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Disabled students in the performing arts - are we setting them up to succeed?

Abstract

Professional training opportunities for students with physical and learning disabilities in the performing arts are conceived and developed in the context of government policy initiatives for inclusion and models of disability that aim to ensure that educational provision is of a kind which does not stigmatise individuals or devalue their performance.   In this paper we consider three partnership programmes linking two theatre companies and one dance company with schools that provide high level mainstream training.   The programmes were planned to offer paths to progression for disabled students, and we examine what the programmes have taught us about the characteristics of inclusive practice in drama and dance training that can set disabled students up to succeed.

Key words: Disability training; performing arts; inclusion

Introduction

In the context of mainstream education in schools the UK government's commitment to the principle of inclusion was signalled by the Green Paper *Excellence For All Children* (Department for Education and Employment, 1997). The focus on a more responsive approach to teaching has encouraged teachers to develop 'personalised learning' for all pupils, acknowledging that education systems have to recognise the diversity of learners' needs (Milliband, 2004 in Wedell, 2005).   The Government's document *Removing Barriers to Achievement* (Department for Education and Skills 2004a) confirms this principle, affirming that

all young people are valued as individuals and making a commitment to remove barriers to learning that arise from an unsuitable school environment, inappropriate grouping of pupils, inflexible teaching styles or inaccessible curriculum materials.

While a majority of teachers may echo their support for removing such barriers to learning, it is the practicalities of classroom teaching that are not always conducive to putting these into effect. In part this is because of inflexibilities of pupil grouping to match learners' needs; in part because the challenges posed by the necessity to respond to a wider range of learning needs have not occupied a central focus in initial teacher training; in part too because of the need to accommodate demands at policy level for both high standards of achievement and inclusion (Wedell, 2005). Adoption of policies that acknowledge and respect individual need requires a commitment based on values (Lindsay & Thompson, 1997) which may conflict with an agenda driven by the desire to improve standards of educational outcomes for the majority.

Current discourses of inclusive education

The social model of disability focuses primarily on the environmental and social barriers that exclude people with perceived impairments from mainstream society. This model distinguishes clearly between impairment, which refers to biological characteristics of the body and mind, and disability, which refers to society's failure to address the needs of disabled people. This distinction is the basis for a framework within which policies can be developed that focus on those aspects of disabled people's lives that can and should be changed (Barnes 1996). Aspects will include the economic and physical, as well as the social environment in which

those with disabilities live (Burchardt, 2004). From this viewpoint removal of environmental barriers is a matter of social justice by contrast with an individual model which attributes disability directly to a medically defined condition, the remedy for which must lie in a person adjusting to society's demands or 'rehabilitating' the individual (Oliver & Barnes, 1998),

Recently, however, social and medical models of disability have found a measure of compatibility, with some acceptance that, for example, hearing impaired individuals avail themselves of hearing aids prescribed within the medical model, or a person who has been the subject of a sports or road accident may undergo a rehabilitation programme. Disabled people thereby take an active part in their treatment, accepting that in these examples losing one's hearing has immediate functional implications, and that a spinal cord injury has direct effects upon physical capacity (Gabel & Peters, 2004). For Shakespeare and Watson (2001) Oliver's distinction between impairment (bodily difference) and disability (social creation) is unsustainable, demonstrable by their question 'where does impairment end and disability start?'(19). They argue that the complexities of disability position it where biology and society, agency and structure intersect

While recognising difference can lead to special provision which might be stigmatised and devalued, denial of difference can lead to failure to provide adequately for individuality (Norwich 2002), giving rise to the so-called 'dilemma of difference' (Minow, 1985). The tension is recognised by Warnock (2005); she calls for the assumptions of the current educational framework to be reconsidered and argues that a concern to treat all learners in the same way, at the same time

adequately meeting the needs arising from individual differences, carries an inherent danger of labelling learners in a way which devalues them. Warnock's reappraisal touches upon the tension between debates based on individuals' rights and evidence for the effectiveness of different provision (Lindsay, 2003). The former has been a major policy driver over recent years, with legislation developed to ensure rights to inclusive settings within the education system, characterised in England by the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001. However, 'rights' are not uncontested (Christensen & Dorn, 1997) and the social model of disability has been criticised by Low (2001, 17) as having been developed beyond a reasonable frame of reference.

> In a kind of reductionism, "not only the individual" has been mistranslated as "only social" and "the individual is not everything" has become "the social is everything".

Furthermore, Mithaug (1998) has stressed that there may be debates over the primacy of different rights and hence inclusion may not necessarily be conceptualised as the dominant right to drive policy. This debate is sharpened by the lack of clear evidence for the effectiveness of inclusive education (Lindsay, 2007). Moreover mainstream and special schools need to be reconceptualised in any case as new systems, including federations of schools and other forms of working together, operating within a framework that allows schools to explore different aims and degrees of collaboration in accordance with their particular needs and priorities, though improved standards and improved inclusion may be principal goals. (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2009). The

flexibility offered may allow sharing of expertise and resources as well as modelling of inclusive practice and so allow mainstream and special schools to come together to provide inclusive education on a wider scale (Lindsay *et al*, 2007) .

