing during lessons that require them to sit for long periods of time. Both participants expressed their belief about what characterizes a learning disability. Participant A articulated her belief that we all have a learning disability to some degree and her inquiry about a learning disability not being something they are born with, but perhaps something that develops because of their social environment or home environment. Participant B articulated her belief about an LD student being someone who is of average intelligence and has extreme difficulty
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learning in a particular area. These students feel a need to be understood and could benefit from more confidence. Dissimilarly, she also expressed that partial integration is more beneficial than mainstreaming because a class taught by an LD expert will permit instruction that responds to the needs of the particular students. The participants also shared their beliefs about the value of dance education. Participant A communicated that dance does not get enough airplay and that it is critical that teachers take the attempt with dance education, whether they are comfortable or not. She also suggested that teachers get students to go about the explorations with their bodies because it is hard to articulate movement in words. Beliefs around this approach vary from perspective to perspective, however, the data presents positive beliefs around dance education.

A comparison is noteworthy between both participants. Through analyzing the data, it is clear that Participant A got to work with children over a longer period of time and the students were much longer. Participant B has classroom experience and therefore works with a child for one school year. Participant A speaks to her belief about building relationships with the children and parents over a numerous amount of years, where Participant B speaks to her belief about dance being a great way to increase confidence in LD students.

Research supports Participant B’s description of a learning disability as a condition that interferes with students’ ability to learn (Roualdes, 2013). The same researcher also articulates that many teachers feel underprepared to address the individual learning differences in the mainstream classroom (Roualdes, 2013). This aligns with Participant B’s belief about partial integration with LD students. Having the experience she does, she can relate to the challenges that surface when an LD child is mainstreamed.
This theme in the data collected is relevant to parents, teachers, and students in many ways. Firstly, it speaks to the importance of parents to be open minded about dance education integrated in all curriculums. Since LD is a predominant issue in our education system, this holistic approach needs to be valued more and parents need to voice their commitment to this work. The student’s commitment is reflective of their parent’s commitment and it is imperative that everyone carries positive beliefs around this approach so more exposure to dance integration can occur. This data highlights the importance of the teachers believing that they are teachers first and subsequently that dance can support the LD children in their class. It also signifies the importance of the teachers believing in the child’s growth and development regardless of what support or lack there of the child is receiving at home. Teachers must teach the child first.

### 4.3 Instructional Strategies Used

My third theme I will discuss in the analysis section of my research is instructional strategies used to implement a dance integration approach. This theme encompasses differentiation, curriculum integration, embodiment, and inclusivity. To begin with, music plays a significant part in creative movement. Children love to sing and couple it with music. Head and shoulders song and dance is a great example of this. When the child is touching, they are creating the movement of identifying. Additionally, you are bringing in vocabulary. Participant A discussed the importance of music selection. She expressed that she tries not to use music that students can identify with and mimic because then the authenticity of the movement is lost and it is not longer self-expression. She picks music that fits the mood by establishing the tempo, dynamics, or cultural denotation behind it. Participant A highlighted that she represents the students in her class by finding music they can identify with culturally because it enhances what they do. Secondly, participants discussed the language they use around dance integration.
Participant A articulated that she interchanges between dance, creative movement, and movement depending on the age group. If you use the word ‘movement’ with older kids, it takes away that element of risk or intimidation. It is important to take a survey of the room in the beginning to find out how they feel about moving their body and if they are comfortable or not by asking them to raise their hands if the statement applies to them. Some questions Participant A uses are: “Who here feels absolutely comfortable, loves being in their body and thinks dancing is the most amazing thing ever? Who is somewhat uncomfortable? Who is really uncomfortable? It is also important to explicitly make clear that students do not need to answer or participate if they do not feel comfortable doing so.” Taking this survey in the beginning gives the teacher an idea of the comfort level of the group and allows them to shape their language around that. It is also essential to talk about guidelines and express to students that our bodies are all unique and laughing is only fine with the kindest of intentions to ensure we create a safe space for all. Participant B also provided insights around the language used. She uses ‘Arts Enhancement’ or ‘Arts Integration’ as an identified component in every lesson. She explains how dance will be incorporated and why she feels it will help students to understand or express their understanding of the lesson’s key content. Next, the structure of the class also contributes to creating a safe space. Always start as a whole class and ensure the activity is low risk. For example, you might do an activity that lets them get to know the space and explore personal space and then build from there. It is good to follow the whole class activity with partner work because students feel they can be intimate with one person and delve deeper into exploration. Finally, you might finish the class with a small group activity because it allows for students to work together collaboratively and be creative. These activities can begin with a concept that needs to be brainstormed together that can subsequently be interpreted through
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choreography and presentation. Ensure that strategies are being implemented to get the students to work in different groups with different people. Thirdly, teachers may be hesitant to use these instructional strategies because they do not know how to assess them. Both participants share how they use assessment and evaluation methods in their class.

