

***LIMITLESS: TEACHING AND LEARNING INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY DANCE
CREATION AND PERFORMANCE***

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Abstract

It's not ability that's the limiting factor for an inclusive community - it's opportunity. Through the project *Limitless*, I looked at pedagogical practices implemented during the creation of three dance pieces, which were recorded, edited, and distributed on social media. Through my project and its analysis and accompanying research I will examine 'what pedagogical approach is best practice with inclusive dance?' Through combining an overview of relevant literature with reflections on personal experiences in the project, I will examine the best practice teaching methods and the dancers most preferred learning models within inclusive dance. This document is meant to provide an insight into what are effective teaching and learning strategies in inclusive dance.

Some refer to this project as advocacy art or therapeutic art and they wouldn't be wrong, those are both bi-products of this project, however, they were not the focus. This was a study in dance and teaching.

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Introduction

Being able to get in and out of a building is not enough. You need meaningful access. That means being able to use the coffee shop and the bathrooms, just like everyone else. You can get into theatres now, but can you also get on stage? That has to be the goal. Rick Hansen, 2004 (Johnston, 2012, p.3)

The above quote from Rick Hansen, athlete, activist and philanthropist, is a statement I strongly believe in. Inclusion isn't only about having access it's about opportunity; it's about changing the traditional ways 'things have always been done' and creating socially just and equitable opportunities for all people. Through my project *Limitless* I intended to create a meaningful space where dancers of any ability could come together to create and share their work with one another and eventually with a potentially unlimited online audience.

Personal Motivating Factors and Passion

Every person develops their own artistic values and beliefs; people know what they like and what they don't like even if they struggle to justify it or to describe 'why?' Before I can get into the project and the process of teaching, learning and creation, I feel it necessary to frame my perspective.

For much of my adolescent and young adult life I considered myself a dancer. Within my post-secondary education the description of 'dancer' became more prominent as did my other main identifier, 'teacher'. Both of these roles that I have developed over the years drastically changed as I learned a new type of dancing and teaching.

What does it mean to be a dancer? For almost 30 years I had one pretty decisive answer, someone that moved through the space, jumped, lifted, partnered...dancers were the epitome of strength, flexibility and endurance. I was a dancer. I could flip, leap,

stretch, and support a partner. I could memorize steps and quickly race through the space or carve the air around me slowly and gracefully. I was a dancer. In the Fall of 2009, while dancing in four different projects, I suffered a dance related injury and was later diagnosed with a second degree Isthmic spondylolisthesis (fractured vertebra and resulting dislocation causing nerve damage, temporary with a successful surgery). Much of my identity as a dancer disappeared. I continued to dance into spring 2010 to complete all my performance commitments, trying to hide the discomfort that I felt. As the months moved on so did the severity of my diagnosis. I couldn't support my weight on my right foot; just walking would leave me winded and reeling in unceasing nerve pain. I was no longer a dancer. This pain lasted a year and a half, a blip in the grand scheme, but it was enough to have altered my outlook on 'what a dancer was' forever. After I began the recovery from a successful spinal fusion back surgery in January 2011, I kept getting the urge to dance and move. The nerve pain was gone, however I was left with impressive scars and unyielding rods that would never let me move the way I once could. I often shrugged off the limits with my new body as, "I'm in my thirties – I wouldn't dance like that anymore anyways", but I secretly longed to move without feeling the crushing comparison of who I once was, the dancer I used to be. I was never a Baryshnikov and have no delusions of what I could and couldn't do, but the bars in my back now made it impossible to push myself to do what I once could.

But what *could* I do? Yes there were tricks that I'd never be able to do, but there was a world of dance vocabulary that I could do, that almost anyone could do. I had imposed so many limits on my definition of what a dancer was, that I never looked outside at any other possibilities. In all of my dance experience, dance was physical, it

was external, something to show others, but I had dance in me; I would hear music and I would create images of movement, but there was a disconnect between what I created in my head and what my body was able to do. While moving through the regimens of physiotherapy, many seated exercises began to inspire new dance creations. I could still be a dancer.

‘Dancer’ is only one of my self-identified labels. There are many words that I use to describe myself but one of the first I use is ‘teacher’. I have been a public school teacher in a rural K-12 setting for 12 years and it has become a synonym for me, “Hi my name is Corey and I’m a teacher.” As a teacher I’ve had many roles and responsibilities but many of my most powerful memories of teaching and learning come from inclusive work. I always found working with a student that had a diagnosis that affected their learning was compelling. During my undergraduate years my summers were spent involved with care agencies working with clients that required some support. Although my primary role wasn’t to teach, these experiences always taught me - either something about myself or a life lesson that I could use in my future classrooms.

When I received an email and follow-up phone call from Lisa Doolittle, my former movement professor, explaining the work she was getting involved with and requesting that I consider doing my Masters in this field with her, I jumped at the chance. I have danced in many of Doolittle’s choreographies in the past and had seen her work produced on stage and screen. I had always been aware of her involvement in the community beyond the university connecting dance and theatre students to a variety of community and cultural groups. The offer to work with her on her next endeavour was such a great fit. Doolittle was piloting a course (Dance and Theatre for All Abilities:

Production Development) that focused on inclusion. Although it was a temporary course, it was the start of something that permanently helped me to recreate my definition of what it means to be a teacher and a dancer. Work that I did alongside Doolittle in the university course Drama 3850-A Dance and Theatre for All Abilities: Production Development (Fall 2014) to the mainstage production *Unlimited* (Spring 2015) significantly prepared me to continue work with a community company of dancers open to anyone who wished to continue working with inclusive dance practices.

This thesis report offers insights into the work I did alongside a community of dancers in a group we called *Limitless*. Within the *Limitless* project we created three dance pieces that were video recorded during the Fall of 2015 and shared online via YouTube and other social media platforms early in 2016. I ventured forward knowing that at least we were going to be dancing and creating, both art and opportunity.

My emerging vision included:

1. That meaningful art can be created by people of all abilities.
2. Continuing inclusive arts practices in the community was paramount to my project.
3. Most importantly for this research, I wanted to experiment and develop teaching practices that aimed to promote the growth of individuals, artistically and socially, and I planned to create three different collectively created dance pieces.

I met a few of the *Limitless* dancers in the university course that was offered, others in the creation of the production of *Unlimited*, and a few new dancers joined our team through word of mouth. *Limitless* was comprised of seven females, 3 dancers without a disability and 4 dancers with a disability; and five males, 1 dancer without a

disability and 4 dancers with a disability (I will discuss the language of ‘with’ and ‘without’ in a later chapter). Although we were a company of twelve performers, on average in rehearsals our attendance was closer to eight. The rehearsals within *Limitless* ran for one hour, two days a week on Friday evening and Saturday afternoon, from August 28th to December 19th, equating to approximately 30 hours of creation and filmed performance time. Knowing we had this limited time to create and re-teach any dancers that may have been absent in a class, we had to focus as a team in order to complete the video pieces in the time we had.

The first pedagogical framework evolved from a ‘me’ to a ‘we’, we were a team. I may have conceived the project overall, organized the space and prepared music and exercises for class as part of my lesson plan, but we were contributing partners all with something to share. We all had a role in helping one another as part of an artistic ensemble and maintaining our positive learning environment where all dancers could take risks and be celebrated. Democratizing the class was essential to help with the collective creation process. Ideas were welcome, help was encouraged, and every member felt ownership – from process to product.

A second pedagogical focus was experimenting with my role within the varying modes of creation. Consistently using a set structure of creation and performance may have been successful but wouldn’t necessarily be challenging. I wanted to do something different with each video, which meant new styles of instruction and learning for each creation. When I began developing *Limitless* choreography I was cautioned early on to avoid traditional studio teaching practices, to limit set choreography and allow for more improvisational dance structure. I didn’t want the dancers to mimic or try their best to do

what I did based on my choreography; I wanted them to have freedom to create and develop the dances together. I limited my conceptual visions to selecting the music, gathering some costume and prop pieces and determining possible performance venues. The process of creation and imposing my choreography on the dancers proved to be difficult, our first piece involved almost zero choreography created by me, which I later regretted. This organic creation process was difficult for me and will be discussed more fully later.

The third and final focus of the project was to critically reflect on the process. From analysing and critiquing the videos, hearing comments, reviewing my journal written during the process of creation, and through discussions and interviews with the performers and focus group participants, I hoped to develop a better sense of the more effective and meaningful ways to continue to teach and to create meaningful inclusive dance work.

This first chapter describes my background as a teacher and dancer and my intentions with this project. It further discusses the development and creation of *Limitless*. It is also meant to establish pedagogical background and important vocabulary that will be expanded in later chapters.

In the second chapter I explore written work on various aspects of inclusive dance including: vocabulary, teaching and learning frameworks, models of disability, performance creation and aesthetics including video creations, and disability studies. Here I will compare and contrast theories and methods as I draw out connections to the concepts and approaches I accessed in my own research.

Chapter three is a focus on the methodology of research. This chapter describes the ways I focused my project development and the people involved in helping me to clarify the finished products. Qualitative methods involved interviews with the company of dancers, information from parents and/or guardians on their reactions, focus groups, and comments from audience about the work.

Chapter four is an analysis of the three creations, the processes and products of *Limitless: Wishing for Yellow, Understand and The One*. This chapter discusses the teaching strategies and the different creation processes used for each project, along with primary data reflections that analyze and evaluate the teaching and learning that took place during the creative process. Each creation examines connections between what was experienced, and the practical aspects of our work and the correlation to the theories and research published in the field.

The conclusion will summarize key findings in my research. Relevant philosophies of inclusive dance practices will be summarized and examined in context of my personal growth and discovery from this research. The intention is to add to the growing body of knowledge regarding creative inclusive dance practice.

Some Background to Inclusive Arts and Pedagogy

Inclusion, integration and disability are key terms in my research but as I've read and discovered they become limiting, limiting in terms of labels and expectations. 'Disability' as referred to by one person may be referred to as 'impairment' by another. 'Inclusion' to one, is 'passive participation' to another (Hickey-Moody 2009, Conroy 2009, Cheesman 2011 & 2014, and Kupperts 2003). Within the public education system

language changes, what was once mainstream and traditional is now politically incorrect and prejudicial.

For the purposes of this paper, ‘integration’, ‘inclusive’, ‘mixed ability’, and ‘all abilities’ are a way to show the diverse population that was involved in the company, *Limitless*. Disability is a contested term with many connotations. For some disability equates to inability. This perception is less common in 2016 especially within educational spheres, although there are still learning models that ‘medicalize’ and base disability on a diagnosis of deficit, ensuring that we always recognize incompleteness within the individual. In that context every person is disabled as we all have areas of strengths and weaknesses. I don’t intend to be controversial or overly simplistic in this discussion but avoiding diagnosis of deficit became a huge part of the pedagogy in *Limitless*. Further it is the most effective teaching method within most classrooms; teach keeping in mind the students strengths and use those strengths to help improve areas they may struggle in.

What’s also important in this discussion of inclusive terminology is the context in which we were working. *Limitless* was not connected to an educational system or imposed curriculum. It was community-based. This affected both the creation and analysis of the rehearsal process and the final video products. There was no ‘evaluation’ or grade given to the process or the products; however there was learning, reflection, and celebration. Learning took place in many forms. The most obvious evidence was the creation of dance and movement choreography and vocabulary; this took place through doing it, embodied learning. Embodied learning was used throughout *Limitless*, connecting the mind and body to the learning process. We described how emotions may

show on our face but then we experimented with how that could look through movement. The ensemble also learned to work with one another and ways to problem solve during the creation processes and performances. What was clear was the pride and accomplishment that the dancers felt after completing the filming of each music video. The dancers didn't have an IEP (Individual Educational Plan – a legal document outlining areas for the learning team to focus on for student growth and success), typical in public education environments, they didn't enter the studio labeled with a diagnosis or medical conditions, they came as dancers wanting to move and that is exactly what we focused on. They were still challenged, and were encouraged to dance as solo artists, as a partner within a duet, part of a small group, and within the entire ensemble. Another significant part of this research was that we developed the pieces together and we all had specific areas of input and interpreted meaning. I will speak to my intentions and reflections when talking about the creations and I will strive to present the opinions of the creative ensemble as accurately as possible to help clarify the value of the work.