The main focus of research and policy regarding education for people with disabilities has been on the period of compulsory education as, at this time, in the UK and developed countries education is a universal provision and access to education is a universal right, up to 16 years in the UK. Much focus has been on academic achievement but the performing arts have also been recognised as a powerful tool for ensuring inclusion (Goodley & Moore, 2002). However, vocational education post 16 years aimed at training performing artists raises additional issues compared with education within the school system. Vocational education is more focused, designed specifically to prepare students for particular jobs, in the present case within the dance and acting professions. Two important challenges arise. First, the Arts has a strong, albeit not complete, focus on excellence: vocational schools that train actors and dancers are seeking the most talented young people available. Second, these professions are notoriously fragile in terms of employment: professional actors and dancers accept that they will spend much time not in active employment in their chosen field, but 'resting'. Specialist theatre and dance companies employing disabled actors and dancers have limited job opportunities and the funding situation for these companies is uncertain.

Disabled dancers and actors share with able bodied peers substantial challenges to gain successful employment; they also face the challenge of demonstrating the skills and characteristics sought by casting agents. But before this stage they must secure entry to a course of professional training, at which

point their disability poses a challenge different from and far greater than that faced by a young person within a school system that is part of a universal provision. Evidence for inclusion and optimising access and learning applicable to a comprehensive school system is not relevant here as the focus is on training young people to gain entry to the performing arts at a high level of expertise. There are, therefore, not only issues of value and (inclusive) philosophy but also questions of excellence and likelihood of employment in a fiercely competitive industry. As Raynor & Hayward (2009) note, an acting career is typically characterised by short-term employment and long periods of unemployment. These difficulties are compounded for actors with disabilities, who are rarely considered for roles where disability is not the focus.

The present paper reports on a study of post-compulsory education in the performing arts in England, examining the development of three innovative programmes of training in dance or acting for students with a range of disabilities. The paper explores the nature of the training offered, its impact on the students and the implications for the future development of training for performing artists with disabilities.

Context of the research

Beginning in 1999 the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE)[1] funded a bursary scheme, the Dance and Drama Awards (D&DA), in England. Eight hundred and twenty awards supported, regardless of ability to pay, access to

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[1] Currently Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). In 2005 funding became the responsibility of the Learning and Skills Council.

professional training in dance, drama and stage management for the most talented individuals, at 29 (reduced to 17 by 2006) designated providers in the independent sector. These providers had received an excellent or very good grading following an inspection by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted). A secondary purpose of the awards was to be more responsive to social objectives related to widening participation and raising aspiration. Three years into the scheme, there was firm evidence for improved access for those from low income families, but continuing under-representation in professional training of students with disabilities (Neelands *et al,* 2003).

In response, the DfES sought more proactively to influence entry into training provision for disabled students. DfES *Guidance on Disability Access* (2004b) produced for D&DA providers acknowledged that, although some staff in the schools accepted the inclusion of disabled students as a natural extension of their provision, others were doubtful that those with certain significant impairments and their non-disabled peers could train and ultimately work successfully together as professional performing artists. The Guidance therefore recommended preparing schools in a number of ways: inspiring and building the confidence of less engaged staff on the one hand and on the other, removing barriers that prevented prospective disabled students from auditioning and entering training. There was a need, in short, for building bridges: linking providers' expertise in dance, drama and stage management with that of those engaged in inclusive working practices.

As a first stage, disability training was provided to all schools in the D&DA scheme by consultants funded by the DfES. Subsequently, providers identified

several issues hindering disabled performers' access to training, despite recognising rights enshrined in law as well as concerns for social justice (Band & Freakley, 2005). These Issues resonate with those in mainstream education, identified in our Introduction. Lack of resources emerged as the principal problem: capital development funding would be necessary for building adaptation, without which schools claimed they could not offer training to some students with certain physical disabilities or visual impairment. There were concerns too about the human resources necessary in terms of staff leadership and professional development for all staff to enable them to adapt their practice. A further issue was the struggle to accommodate disability within a standard of excellence without compromising that standard, the complexities of which are to some extent defined by each art form: standards for disability access and training would, it was argued, have to be accommodated within the framework of standards demanded both by the art form and by the industry, bearing in mind the 'non-negotiable' status of some areas of a course. Providers felt this could prove difficult to achieve for disabled dancers in particular, though perhaps not for all disabilities or all forms of dance.

All providers of dance training agreed that classical ballet was the least flexible in accommodating disability, its inaccessibility stemming firstly from its 19th century repertoire foundations, secondly from the explicit clarity of its goals and parameters: the dancer is either able, or unable, to perform its set pattern of steps and movements. The training leads progressively to mastery of these steps and movements, clearly revealing the performer's ability (or not) to achieve them at each stage.