Participant B gives the same opportunities to move to all her students however, will sometimes consider the artistic expression of an LD student to count for a larger percentage of their grade. She also gives students the opportunity to explain their dance to her verbally if they wish because all art is open to interpretation. Other options include creating a visual or digital representation, or even demonstrating their dance to her and a few of their friends over lunch instead of the whole class to accommodate for comfort. Participant A communicated that exit cards and self-reflections are common assessment pieces that she uses. She asks them about their own feelings about movement, what they found most challenging and their participation. She connects this idea of using our bodies to discover how to become more mindful and slow down to really discover where our emotions are situated. This supports the idea that students need to be consciously in their body but not interacting with anyone else at times because it gives them a focus. Participant B shares some of her cross-curricular integration lessons she has done in the past. She shares ideas specifically around English, History and Science because she finds these subject areas most challenging to integrate. Some examples are cultures and periods in history through social dance at all levels, and the structure of a cell (meiosis and mitosis) at the grade nine science level. She mentions that health, social studies, physical education, drama, and math all lend themselves far better to natural integration of movement. Overall, the instructional strategies used begin with the commitment and enthusiasm portrayed by the teacher.
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One comparison I did notice between both participants is their focus around dance education. Participant A is more focused on deriving the emotional aspect behind creative movement in addition to the social interaction. Participant B is more focused on making specific curriculum integrations with dance and using dance as an assessment method. I think this speaks to the age groups they have most experience working with. Where Participant works more at the primary/junior level, Participant B works more at the junior/intermediate level. It is inevitable that assessment and evaluation is of more focus at the intermediate levels. All in all, they used similar instructional strategies with fluctuating focuses at times.

Research supports the importance of specific instructional strategies to implement an effective dance integration program. The literature review highlight that with LD students there is a discrepancy between their intellectual capacity and academic performance (Mumford & Chandler, 2009). The LD student is able to obtain information, however, does not find success in traditional ways of how academia is performed, or in other terms demonstrated. Research by Smith (2010) also highlights that the artistic creation has order and understanding sequences is vital for LD students. The clear beginning, middle, and end are easily grasped and understood by an LD student and that is why it is imperative that teachers use strategies such as beginning low risk and whole class through finishing in small groups towards a collaborative creation. The same research emphasizes that the teacher approach to the task is of high importance (Smith, 2010). Research conducted by Skoning (2008) speaks specifically to the increase in positive attitudes towards math when dance is integrated. Much of the literature review in chapter two stresses strategies used and the impact they have on student learning.

This data points towards active ways to begin incorporating this strategy in the classroom. Appendix C outlines lesson descriptions and quick accessible activities that teachers
may find helpful. They are very much adaptable and accessible to LD students. It is a good idea for teachers to compile a play list for dance integration and to keep in mind to sparingly use popular music. Some ideas for music include world music, specifically in different languages. Another great source to derive instrumental music is soundtracks from movies. A compilation of a variety of appropriate music is the start to your creative movement program. In addition, remembering to survey your students and shaping your language around the feedback you receive. Conclusively, the goal is fostering engagement in the classroom through creating relationships and creating connection because when children are engaged, they have a greater desire to learn.

4.4 Observed Outcomes for LD Students

My fourth theme I will discuss in the analysis section of my research is observed outcomes for LD students. This theme encompasses communication, independence, acceptance, confidence, and social development. To begin with, Participant A observed that the younger the children were, the more comfortable they are with dance. It is evident that young children love to move and are naturally inclined to move when we see them running, skipping, bouncing, rolling, and much more on the playground. As children get older, they are more aware of how people perceive them and they begin to hinder themselves. Hesitation begins around the junior age group where they start to ponder who is looking at them and if they look silly. Once they get to the intermediate level, they are concerned about maintaining a trendy persona and are hyper aware of their bodies due to changes that occur through puberty. One factor that contradicts this observed outcome with age are the students with dance experience. These students will fully participate in dance education, however due to training, they sometimes have difficulty stepping outside of technique and being creative. These students are sometimes more challenging than
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the students with no dance background. Specific outcomes are observed for students with learning disabilities. All children are typically really responsive to dance and sometimes it is those with LD’s that are most responsive.