Based on international contexts there is no consensus on the terminology used in referring to this type of dance (integrated, inclusive, mixed ability, all ability, etc., I will speak further to this in Chapter Two) or in reference to the performers, however, I prefer the person-first language. Person-first language refers to the individual before describing a disability eg./ He is a student with autism...as opposed to...He is an autistic student. I also mirror the sentiments of Whatley (2007); that although I use the term 'disability' within this paper I acknowledge that this is not a neutral term and comes with many subjectivities from different audiences.

The Background to *Limitless*

Limitless evolved from the University of Lethbridge Fall 2014 course (Drama 3850-A Dance and Theatre for All Abilities: Production Development) and a large-scale theatre production, *Unlimited*, in the Spring of 2015. My role in the course was mainly as a classroom assistant and reflective observer. During *Unlimited* I took on the role of assistant choreographer, but I always remained reflective during all creative work whether I was leading it or not. I picked up variations of teaching strategies from those teaching the ensemble that were more experienced in integrated dance (Pamela Boyd, from MoMo Mixed Ability Dance in Calgary) and collective creation (Lisa Doolittle, professor from the University of Lethbridge). I also recognised that during instruction I had to adapt material to fit my personal teaching style. The rehearsal process for *Unlimited* taught me invaluable methods for creation, but also reaffirmed the strengths in my previous dance and teaching experience. Within *Unlimited* I created a unison waltz with all performers on stage, a process and product that was demanding and rewarding. Within this short choreographed section I saw many performers shine as they demonstrated their understanding and skill in rhythm and choreographic structure. I also witnessed the struggles that came from some who found the imposed structure of unison movement very challenging I was also interested that those who struggled with this type of dance found support from the entire cast and more specifically from their waltz partner. Witnessing the successes that came from *Unlimited*, the creation process and the performance in front of large audiences, seemed to inspire the performers and I wanted to further this opportunity for dancers in Lethbridge, and thus *Limitless* evolved.

Most *Limitless* dancers had already experienced collaborative creation and integrated dance and had previously worked with one another. This allowed for a seamless transition to our new project and it also gave me inside knowledge as to how to best create alongside the dancers. From *Unlimited* I knew the dancers that preferred more independent improvised creation and those that needed more choreographed structure. In *Limitless* I wanted there to be opportunities of challenge for all dancers. Therefore it was important to have different structures and increase the challenges for the performers. This also proved to be more fulfilling in terms of my reflective process. Although consciously using different choreographic methods for each video was unintended, what I did try to avoid was 100% choreographed sequences created by myself. The three videos created all relied on differing amounts of choreography and structured improvisational creations. Improvised sequences were still structured, however the movement of the dancers was not set as it was with the set choreography, that I created, or that was created with the dancers. Through discussions with Lisa Doolittle early on, I knew I had to refrain from choreographing everything and to work with improvisational techniques, giving agency to the dancers voices and their bodies, creating alongside them rather than imposing my creations on them. I took those suggestions very seriously and in doing so, I removed all of my set choreography from our first dance creation, however, in terms of a pendulum swinging, I swung too far. The first creation *Wishing for Yellow* was largely un-choreographed, but was structured in terms of transitions and movement quality. Our second dance piece, *Understand*, allowed for a sequence of repetitious movements intermixed with improvisational exercises, a happy balance of choreography and improvisation. Our last creation *The One* was

largely choreographed using a popular line dance that the dancers knew or had performed socially, it also included an improvisationally-structured chair sequence that had seven movements that the dancers could do in any sequence they chose.

Following each rehearsal I wrote reflections that captured some of the main insights I had from class that day, typically surface descriptions that reminded me of deeper insights. Some reflections caused me to think about specific dancers and ways to further engage them or celebrate what I had seen within the class. Following the creation process, filming and editing of each dance piece proved to be another process of reflection. I analysed the rehearsals that took us to that performance, I recalled the language I used and the exercises that I tried, I critically examined the themes that audiences might take away, and I pondered what really was the biggest impact of this video project? I found my reflections created questions and answers simultaneously, but were these answers based only on my context? Through my examination of authors in the field of inclusive dance I discovered resources and discussions that shaped my position and helped me to affirm my inclusive dance teaching decisions.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The disabled performer is both marginalized and invisible – relegated to borderlands, far outside the central area of cultural activity, by the discourses of medicine. At the same time, people with physical impairments are also hypervisible, instantly defined by their physicality. The physically impaired performer has therefore to negotiate two areas of cultural meaning: invisibility as an active member in the public sphere, and hypervisibility and instant categorization as a passive consumer and victim in much of the popular imagination.

Disabled performers have successfully and visibly taken up the medium of performance to expand the possibilities of images, spaces and positions for their bodies. In their work with bodies in public spheres, they attempt to break through stereotypes of passive disability.

(Kuppers, 2003, p.49)

Following my back injury, taking the medication cocktail that doctors prescribed and navigating my steps with a cane and later a walker, I experienced the gaze that Kuppers refers to, I was both Visible and Invisible. I used to be a dancer but I was naïve and ignorant about how complex that dance world was. Through my serendipitous journey I was able to experience a world of dance and creation that was foreign to me but was accepting of all abilities.

The complexities of inclusive dance aren't fully discovered in the dance studio and it's impossible to capture the magnitude of this field in a single research paper. Based on the breadth of fields involved, I've divided this literature review into three subcategories to give focus and increase accessibility to information found, while trying to maintain that all the areas mentioned are interconnected. In the first section I discuss the language and terminology involved with teaching inclusive dance. The second section delves into the reasons for using performance as part of inclusive dance; and finally I touch briefly on the history of disability and disability studies with a narrow focus on performers and the evolution of disability performance.

What Do I Mean And How Should I Say It? (Language and terminology)

What Do I Call This Form of Dance?

The language used to discuss the field of Disability Dance changes and is fraught with controversy. When using terms of description alternate binaries are quickly exposed (Hickey-Moody 2009, Conroy 2009, Cheesman 2011 & 2014, and Koppers 2003). When the term disability is used it creates an alternate image of ability. But disability also brings up less used related terms, although historically prominent of “cripples, freaks, invalids, and the retarded.” Within *Limitless* our work was never meant to catastrophize any dancers or evoke “notions...of pity, charity, segregation...and the acceptance of restriction for people with impairments” (Conroy, 2009, p.1).

What’s more common in the Disability and Dance field is to refer to studio companies and community groups as Inclusive Dance, Integrated Dance, Mixed-Ability Dance, and/or Community Dance. But even these terms actually don’t adequately express the type of dance or performance and may even have a negative effect. “Instead it functions like a road sign warning the unwary theatre-goer of possible encounters with wheelchairs – it tells us that we can expect to see a disabled person on stage, which can only leave us asking, ‘Is that really necessary? Who is it that needs to be warned?’” (Benjamin, 2002, p.15). Writers in the field of disability arts all struggle with a working terminology that is clear and respectful and most contributors speak to this difficulty within their writing. Disability and the aforementioned studio and community titles all contain ‘binary distinctions’ between “abled/disabled, disabled/non-disabled, fit/frail, normal/abnormal” (Cheesman 2011; Koppers 2003; Benjamin 2002; Whatley 2007). Hickey-Moody (2009) brings up an important discussion I found useful in

conceptualizing these binaries, in her observation of Restless Dance Company, an integrated dance group in Australia, in terms of describing dancers in the company through ‘Reverse Integration’. The terms ‘with’ and ‘without’ are used to refer to those with and without a disability. ‘Without’ has a connotation of lacking or missing something – being without equates to being less than, but using ‘Reverse Integration’ (as the company calls it), ‘Without’ refers to the population that does **not** have a disability. Those ‘with’ have what’s needed; they are complete and whole because they are individuals ‘with’ it. This has the positive effect on the population it refers to (those with a disability), as they are more often being made aware in societal spheres that they are less than whole or lacking skills and abilities because they are identified as having a disability (Hickey Moody 2009). ‘Reverse Integration’ is a process that I identify positively with, however, when discussing my project and performances in later chapters I will be referring to the company as often as possible simply by ‘dancers’.

The Social Framework of Disability

The approach I took going into the project of the work, and ideally how I work with all students to improve their learning, is to focus on the person. It might seem easy enough but through developing *Limitless* and discovering more about the field of ‘dance for all people’, I began to consider the broader social context of disability and social justice. Most authors in this field focus on the shift from the ‘medical model’ to the ‘social model’ and in some cases a move to other models. “The medical model had viewed disability in terms of some kind of deviation or deficiency from what was considered the range of ‘normal human function’... The social model, on the other hand, incorporates a broad cultural understanding of disability experiences, such as stigma,

representation of disability in the arts and the media, and the history of institutionalization...Reconciliation between the two models has been sought by developing a comprehensive model and a new independent model” (Briggs and Kolb, 2012, p.3). Tobin Siebers, as quoted by Kirsty Johnston, discusses the social model, and the need to move even further beyond it in the development of the disability studies field. “Unlike the medical approach, the emerging field of disability studies defines disability not as an individual defect but as the product of social justice, one that requires not the cure or elimination of the defective person but significant changes in the social environment...attacking the widespread belief that having an able body and mind determines whether one is a quality human being” (Johnston, 2012, p.12). The social model of disability is useful as we move closer towards an embodiment model (Johnston, Koppers, Benjamin, Conroy). Different authors have labeled this new model of discussion differently: Koppers refers to it as a ‘rhizomatic model’, Benjamin calls it the ‘arts model’, and Conroy refers to it as a ‘humanist model’. The researchers agree that it means looking at each person to discover their own unique lived experiences, celebrate the differences to create a dialogue and further explore creation, and “to find that which we all share and value” (Conroy, 2009, p.11), in ways that also combat the widespread stigma and social injustice experienced by people ‘with’.

Educational Context

The language used by an educator differs greatly from a classroom setting, to a community dance class, to an academic audience. In this section I describe the educational context from which I approach this research. Within Alberta, inclusion is the

accepted terminology and description for classrooms around the province. The governing body of Alberta Education describes inclusion on its website:

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that demonstrates universal acceptance and promotes a sense of belonging for all learners. Inclusion is not just about learners with special needs. It is an attitude and approach that embraces diversity and learner differences and promotes equal opportunities for all learners in Alberta. Alberta's education system is built on a values-based approach to accepting responsibility for all children and students.

(<https://education.alberta.ca/inclusion/what-is-inclusion/>; July 12th, 2016)

Based on the description on the website for Alberta Education Inclusion homepage, the values and pillars described as foundations and fundamental beliefs about inclusion follow a model that is based on a supportive and individual experience, which aligns with the 'new' model described in the next section.

Within the thesis project of *Limitless*, the students and the space I worked in was outside of the Alberta Education policies, which changed the approach I took when planning and assessing the work we did as an ensemble. Alberta Education and classroom pedagogy is strongly connected to Alberta's Programs of Study and mandatory curriculum goals and learner expectations. Within the inclusive model, this typically meant creating additional documents for students referred to as IPPs or IEPs (Individual Program Plans or Individual Education Plans) which are meant to help or challenge students in such a way that student and/or curriculum demands can be adjusted so that students, staff and parents can celebrate student successes at their level and be able to document progress. These documents have traditionally required further assessments and eventual diagnosis to help determine exactly what modifications (moderate to extensive changes in curriculum), adaptations (minor to moderate changes in curriculum) or

accommodations (tools or additional strategies) will best support students in their educational achievements.

In *Limitless* I avoided using Alberta Education Inclusive language and procedures as we were creating much of the choreography together, so we were all working at a pace that was natural for the class but allowed for dancers to be challenged and for success to be achieved by each participant. This type of community inclusion has connections to public schools and is similar in theory but quite different in practice. Some of the current working realities of teachers are larger classroom numbers, diverse learners within their classrooms (with higher numbers of English Language Learners), more expectations and requirements to document student growth, but all within a restrictive time period. Research published by The Alberta Teachers Association (2015) sees the need and strengths of inclusive classrooms, yet teachers report the obstacles of time, funding, and other needed resources. *Limitless* dance classes were one hour in length, had participants that wanted to be there and were very engaged, and a chance to teach without curricular demands. This creates a very different teaching and learning structure, a structure that isn't a working reality of teachers in a K-12 setting (ATA Research 2015; ATA News 2015). I was able to have some one-on-one movement time with each dancer every class and even though an hour was tight on time we worked quickly and effectively. Our class was creative and fun, we laughed and joked with one another – we were learning, but it wasn't with a textbook or required demands from a ministerial order, we were learning in a way that used the dancers' strengths and since they all wanted to be there (as opposed to many classroom environments), we could spend more time creating and less time focusing on classroom management. One of the best aspects of this research that set it

apart from the K-12 classroom was that there was no formalized assessment. I didn't have to submit grades or offer summative assessment results to help show that dancers met curriculum demands. We remained challenged throughout the process and students showed their own sense of accomplishment in their learning.