The notions of excellence with which providers were working were very much employment led. The view that employers and audiences for the work of disabled performers (dancers in particular) might be few and small respectively was identified as a factor likely to caution against unqualified support for disability training in the performing arts, notwithstanding recent positive changes in the employment landscape in television in particular, which might in time be echoed elsewhere in the entertainment industry.

Research Focus

This paper focuses upon one of a series of initiatives devised by the DfES in response to these concerns: partnership projects commissioned with three employers of performers with disabilities. All three projects were to deliver bespoke training to suit individuals' needs and requirements, ensuring that students who, due to their disability, were hitherto unable to study in a mainstream training environment, had an opportunity to work and study with a disability focused company in an appropriate and suitable mainstream environment. At a professional level, the projects aimed to provide the opportunity for tutors from the companies and from D&DA provider schools to work collaboratively, sharing good practice in the delivery of inclusive training in the performing arts. In each of the three projects a specialist company worked in collaboration with one of the D&DA provider schools.

The overall aim of the study was to investigate the effectiveness of the three projects and to identify the lessons to be learned to support government policy in the arts. The research questions that drove the study were as follows: Firstly, what

factors were influential in assisting the schools to provide effective training in dance and drama?   Secondly, what light does this shed on the wider policy issue of inclusive education? The findings were also intended to have a direct influence on government policy as it related to the training of professional dancers and actors and the development of a policy of equity for those with disabilities.

Each of the three projects was treated as an exemplar in the form of an exploratory study of the first implementation of a new policy. These were not, therefore, detailed case studies, not least because the dynamics of the companies' social settings were not well known (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The focus was on the intentions and actions associated with each project and the views of tutors and students regarding their experiences within the learning context. Consequently, thematic analysis of interviews supplemented by document analysis was undertaken. The Results section (below) is organised on the basis of these emerging themes.

Methodology

Prior to the commencement of programmes a visit was made to each of the three progress meetings held between DfES and the providers. At these meetings financial arrangements were discussed as well as plans for recruitment, audition and the rolling out of programmes. Members of staff representing the companies agreed to co-operate with the evaluation, allowing visits to observe elements of the course by arrangement, and the research team secured schools' agreement to visits as plans for course delivery became clear.

Auditions for places on the programmes had already taken place prior to the start of the programmes and our engagement with the study. Field work visits to

all the companies and training providers took place over the 9-10 month duration of the programmes and were timed to coincide with course work, so that interviews could be informed by observation of the full range of learning experiences offered to the 21 students, who had a wide range of physical, sensory and learning disabilities. The visits gave the opportunity for discussion of aims and objectives with appropriate members of staff at the companies, with school tutors engaged in delivery of the course material and with the students, all of whom agreed to give their views. Where face to face follow up interviews could not be accommodated because of pressures of time, telephone interviews took place.   Overall, 21 visits were made to the three projects to observe the training in progress, to workshops, rehearsals and performances, and to conduct interviews. A breakdown of the interviews undertaken is as follows:

- 14 face to face or telephone interviews with 9 host project staff about their aims and objectives for the project, anticipated legacy from their project and implications in terms of ongoing access for students with disabilities. .

- 17 face to face or telephone discussions with 14 tutors from the provider schools on their responses to involvement with the project, including any additional or different lesson preparations they had made, any adjustments they found necessary to accommodate the disabled dancers and actors in the course of the sessions and any ways in which their experience of leading the sessions were likely to impact on their approaches to teaching disabled and mainstream students. .

- 15 Individual or group, face to face or telephone interviews with all 21 project students about their reasons for taking the course, what they felt

they were learning and how they hoped this might help them find employment

- 4 Individual or group, face to face or telephone interviews with 6 mainstream students about reasons for their involvement and their perceptions of engagement with the project students

All interviews were semi-structured following standard interview schedules devised for each participant group. Questions concerning main themes were supplemented by standard probes to optimise consistency of coverage within a less formal, conversational format. Each interview typically lasted 30 minutes but some with provider school staff responsible for devising and managing the projects lasted up to 60 minutes. Each was recorded with the interviewee's permission. Each participant was provided with information about the study and gave informed consent to be involved. The anonymity of individual contributions to the evaluation was assured and pseudonyms are used for the participants and programmes throughout this paper.

The Projects

The two drama based projects were: Stage Right, offered by Fairfax Theatre Company, with five students, and Green Shoots, provided by Compton Theatre, with eleven students. The dance based project was the Foundation Course in Dance provided by Harman Dance Company, and recruited five students.

Stage Right

Fairfax Theatre Company is a professional theatre company working with learning disabled actors, whose stated mission is to dismantle barriers to artistic excellence

so that learning disabled and non-disabled artists can perform alongside one another as equals

This 10 month part-time pilot programme selected participants on a nationwide basis from aspiring actors with significant prior training or professional performance experience through working for an Arts organisation.