Participant B expresses that dance is a particularly appealing option for ADHD students because it gives children a chance to move about and to explore a concept physically, through dance, and can engage the attention deficit students and increase their understanding. In addition to offering engagement, dance can offer differently abled students a chance to communicate their understandings more effectively. Participant B also observed outcomes of these students in specialized classes. She identified a disadvantage for specialized classes being that it may hurt the students self-image and distance them from their peers socially, consequence being that their peers may view them as inferior. On the contrary, an advantage for specialized classes may be that they can receive far more individual attention and students who relate to their uniqueness surround them. She also shared an observation from experience in her mainstream class being that students who tend to procrastinate when given reading and writing tasks are far less likely to procrastinate when given a chance to work on their movement pieces. LD students are more receptive to the idea of communicating through movement. Participant A shared a specific experience with a struggling student she taught in a mainstream classroom. Prior to the dance work that Participant A had stared with the group, this particular student was frequently excluded. During the start of the dance education integration, students would not hold her hand and remark negative comments. The facilitator quickly emphasized the importance that everyone is connected and we are all one together. Upon starting doing work with movement and the curriculum, she became more included because the activities pushed everyone to find a partner or work in a small group. It is clear that she was naturally integrated into the activities.
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It is apparent that LD children have particular challenges that come in different ways and using movement to tap into communication skills and conflict resolution has profound effects. The greatest benefit of children being integrated as this student was in this instance is that all children learn from each other and we all have strengths and weaknesses. Participant A shared an observed outcome around props. She commented that when there is a use of props, it takes away from the child feeling like their body is being the focus and rather the body utilizing the prop in space. Through the data presented, it is clear that dance integration is wonderful for all children, while providing additional support for children who are showing certain delays in various aspects.

There were not many comparisons across participants and they both observed similar outcomes. Additionally, there is research that also supports their observed outcomes. Research shows that LD children need alternate ways to express ideas and that visual and kinesthetic experiences enable them to overcome verbal communication by providing them alternate ways to convey abstract ideas (Baum, Cooper & Neu 2001). The participants both observed this outcome and spoke to it. The literature also supports the idea that dance offers continual exploration without structure or repetition (Jobling, Virji-Babul & Nichols, 2006). Since students with learning disabilities usually have an attention deficit, the lack of structure releases the resistance that teachers normally place on these students. The literature review discusses an abundance of research that supports these positive observed outcomes of dance integration identified by the participants.

The data presented in this theme points towards the great benefits that LD students can obtain. The overall benefit of bringing in dance education is that it gets children in their bodies and allows them to make decisions on how they feel and what they are able to do. It provides
opportunities for them to explore their world in a new way through broad parameters that are in place for the exploration. Firstly, it is important to use props occasionally, especially at the intermediate level. Students are more free and willing to move when they have something their moving with because as mentioned before, it takes the focus away from their body. Secondly, although frequent short activities are beneficial, it is also important to allocate longer periods of time for this work because it provides the opportunity for students to engage in intimate work in small groups. Also, the longer they work on an activity, the deeper the learning is and the participants find that the student’s lack of comfort eases off and any feeling of disconnection diminishes. The most important overall outcome that is observed is how these students are able to build relationship through exploring movement and appreciate the different shapes others are making.

4.5 Factors That Support And Challenge A Dance-Based Approach

My last theme that I will discuss in the analysis section of my research is factors that support and challenge a dance integration approach for LD students. This theme encompasses responses around fear of the unconventional strategies used in a classroom. It also incorporates how assessment and evaluation are used with this approach. To begin with, Participant A expressed how the education system is putting the students at a disadvantage with the abundance of time spent sitting at desks and constraining them. Furthermore, there is an expectation about how their body should be in that structure. Some teachers get caught up in insisting that every child do what the teacher is doing. We do not use our bodies enough in the classroom. Similarly, Participant B articulated that traditionally, schools did not recognize learning abilities and failed to tailor programming to these students, however suggests that a shift has occurred over the years. Participant A reinforces this idea by communicating that there is not enough
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money to build the support in the classrooms even though integrated classrooms allow for the students to be with their peers and having those social interactions. Without the additional support in the classroom, teachers struggle with accommodating numerous IEP’s as it creates a challenging environment. Participant B expressed the need for the government to allot more funding to employ LD support staff and have separate classes where students’ individual needs can be addressed. Time was recognized as both a factor that supports and challenges this approach. Participant A expressed that dance is low on the value skill and therefore gets digressed due to what teachers label as insufficient time. Rather, a teacher’s flexibility may be the determining factor around this proposed challenged. It is about making the time and looking for the small moments first. Additionally, learning how we utilize dance from five minutes to an hour. You can get caught up wasting the same amount of time disciplining a student than you would have spent doing a quick dance integration activity. We can also shift this negative impediment around time by actively finding ways for cross-curricular integration. Incorporating dance at least once per lesson or once per day will help merge this approach into the classroom.