Embodied Learning

Limitless was a chance to study inclusive teaching and learning in a community setting: the planning, the obstacles, the successes, the reflecting, and the altering.

Teachers must reflect on their work and make changes to improve it; it is no different within a community dance environment. It's important to keep this frame in mind, this is meant for a community group interested in opening up more opportunities for all dancers. It's for those reasons I feel it necessary to focus on Kaufmann's work, *Inclusive Creative Movement and Dance*. Although Kaufmann's work serves a very clear function in dance education practices, it does so in a model of K-12 curriculum settings. Kaufmann's focus on academic documentation and alteration of lesson plans to show adaptive strategies are necessary within a curriculum context. There are many applicable exercises, activity descriptions and recommendations for different grade/difficulty levels, and ways to choreograph movement, however these procedures and techniques can get lost in the teacher jargon that would be misplaced within a community setting where plain language is the most effective and inclusive approach. Kaufmann's teaching tool is focused on dance in the classroom and dance as a curriculum; yet I believe dance is so much more than this. Dance is a social experience. Dance in a community setting is a social experience where individuals come together to express themselves in an activity that they enjoy and spend time with others of a similar mind-set, and integrated dance is no

different. If I recall my dance classes in early physical education classes I remember pieces of our dance teaching, but nothing forms a full picture. But at the same age while attending weddings with my family and seeing the social nature of dance, I remember learning many dances and trying experimental dance moves with cousins, aunts, and uncles. To me this illustrates learning dance by curriculum versus learning dancing through social engagement. Kaufmann's writing serves a valid purpose within an educational context where curriculum and assessment are necessary but it's important not to lose the social nature of dance and how that social atmosphere can be so conducive to the learning. The learning that I witnessed from the *Limitless* dancers came in many different ways: from dancers learning new steps to add to their repertoire, to seeing students struggle with and then perfect a sequence of choreography, working with one another in different movement exercises and helping each other when there were struggles. I saw dancers gain confidence by trying improvised movements and I saw dancers push themselves to the point of almost collapsing. This wasn't always captured in the final video products, but the process of growth, although not met in a checklist of curriculum outcomes, is so incredibly valuable.

Education is a powerful tool for promoting individual growth and social change; dance is a comprehensive platform to help spread the educational message. "Dance can be a vehicle for self-transformation and social transformation, a process for understanding identity marked by history and culture, and a place where we might create new or alternative meanings" (Matos, 2008, p.89). Similar to Matos are the beliefs of Rose (an author whose research focuses on the promise of public education in America), "...if we determine success primarily in terms of test score, then we ignore the social,

moral and aesthetic dimensions of teaching and learning – and, as well, we'll miss those substantial intellectual achievements that aren't easily quantifiable” (Hickey-Moody, 2009, p.42). Both authors see a need to change the discussion around ‘what is dance education?’ Through their contributions both authors see the value in embodied learning with all dancers. The work may be seen as therapeutic which can be a great bi-product, but the art in these situations should always come first and should be accessible to all. “A dance theatre work can present a person with intellectual disability in a very different way from other public arenas, by deploying the body’s power to move, feel and sense” (Hickey-Moody, 2009, p.11). Whatley (2007) addresses a practical approach to what Kauffmann was referring to in inclusive classroom education but she writes in a more observational and practical way to approach a community dance environment, often focusing on the student voice rather than the curriculum. Whatley discovered through her observation and participation in a mixed-ability university dance class that the dancers ‘with’ (with a disability) preferred work dealing with imagery and creative improvised movements, rather than a typical technique class based on repetition. The ‘imagery and play’ aspect was democratizing for the students giving them power to dance with their strengths and in a way that was more comfortable for them; repetition of technique only highlighted the mistakes or ‘faults’ that the dancers saw in comparison with other students and increased their insecurities. Dancers ‘with’ in the class also referred to the invisible/hyper-visible comparison that Koppers discussed, “in a big class (it) allowed them to ‘hide’ and work less hard...(it also) reinforced their sense of difference from the majority and their perceived ‘struggle to keep up’” (p.11). Throughout the discussion it was clear that a focus on the social constructs of the class was crucial to establishing a

truly inclusive classroom, a place where students felt welcome and where all students collaborated with one another in a non-segregated way.

Making an Entrance: theory and practice for disabled and non-disabled dancers (Benjamin) is a monograph as the title suggests that discusses the theories of disability dance but also ways to make them a reality. This book is written by a professional dance teacher and choreographer, and brings a professional dance perspective to the teaching/training of dancers with disabilities. The focus on “students (exploring) ideas without being judged or criticised, while at the same time learning to give positive feedback and support to each other during the creative process” is a foundational aspect of Benjamin’s stance on integrated dance (or really any classroom) (Benjamin, 2002, p.43). Inclusive dance environments **should be** a safe space for all learners, where all voices, minds, and bodies are welcome regardless of the classroom demographics (Benjamin 2002; Whatley 2007). It is imperative that when establishing the positive learning environment, building the classes’ repertoire of dance vocabulary and exercises, creating and learning together that inclusive/integrative dance not be categorized as it’s own separate dance form or style. This would further segregate the dancers and their dance spaces from what their goal in the educational practice is, to make embodied and societal transformations (Benjamin 2002; Whatley 2007; Matos 2008; Hickey-Moody 2009; Perring 2005).

Dance studios should be safe spaces for artists to come together, explore, and create. Schools within Alberta have moved towards an inclusive model that requires teachers to differentiate, adapt and modify their instruction to best suit all students’ needs. This inclusive practice has been increasing in popularity in post-secondary

institutions offering some tools to help students be successful and encourage further education. What is still lacking, based on my personal experience, are ways to increase community inclusivity. *Limitless* was not a new concept for inclusive dance practice as Whatley (2007) and Benjamin (2002) describe in their studies, but what they affirmed was the need to establish a safe space for all performers.

This speaks so much to the process of dance and how important the studio atmosphere is and this is very important, but whom does the learning environment benefit? In most cases it is the participants **in** the class. Unless we can get all people to take a class in these situations, the opportunity to create public change or inspire others ends there. What is needed are opportunities for audiences to see art and creation made from all people which is why *Limitless* didn't stop with studio creation, we took it a step further to create examples of performance that audiences could see and experience without being a part of the studio ensemble, it doesn't have the same impact as being a part of the process, but it does create awareness.

Why Perform?

“3 weeks of trying to deal with this and it just gets worse – but it made me think, this is 3 weeks of me being in pain and uncomfortable – with the crutches, getting looks, etc – it's one of those reminders that normally my life can go by unnoticed, but for the dancers, do they ever feel stared at? Looked at?” (Appendix B; October 9, 2015)

The category of performance covers many related topics: the role of the audience, the type of performance, and in this case why dance and why film? In contrast to professional or academic dance programs, community dance groups may not be interested in a public performance. For my research purposes the films created and their public perception is the only context I can use for external conversation as a means to

reflect on the teaching process. I was interested in the reasons researchers feel so intent on using dance to promote changes within the dancers themselves and the audience.

Kuppers brings up some vital aspects to this discussion, dance is an educative tool for the dancer and the audience; embodiment is a part of the performance but also has direct connections to the viewers and what they take with them.

There are few media and art practices in disability culture that have as much educative power as dance, even if dance is one of the more marginalized art forms out there. Dance communicates the inherent sharedness of movement because it can directly focus on forms of embodiment that are stigmatized and equated with inability. To dance is to live, and to signal one's self as alive, whether one speaks or not, whether one externalizes expression or not. All movement is part of dance's aesthetic reach: breath animating a torso, a slight hand gesture, the crumbling of the human form (Kuppers, 2014, p.114).

This shared embodied experience has the power to transform the individual and society. In order for this change to occur there is important work to be done in educating the audience to be engaged and active in the viewing process (Whatley 2007 and 2014; Kuppers 2003; Briggs and Kolb 2015). Whatley (2007) describes five levels of viewership: passive oppressive, passive conservative, post-passive, active witness, and immersion. These viewing strategies anecdotally are related to moving from the spectacle of different or the 'other' and can be related to historical forms of disability performance in the "Freak Shows" that existed and a type of fear of contagion that audiences (dis)engaged in, which was the 'passive oppressive' style. The second form as Albright (1997) has described is the 'ablist gaze', which "reinforces the distance between the dancer and the viewer" (Whatley 2007). Viewers watch knowing that they won't be moved or challenged and not to get their hopes up in terms of performance quality. 'Post-passive' is the denying of difference from the audience, that the disability is no

longer acknowledged which can in turn erase the importance of the dance performed. The final two strategies, 'active witness' and 'immersion' disrupt the passive approach and allow the audience to make connections to their own bodies, their own work, and their new understandings of types and styles of movement. Finally the experience of embodiment is achieved and audiences have an emotional attachment to the movement; they feel the excitement (Whatley), the tension (Benjamin), and the corporeal breakdown of ones' feelings through the embodiment of the dancers' work (Kuppers). It is clear that audiences are not all the same and the way one audience member challenges their viewing approach is unique, it's also vital for the dancers to move beyond their assumed knowledge of what the audience will think of them: "tragic, poor, helpless, heroic, struggling, etc" (Kuppers, 2003, p.3). Inclusive dance theatre creates opportunities for dancers and audiences to experience difference, evoke emotion, and to challenge bodies and minds (Hickey-Moody). Although these feelings and vulnerabilities maybe easier to connect to in a live performance I felt it could be achievable through film and video as well.

Catherine Long, a disabled dancer in US, performs because it allows her to take control of how she is viewed. "In the street, people will look at her, an event that she cannot control, in the theatre she is intentionally directing the viewer to look at her – something that is clearly empowering for her" (Whatley, 2010, p.44). Performing live on stage does create the potential for more vulnerability and potential risk for a performer; mistakes seem larger and can become an all-consuming focus for the artist. However through film, multiple attempts can be made, editing occurs, and the result is a finer lens through which the art is controlled. Harmon makes a good argument about the ability to

edit and mainstream inclusive arts. “Differently abled dancers desire public exposure so as to ‘mainstream’ their dance and provide greater opportunities for other differently-abled dancers, and they see dance as medium through which they can control the ‘gaze’ to which they are subjected, fashioning a more positive social environment for themselves and everyone” (Harmon, 2014, p.497). Further, the achievements of ‘mainstream(ing)’ through video work allow audiences worldwide to have access to more than descriptive analysis by authors in the field. Video provides an opportunity to see and experience the creation anywhere, to immerse oneself in the viewership and still find ways to connect to the work being done. This type of controlled public consumption allows diverse audiences to have access to work that may not be available in their community due to limited access to visiting performers or creation opportunities. Video, especially when distributed on social media, allows audiences access to experience new ways to engage with a dancer with a disability. At the very least creating awareness to differing artistic styles and performance opportunities, at it’s best bringing inspiration and confidence for a new dancer to get involved. Through the use of social media, dance performance has the potential to reach any person on the planet, allowing for dialogue to happen, tensions in viewpoints to be challenged, and different forms of embodiment to be embraced (Cheesman 2014).

By researching the field of performance in relation to disability I continually found myself in another quandary: live performance versus filmed performance. Both have their advantages and disadvantages. Through my direct experience with *Unlimited* I was able to see and participate in a post-show discussion with an invited panel, dancers and the audience. These discussions allowed for discoveries to be heard, dancers to be

celebrated, and questions to be asked to increase understanding of the show and the larger field of inclusive dance. By using a video medium, I lost direct access to an audience and the resulting conversations that could have followed; what I gained was an accessible video that can viewed and shared. But I question the value of this for the performers. Did they receive the satisfaction of applause for their work that they could share as a team or were the compliments and congratulatory remarks diminished because they weren't shared and experienced with the other performers. Luckily we were able to perform one of our dances in front of a large audience (discussed later in Understand), which brought with it a new energy for the performers, this was a wonderful experience that unfortunately only occurred for one of the dances. What does the online audience think? Does the dance stick with them? Are they likely to attend a dance of this nature in the future? These are questions that I can't determine the answer to and are beyond the scope of this study. As much as I wanted the dance pieces to always have an audience, there is a detachment and isolation to the art by relying solely on an on-line audience. What I can say with certainty is that the *Limitless* videos have been met with positivity and conversation. Those that have seen the videos have expressed their enjoyment in seeing the creations and often ask about what is happening currently, which has led to an unintended use, promotional material. The videos have become tools of publicity to help spread awareness of this dance initiative in Lethbridge and are used by local agencies and recently within an Arts fair to help advertise the current offerings of dance for all individuals within Lethbridge.

