

Parental Perspectives on Inclusive Dance Program: Their Child's Experiences and Outcomes

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PURPOSE: Children with disabilities have limited access to sport and recreation activities due to lack of inclusive community programming (Piškur et al., 2016). Inclusion refers to integrating students with disabilities with their peers into a variety of general education and community settings. Inclusion is a social justice issue and all children and youth with disabilities have a right to live, learn, play, and work alongside their typical peers (AOTA, 2015). This qualitative study aimed to explore the impact of the Nashville Ballet Adaptive Dance Program: New Perspectives on its participants with disabilities through examination of the parental perspective in order to inform the programming to ensure the continued quality and sustainability of this community-based program. The study sought to answer two main research questions: (1) What are the parent's perceptions of the inclusive dance program? (2) How has the inclusive dance program influenced/impacted their child's health and well-being?

DESIGN: The study used a qualitative design and phenomenological approach to explore the parental perspectives of the inclusive dance program. Convenience sampling was used to recruit participants. Inclusion criteria required participants to be a parent or caregiver of a child with disabilities who was currently or previously enrolled in the Nashville Ballet's Adaptive Dance Program: New Perspectives. Exclusion criteria included individuals who are not fluent in understanding or speaking English as no translation services were available. A recruitment email was sent to all potential participants via the director of the dance program, also a research team member, and included information about the research study, a recruitment flyer and an informed consent form.

METHOD: A demographic electronic survey and individual, open-ended, in-depth interviews via Zoom or telephone were conducted to collect data on the phenomena (n = 9). Data were analyzed thematically based on Nowell et al.'s (2017) article using a six-phase approach to establish trustworthiness in qualitative research. After discovery of the initial findings, a focus group (n = 5) was employed for member checking to ensure accuracy of results. Other analysis methods such as dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity were implemented to increase the rigor of the study and its findings.

RESULTS: Four themes and five sub-themes were identified: (1) inclusion, (2) child impact (with sub-themes of social, physical, well-being), (3) inclusive dance program (with sub-theme of finances/scholarship), (4) activity participation (with sub-theme of comparisons). Parents defined inclusion as 'everyone, regardless of physical and behavioral differences, is accepted and has the opportunity to participate'. They expressed appreciation for the dance program and felt it brought excitement and joy to their children via friendships, fun, exercise, emotional connection and community integration. Parents also voiced gratitude for the financial aid and external funding provided, but spoke of limited community programs and opportunities for their children with disabilities.

CONCLUSION AND IMPACT STATEMENT: Parental perspectives outlined the value and need for more inclusive programs in order for their children to reap continued social, physical, and emotional benefits. Their perspectives highlighted children's occupational needs and rights to engage in inclusive leisure. OTs must work to create recreational outlets and work alongside parents to advocate for inclusive opportunities. Further research is necessary, however, the evidence from this study will fortunately be used to improve and procure future funding for the sustainability of the inclusive adaptive dance program.

References

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