Another challenge that arose through discussion with the participants are resources. Participant B expressed the difficulties around finding adequate, supervised space in which the students can work on their project and how she commonly encounters this challenge. Participant A expressed the challenge around sufficient resources to support teachers in the classroom. She discussed the difficulties around not being able to pick up a book and read about how to teach dance and instead, the visual aspect that is required to learn it. Consequently, the only teachers who are integrating this approach comprise of mostly individuals who grew up dancing them selves. Participant B highlights the importance of attending professional development centered around arts integration because it provides opportunities to meet peers who are also committed to
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enriching learning through the arts. Furthermore, rich discussions are brewed and sharing of useful ideas ensues. She emphasized professional development sessions that focus on integrating dance with other curricular areas as a supporting factor for this approach. Participant A shared that she uses props to engage students. Some props she mentions are scarves, feathers, leaves, hula hoops, stretchy bands, rope, and overall props that are themed. Participant B uses her own knowledge around dance, the Internet, music, videos, and discussions with colleagues all to support her. One final supporting factor that was discussed was the opportunity dance provides for LD students to demonstrate their knowledge. Participant B discussed that through her experience, she has observed that LD students commonly fail at demonstrating their knowledge through paper and pen and find success in displaying what they have learned through dance. Overall, many great insights were brought to light around factors that support and challenge this approach.

Through analysis of the data, a few comparisons were striking about the responses both participants provided. To begin with, Participant A remarks that being immersed in dance education brought light to her doctoral work in a new way. On the contrary, Participant B mentions that being immersed in professional development brings light to her work in the classroom. It is interesting to notice this interesting dynamic of how their own development around arts education manifests. Secondly, Participant A discusses this idea that it is beneficial to build an understanding in your classroom that everyone is a teacher to each other. Additionally, she expresses that integrated classrooms are a more human approach to learning because we get to all be together and most importantly, we learn to have patience and be support for others. In contrast, Participant B recognizes the benefit of integrated classrooms, however, also expresses her opinion about the advantages of segregated classrooms. She articulates that
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tailored instruction for a small group of students who all require the same support can allow for more learning. However, she expresses the need for partial integration so their confidence does not become depleted. Thirdly, Participant A articulates that there is a lack of professional development available that specifically caters to teaching creative movement. Participant B highlights that professional development is key around supporting this approach. This comparison poses questions around what different teachers might be looking for out of these professional development sessions. These comparisons between participants are noteworthy and add depth to the analysis.

The literature review supports the data collected and identified in this theme. Researchers state that co-teaching with special education teachers helps meet student needs and create inclusive classrooms (Parker, Allen, McHatton & Rosa, 2010). This data aligns with Participant B’s speculation that partially integrated classrooms allow this additional support that is very difficult to derive in the mainstream classroom. Research conducted by Baum, Cooper, and Neu (2001) highlights that the education system needs programs that offer an inclusive environment that honors diversity and different strategies to help them compensate. Participant B discussed how dance allows LD students to demonstrate their learning in new and untraditional ways where most are able to find success. Alternate research supports teacher perspectives by stating that teachers identify class size, inadequate resources, and inadequate teacher preparation as factors that would affect their ability to try new approaches (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000). Overall, the research presented is complementing the findings gained from the two participants in this research study.

The findings in this theme are pointing towards real issues that teachers experience frequently and changes that are evolving over the recent years. It is important that although
many factors were identified, it is important to speak to the factors that we can change so that we can actively transform our approach. Firstly, it is significant to note that time is both a positive and negative factor. Time management is something that most teachers always battle with throughout their career. Cross-curricular integration is the first step towards maximizing time in the classroom. It is unrealistic to propose that dance needs to be implemented one hundred percent of the day. Instead, use dance to find untraditional ways for instruction and assessment. The curriculum should always be at the core of each lesson, however, the authentic experiences that the students take away from each lesson is most significant. Secondly, in addition to cross-curricular integration, committing to getting students out of their seats for short periods of time frequently will also support this approach. Using five minutes between lessons to put music on and let loose while preparing for the next subject or creating a simple dance to line up at the door. It is all about the small changes that make the biggest of differences. The students appreciate that you recognize them as humans who inevitably need to move and not be constrained to a seat and desk. Lastly, attending professional development sessions is a great support for becoming a well-rounded teacher. Being exposed to professionals in a particular subject area you are interested in adds to your ability to be able to obtain new perspectives as well as critically analyze and deepen your own pedagogy. Conclusively, the participants offer great prospects on how you can recognize and use supporting and challenging factors to your advantage.

4.6 Discussion

Chapter 4 thoroughly describes, compares, and relates five themes that arose through analysis of the data. The themes touch on all the sub questions supporting the main research question that looks at how dance is used as responsive pedagogy for students with learning
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disabilities. All the themes relate to each other because they are all derived from the research question. In particular the teacher’s background and beliefs closely related and instructional strategies and outcomes observed also closely related. Through discussing the participants backgrounds in theme one, it was clear that they expressed dance providing them independence and confidence, which they both observed in theme four for outcomes of their LD students. In theme three, the instructional strategies emphasized providing opportunities for students to make decisions, which was reflective of both participants observed outcomes identified in theme four. Considerable amounts of my data confirm what I found in my literature review in chapter two. It is apparent that both my participants are advocates for arts enriched education and share a passion for this work. In the next chapter I will discuss next steps for this research.
Chapter Five: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The research I have conducted has shaped my understanding around how the arts can benefit all students, but particularly LD students. My research question looked at how a sample of educators was integrating instruction and creative movement as responsive pedagogy for students with learning disabilities. Sub-questions looked at teacher’s beliefs, instructional strategies and approaches, observed outcomes, and factors that support and challenge this work. I undertook forty-five minute semi-structured interviews to conduct my research study. Criteria were established prior to selecting my participants and they aligned closely with my research question. A thorough literature review was performed to immerse myself more deeply into the topic prior to establishing my methodology. This profusion of literature helped effectively shape my interview questions to obtain more profound data upon meeting with my participants.