History of Disability and Disability Studies

Disability studies does not treat disease or disability, hoping to cure or avoid them; it studies the social meanings, symbols, and stigmas

attached to disability identity and asks how they related to enforced systems of exclusion and oppression.” (Siebers, 2008, p.3)

The study of disability in academia may be new but disability culture has a well-established history that is crucial to frame in order to understand the present study of ‘disability’. The history of disability culture is diverse but I’ll focus mainly on the ways disability has been displayed within dance and performance; this is not to devalue the rich culture that exists in other aspects of disability which has significant impacts on disability studies courses. Although examples of early staged disability involve ‘freak shows’ in ways that dehumanized the ‘performers’, modern takes on performance challenge traditional aesthetic values – moving away from the grotesque body to a different body (Benjamin 2002; Siebers 2010; Koppers 2003; Cole 2012; Albright 1997). The formation of inclusive dance companies is chronicled mainly in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1980s and 1990s. Many companies that formed in those early years are still creating and performing new works today and along the way many new companies have formed across the globe. The works created by these companies were often explicitly challenging to the medical model of disability and were intrinsically political (Conroy 2009; Briggs and Kolb 2012). Matos’ (2008) work showed that performances can be a means of transformation, individually and socially. Disability culture and performance is not about acceptance of difference, rather it is about embracing and encouraging difference. Disability pride isn’t always about showing ability and the aesthetic qualities of difference; in some performances it’s about enhancing the ‘grotesque’ (Albright 1997; Koppers 2003; Briggs and Kolb 2012). These experiences are about changing the audience gaze and the conversation about disability

while embracing the disability and at times capitalizing on it. Briggs and Kolb (2012) and Kuppers (2003) describe the ways performers with disability created performances that highlighted their disability in a way that is similar to the old carnival shows that once dehumanized people that were physically different. For instance Briggs and Kolb describe the work of Suzanne Cowan, a wheelchair user that created Ava the Amazing Spider Woman. Cowan who describes her legs as ‘floppy’ added four more floppy legs to help create Ava. Kuppers description of Mat Fraser as Seal the Sealboy continues to offer a challenging look at the history of people with physical differences, specifically those within the US freakshows between the 1930’s-1970’s, such as the incredibly popular Ringling Barnum travelling show. Fraser, who has short arms (phocomelic), takes on the persona of Stanley Berent a retired freak-performer and recreates the freakshow that Berent was a member of. His addresses to the audience, much like Cowans, reclaim the stigma of their disabilities with exaggeration. Since both of these performers created their performances they are also staging their art. They are not victims, they are performers; they are not being controlled but rather both artists are taking control of the way people typically see them and take pride in controlling the audience gaze.

The evolution of disability performance is further exemplified in the work of Restless Dance Theatre in Australia and the discussion that Anna Catherine Hickey-Moody (2009) has involving the language of ‘with’ and ‘without’. Reverse inclusion used in their company is a testament to how far disability performance has come, but a reminder of how much more there is to go. “Bodies with intellectual disability need to be known in terms of what they produce, rather than by reference to what they are not”

(Hickey-Moody, 2009, p.2). Along with educating audiences, this will help to change the gaze of disability and will help performers and audiences to focus on what is most important, the art.

Summary of Literature Review

In the field of inclusive dance, there are many approaches that one can take. My discussion has focused on the language used and the way an audience is engaged in the performance, the history of the field of disability studies and how disability has evolved in performance. This investigation shows how far the art has come and describes the benefits to the artists that come with celebrating their achievements. It is complex, and it is difficult to talk about one without referencing another. Through researching the work of scholars and practitioners in this field I was able to identify authors that I connect with in how I approached my research project. While not completely removing myself from an educational background, it is important that the research and description of my work is accessible for a diverse audience and that it doesn't become lost in educational terminology or academic language. While both Kaufmann (2006) and Benjamin (2002) are advocates of inclusive dance their approaches differ, Kaufmann uses knowledge of curriculum and differentiation to help inform a specific population of educators within a K-12 setting, Benjamin speaks broadly of theory and practice in community and at times professional arts context, allowing one to best apply his work to the working reality of the reader, placing a heavy emphasis on safe spaces and improvisational techniques. As all authors have suggested, it's important to redefine traditional perceptions of dance and disability. Koppers (2003, 2014) and Whatley (2007, 2014) draw insights on the power of dance and performance to change disability perceptions and reduce prejudice.

However, none of this would happen without meaningful teacher training and accessible programs, both within an educational and community context.

Although this academic study and discourse was developed following the completion of my research project *Limitless*, it plays a big part in how I discuss the project work and reflect on the experience.

Chapter 3 - The Project: *Limitless* and methodology

Limitless evolved out of course and production work in the 2014-2015 school year. From September to December of 2014 a course, unlike any offered at the University of Lethbridge campus, opened the students and community to an inclusive post-secondary experience. This class worked towards the creation of a workshop production but more importantly it laid the groundwork for a mainstage production that would show Lethbridge audiences a collectively created dance show with inclusive practices at its core. *Unlimited* was the most highly attended of the four productions of the 2014-2015 Theatre Department's mainstage season. It also created much needed awareness for more opportunities to exist between the community and performers with and without disabilities.

In the summer of 2015 I began the creation and development of *Limitless*. *Limitless* was meant to continue the efforts and partnerships that were made but also create something different. During *Unlimited* I networked with dancers and their parents to let them know of opportunities that I was working towards with *Limitless*. Many were excited to continue their development of dance and creation and perhaps most importantly they loved performing. From early discussions it was clear that I could count on seven dancers with a disability joining but the recruitment for dancers without proved to be more difficult. Without receiving credit or some other incentive all other university participants were unable to join this endeavour. I could hypothesize on various reasons but my firm belief was that inclusive arts was still seen as a lesser art for many of the students, it didn't offer a reciprocal benefit as it had during *Unlimited*. It was through contacts with the parents I had met during *Unlimited* that two new dancers joined our

ensemble, with other ‘without’ dancers joining for a couple of classes but never with consistency.

Limitless was never intended to be a permanent company but it was intended to keep the momentum going within the community and continue to provide an opportunity for dancers of all abilities to collaborate and perform.

The performances created in *Limitless* would not be presented live; they were to be filmed, edited and shared through online platforms. There were two main reasons for the change of medium: adaptation and innovation for a new context and intended expansion to an online audience. *Unlimited* was a spectacle that allowed for professional, live production qualities (venue, costumes, lighting, sound, large cast, a live musician, and backstage crew) that required resources and a budget that I simply did not have. I was only able to schedule two hours of rehearsal a week compared to the average eighteen hours per week with *Unlimited*. I didn’t want a live *Limitless* show to be compared to what was previously done and be seen as a lesser production, thus diminishing the community momentum. The music video style products were never meant to be comparable to the live production; they meant to create similar opportunities to collaborate and dance. The other intention in using music videos as the art form was the ability to use social media to reach a wider audience to the work being done in Lethbridge. I had family and friends that wanted to see *Unlimited*, as did cast and crew, but based on location and timing were unable to attend. Through the utilization of the Internet I hoped to be able to virtually connect with any audience at any time.

The cast for the *Limitless* videos were recruited mainly from the previous production of *Unlimited*, out of the twelve performers only three were new to the group,

and out of the twelve performers only one dancer requested to be a part of the rehearsal process and not the productions.

With no budget or financial supports available, I wanted to collaborate with mixed ability dancers to create short videos and use online platforms and social media to share our work beyond the Lethbridge audience. The decision to distribute the videos online meant that I also needed to arrange for the filming and editing of the products so they had a better professional quality and were more likely to be seen as something credible and not get lost in the plethora of online video consumption.

I also had to use music that wouldn't violate copyright laws. I received permission to use music from a Vancouver-based band, Jason and the Diatonics that appeased one concern of using music and sharing it online without copyright or royalty concerns. The next was booking a space that was affordable and convenient for the dancers. The City of Lethbridge Community Arts Centre, known as CASA, had a dance studio that was the perfect space; it was centrally located, accessible, and although it was heavily booked, I was able to book two hours per week, one-hour Friday evening and another hour Saturday afternoon, which remained mostly consistent for seventeen weeks. With the rehearsal times booked and dancers and guardians aware of the plan, we developed *Limitless* with twelve dancers.

The dancers from early on knew our goal was to create music videos that would be released online. Their roles within the videos were to create together, challenge their comfort zones and to continue to learn and develop their ways of expressing themselves through movement. They knew that at certain points I'd be interviewing them but that

most of what I was doing was reflecting on the teaching and creation process, what that would look like would differ every class.

Over the four months of rehearsals I reflected on the teaching and learning process, I listened to comments made by participants, and I tried to create three very different styles of performance to allow for variation within the class and to challenge all the dancers to learn new and different techniques.

The goals that I had initially established for *Limitless* were:

1. “Creation and Distribution”. Create four music videos that would be released via social media outlets. The intention was to create music videos filmed in different locations that the dancers could view online and share with their families, friends, and ultimately anyone we could connect with on social media. The videos’ underlying purpose was to change the medium of presentation without altering what the dancers had been accustomed to by performing on a stage in front of a live audience, while allowing me to look at the creation process in shorter self-contained projects.

2. “Embedded Feedback”. Have an early focus-group meeting to discuss the creation of the first video to provide more reflective feedback from viewers that had different connections to inclusive learning, community access, and/or dance. The intention was to have open discussions with the viewers but also specifically ask about their initial feelings from the video, their interpretations of the theme, and any reactions or recommendations for the first video creation and future projects. Initially invitations were sent to seven community members with differing backgrounds in arts, education, inclusive supports, and community development. All of the invitations, except two, were based on connections I had made in the previous year while working on *Unlimited*; the

other two were teacher colleagues I had met outside of the *Unlimited* experience. Of the seven invitations, six were promptly confirmed but on the day of viewing two were unable to attend.

3. “Checking in on the Participant Experience”. I wanted to have two informal interviews with the performers as check-ins to ensure their voices were heard within the creation process and the overall structure of the class. What did they most enjoy? What would they like less of? Which dance creation and video did they most enjoy? Why? What would they hope for in the future? It was also important that they were the first audience of the video before it was shared with a focus group. If there was anything they were uncomfortable with or did not want shown, they would have the opportunity to voice those concerns. Similarly, before the other two videos were released, they were shared via email links. The dancers and their families would be the first audience to see the work they completed.

4. “Personal Reflection”. I wanted to reflect on my teaching introspectively and through writing. I wanted the plans that I created to be meaningful to the dancers and the class creations, but I also wanted the class to be efficient as our time was limited for creation. A few of my focusing questions were:

- What is individually created? Why?
- What is collectively created? Why?
- Why did I choreograph the sections that I did?
- Did I change something during the process? Why?
- How did I feel about the final video creations?

These questions allowed me to reflect on the process and the products. While they were inextricably connected to one another, they offered different avenues of reflection which

later I realized related back to aspects of the literature review and complexities of instruction, performance, and audience; they're all linked but also separate.

5. "Scope". I wanted *Limitless* to serve as an interim project. *Limitless* was never intended to go further than this master's project; but it was to be a stepping stone to allow for a community group to get organized and offer more opportunities for Lethbridge and area within the field of inclusive dance.

6. "Research". I also intended to research the field of Inclusive Dance beyond what I had already experienced and researched through production creation and course research. I wanted to frame this experience in a way that was separate from my K-12 pedagogy background; *Limitless* was not a classroom, there wasn't a curriculum guiding this. I was not formally assessing and grading student technique and understanding, I wanted the work being done to be accessible to the community and educational institutions. It was important for me to gather information from this project through direct observations, dancer feedback, audience observation and interviews through formal focus groups as well as informal conversations from a variety of demographically diverse audiences.

Once the foundation for my project was established and classes begun, we worked to re-imagine what dance would look like in our context. We weren't a large cast consisting of a majority of dancers 'without', we were a small cast that was made primarily of dancers 'with'. This would affect our creation but as Benjamin (2002) so eloquently states, "In terms of teaching methodology, an integrated workshop or class can function perfectly well without the presence of a disabled student; it simply doesn't miss a beat when a disabled person joins it" (p.16). We, on the other hand, didn't miss a beat

if someone 'without' joined our class. This was a new context for us all, with new projects, new music, new inspiration, and we could decide how we ran the class and what we created.