The programme comprised three parts: "residencies", where all the students worked together, at the company's base or at the five participating provider schools; performance placements, which involved working with other learning disabled actors on a show; and individual and small group work with the drama schools. The curriculum focused upon acting for the stage, radio, film and television and included voice work, verse, audition skills, physical theatre, character and work, stagecraft, stage fighting, improvisation skills, and forum theatre. As with the other two projects, tuition, travel, accommodation, the services of support or communication workers, and audition attendance costs were free of charge to the students.

Green Shoots
Compton Theatre Company is also a professional theatre company, comprising actors with physical and/or sensory impairments, engaging in performance training as well as developing new writing, young people's theatre and education work. The university accredited Green Shoots was a nine month course running over four days a week, with two 15 week semesters. Semester 1 provided a basic practical skills foundation (in voice, acting and movement), with appropriate parallel

seminars.   An Exploring Text module used various texts to consider approaches to acting skills, and the course also featured non-text based performance.   A performance event took place at the end of the semester, drawing upon both the text and non-text based extracts studied, and a signer enabled access to a diverse audience.   Semester 2 introduced solo performances and students were introduced to workshop theory and skills delivery training.   They worked on monologues and group text work for the showcase and professional development week that brought the programme to a close.

Harman Foundation Course in Dance

As a leading educator and employer of disabled dancers, Harman Dance Company had already offered workshops and training to potential new dancers through its education and outreach programme, but the Foundation Course represented the company's first extended training programme. This one year, full time course was delivered in three terms of 11 weeks, 16 hours per week, and aimed to help students to identify their individual strengths and prepare them for more advanced training, perhaps entry to a course accredited by Trinity College, London. London Open College Network (LOCN) accreditation was secured as the programme proceeded, with permission to award this first cohort of students retrospectively.

In accordance with LOCN structures the five units were: dance/movement studies, movement analysis, contextual studies, fitness, health and safety, and performance studies. The course focused upon understanding basic movement principles, applying these to develop the movement vocabulary of individual

students and implementing this in their work. The regular timetable was supplemented with choreographic residencies by Harman Dance Company and other guest artists.

Students on all three programmes trained mainly with others in their group, but each programme also offered episodes of integrated training with mainstream students within the collaborating drama or dance schools.

The following section examines the perceptions of senior members of staff at the schools and companies, tutors and students during the programmes the implications of their views for inclusive practice in drama and dance training; these results are presented according to three main themes emerging from the and interviews. Following responsive approaches to mainstream teaching, we reflect upon how the underlying ethos of valuing difference has shown itself in the programmes in respect of prior planning, learning support needs and adaptive teaching and learning practices. We consider also ways in which the programmes succeeded in reconciling this ethos with expectations of high standards of achievement.

Results

Prior planning and support for learning

At a fundamental level, the programmes achieved inclusion simply by bringing potential disabled artists into training they would otherwise have been unable to access: disabled students were recognised as a group and introduced to training led by tutors in high status performing arts schools that select their students

through a highly competitive audition process. At the provider end of the teaching relationship the engagement of these tutors, many with no prior experience of training disabled students, represented an experiment in inclusive practice. For all three programmes the venture entailed a good deal of prior planning from the outset to provide applicants with equal access to the audition process; needs assessment to guide access to the curriculum, and various kinds of support, including pastoral support, for the duration of the courses. A member of Fairfax Theatre Company's staff shared students' accommodation during periods of tuition held away from its home base, and during classes was always present to support the five students, quite frequently joining in the exercises, particularly those requiring an even number of students.

For all three programmes, the audition structure was similar to that adopted in mainstream training, including improvisation and warm up exercises, a prepared solo piece and an interview.   However, for the Compton Theatre Company applicants, text was supplied in various formats as appropriate to the needs of each student including audio format, large and standard print, while at Harman Dance Company two applicants were allowed to submit evidence by video. Similarly, for visually impaired students once on the course at Compton, core texts were recorded onto audio tape, and were also offered with enlarged print. Hearing impaired students worked in spoken English while in class, but a British Sign Language translation of the texts was available for them to work on at home. Students were frequently consulted as to whether learning methods and strategies for progress remained appropriate to their needs, the outcomes of discussion feeding into their individual learning plans. Where difficulty in securing suitable

personal support was impeding access to training for a speech impaired student, Compton Theatre Company developed a new post offering access support that combined knowledge of theatrical practice with appropriate communication support.

Fairfax Theatre Company students' access to training sessions was enabled by access support workers, following discussions with the students to ascertain their needs. They provided audio description, line feeding, orientation, note-taking and mobility support. Provision for individual difference at this level minimised the need for tutors to make substantial changes in session content.

Representatives from four mainstream schools that were to provide the programme's training were invited to observe the Fairfax Theatre Company audition process and used this as an opportunity to consider ways in which the learning disabled students could be integrated into the programme. Interestingly, a disability training specialist observed that as soon as the candidates were introduced to the audition panel, the process became about them and how to help them rather than about teachers dwelling on the difficulties of working with the students.