5.1 Overview and Significance of Findings

The research I conducted shows that this dance-based approach is happening in schools and is being advocated for in traditional classrooms. It also highlights the challenges of why it is not happening more often. The challenge sits in the pedagogical facet where some teachers find it difficult to integrate dance. One of the prevalent misconceptions is the idea that dance has to be a large component of each lesson. The data I analyzed in chapter four indicates it is most successful in short and frequent intercessions throughout all lessons. Teachers should not try to make it the focus but rather use it as an instructional strategy to support the students learning. The greatest impacts of the dance-based approach are being seen with LD students. The teacher background and professional development contribute to how effective their arts integration will
be. The research shows the importance of immersing yourself in environments that encompass arts integration. The student’s commitment to the dance-based approach is reflective of the parent’s commitment and vice versa. Educators need to positively shape attitudes around arts integration as an effective strategy for LD students. Engagement is imperative and teachers can foster it by using a wide variety of music from different cultures so every student has the opportunity to relate. In addition, props are a great resource to include because it increases willingness for students to move their bodies by taking the attention away from their bodies. Building relationships with others was one of the most profound effects that came up in the research. Time management was one of the eminent factors that challenge this dance-based approach. However, the data showed that cross-curricular integration, short implementation, and attending professional development sessions are the most operative way to encounter this challenge.

5.2 Implications

There are many implications that surfaced from the findings of this research study. There are broad implications of the findings for the educational research community as well as narrow implications for my own professional identity and practice. The next section will discuss who and how these findings are affecting certain groups of people. Following, recommendations will be made in regards to the implications in hopes to perpetuate active change around integrating dance and creative movement for LD students.

5.2.1 Broad

I will begin by discussing the broad implications that the findings insinuate. I will address different bodies of people such as students, parents, teachers, administrators, educational
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research agenda, and teacher education. To begin with, without this dance and movement integration, it can be proposed that students generally experience less success in academics. Students may experience less frustration and stress when having the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in a different way. Learning disabilities do not allude that they have a lesser intellectual ability, but rather that they are disadvantaged in the way they absorb and communicate their learning. Roualdes (2013) supports this by claiming that a learning disability is a condition that interferes with the student’s ability to learn and is caused by difficulties in processing and integrating info. Mumford and Chandler (2009) further support this by expressing that discrepancies exist between intellectual capacity and academic performance. This new mode of learning will provide LD students a holistic method to learn, and consequently may motivate them to strive for higher education. Long-term, these students can find personal coping methods and techniques that they can use in the future in a career setting or even in a social context when relating to others. Secondly, parents may find this pedagogy a controversial issue. Implications of the findings affirm the need for more advocacies in this area of work to ensure that all parents are well informed on what exactly a dance-approach entails and its effects for LD students. Moving is the first and most important way infants explore and learn about the world (Dow, 2010) and more awareness needs to be made to parents about the significance of these initial learning’s to emphasize the importance of moving to learn. Next, dance and movement integration may strike teachers as additional work and may deter them away from implementing it. Teachers who do engage in this work and are committed to adapting it into their classroom will see different learning occur in their classroom. The arts integrate the whole learning process (Smith, 2010). They will be able to build a different relationship with their student that is meaningful to the student’s learning. Smith (2010) asserts that the teaching
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approach to the task is more important. Subsequently, administrators will also encounter implications as they take on a large responsibility of supporting their teachers in this work. In some cases, administrators may need to be the starting point and implement professional development around arts integration or drive a school wide change that shifts changing around dance and movement in the classroom.