Chapter 4 – The *Limitless* Projects

From September to December 2015, *Limitless* created three unique dance videos: Wishing for Yellow; Understand; and The One. Each creation involved different learning structures, mainly through the variations of choreographed and improvised sections. The dance creations took different lengths of time to rehearse, and had different thematic meanings. It's important to note that the performers had experience with dance and creation from their work at the University of Lethbridge but this was unlike the work they had created previously. Also *Limitless*' 'mixed-ability' structure differed from the ways they had experienced it while dancing at the university. The dances created with *Limitless*, the interviews that accompanied the experiences, and the releasing of the content follows the informed consent of individuals that participated and the approval of Human Research Protocol #2015-073 (Makoloski) from the University of Lethbridge.

Wishing for Yellow

Our time together consisted of the creation of three distinct music videos. These projects were different from previously made projects in that our audience was a camera. We weren't performing on a stage with a large audience; we were creating dance pieces where the camera would move and shift which created a completely unique dynamic that we hadn't experienced before. The first project was Wishing for Yellow and it took the most time to create - eight weeks. Wishing for Yellow involved a three-phase story line that was director imposed with improvised dance from the performers incorporated throughout. This initial creation also served as an orientation. We were all familiar with one another from our previous work together, but we were in a new space and we were working on a new project that was very different from previous performance creations. It

took a few classes to develop a feeling of safety in the space and the ability to take risks, and after a few months of not dancing, to also build up our endurance. Wishing for Yellow was the only video filmed in an outdoor space away from the studio and although the filming for this project was the least professional, it was special in its location and changes of scenery. Wishing for Yellow was also the only piece that was shared with a focus group to help solidify aspects that were important to maintain in future filming, or aspects to include or modify that I hadn't yet considered.

My initial inspiration for Wishing for Yellow was the theme of change; looking the juxtaposition of the performers from the beginning to the end.



Figure 4.1
Opening shot – grey, isolated



Figure 4.2
Near the end – open, colourful, jubilant

Yellow was the clearest motif represented in the lyrics and was a symbol I had planned to use throughout the performance. The question I asked of each dancer initially was how does your body dance to 'yellow'? What did that mean to them and how could they embody that abstract idea. The beginning of Wishing for Yellow showed slow, introverted movements. There was little to no connection between the dancers. This was the dancers' interpretation of the beginning music and their ways to portray a body with a lack of 'yellow' or any colour, the setting of the cold grey cement helped to emphasize the emotional quality of the dancers and further show the change that would occur throughout the song. With the song's first introduction of cheerful whistling, colour

started to flood the screen as Maggie, the bringer of yellow, appeared and spreads joy and happiness in the form of bright yellow wristbands.



Figure 4.3
The slow introduction of 'yellow' bringing happiness, connection, and colour

Maggie did not want to be part of the initial 'sad' improvised dancing and it was only by accident that her role developed and stuck. Maggie, through my previous work with her and observations, prefers structure and choreography; at times she participated in improvisational activities during rehearsal but given the choice she would choose choreography. As the dancers picked up and put on their yellow wristbands, their mood changed and the first level of transformation occurred. Movements started to become faster and dancers saw and occasionally connected with one another.



Figure 4.4
As the dancers place the yellow wristbands on their arms, their movements change to happy and excited movement qualities.

As the dancers continued to move freely we transitioned to the next scene, leaving our first location behind. The dancers dashed up the stairs and hid behind black and

white umbrellas, which became the setting for the second transformation. Behind the umbrellas the dancers removed their coats or outer layers to reveal a bright yellow t-shirt that allowed them to connect even further with one another, they no longer moved as individuals but as a cohesive group, away from the cold concrete space into an open field.



Figure 4.5
Following the wardrobe change to show their yellow shirts moving to the open field

The dancers were no longer sad-solo dancers; they were energized and connected to one another. In this last space, the dancers worked with three large yellow umbrellas and danced freely and unencumbered. They danced with one another, they smiled, they laughed, they played in leaves, they wove around each other and finally they all started a dancing march towards the camera allowing the audience to see their smiling (and tired) faces close-up. From my perspective I saw mistakes and stumbles, but the joy and fun far outweighed the need for ‘perfection’. The dancers were not limited to structured movement, other than a routine with the large yellow umbrellas. After this set sequence they danced in their preferred movement style; while one dancer was free styling through the field and giving his best break dancing moves, another was executing a precise jazz square hitting every beat of the music, and others were spinning, jumping, mirroring. There was no such thing as a wrong move here – they were all involved, dancing and

moving however they best wished to express themselves; this was a stark contrast from the beginning of the dance. (Figure 4.2)

After filming and editing I shared Wishing for Yellow with a focus group audience. From the focus groups I hoped to get an objective look at the first creation and suggestions that could be made to improve the quality, the message/theme, and further discussions that could cause me to reflect on my teaching. The focus group interviews helped clarify a few things. The product of the music videos and my vision were the topic of the focus group meetings and although much was offered in choreographic critique or possible editing, none could comment on the teaching as that was part of the hidden process and not revealed in the filming. What was suggested in the focus groups were additional ways to further engage the audience. It was wonderful to have four diverse perspectives discuss Wishing for Yellow and offer their views. In the focus group interviews a few words or phrases came up repeatedly help to describe what they were seeing and what they hoped would be retained, and possible things to think about for future video creations. The term ‘freedom’ came up clearly with all discussions.

The dancers evolved during the piece to embody a freedom in their movement, a clear individuality and celebrated uniqueness; a glimpse at their potential. The first focus group interview with Sue (a former school teacher and current university professor working in the field of inclusive education and educational psychology) and Sharon (a community liaison for supporting people with disabilities in the community), confirmed the effectiveness of a stylistic change in the video to begin with a black and white colour scheme that would dissolve into natural colour when Maggie entered the space; this was a change I made to help increase the contrast with the yellow. It was also suggested in this

first interview and confirmed in a later interview with Betty (a school teacher with a considerable background in dance performance and creation) to increase the focus on the performers' own stories. Providing a voice and a piece of their own story would help with connecting to the audience, but also increase their engagement in the viewing. These were valuable suggestions that I thought about including within the performances. However, including spoken personal stories was not a part of my Human Research Protocol #2015-073 (Makoloski). The consents given were for recorded interviews only to be heard by me, video recorded rehearsals were never to be published, and filmed and edited released final video products. No mentions of personal stories were ever approached in my research. Rene (a community worker and advocate for people with disabilities) in her interview commented on the evolution of the characters. They blossomed; it was heart-warming to see them go from individual movements to dancing together at the end. She also saw a message of growth and community, that there was a cohesiveness that helped create an authentic community that didn't seem forced but was natural. Betty reiterated this sentiment in her interview talking about the safety that must have been established in the studio space that enabled this naturalistic and trusting atmosphere. "They must really feel safe and trust one another in order to take these risks and dance so freely with one another" (Betty Interview – November 20th, 2015). All members of the focus group interviews expressed a wish to see the process, to have an inside look at the development that had occurred, knowing that the product was not the full story and that the product would never communicate as strongly the growth that had occurred as being a part of the process would. I couldn't agree more. By dancing and creating with the dancers for the better part of a year, I had seen each one grow and

become more confident in themselves which is difficult to show within a brief music video. But Sharon, who works with many of the dancers in a different community relationship, also commented on how much more independent they had become outside the dance environment, how they were more self-determined and motivated, and that they were pushing themselves to be more involved not just in dance but elsewhere in their lives as well. Rene also reiterated that their communication and ability to contribute and share with others was also improving, which also affected the families in feeling a new sense of pride. Betty best expressed the importance of this opportunity for the participants; “dance should be an art form that is permissible for every size, shape, every person because the experience of movement is life” (Betty Interview, November 20th, 2015). Betty’s quote speaks of the need for movement. For most audiences, they are there to see a polished and perfected performance, what they don’t see is the journey. The process of creating these dances was the most meaningful, as is teaching a class; it isn’t the final exam that is most meaningful, it’s the learning made along the way that is most significant.

The mid-round interview with the dancers took place on October 30th, 2015 following their first viewing of Wishing for Yellow. I had a handful of questions that were specific to our first completed film and future video projects and also for the structure of the class in general. The discussion for the most part reiterated what I was witnessing in the class and my feelings about the video work. The dancers first and foremost loved being able to dance. They brought up trying new styles, using more music variety, more challenging movements, more structured choreography for the filming projects and more free dancing in the class as an activity, what we called ‘dance

party'. These comments and suggestions became a part of my reflexive lesson plans. Although time was always a struggle, we needed to have more time to dance and cut loose, the dance parties from that point on became a regular part of our class wrap-up. The typical classroom lesson plan became: warm-up and review for ten minutes, new dance section creation and cleaning for forty minutes, wrap-up which involved a five minute dance party and high energy dance followed by a five minute cool down, catching our breath, stretching, and a vocal review of what we went through in that class. This structure worked for all of us, and it became a routine that all participants knew quite well and knew what to expect. The dance party actually became one of my favourite parts of the class because I could see and be a part of dancing with every single member, dancing how they wanted, moving around to different people, it was a great way to connect to each mover in a more individually authentic way.

What I further gained through my personal reflections on the classes and watching of the video with the dancers and with the focus group is difficult to summarize. How did I teach? How did that teaching translate to the performance? What did the dancers enjoy? Did the community gain anything from these videos? There are many questions that don't necessarily have answers but force me to think about my role and ways to make what I do and my vision more meaningful. As a teacher I plan for each class, I execute that plan (adjusting as needed with alternate plans), and reflect on what occurred. It's necessary for me to do this to determine what needs to be done next class but also to improve my communication, sequencing of activities, types of activities, ways to further include the dancers and their voice, etc. Wishing for Yellow took the longest to create but it was necessary to have an orientation and develop a new vocabulary for our

purposes. If I had focused more on a tighter timeline because of the pressure I had put on myself for outputs, it would have severely damaged the relationship with the dancers or it easily could have stopped that relationship from even happening. I had to ensure they had a voice and opportunities to express themselves in the class. I had to use different ways of teaching and language to communicate what movement styles we were working towards. Reflecting on my teaching approach I realized that I used many techniques to communicate what we were working towards. I used everything from body terms and movements qualities (right leg step forward), through feelings and emotions (move like you're joyful, full of happiness), through formal dance terminology (we're going to do a *chaîne* turn). I used visual demonstrations, (watch me do this then give it a try), and visual cues (drawing stick figures that show the movements that we were doing). Combinations of partner work were mixed with audio and visual cues and plenty of repetition. There was no 'right' way of teaching. I often found that I used multiple strategies. I discovered that, based on the structure of my classes (Friday evening and Saturday afternoon), it was always better to review dance pieces on Fridays and teach new sequences that night as well, and to mainly focus on review on Saturdays. I often found that if I taught something new on the Saturday I would have to spend roughly the same amount of time re-teaching it on Friday during our next class, but having the review of the movement from Friday to Saturday more or less allowed the dancers to remember that movement quality much better, so by the time Friday rolled around again the dancers remembered what we were working on and it allowed us to review and then develop more material for the dance. I also found that keeping a routine to our class structure was helpful for the dancers and myself. Our warm-up was usually brief but it allowed for an

important check-in with the group. We would review what we had been working on without music and then with music. We would create our new section that we would repeat a few times then add it to our previous work and run the full sequence. At this point we usually started our cool down where I would lead the group through some stretching activities, but I would also give a verbal reminder of all we had gone through that class. As mentioned, we included the ‘dance party’ near the end of class just before cool down where everyone could just cut loose and dance with each other or try out some new moves; the ‘dance party’ has become a permanent part of my dance teaching.

Wishing for Yellow was our first creation as a new ensemble. In terms of teaching, I avoided falling into my more comfortable pattern of choreographing all aspects, so much so that I didn’t choreograph anything. An important realization in my research was that I feel the quality of both the process and product could have been improved with more imposed choreography. This dance lacked a balance between the choreographed movements and the structured improvised movements. This was an important lesson for me; by listening to my supervisor’s suggestions of using structured improvisation, I swung too far away from my style of teaching and dance creation. I do love this dance and there are moments I wouldn’t change because it allowed each dancer to be themselves and move in a way that they wanted to and felt natural. Even though this dance took the longest to create, it was also imperative that I not rush the process of orientation and building comfort and safety in our new dance space. What the process of creating this dance piece also proved was that the participants were an important part of the creation. Democratizing the class through improvisation exercises was necessary; it

showed my confidence in the ensemble and also proved to the dancers that they were going to be successful in this new endeavour.