The range of profiles represented by the applicants brought challenges for auditioning and assessing potential for accessing the curriculum. In the context of these three programmes panels needed in some cases to put aside a company's preferred ethos of open access to consider carefully applicants' physical capacity

to complete the vocational development offered, bearing in mind students' inexperience with long hours of training.

Access to the Harman Dance Company Foundation Course curriculum was facilitated at a national centre for spinal injury, offering a pool, fitness and IT equipment. As regards fitness, health and safe practice, the course provided for students to work to an individual physical development programme, devised in consultation with a dance science specialist and an osteopath. Students also had access to body conditioning, movement therapy and rehabilitation specialists e.g. Alexander, Pilates and physiotherapy, and further learning support where required. It was important to have support in place from the beginning of the course; a deaf student, initially slow to progress, did so very quickly once support measures were made available.

The three programmes made differential use of information regarding students' impairments. Harman Dance Company arranged for an assessment by an osteopath, Company staff and an individual tutorial. Information gleaned, including diagnoses, was used as a basis for short student profiles compiled for visiting tutors, outlining each student's 'capabilities and limitations', 'areas of attention' and 'additional learning support'. The information was used to facilitate environmental adjustment in the form of a training programme devised according to the needs of each student. Health and fitness had to be approached on an individual basis with the help of a health professional, a departure from common practice in most dance training,   because of the variety of abilities and impairments within the group,

The rather less physically exacting demands of the two drama programmes upheld in practical terms the companies' ideological dislike for categorising students through a diagnostic model. Their needs based approach involved, for example, repetition, or chunking the work into slightly smaller steps. All three programmes considered, however, that impairment must be acknowledged if provision is to be made that avoids educational barriers (Terzi 2005). While safeguarding their students' health and safety the schools shared a common purpose in seeking information: to prompt visiting tutors to consider ways of adapting their teaching approaches to the needs of every student.

Adaptive approaches to teaching and learning

Approaches to teaching observed on all three programmes, and in tutors' comments reflect their rejection of any prescriptive approach to teaching disabled students, for that would seem to deny the unique qualities of each person. Several tutors observed that, in any case, literature on approaches to teaching those whose speech and vocal ability are impaired is sparse. The three programmes provided numerous examples of adaptive teaching approaches for disabled students that accommodate individual differences in action.

There were many instances where the mainstream tutors were able to call upon their considerable teaching experience, whether involving students with a learning or physical disability, to deal spontaneously with individual access difficulties as they arose in class.   These tutors made clear that they had not tailored their material in advance to accommodate the students' disabilities but made adjustments as needed in the classroom context.

Variations in the experience of the Compton Theatre Company and Harman Dance Company cohorts were certainly wider than would be the case for a typical cohort accepted for mainstream performance training in the provider schools linked with the project. While an undergraduate group for this Performing Arts degree may include individuals with dyslexia or dyspraxia, (a characteristic also found nationally, Neelands *et al*, 2003), for whom certain adaptations will have to be made, the number of disabled students in the group would clearly not be so high, neither would the degree of their disability be so significant as was the case with Green Shoots. Nevertheless, mixed ability teaching is a frequent feature of this Performing Arts degree course, so that many teachers were not new to adapting approaches for students with different learning needs. Essentially, this meant that in adapting teaching approaches to accommodate disabled students,

> You're already beginning to examine some things that have been taken as given in [mainstream] drama training
>
> (Tutor at Compton Theatre Company).

Fairfax Theatre Company Stage Right students found it most helpful to have a lesson structure made clear to them in advance, with ongoing explanatory narrative during the session.   In addition, certain individual learning needs among this group (and this would apply to learning disabled students more generally) needed to be supported in particular ways. This might mean more repetition, perhaps putting more, and slightly smaller, steps into a process, and frequent use of reflective techniques: engaging students in activity and reflection immediately after a session, to eliminate long gaps between performing and reflecting.

Several tutors commented that *all* students learn in different ways and on the need to bring a range of approaches to the classroom. Where, for example, a break after twenty minutes was needed to accommodate a lone interpreter, the teacher began to consider the optimum attention span to be expected from mainstream student groups. Another tutor, having replaced the instruction *"everyone close your eyes"* with *'I'd like everyone to focus in and cut out all the stimulus around them'* in a class that included blind students, reverted permanently to this new phrase on reflecting that sighted or not, students with closed eyes may be distracted by sounds around them. A flexible approach, important in a mainstream context, acquired crucial significance when teaching disabled students.

As previously noted, Harman Dance Company based students' individual learning plans on a physiotherapist's specialist assessment, sharing the information with all tutors to enable them to devise teaching and learning strategies centred around each student's specific capabilities, development potential and safety. It is noteworthy that this strategy is not very different from that of all vocational dance courses which include physiological assessment of body structure and functioning: the factor setting it apart from mainstream practice is the extent to which Harman Dance Company adapted teaching approaches to facilitate students' access to training.