Other broad implications include educational research agenda and teacher education, which go outside the spectrum of the school community. First, this research points the need for further research to be conducted in this area of literature. Evidently a gap appears to exist between the effects of dance integration on learning and how LD students can be supported in holistic manners. The findings imply that there are experts in the field engaging in this work and researching about it, however, more work needs to be done on practical strategies to directly transfer into the classroom. Furthermore, teacher education programs may be the most powerful way to instil confidence and persistence with arts integration. The findings lend themselves to how much the teacher’s background plays a factor in their likelihood to use a dance approach. Both participants came from extensive dance backgrounds and their teacher education program was not a large influence of this work. Not many teachers have the opportunity to have an extensive dance background; therefore, teacher education programs need to ensure that they provide those experiences for teachers. Research conducted by Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden (2000), asserts that teachers identified inadequate teacher preparation as one factor that would affect their ability to incorporate inclusion in their classroom. Overall, the findings have broad implications for students, parents, teachers, administrators, educational research agenda, and teacher education. The implications are not limited to these groups, however, are most significant.
5.2.2 Narrow

In addition, many narrow implications emerged from the findings. I will address how my teaching practice, my teaching philosophy, and my professional identity were influenced. To begin with, these findings affirmed the teaching practice I hoped to implement before even starting my teacher education program. Through extensive literature reviews around this topic and speaking with advocates in the field, my teaching practice has now been supported with evidence that will continue to push me to use a dance approach in my classroom. This implication may not be able to be generalized to the whole teaching population because I recognize that I come from a different place with my background in dance. Smith (2010) says it very powerfully, “The arts can develop learning-disabled youngsters to develop and strengthen the perceptual skills that form the foundations for further learning” (pg. 12). This statement eludes the significance of emotional and social development in the classroom. Furthermore, my teaching philosophy is always growing and being shaped and the findings of this study have influenced it immensely. The underlining common factor that never changes is inclusivity. How I can go about incorporating inclusivity in my classroom is always changing. Many students experience a lot of exclusion in their day-to-day lives inside and outside the school. If I can make my classroom a safe space, that is a significant part of their week where they can be at ease knowing that they can enter a space that they will be accepted in. “Dance is important to incorporate into our inclusive classrooms if we want to meet the needs of more diverse groups of students” (Skoning, 2008, pg. 9). This statement by researcher Skoning illuminates the value of dance pedagogy to foster inclusivity. Through immersing myself in research as such and speaking with my two participants, the findings have made positive implications for my teaching philosophy and have highlighted the importance of being unique. Finally, my professional
identity has undergone the most change as I reflect back to where I started before beginning this research paper. The findings have made me cognizant of the responsibility I have as a teacher but also the power I have as a teacher. I am about to enter a career where I have the opportunity to make one of the profound impacts. The findings insinuate a need for advocacy and both participants that I spoke to are both active advocates in the field of dance integration. It is part of their professional identity that they have shaped through experiences. I have used dance personally to break self-imposed barriers that society labels normal and it has allowed me to grow and evolve when I reach discomfort (Ridler, 2014). These experiences that have evolved into my professional identity will directly have an influence on my students. Conclusively, both broad and narrow implications are significant when analyzing the findings, however, the narrow implications have had the most substantial impact on my own teaching practice, philosophy, and identity.

5.3 Recommendations

Through analyzing the data and extracting the implications for the findings, it is now possible to make some recommendations that are relevant to teachers and the school-based community. To begin with, something that was apparent throughout the research and data was the idea that dance does not need to be the core of the lesson, but rather the curriculum should be the core while using dance and movement as a way to deliver the curriculum. It provides a way for students to engage with the material in a different way and subsequently, demonstrate their learning in holistic ways. Secondly, much of the research claimed that teacher’s fear around integrating this dance approach was inadequate preparedness and experience in the arts. Both the research and participants spoke to this misconception and recommended that teachers use short and frequent implementations of dance. One of the participants recommended a class
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dance when switching from subjects or a dance to line up at the door. Other ideas include cross-curricular integration with many subjects that I speak to in chapter four. Finally, bringing in guest artists is a great way to start a school wide community around implementing dance integration. Sometimes teachers may feel a sense of ridicule or isolation when using a dance approach that may not be valued in their school. Administrators have an imperative role in shifting how teachers value an arts integration approach and in some instances, it must begin with them. Guest artists are a great way to begin to break these barriers. Overall, there are many recommendations that can be derived from the findings and implications that would vary depending on whose perspective was being offered.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

As with any research study, not all gaps are reported on and questions arise throughout the process that remains unanswered. One burning question I had throughout was how to ensure fair assessment in mainstream classrooms when LD students may be demonstrating their learning in different ways. It is known that equity is essential in a classroom; however, sometimes it is not known how to perpetuate equity when you have students of diverse needs. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, more resources need to be available that teachers can use as support to directly implement a dance approach in their classroom. However, effective resources cannot be created without consequential research being done. Another area that requires further research is parent involvement. Throughout the research study, not much data was collected about how parents can be part of the process and support students at home. Since students are only in school for eight hours a day, it is imperative that there is some cohesion between school and home. If students are learning in holistic ways in the classroom, it may not support them to go home and return to learning in traditional ways. Thirdly, how art is valued in the education
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system has always been a controversial topic. Specifically speaking, art ranks low on the hierarchy with dance ranking lowest within the art hierarchy. Research needs to be conducted on what starting points are most effective for this momentous shift. Dance receiving more value will subsequently provide teachers more support. In conclusion, those are three areas of research I identified as needing further attention, however, it is discernable that there are many gaps in research apparent.