Understand



Figure 4.6
The opening sequence introducing the title for our second piece

Understand was the next piece we created. It took about six weeks/twelve classes to produce. Understand was the video creation I most connected with and involved the most video editing to fulfill my vision of the piece. Understand combined both improvised movements and choreography within a defined framework. This is the type of dance creation I feel is most effective with inclusive dance practices and addresses a focus of this thesis research; finding a working combination of structured improvisation and choreography.

This second dance creation first involved the dancers in creating a personal mask. The mask would be used as a transformational item and was meant to symbolize the negative labels that we might place on ourselves or how society may judge others before actually getting to know them.



Figure 4.7
The negative masks and labels we sometimes feel judged by, both with and without



Figure 4.8

This theme was intentionally ‘political’. I use Conroy’s description of political (quoting Sian Vasey chair of the National Disability Arts Forum): “To live as a disabled person is to occupy a role as a producer of disability culture. This, in turn, is political. For Vasey, there is a political urgency offered by the status of disability artist...If art does not address political issues, then it is a waste of time” (2009, p.10). Although my sentiments are not as black and white, Understand fits this concept of ‘political’ action the most clearly. It also showed the difficulties of binaries that are erected around people with a disability such as tragic/heroic, abled/disabled, etc. (Kuppers 2003) Dancers brainstormed negative labels together and decorated their masks with terms that they wanted to use; words like lazy, messy, dumb, crazy, helpless, etc. Dancers began moving through the space, isolated from each other. Slowly they approach their targets, their mask, adorned with negative stereotypical descriptions. The masks were there as a way to show to the audience the feelings or labels that we all carry with us, but also more than anything they were there to be shed, to be thrown away; these labels were something that didn’t define any of us dancers. As the dancers picked up their masks and held them to their face, they were frozen, stuck in place. But this was short lived and soon the masks were shed and opened up to the rest of the group, the moves were no longer bound and a struggle, they were open and jubilant. Our connection to each other was evident by

dancing a chorus in unison, a sequence that was repeated throughout the piece. There were moments where the dancers showed the connection to one another through mirroring exercises or a game of statue tag, but these connections however they happened were organic and completely individual.



Figure 4.9
Structured Improvised Movements - Mirror work
with positive affirmations



Figure 4.10
Structure Improvised Movement - Statue tag
showing connection to others

The small duet or group movements evolved into the unifying chorus, no longer connecting to just a partner but to the entire ensemble. During the improvised ‘statue tag’ new labels added in the editing process painted the screen: helpers, volunteers, compassionate, friendly, leaders and dancers. These were our new labels, hopefully challenging the early negative labels to create new descriptions for the viewers to see. The conclusion for Understand showed all of the dancers moving towards a clumped group. We were no longer scattered and separated throughout the room moving in our own space or with a partner at different times, we were a team, a family that had come together through dance. Just like any family we try to understand each other as best as we can. The message for the viewer was not prescribed. It was hoped that viewers took away something positive, but ultimately we wanted people to feel uplifted, and to hopefully look at others with respect and understanding.



Figure 4.11
Closing image of the entire cast coming together, finding a way to connect

The creation of the choreographed chorus sequence is a good teaching and learning moment to describe. One Saturday attendance was low; there were four of us total. I made it our goal to create a choreographed sequence together that went with the lyrics. The only instruction was that it had to be four moves that were stationary, keeping our feet in one place and only using our upper body to communicate the lyrics. The dancers heard the music a couple times and individually created a pattern that went with the lyrics:

“Cause there are so many **people**, so many **places**, so many **viewpoints**, and so many **faces**.” (Jason and the Diatonics, Understand)

Each dancer created a way to express the four main words of the verse. Dancers showed these movements to the group, two of the dancers were able to repeat their choreography, the other struggled with repeating his choreography, but we were able to pick up some of his movement qualities. We learned all of the phrases and then we democratically picked the four dance moves and slightly altered some of the moves to create a phrase that was more dynamic. This activity really embodied a democratized dance creation process. In the following class when we had our regular turnout, the four of us that set this choreography were all a part of teaching it to the remaining dancers.

This was a wonderful moment for me (as a teacher) to step back and watch the dancers (the students) do the instruction. They worked with their dance peers and soon everyone was in unison. This is the type of classroom or studio space I most enjoy because there isn't just one leader teaching. It demonstrates how much stronger we are when there are many leaders and helpers and when participants are encouraged to take charge of their own learning while being supportive of those around them.



Figure 4.12
Dancers going through a portion of the chorus – this was choreographed

Understand was unique out of the three pieces as it was the only one that was also performed live. On Thursday, December 3rd 2015 *Limitless* performed in front of approximately 200 people as part of the celebration of the International Day of Persons with Disability (IDPD). The performance demonstrated a few things; the dancers were prepared and could dance in a new space with ease, whatever nerves of performing live evaporated in seconds, some dancers (Maggie in particular) showed how incredibly talented she was in movement and that she loves to perform in front of an audience, but for everyone there was an instant gratification that came with the applause.

Kuppers (2014) discusses a viewing tool for teachers and students to help better define what they are witnessing and suggestions for questions to better explore the media. I will use Kuppers 'Observation Wheel' (2014, p.171) to explore Understand to analyze the aesthetic dimensions of Understand and to consider ways in which this dance work

pushed me and the group toward our project goals. The ‘Observation Wheel’ is divided into four categories: What you see, What you hear, What does not resonate, and What you want to work on. I will describe the dance in that same order.

What I see:

The opening starts free of music or sound, it’s a cast of dancers moving freely around the space in a variety of speeds and levels. The dancers are holding and dancing with letters and as they all get closer to one another within a line formation all facing the same direction their letters reveal the word ‘UNDERSTAND’ (Figure 4.6). There is a transition that now shows the dancers rearranged in the dance space, spread around the room. They’re all moving freely of one another, there’s no apparent contact or connection between them. There are streams of sunlight that surround some dancers and cast shadows on others. The dancers are using different levels, speeds, movement qualities, and they are all travelling to reach a spot where a mask is placed for them.

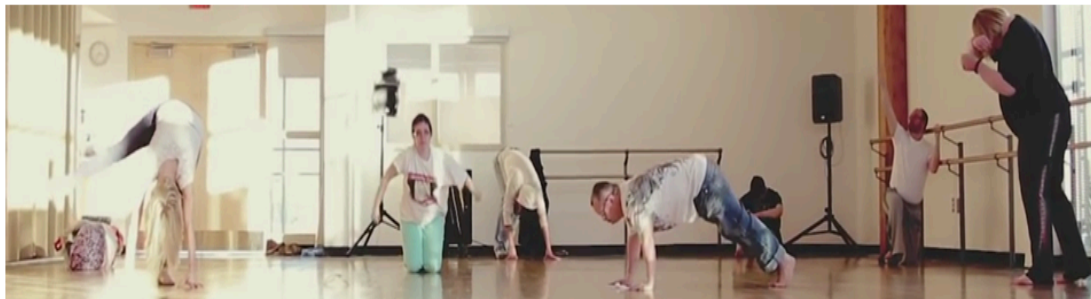


Figure 4.13

The closed in, isolated movements that start off the performance, moving towards the negative masks

As they reach their masks and slowly place them over their face the dancers are brought into a close-up that also reveals words that are written on the masks. The close-ups and words appear fast, a second and they’re gone, but it’s clear they are negative terms: sloppy, ditzzy, lazy, four eyes, nosey, creepy, dumb, etc (Figure 4.7 and 4.8). As soon as

they are all shown they are just as quickly thrown away. The dancers take those masks with labeled insulting terms and toss them in the air. It's at this point that we see the dancers change their previous style of movement and interaction. Throwing the masks away opens the dancers to each other. They are smiling, no longer avoiding one another, and they even do a synchronous sequence of movements showing a stronger connection with one another. There's another brief transition as the dancers make their separate way to a partner or small group of three. Three duets and one trio are spread around the room. They are moving in a mirrored style and it is unclear at times as to who is leading and who is following (Figure 4.10). At this point new text appears on the screen superimposed on the dancers but this time the duration of the text is more sustained. The phrases are no longer individual. They all start with "we". These are positive statements: we are hard working, we are helpful, we are volunteers, we are artists, we are dancers, etc; these positive affirmations are not just occurring within the short sequence as the negative mask labels. Instead they are spread throughout the last three minutes of the song. After the mirroring, the dancers again connect with the whole group as the same chorus movement is repeated (Figure 4.12). The dancers move together briefly once again and all of sudden freeze while two dancers move through the space to copy one of the frozen dancers. The mobile dancer assumes the frozen shape of the statue, and the frozen dancer then comes to life and moves until they find another frozen dancer and brings another statue to life. This pattern of freezing and unfreezing, dancing solo among the frozen bodies, could be seen as an isolating style of movement but there's an awareness of the dancers that also seems to happen in this sequence. The movers obviously have life as they go through the space, but the statues are also engaged and

giving off energy as well. This 'statue tag' phrase ends with the repetition of the chorus and as the chorus ends, the dancers are all full of energy, life and connection to one another. They are looking at each other, dancing with one another, they are still dancing freely, smiling, and no longer are they spread around the room far from one another, they are close and in some cases connected to one another. The dancers assume a final frozen image, all in different positions within this final tighter clump, as the last statement appears "WE ARE ABLE" (Figure 4.11) and the screen slowly fades to black.

What I hear:

Although throughout the entire music video, only the song is audible, there are clearly instances where the dancers are talking with one another throughout the dance. You can see their mouths move and other dancers respond to the verbal cues or conversation that is happening. You see the music embodied in the dancers and their movements, at times slow and melodic to quick and up-tempo. The lyrics clearly communicate the need to try and understand others and see the world from other perspectives. The lyrics, that become important to the theme of trying to understand one another, discuss emotions that we share, and our similarities and differences, which unite us through our humanity. "We've all suffered loss. We've all suffered pain. There's a lot less ways we're different and a lot more ways we are the same...we are the same." (Jason and the Diatonics) We can all find ways to separate ourselves through the different qualities we have, religious beliefs, cultural backgrounds, gender, age, and so on, but ultimately we are united by something that also bonds us to one another, we truly are all the same. This message becomes grafted onto the bodies of the mixed-ability performers.

What does not resonate:

Kuppers describes this section as what annoys or upsets the audience, creates friction, what's missing and is noticeable in its absence (2014, p.172). I am biased with these works and the creations we made; I take great pride in them. Still there are a few things I wish I had more control over in the filming of this piece. The first change I would have made if given the option, is control of the lighting. The sun streaming in the studio is beautiful and at times works perfectly with the dancers and the qualities of their movements but in the initial section and up to the tossing of the masks it would have been fitting to have a darker space, still light enough to see the dancers and their movements, but not as sunny to help convey that change in mood. Given the limitations of the dance studio space, there were no blinds or ways to control the outside lighting. The other change I would have made if it were something I had known about at the time of submitting ethics approval was to film the live showing of this dance at the IDPD event. I remember how incredible the dancers were in the space and performing in front of a large audience. This is best exemplified by comparing Maggie's two performances. Maggie, in the filmed version of Understand, was occasionally more isolated and less physically active with the dance. There was a nervousness that came with the filming and even though she doesn't always enjoy improvisational dance portions, Maggie often participated in class much more than was shown in the film. The performance during IDPD showed the quality of movement that Maggie had during rehearsals but also how much more she pushes her movements with a live audience. Maggie shone at IDPD. She was doing the splits, performing with ease, dancing with others, and was far less nervous. Having a copy of that performance would show a very clear difference between the

dancers and that dance space; even being set against black walls and floors would give a much different feel to the mood of the video. It would also provide a unique opportunity to analyze the videos with seemingly minor changes but what I believe would also prove to be quite impactful aesthetic differences.