During the second term Harman Dance Company staff understood the true range of students' capabilities and needs, adjusting their approach then readjusting

the teaching processes for each person, as all were at different levels. Individual differentiation was most evident as the key to students' learning in the teaching of techniques, especially contemporary dance technique; here the approach was tutor-led improvisation, starting with simple gestural movement and progressing into more complex travelling movement, rather than the traditional class format of directly taught centre exercises, movement phrases, jumps and travelling sequences. This enabled students continually to devise movement appropriate to their physical capabilities, the tutor constantly urging bolder, more complex or more extreme movement. Tutors were observed using a wide range of teaching strategies including detailed audio-description and physical demonstration, or hands-on guidance with dance-technical/anatomical information addressing, for example, placement, location from which a movement is instigated, positions and directions in space.

While the disparity in students' experience and the range of impairment frequently demanded adaptive responses from tutors, many teaching disabled students for the first time, there were challenges too for the students. They were entering into a new learning situation, some finding themselves perhaps for the first time in a group where everyone has a disability: with the development of greater inclusion in schools most of the disabled students were used to being the only disabled person in a group. Individuals may feel empowered and unified as members of a disabled cohort, but are called upon to share the support available with other group members. Moreover, a number had been disabled only recently and so had had little time to adjust their sense of identity to incorporate the disability and feel positive about that:

I think to come to a course, to a group like this, if you haven't gone through that process, would be very challenging.

(Tutor for Compton Theatre Company)

Staff at Harman Dance Company referred to students' frustration with each other's limitations. Similarly Fairfax Theatre Company students needed a period of adjustment to become used to one another's strengths and weaknesses. For some students in all three programmes, aside from their experience or ability as actors or dancers, the experience of working as a group, rather than as individuals was also quite new. The 'ability to work in a group' is familiar also to pupils and teachers in mainstream learning contexts as an important element of transferable skills training. A drama school tutor pointed out that students in any group, as well as teachers, have to cope with people learning at different speeds, as well as the occasional student who may not have any disability but is continually difficult and disruptive.

Maintaining standards and monitoring success

The wide range of experience and talent represented in the cohorts of students brought into question the level of standards and discipline which could be appropriately applied; at the same time it is important for the status of these programmes, and disability training more generally, that they be applied at a level consonant with mainstream performance training. Several tutors for the Green Shoots and Stage Right programmes questioned whether in a teaching situation disabled students in general are sufficiently used to being told 'that's not good enough', whether they are perhaps more used to receiving positive comments. The

tension between tolerance of mistakes and the desire for quality of performance becomes problematic where members of the group feel that more emphasis could be placed on improvement. (Allan & Cope, 2004) Students in our sample emphasized that judging their work by standards less strict than those applied to non-disabled students would *'do the disability case no favours'* (Compton Theatre Company student).

A blind tutor felt that some, especially non-disabled tutors, are too tentative both in their course related interaction with the students and in their approach to discipline; less able perhaps than disabled tutors to appreciate the limits to which the students could be pushed:

> I was determined that I wasn't going to sort of molly-coddle them because I'm disabled too and I know… what I can cope with… Somebody fell over and I just said "oh, get up", I mean, you know, these things happen.
>
> (Tutor for Compton Theatre Company)

One tutor, new to teaching students with a disability, was learning to adopt a more strict approach,

> [no longer] scared to make demands around punctuality, and discipline, and rigour… I think once you've worked with a group of disabled performers for a while you realise that you have to make exactly the same demands as you would on any other group.   (Tutor for Compton Theatre Company)

As regards standards, the Green Shoots course was continuously assessed by the tutors delivering each unit, and progress was checked through regular tutorials. Students also needed to submit theory papers for assessment, in a format

appropriate to their individual learning style: on computer, disk, video or mini disk. Submission of work through an alternative medium is a contentious issue (as in mainstream education) in relation to preserving standards. The view that the essay, as a very important way of organising thoughts, is a crucial skill to master competes with the view that ideas can be conveyed equally effectively through an alternative medium, though not just in *any* form chosen by the student.   As university students   Green Shoots students' progress was monitored through the publicly recognised assessment methods in effect through the university's quality assurance protocol.

Harman Dance Company staff felt that the Foundation Course delivery and content was more consistent with techniques and training that take place in schools where students are training for the contemporary and independent dance sector and market, rather than the musical theatre sector – the market to which the project schools tended to work.   In line with accreditation procedures, Harman Dance Company staff were keen to develop for the future a more streamlined teaching and learning approach involving more specific goals for tutors and a clearer articulation of learning outcomes. To this end, the company was able to plan, as the course progressed, a core team of tutors around the curriculum, identifying tutors to be invited back and places where additional tutorial input was needed. Accreditation planned through LOCN was granted retrospectively and, at an informal level, students undertook peer assessment of performance and work in the studio.