5.5 Conclusion

The reason I chose to explore Dance and Learning Disabilities in my MTRP is because I am interested in finding out how to support LD students through my passion for dance. I was and continue to be determined to learn about holistic approaches that I can incorporate into my classroom. Through my self-identification of being a kinaesthetic learner, I want to be able to provide similar positive experiences for struggling learners. The research I have conducted for my MTRP matters for many people, but most importantly, to make a difference in LD students lives, providing them learning strategies to hopefully use throughout their life. In addition, elementary teachers in mainstream classes across the Greater Toronto Area will most likely find merit in this study, as it identifies challenges, deconstructs them, and provides transferrable ideas that can be used in the classroom. Furthermore, Principals of schools will hopefully be able to find value in this research study as it identifies barriers to the integration and provides approaches to overcoming the challenges. It will also highlight the importance of providing opportunities for their teachers to attend professional development days around the arts. Additionally, this research can highlight and emphasize the value of arts for Faculties of Education creating their Bachelor of Education programs. Since it is clear that the research shows experience and professional development are crucial in implementation of arts integration,
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Faculties of Education can integrate them in their degree program to ensure teachers are well qualified. These qualifications will be reflect their confidence and willingness to execute this approach. The benefits of the research study do not lie solely with these three bodies of people, but can extend to the greater population as well.

When beginning this research study, I had hopes that evolved to why this research matters today. My hopes for this research study are that LD students find more success during their education journey. Often, students may experience marginalization within a mainstream classroom. Through engagement with my research study, I hope educators can implement ways for LD students to feel a greater sense of inclusion in classrooms. My overall hope for this research study is that LD student’s strengths become highlighted. LD students are not of lesser value than students with out LD’s, but rather have different prospects to offer. Often, LD students have hidden talents that may never be exposed. Educators need to provide opportunities for these students to demonstrate their learning through methods that they identify as their strengths. For many, dance and creative movement may be the missing element in their education. I look forward to engaging with further research in this are, but most importantly, transferring my learnings into my own classroom.
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Appendices

Appendix A – Consent Form

Date: October 5th, 2015

Dear Traci Scheepstra,

My Name is Filomena Romita and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on how teachers use dance as responsive pedagogy for students with learning disabilities. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have practical experience with this particular work in the classroom. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research conference or publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. This data will be stored on my password-protected
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computer and the only people who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor Eloise Tan. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to participation, and I will share with you a copy of the transcript to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Filomena Romita

filomena.romita@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Eloise Tan

Contact Info: Eloise.tan@utoronto.ca
Appendix B – Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in this research study. The aim of this study is to learn how dance can be used as a responsive pedagogy for students with learning disabilities. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes and I will ask you a series of questions about your experiences in the classroom with learning disabilities and the pedagogy used. I want to remind you that you may choose to not answer any question you do not feel comfortable answering or you do not feel is pertinent to the research study. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Section 1: Background Information

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher?

2. What grade do you currently teach and what grades have you previously taught?

3. How long have you been in your current position/school?

4. Can you tell me more about the school you work in? (size, demographics, program priorities).

5. As you are aware, I am interested in learning how teachers implement dance as responsive instruction for students with learning disabilities. Can you tell me more about what personal, professional, and/or educational experiences developed your interest in dance and your commitment to supporting students with special needs?

   a. What did you study in university?

   b. What professional development in these areas have you participated in?
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c. Were you trained in dance as a child?

6. How common is it for you to have students with learning disabilities in your class?

7. What learning disabilities have you worked with?

Section 2: Beliefs/Values (Why)

1. In your experience, what are the benefits of dance in education? What educational outcomes do you believe are possible when students have the opportunity to learn with dance? What educational and social outcomes, if any, do you believe are possible for students with special needs? Why? What has been your experience? Can you give me specific examples?

2. What does the term ‘learning disability’ mean to you?

3. What do you believe are some of the core needs and challenges experienced by students with learning disabilities in schools? What do you think about how schools typically respond to the needs of these students?

4. In your view, what are the benefits and limitations of mainstreaming students with special needs versus placing them in special education classrooms?

Section 3: Teacher Practices (What/How)

1. In which subject areas do you typically integrate opportunities for dance and creative movement? Why? How do you see these aligning with the curriculum?
2. How do you incorporate dance and creative movement into your unit and lesson plans? What instructional strategies and approaches do you use? Do you integrate these for all students, or more as responsive instruction for students with special needs?

3. In your experience, how do students with learning disabilities typically respond to opportunities to learn with dance and creative movement? What outcomes do you observe from them?

4. Can you please give me an example of a lesson that you have conducted that integrated dance?
   a. What subject were you teaching (grade, curriculum, strand)
   b. What were your learning goals?
   c. What opportunities for learning did you create? What did students do and why?
   d. How did students respond? What outcomes did you observe from them?
   e. What outcomes did you observe from students with learning disabilities?
   f. How, if at all, did you assess this lesson?