What you want to work on:

This section of the observation wheel allows the viewer to celebrate aspects of the performance but also provides a goal; what is worth developing further? What portions connect with the viewers and attract them to this work? Although I'm very proud of this work as it stands, applauding it seems very self-serving and is not what is intended. I'll focus on whether or not I achieved the project goals or if I needed to revise the goals at this point. Seeing the video, the areas that I would like to work on further are the improvised exercises, mirroring and statue tag. Through mirroring further, I'd like to remind the dancers to use a variety of levels (laying, kneeling, and if standing –reaching), which would challenge the dancers but also improve the aesthetic variation of that piece. In my opinion the length of the mirroring section was fine and didn't become redundant but more varied mirroring movements could improve the aesthetics within the story of understanding one another and connecting further with each other. The moments that the video didn't capture from the rehearsal process - the high-fives, the pats on the back, the congratulations and thanking one another for the work that was shared. Similarly, the statue tag portion is one that could have benefitted from dancers exploring different levels and the addition of another mover, three dancers instead of two. I would have also tried to get the movers to interact with one another before freezing again, to show a playful quality and by connecting with another now that they were unfrozen before they

were to assume another frozen shape, waiting to be brought back to life. A slight adjustment in rehearsal would have allowed more opportunities for the dancers to connect with another before they went to connect with a statue. These improvised pas de deux would have given an entirely new level of dance and performance to the piece and would have increased the challenge for the dancers and variations for the audience; it would have provided a greater challenge by allowing for more development of improvisational skill and added artistry to the performance. It wasn't until the video was edited and seen, that this alteration came to mind which helped me realize how difficult it was to be a part of the dance and still direct it.

Overall Understand is the dance piece that was seen by the largest audience (live and online). Through YouTube it was viewed over 350 times, it was staged in front of an audience of around 200 people, and was also shown on a university monitor for approximately three months in a high traffic main entrance, reaching upwards of 1000 passers-by. Through the use of the words and phrases I believe it conveys the clearest message of using integrated dance to express the importance of integration for all peoples. This dance creation was the perfect balance of choreography and structured improvisation. I would have liked the time to challenge the dancers further with using levels and restructuring the statue-tag portion but as a teaching model this was successful both in use of time in rehearsal and final product. Although choreography and improvisation in most research and performance contexts in this field require a balance, it was the words of Pamela Boyd following our live showing at IDPD, saying that it was the perfect combination of the two, that truly let me know this project achieved the right balance of set choreography and structured improvisation.

Our final dance, The One, was similar but also opposite to Wishing for Yellow. The One was created using a single rather than a mixed teaching and choreographic approach. But unlike the structured improvisation in Wishing for Yellow, The One was largely choreographed.

The One

The One is the last dance that we created and was completed in the tightest timeline. The One is a focused look at relationships with the 'wrong' one and then finding the 'right' one, which actually turns out to be the same person in the end. The overarching structure was to start with a partner, get split up, and then find each other again at the end. We had five classes to get this dance finished before we filmed it. This dance also contained the most choreography staged by me, partly because of what the ensemble had requested in the earlier interview and partly because of the extended time needed for collectively created performances was lacking. The premise was that dancers entered as a duet or group of three but then quickly separated into two groups – one group of dancers were abandoned by their partners, in essence, they were dumped and were left to sit in an inward facing circle of chairs while the partners left to go dance with their group in a structured line dance.



Figure 4.14
Partners getting split up, one stays with the chairs – the other heads to the dance floor

The ‘sitters’ also had structured movement; they had seven gestures that we created as a group that could be performed in any order. This was a great improvisation exercise where dancers could copy, dance in canon, or do their own thing completely. What I noticed during rehearsal is that dancers were very independent in their moves and confident in their choices. Yet, when performed for recording purposes, dancers mimicked more than doing their own thing. This lack of original movement material is not visible in the way that it was filmed because the cameraman situated himself in the centre of the chair circle and managed to capture the facial expressions of the dancers but rarely focused on multiple chair dancers at the same time. What this sequence also captured was the clear contrast between the dancers’ preferred styles. Maggie, when seated in the chairs for the improvised sequence, shows her discomfort in this format because it isn’t structured enough for her and I assume it makes her nervous. The opposite is clearly the case for Lars. Lars during this improvised chair sequence takes advantage of the seven rehearsed gestures but also creates his own spin on the character and style. Lars was seen darting his head around (rather than just shaking his head) and also improvised a ‘drinking a beer’ sequence that shows his comfort in working with an improvised structure.



Figure 4.15
Maggie doing a structured improvised dance phrase



Figure 4.16
Lars adlibbing the improv

If performed live it would have looked very different, as it would have shown an overwhelming amount of repetition and my fear is that a leader in the movement might be discovered, one leader and the rest followers; especially when the intention was for each mover to make independent movement choices. The camera focusing on one dancer at a time in the chairs allows the audience to see this dancer doing their own thing as opposed to the 'follow the leader' structure that developed. While the 'sitters' were doing their movements, the standing dancers were busy doing the slightly altered version of 'Cadillac Ranch' line dance with a small adjustment to make the counts fit. They would dance this sequence four times before taking the place of the 'sitters', and then the 'sitters' would begin their four sequences of the line dance, while the others took to the chairs.

The line dance was a structure that most dancers were familiar with because of their backgrounds with school, weddings, and other social gatherings; however, this type of dance requires precision in order for it to be aesthetically successful. A few dancers struggled with this precision, and so the sequence was never visually perfect, but more than anything we had fun and were a team cheering each other on as we completed the routine. During the line dance I continued using the same structure of vocally coaching the dancers' moves. Visual cues - seeing other dancers or looking at the mirror, also helped dancers recall the sequence.

Because this piece involved the most structured choreography, less collective creation time was needed, yet dancers still had opportunities to create individual movement phrases and were also able to develop a character for the dance. The One also required the dancers to remember a previously learned social dance. Using the 'Cadillac

Ranch' line dance in one section allowed the dancers to move with a familiar piece of choreography in a new context. The other section of choreography involved a collective creation aspect; creating set movements in rehearsal but also improvising in rehearsal and the performance. Together, the dancers and I created gestures, which I narrowed down to seven. These gestures were performed while sitting or remaining in contact with a chair. The seven gestures were created over two different classes and allowed for a lot of repetition and interaction with others as well. The premise was simple, the choreography was established, and we repeated the moves allowing for the dance to be comfortable in terms of the improvisation and synchronization for the line dance. It took us five classes, a total of around four hours to create and a final hour to be filmed. The dancers loved this piece, it had a little story, some comedy and character work, allowed for a fun social dance that they had all had experience with previously, and still allowed for individual creativity with their improvisations.

With regards to character work, previous dances required the performers to move with emotion but they were still themselves. In The One, couples enter together (their significant other), seemingly joyful, but one member of each of the partners abandons the other at the chairs while they go take a spin on the dance floor. The chair dancers had just been dumped and had to react as their character would in that situation. As the happy dancers finished their line dance sequence they approached the chairs (perhaps to reconcile) but the chair dancers that had been left there after the 'break-up', left their seats to have their chance on the dance floor. Finally in the end the partners link arms and leave the dance studio together, they are happy and rushing to leave the space (Figure 4.17).



Figure 4.17
The dancers happily leaving with their initial dance partner

During the filming of this dance personalities emerged. Dancers, while exiting both the dance space and the view of the camera, were joking and playful. There was a jovial nature that the dancers expressed, they were excited and engaged. The dancers were having fun with one another, excited to do another take and just enjoying the last time we would be dancing with one another for this project. It was also clear within this dance which dancers preferred set choreography and which preferred improvisation. Lars, for example, loves being able to do his own thing while dancing and lets the music guide his movements. Maggie, on the other hand, shows more comfort with choreographed sequences and shows her discomfort with the improvised chair gestures, but she dances in the line dance section much more freely. As we finished the filming of this last piece, I was excited but also wondered if I accomplished what I had set forth with these video creations. This further made me wonder if the dancers had set goals for themselves.

When I look back to the goals that I set out initially I see successes but also areas that I would have liked to improve on. We created three music videos rather than four as was intended but time pressures didn't allow for another creation and I felt rushing the other projects further for completion would have only been detrimental to the company

and the products; I preferred quality to quantity in this case. Rushing for the completion of another video would have also required we lose other aspects to the class that allowed us to have fun and really enjoy our creation time together, allowing for that safe place where there was time to work but always time to have fun. Losing that positive and safe environment would have destroyed any momentum that was made with previous projects. It's the relationships and safe place to move and dance that were more important than the number of products created. I would have also loved to have performed The One in a setting that spoke more to the situation that was established, perhaps the feel of filming the video in night club with tables and chairs and a defined dance floor space would have helped to portray the characters in a more recognizable situation.

In terms of the focus group interview and two company interviews (mid-round and at the end), there are also positives and negatives. The focus group interviews were great and offered some new ideas or aspects that I didn't consider. One suggestion which would have been a wonderful way to further connect with the audiences was to have the dancers speak about themselves and what dance means to them as an introduction or conclusion to the dance videos created. I agree that these small additions would have been a nice way to better connect audiences with the dancers, but it would have also been extremely difficult for a few of the dancers as I witnessed while doing the company group interviews. The dancers were great at communicating with their bodies but these filmed interviews showed how uncomfortable they were with sharing their thoughts verbally. Of the ensemble that was interviewed, all dancers spoke positively of the experience. The sentiments that were most agreed on were the love of being able to dance and create with one another. Portions of the interview also relied on much

interpretation and follow-up questions to determine the intended meaning. The last thing I would have wanted in the published videos was for me to interpret what was being said and diminish the dancers' own voice. I knew that the interviews were going to be more difficult, having worked with the dancers and having gone through reflections and interviews with them before, but I still very much wanted to get a sense from them of what they liked and didn't like. I was able to pull this out from a few of the participants, but for the most part the company dancers were agreeable to almost anything that was shared. In terms of the dance pieces we worked on, all dancers seemed to have different favourites for one reason or another. A few dancers (Randy and Blake) preferred Wishing for Yellow because it was performed outside in a different space and it involved more props and costume pieces. Some (Bill and Jasmine) liked Understand more because it was performed in front of an audience. A few liked The One because it involved a little bit of comical character work and also used another social dance that they knew and enjoyed. The way the dances were taught or the instruction used didn't seem to be a factor in what the dancers said they preferred. My interpretation at the lack of discussion around pedagogy is that whatever we created was learned and taught in an encouraging and fun way that allowed dancers to feel challenged, safe, and successful in whatever they were attempting.

When I look back to my teaching reflections and the overall project there are a few questions I have to guide my discussion.

- What was individually created? (How was this taught: by me? or solo dancer creations?)

- What was collectively created? (developed as a team and/or decided on by the group)

- Why did I structure or choreograph the sections that I did?

- What was changed during the process? Why?

Looking over the projects and thinking about what was specifically created and choreographed by me, I can estimate percentages of improvised vs. choreographed sections. Choreography for me involves precise movements during a particular time frame to some form of music. Choreography and structure to me are quite different as structure involves more signposts or a way of transitioning (at this point we mirror a partner, at this point we move to the open field, etc.). The structured goal of the transition may be set but the movement style is not. In terms of structure each dance was planned out and at least tentatively set (allowing for adjustments and changes as needed), which meant 100% of the dances were structured by me. As for choreography that was set, all dancers performed a choreographed line-dance for half of The One, we had a set chorus during Understand, and in Wishing for Yellow the only set choreography was the movement of the yellow umbrellas. In all approximately 25% was choreographed leaving 75% structured. When looking critically at the video projects, Understand is the creation that had the perfect mix of choreography and established improvisational structure, approximately one-third choreographed and precise with the remaining two-thirds allowing for individual movements within a structured framework. Wishing for Yellow relied heavily on improvised movements that still occurred within a structured framework, but the quality became repetitive in a way that it seemed to lose impact and to me took away from the narrative that may have been better-established with a few

pieces of set choreography. I learned from this experience and implemented changes to my teaching which had a direct and lasting effect on my teaching-style for this project. The One was all choreographed or relied on set improvisational structures, which can seem very choreographed. I believe all the dances were entertaining and the company enjoyed the creation of each video. A national mixed-ability training workshop held in Calgary through MoMo Dance Theatre during the first week of February 2016 clarified for me the need to continue to have a structure (with flexibility) and to allow for choreographed sequences in combination with improvisational aspects. This allowed the class to have structure and a partial vision; the dancers and their creative dance suggestions filled in the missing elements and allowed each member to be a part of the creative process not just a bystander. *Limitless* rehearsals that worked with improvisational structures became platforms of discovery that helped to shape a dance or become an aspect of a dancers' personal dance vocabulary - a movement, a quality, a style that they developed that helped to showcase what they wanted the audience to experience. There were moments while we worked on improvisational structure that I just watched and enjoyed. It wasn't about a video project in those moments, it was about enjoying the movement being done. It was clear the dancers appreciated some of these moments as well; when we were finished and they would erupt in applause, they knew they had just done something special that was worth celebrating. If I had structured a sequence in that time and took away from that improvisational practice we would have missed those moments, those transformative experiences helped to shape the video outputs but also encouraged the confidence and artistic expression of each performer.