A range of disabilities was represented among Fairfax Theatre Company Stage Right students, but all started the programme having already received prior training, or professional performance experience with an Arts organisation. The students stated that they valued training with a professional theatre company in combination with highly regarded drama schools, rather than formal course accreditation, though Fairfax Theatre Company explained that the company was *'looking into'* the possibility of Open College accreditation for Stage Right . The short contact time with tutors was a drawback for students on all three programmes but especially for Stage Right students given the lapse of several weeks between residencies. It would be quite unrealistic to compare these fairly short bursts of input from tutors with the training on offer from a more sustained training programme, for many of the lessons to be learnt within performance training entail daily repetition towards an accumulative effect rather than understanding new knowledge:

> [such lessons] have over time an effect on your voice, or on your body or on your ability to perform….
>
> (Member of staff, Fairfax Theatre Company).

From the early stages of the programme Compton Theatre Company students wished for greater inclusion in the Performing Arts degree, with respect to curriculum and interaction with the mainstream students, stressing the value of integrated training in preparing disabled students to mix with able bodied actors in the industry. They worked with third year students from the University's Performing Arts degree, delivering practical, drama-based workshops to two

primary schools. Green Shoots students were invited by third year Performing Arts students to act in their pieces, having auditioned alongside the mainstream students for a part (a measure of their competence in the eyes of the latter group).

In the case of all three programmes, episodes of inclusive training produced social advantages as well as benefits in terms of performance development, sometimes blending the two. Two third year students participated in Stage Right classes for the duration of the residency at one drama school. Joining in class exercises, they helped individual students to interpret a tutor's instructions, or offered focused attention to help them to carry out exercises. In joining break time football sessions they established a more personal rapport with the Stage Right students, establishing a social link which transcended perception of the drama school students as individuals on the opposite side of the learner/teacher relationship. For their part, the two mainstream students felt that the integrated sessions contributed positively to their learning; they revisited aspects of their own training and examined in more detail movements or phrases previously taken for granted.

A two week fully integrated choreographic project at the close of the programme brought a similar mix of social and developmental benefits for Harman Dance Company students, working under the guidance of a renowned choreographer with second year Conservatoire students to create a performance alongside other end of year productions. All the Harman Dance Company students found this work helpful in combating a sense of isolation, providing more opportunities for exchanging ideas and giving them the chance to demonstrate their abilities and

their capability of working with other [non-disabled] performers. The choreographer noted the ease with which the two sets of students interacted socially and 'gelled' as a group.

Notwithstanding their eagerness for more sessions that included non-disabled students, Stage Right students doubted their ability to cope with the pace of a fully inclusive course. While the two mainstream students affirmed that they would welcome further opportunities to engage with learning disabled or physically disabled students, perceiving a great deal of artistic talent and originality in this group, both felt that the disabled students would find the pace of the three year course too demanding:

> A course like ours…has to move at a certain level, so it has to have a certain dynamic, to move through a certain rhythm – it's a hard course, you know, and I am sure they would have difficulty in keeping up with the sort of course that we do.

> (Third year student).

While the Harman Dance Company students wished for more opportunities for integration they rejected a suggestion for mainstream students to observe a Foundation Course class, commenting: *'We don't want to be in this fishbowl position'* (Foundation Course student). The comment underlines the imperative that measures to increase opportunities for integration/inclusion are sensitive to the comfort levels of disabled students, bearing in mind their centrality in the process of change for, as Allen (2004) argues: 'inclusion is not something which is practised upon individuals, but is a process involving active engagement and control over decisions by the learner' (34).

Discussion

This focus of this study was a government initiative to develop training in dance and drama in mainstream settings for disabled students, combining the expertise of professional training courses with that of companies of disabled actors and dancers. The study sought to examine, in the first instance, what factors were influential in assisting the schools to provide effective training in dance and drama, and then to consider what light does this shed on the wider policy issue of inclusive education.

The study has supported the importance of approaches found to be important at school level in developing effective inclusive practice, namely careful planning and thoughtful adaptation of approaches to teaching and learning (Ofsted, 2006), As this was a new initiative there was a recognised need to think and plan carefully to meet the needs of the students, whose needs were outside the experience of the staff in the mainstream institutions. Nevertheless, they were able to call upon their existing experience and adapt their teaching accordingly, assisted by staff from the companies of disabled dancers and actors; which also supports the importance of drawing upon the first hand experience of disabled colleagues. It was also important to adjust attitudes and this applied also to the students, many of whom were experiencing mainstream for the first time, and some of whom were still developing their identity following a disabling experience.

The education systems in many countries are struggling to reconcile an agenda of increasing standards with one of increasing equity (Dyson *et al*., 2004). This was fundamental to this study as the students were beyond compulsory

education and seeking to enter a profession where excellence was a defining characteristic and requirement. These students recognised and accepted this necessity and tutors, especially those with a disability, addressed this full on. However, the need to make appropriate adaptations to ensure that necessary skills were assessed fairly was also acknowledged.

With respect to implications for the issue of inclusive education in general, the study provides important pointers. 'Inclusion' encompasses a number of models. These three programmes introduced inclusive practice in the Arts in its broadest sense by bringing into training disabled people who would otherwise not have been offered this opportunity. Moreover, some mainstream tutors were brought into engagement with disability training for the first time. The schools, the companies and not least, both project and mainstream students reported social and learning benefits from elements of the programme which brought together disabled and non-disabled students.

