

INCLUSIVE ARTS VIBE EVALUATION UPDATE April 2011

The Disability Art and Culture Project has an after-school dance program. It is part of our youth program, Inclusive Arts Vibe (IAV). In IAV, students with and without disabilities learn and perform integrated dance. Here are some findings from our most recent evaluation.

Arts Standards

When arts education uses conventional standards, students with disabilities are always portrayed as "struggling." The standards automatically exclude students and artists who do not and cannot conform to what is typical, even when the commitment of the student or the skill of the artist is high. In an integrated arts program, standards are not a barrier to students and artists with disabilities. Integrated standards are inclusive of all bodies and all minds.

Dance in a Natural Range of Movement

In IAV, the instructional methods allowed each student to express dance concepts "in their natural range of movements" [Fall 2010]. "Choice" described the ways dancers connected and developed together.

An older dancer talked about being taught or forced to conform a certain way [behaviorally], instead of enhancing who she is with her disability. In DanceAbility, choice is part of the curriculum--some of this is because it comes from contact improv, where choosing how one is touched is critical. But the translation to disability is important. In Alito's [DanceAbility] curriculum, it is very clear that people don't have to participate when they don't want to, and they make this choice for themselves, not their parents or teacher or aide. They also move when and how they want to move--not moved by others unless they instruct others how to move them. The choice issue becomes a balancing act: the teacher asking students to try to see if they might like something--like trying a new food instead of just assuming that they don't like it, and students trying and participating, and making choices not to do things they don't want to do. We honor and teach

students, including students with disabilities, to make choices that they may not always have the opportunity in other situations to make.

Dance with Intention

Students engaged and developed artistic awareness, concepts, skills, and expressions, so that they danced with intention. They created their own interpretations of the concepts and/or copied the movements of educators and classmates. At times, the class spontaneously came together to express a dance concept as a group. The following example took place when the dance concept lesson was "shapes," and students were learning to make angular shapes.

During the angular shape, [three students] made a "star" with their legs. Everyone joined in and they all were in a circle with their legs wide and feet touching. [A fourth student] said someone should go in the middle. She told [a fifth student] to go in the middle and she did. [The fourth student] seemed to open up and "boss" the other students around (not in a mean way, she seemed to be having lots of ideas about the shapes and movement). [Spring 2010]

Dance within the Choreography

Exploring dance and movement in unique ways became the ordinary way of doing things, including within the choreography.

- During choreography, when we did shake, [a student] said she couldn't shake because of her meds. They make her shake too much. I asked her if she would like to do something else. She said she would wiggle. [Fall 2010]
- At one point, [a student] pointed out that [another student] wasn't participating and said she was shy. I said it was okay to be shy. [Fall 2010]
- All students turned with their arms out in various ways. [Spring 2010]

Disability Culture and Pride

These young students asked personal and equipment-related disability questions. What is that for? Do you drive? How do you get dressed? Does it hurt? How did it happen? It was a challenge to allow students to explore their questions, while teaching them disability etiquette. For example, an educator allowed the students to push her wheelchair. After a short while, she guided them away from pushing her and showed them how to dance with her [Fall 2010]. Another time, a student said to an educator, "you can't look behind you, you're in a wheelchair." The afterschool worker joked, "being in a wheelchair doesn't affect your eyes!" [Fall 2010].

There was no wheelchair access to the stage, so that the educators could not work with the students when they were performing. This is a problem in many schools. At the end of Spring term, an educator wrote,

For me, performing on the inaccessible stage was problematic.... I couldn't be with the students to help direct them. It made communication difficult, so I couldn't direct and keep students attention. On the other hand, the students loved being on the stage. It made the performance more special and real to them. This term I didn't have any students who couldn't be on the stage. But as an afterthought, I wondered how [the student from a previous term who uses a wheelchair] felt watching the students on stage...If she made a connection or even thought about the fact that if she performed we would have been on the cafeteria floor instead of the stage. Did she think about the fact that I couldn't be on the stage and did that have meaning for her? What about all the students who can never have the excitement of the stage experience?