5. What resources support you in creating opportunities for dance in your teaching? (e.g. videos, music, internet resources, physical space, curriculum materials)

6. Can you share with me some of your favourite dance and creative movement activities that you find most successful in your classroom? Why do you think these are successful?

Section 4: Next Steps/Challenges (What Next)
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1. What challenges do you encounter integrating dance education across the curriculum? How do you respond to these challenges? What challenges do you encounter integrating dance education as responsive instruction for students with special needs/learning disabilities? How do you respond to these challenges? How might the education system further support you in meeting these challenges?

2. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to arts integration and supporting students with special needs?

3. Do you have any other questions, comments, or concerns?
Appendix C – Lesson Examples

Language – Primary/Junior Level - *(Shared by Participant A)*

This lesson uses the book “Shi-Shi-Etko” by Nicola Campbell as a springboard to incorporating dance and language. The book is about a First Nations girl who is counting down the days until she is going to be taken from her family and brought to a residential school. The whole theme of the book is around “I remember.” She wanted to remember the nature, her culture, her language, her history, her everything. Some themes identified in the book are the trees and water. The trees were important because she would walk through the forest with her grandmother and the water was important because she would go on the lake with her grandfather. Begin the lesson by talking about trees and the trees in our own community. You may even want to bring the students into their community and ask them what kind of trees they see and what shapes they see.

**ACTIVITY 1 – CREATING BRANCHES WITH OUR BODIES**

- Do a whole exploration around the size and level of trees and how the leaves fall
- Bring in movement language
- You can complete this activity inside or outside

**ACTIVITY 2 – MIRRORING ACTIVITY**

- Students are in partners
- One person is leading and one person is mirroring
- The person leading is going to be a tree and explore what it would feel like to grow into a big, tall tree or melt into a small tree, or extend into a wide tree, or be a narrow tree, etc.
- Each partner takes turn leading and being a tree
- When the leading partner gets to a tree they are meant to be, they freeze and hold for a moment before they transition and morph into another tree
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ACTIVITY 3 – DANCING THROUGH THE FOREST

- Half of the class decides what tree they want to be for the next 3 minutes and they create a forest
- Emphasize that you want to see different levels and different shapes
- The other half of the class moves through the forest like Shi-Shi-Etko did in the book with her grandmother
- They can interact with the trees using movement language to describe
- If they find a tree they like, they freeze in the shape of the tree next to it
- The room should look like a forest where movement of starting and stopping occurs – it’s very organic and students are doing it at their own pace

ACTIVITY 4 – CREATE THE STORY

- In groups of 5, students get one section of the story and have to perform that section using a certain amount of criteria set out for the assignment
- The students get an opportunity to collaborate with the criteria and the teacher has the opportunity to assess them

*Teachers can take as little or as much time they need to explore each activity

Novel Study Assignment – Junior/Intermediate – *(Shared by Participant B)*

This is a general instructional strategy that can be applied to many novel studies. Instead of writing a character or theme analysis, offer students a wide variety of creative opportunities to choose from. They can choreograph and perform a dance that communicates personality traits, feelings, and character development of two different characters from the novel. They also have the option of choreographing something that expresses their understanding of the novel’s theme.

English – Grade 9 *(Shared by Participant B)*

- Show dance clips and ask students to journal their responses to the piece
- Students share their responses in small groups and reflect on differences of interpretations
- This activity does not provide students the chance to dance, however, it addresses curriculum expectations while incorporating dance
- It gives LD students a chance to interpret something other than more texts
General Creative Movement Activities – Mini Lessons

Movement Cards – *(Shared by Participant B)*

- Create and then give out cards with vague movement written on them (ex. lunge, jump, turn, drop, etc.)
- Ask students to interpret these in their own way and demonstrate
- Then, assign them qualities of movement (ex. smooth, heavy, sharp, etc.)
- Students can observe how quality can change how movement comes across to the audience
- Discuss how they can combine different movements and qualities to set a tone or convey an emotion
- This activity gets students comfortable with ‘dancing’
- It is up to them to determine how to physically demonstrate a character’s emotions or convey a theme
- Teacher circulates to offer guidance while they work

Feather Activity – *(Shared by Participant A)*

- Give each student a feather
- Invite them to walk around the room with a feather on the back of their hand
- It will slow them down and allow them to become more mindful of their movements
- Next, invite students to throw their feather in the air and catch it using different body parts

Getting In Our Bodies – *(Shared by Participant A)*

- Put on fun music and get people to just dance
- Start by walking and finding the beat
- Next, get your shoulders moving
- Then your elbows dancing
- Dance your knees
- High five someone
- Find someone to do a silly dance with
- This activity lets down people’s inhibitions easily and gets them in their bodies