Senior members of staff and tutors alike stated that they would support further initiatives for teaching disabled and non-disabled students together, though in contexts set apart from the mainstream classroom. Staff felt that several issues at a functional level would impede fully inclusive training. Some were concerned about physical access, others saw barriers for students with a severe impairment, for example students whose speech is difficult to understand and for profoundly deaf students whose first language is BSL rather than English. Tutors felt that these problems are compounded by the lack of expertise among staff in training students with a disability in any context, far less in an inclusive setting. In a

mainstream context, increasing teachers' willingness to work with students with special needs is crucial (Wilkins & Nietfeld, 2004) but schools need support in developing and implementing policies and practices that result in an effective inclusion experience for all parties involved (Johnson, 2000).

Accreditation requirements have presented a number of challenges to an inclusive model of training, especially in ballet, but also in the case of musical theatre training.   In particular, the technical level that must be attained for assessment may be beyond the reach of some disabled students. In an inclusive training context schools would have to consider whether exceptions can be made for them, and the implications of so doing for non-disabled students less able, for example, in dance than in other aspects of performance, but obliged nevertheless to achieve to standard in this element.   With flexibility built into the assessment process, validating bodies could provide advice to schools on a case-by-case basis, safeguarding standards while sharing with them decisions for each course module about adjustments that can be legitimately made, within the relevant university's validation requirements, to accommodate individual needs.

The time needed to bring students up to production, as opposed to practice level, performance was widely perceived as a barrier to inclusive training, notwithstanding each company's desire that training in the long term will be fully integrated into mainstream vocational training structures.   Some students' impairments forced them to take breaks from their session, to use an inhaler, take in some sugar, or massage cramped limbs, for example. Fully inclusive training

would call for a change of ethos so that mainstream tutors and students accepted such accommodations as simply 'part of what we do', rather than as a concession.

A further key to inclusion was articulated as arising from the challenges of a difficult employment market (Raynor & Hayward, 2009). School and company interviewees felt that for most mainstream dance schools inclusion was still a distant concept, though some progress was being made in the theatre world: dance school graduates in England frequently hold a part on the West End stage in highest esteem, for which possession of a certain body type is often a pre-condition (this debarring also many non-disabled performers). In this view, a career in the independent dance sector outside the West End simply does not carry the same cachet. This brings into question whether the value of training in the arts should be measured solely by its success in providing a route to employment or whether personal development is sufficient in itself, where this is the principal or sole outcome.

At an aesthetic level, Harman Dance Company discounted the idea that physical inability to move legs or arms would hold back a performer, suggesting that a ballet student without the use of leg movements would explore balance from the wheelchair. The student would understand that the objective is to create a shape with the body, and explore upper body movement to achieve this. In the words of a Compton Theatre Company tutor:

> If it's human expression with structure around it then I can do that whether
> I'm on my feet or sitting in a chair. My structure might look slightly different,
> but I'm maintaining the structure that I can.

However, for many, if not most schools, support for this perspective would entail a departure from the traditional concept of ballet that creates a specified representation replicable at every performance to a broader understanding of the purpose of art.

A director/writer, however, put the alternative perspective into the context of acting:

> It isn't about being able to walk, or even, necessarily, speak English for a deaf performer. It is something much bigger than that. It is about having an understanding of character and interrelation. And so you then, as director, find different ways of storytelling through being faced with people whose abilities are not the same as a group of drama school students.

Conclusions

A broader understanding of artistic purpose would argue for a new model of disability in the context of training in the performing arts – an aesthetic model that recognises the unique quality inherent in each exchange between actors or dancers, whether disabled or not, and in each of their meetings with an audience, accepting that the skills brought to theatre by disabled performers complement on equal terms those of their non-disabled colleagues. Interviewees in all roles in this study have indicated that for the moment this vision remains an ideal. Turning again to mainstream education for a parallel context, it is essential that in idealistic pursuit of artistic purpose we do not render disabled students *'sacrificial lambs on the altar of inclusion'* (Wedell, 2002), but that we set them up to succeed by recognising and implementing the adaptations needed to facilitate positive experiences on both sides of the teaching/learning process.

The present study provides evidence that carefully planned and funded initiatives in the performing arts can achieve positive experiences for both disabled students and tutors in the context of the performing arts. However, the evidence from this study also suggests two other requirements. First there is a need to conceptualise inclusive practice as both systemic and particular. Each of the three programmes comprised specialist performing arts companies working in collaboration with mainstream providers, each finding its own way forward with differing types, degrees and frequency of engagement and collaboration between disabled and mainstream students. Second, the respect for and engagement with the art of the disabled students presents a strong challenge to societal values and actions: in addition to the usual factors relevant to developing inclusive education in a universal education system, professional training in the performing arts requires recognition but also re-conceptualisation of excellence.

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