It was during “The One” that plans were finalized to continue an inclusive community dance class. A committee, that I was fortunate enough to be a part of, has allowed this initiative, that I was introduced to with Lisa Doolittle’s course in the Fall semester of 2014, to flourish. A personal goal for this project, although tenuously connected to it, was to help ensure that a community inclusive dance practice would continue. Together with previous colleagues and devoted community members and the support of an ally company from Edmonton (*Solidance*), a new dance program, Solidance South, was initiated in January 2016 that ran until June. Plans are currently in the works for continuing programs as well as workshop opportunities to train more potential teachers, both with and without, in the field and continue the sustainability of the program. The outlook is good. What I noticed most through these community programs (although not a part of my direct research), was witnessing other teachers lead the classes as well as reflecting on my own teaching, there is no one right or wrong way to do this. It's about creating a safe place, establishing relationships, and inspiring others through something you are passionate about, while always having fun. As with any teaching, the better plan that's put in place, and the more prepared a teacher is, the more time there is for dancing and exploring what could happen, inviting inspiration to come from the dancers in any moment. Reflection is crucial to improving one’s teaching practice, but it’s taking those reflections and putting them into action that really create value both for the teacher and the students. What these new teaching opportunities really emphasized in my own practice, specifically with my inclusive dance pedagogy, is the need for a balance between improvisational movement exercises and choreography.

Through the three unique dance creations *Limitless* moved from improvisation, to a balance of choreography and improvisation, to almost entirely structured choreography. This allowed me to analyze the rehearsal process and also the final products of the work based on those different experiences. Each dance had a commonality of occurring in a safe and democratized space. Each dance allowed the dancers to try something new that at times inspired a change in the directorial concept of the performance. Each dance allowed me to give verbal cues to the dancers as reminders of transitions and changes in movement quality. This is something I maintained in the live performance and is something I will employ with future performances.

Conclusion

Limitless was a four-month project that allowed me to study my teaching practices within a mixed ability community dance environment. This study was unique for me because my inclusive pedagogy resides mainly within a K-12 school setting where bureaucracy and documentation of students with disabilities took up the majority of my time; I rarely had the time or opportunity to work with them. *Limitless* allowed that model to be turned inside out and allowed me to make meaningful connections and truly witness the dancers' growth and continue to challenge them. Although this study isn't meant to comment on curriculum and inclusive arts practices within schools, it has definitely allowed me to broaden my reflective teaching practices in this field. What I am able to say confidently is that this work is important. I've seen dancers grow so much confidence and increase their independence while taking these dance classes. I've seen friendships develop and important community connections being made between individuals and their surroundings as well others in the community. Obviously dance is not the only reason for these significant gains in peoples' lives, but workers in the field, and parents and guardians as well as the dancers themselves, have spoken to how much they have enjoyed and gained from these opportunities. Hickey Moody's statement rings so true for me "I have argued that the process of devising and performing integrated dance theatre...reconfigures dancers' embodied subjectivities. Such corporeal change alters the way in which people with...disability know themselves" (2009, p.73). I'm sure anyone who has worked within in this field would further attest to these claims and their validity.

After my back injury, I struggled to see myself as a dancer. I wasn't able to dance the way I previously could and I assumed that there was no place in the dance community for someone like me. Working in this field of dance training has allowed me to identify as a dancer again. Just as the dancers have changed and started to take on leadership roles and more responsibility in the class, I changed as a result of the experience.

Although this dance teaching experience was new to me, teaching is not. I used techniques that I would use with any classroom: humour, differentiation, exploration, active participation, and praise. I allowed routine to be a framework that provided security for the dancers and an awareness of what would happen each day. I encouraged dancers to share their opinions and ask questions. I allowed dancers to work individually, with partners, small groups, and the entire ensemble, where they were encouraged to take risks and challenge themselves as well as celebrate their work. "I had to applaud at one moment because of how symmetrical the class was with a shared mirror line – it was quite stunning to see the freeze, I was thoroughly impressed and even said as much as I applauded the group" (Reflection Journal – Appendix B, November 7th, 2015). This very much mimics my classroom teaching, but isn't how I've always experienced studio dance class, which is largely why I negated the concept of me ever being a 'dancer' again – I wouldn't fit the mould of what I had experienced in my dance training. For my dancers, I offered feedback and guidance to help improve the aesthetic of student-created sections, knowing that what is good can be improved upon and skills can be increased. I reflected on my plans and teaching practices; I adapted my teaching to fit the context as opposed to trying to change the dancers to fit my teaching. Following the completion of the project work I researched and analyzed others' work within this field, looking for

discussions of their pedagogy, delving into areas of disability studies, aesthetics within the field, or analysis of other productions, all of which helped me to frame my broader understanding of inclusive arts. This has also allowed me to reframe my knowledge of the local Lethbridge community and create networks with other dance companies (near and far) along the way. All people can dance. It's a statement I believe, but not all people have the opportunity. *Limitless* provided an opportunity for myself and for my company of dancers to explore more of what we could create together. As our Solidance South branch emerged, I have further been able to see the development of dancers as co-teachers and leaders within the studio, a testament to the growth that continues within dancers if given the chance.

What I'm unable to comment on is what dance means to the dancers in the company. Cheesman expresses similar sentiments when she quotes Pasch (1999) "(I) could analyze the thinking, and document the doing, yet (I) would be no closer to explaining the success that occurs within that 'magic moment' of experience" (2011, p.38). The embodied learning that took place for myself and for the dancers was one of experience in the doing. It was serendipitous for me to work with a physical ailment during our time of creation together and it allowed me to create from a new frame of mind. For someone new to community dance initiatives this document provides an insight as to what has worked well for me and my dancers, and also authors whose work I value. I've seen how improvisational activities can democratize the dance space, and that for my dancers a mix of set-choreography and structured improvisation was the best combination to allow all dancers to shine. When I interviewed the dancers at the conclusion of our project work to determine what they learned, what they valued, or

whether they got something out of our working together, I was welcomed with many happy sentiments and feelings of pride in the work they produced. I witnessed their fondness for working with everyone in the company (even if at times they weren't always 100% friendly with one another). Julia (a dancer with) so simply yet profoundly stated, "I just love to dance" (Ensemble interview, December 19th, 2015). This was something that resonated with each dancer in the room. We were all there because we had the opportunity to be there to dance and create with one another. The video outputs have importance and the dancers and their families expressed how happy and thrilled they were to see them, but for me the process is what truly mattered the most. The products of the videos can never truly capture all of the learning that took place, the problem solving that we all faced, the friendships made, the goose-bumps experienced, or the laughs we shared; these were the 'outputs' that developed through our *Limitless* journey.

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APPENDIX A

In order to get an understanding of the dancers, the following chart is meant mainly to summarize the strengths of each performer.

Name (in no particular order)	The strengths and/or biggest contributions I reflected on and identify with the performers
Bill	Strength and versatility in movement – great memory and musicality.
Nicole	Love and ease with performance – supportive to other dancers and able to work with choreography or improvisation, very consistent.
Callista	Calming presence with dancers that experience frustration and ability to ask questions to help clarify exercises – able to dance and collaborate within any structure.
Blake	Incredible memory of lyrics and precision of tempo. Thrives with structured choreography that is very ‘count’ based. (eg. jazz square)
Amy	Incredible flexibility and personal push in improvised structure – movements were very self-expressive and personally challenging.
Maggie	Had a great connection with Nicole to assist in dancing more improvised but was so strong in working with set choreography, thrives in front of a live audience.
Randy	Love and ease with performance, always willing and positive to try new creations, either improvised or structured.
Jasmine	Positivity and contribution to all performances, always willing to try and/or do any role requested – great musicality.
Julia	Easygoing attitude with an always-positive disposition, memory of music and lyrics showed musicality and loved dancing with the whole group.
Lars	Incredible energy and love for improvised movements of any quality: fast/slow, emotionally based, etc. Loves any chance for solo performance.
Participant	Always happy to participate especially within the whole group but could work as a partner with any member of the group, avoided individual movement.

APPENDIX B

Reflections of Limitless (areas that are bolded are identified as being more relevant in teaching and/or growth in the class, or are significant insights worth addressing)

August 22, 2015

Overall the class was OK – I did have to change much of what I had planned based on the make-up of the class, more withs than withouts (emails came later saying that they're not available until sept long weekend or later).

Focused mostly on independent or full group work – going to partners too soon could be uncomfortable for members making connections again.

It's great to have a strong base group of performers with – not sure I'd want more, as long as I get a solid group of 7-8 with and 7-10 without, it would be a perfect combination. I'm noticing the difficulty in retention of performers – university students are at the point that most don't see the benefit to them (no credits) which is something I've been worried about from day 1, many community people that I've approached that were interested in previous months have now backed out...I'm hoping that with beginning teachers that I'll be working with, that some may see a benefit in this type of community development and go outside of their comfort zone to try something new and also add as a mention on their resume.

Building on the creativity community next week – less 'me' directed and more community created.

August 28, 2015

Had a small class today – but great work!

3 were performers with that were in last weeks class, 1 with – his first class, and 2 new community members without. We warmed up together, walked the space and got our heart rates up, did some mirroring, some 'pseudo' follow the leader, worked on our ¼ time box step and added the jazz square. It was great to see the class working with and helping each other to get the steps right. We started slow, and worked our way to faster quite quickly and most of the class was able to do it all to the music counts on a repetitive pattern.

I did recognize my way of counting for the ¼ time box step was awful! I was counting to 8, but based on the steps – I should have made it a 6 count, it creates more repetition with our footwork that way – but it's a habit to do 8 counts (very easily broke that this week). Comments from the 2 community members after class was how much they enjoyed it, they were nervous about how much dance there would be, etc. but they loved the atmosphere and pace of the class. I think they saw visions of what was intended for creation and may be great allies in continuing with the sustainability. Both work within community programs and were great additions to the class today. Many will be away tomorrow – weddings, vacations, etc...hard to plan things with this uncertainty – some classes are a plan ahead for plan a and plan b – but once we start specifically building the show and working with the sections and transitions – I think it'll go pretty fast and will provide a more collaborative structure.

August 29, 2015

What a great class! There were 2 without (myself included) and 4 with. We had a great warmup, people forgot their accessory piece for today, which meant changing the plan

slightly – but it worked out wonderfully. I reviewed the slower waltz step (adding the extra counts) and revisited the jazz square – WOW is everyone picking it up FAST! **Had each member lead a movement across the room (follow the leader-like),** however they wanted and this worked great. **A little hesitant with going, but when they started moving they committed fully to it.**

Went from this to **discussing emotions in movement.** Used the smoky quality outside to help create an image, **smoky is gloomy, sad, depressing, lonely – “how does that movement look?”** – GREAT examples, all very different. Some were very forceful (stomping), others light but slow and introverted, some caricatures of angry – using face and hands on hips, etc...great personal movement qualities, and everyone, after a few examples started to say and **celebrate the qualities that they saw in the movements.** Then focused on the emotion of happy or joyful – what does this movement quality look like? Bouncing, spinning, quick but light, pride – the body language was clear and the switch that happened between the movements was so striking!

The students LOVED sitting back and watching others show their work – I did too! **I always try to circulate and give praise for the work but I’ll always miss something, having these showcase moments is great for building confidence in performance, helps to establish the safe space to try and take risks,** and brings a sense of credibility to what we’re doing – it’s not just ‘fun’ in a dance studio – **we’re building something and these small performances are key to that stepping stone along the way.**

Next week is the long weekend – I’m hoping beyond hope that my reaching out to others works to try and increase the without performers. I’ve received an overwhelming number of student emails backing out of their previous commitment to join, which is so sad because it speaks of one art in the sustainability – but I remain optimistic that I’ll be able to get a few new Ed. students into the mix, with 4 without performers, to get a handful more consistently would be perfect.

Fingers crossed.

September 4, 2015

Class of 8 today (3 performers without and 5 performers with)

We built on ideas from last week – sharing more personal movements (hard for some to do – need more inspiration – I think? From a wider variety of people?) Really seeing, at times, the need for more bodies in the space – ideally without, as **the withs are far more dedicated in terms of attendance...**

Warm-up and our box steps took longer than I had planned today – I think mainly because of our long span between working together, **with classes Friday and Saturday, what we do on Saturday is a very distant memory to the next class on Friday – kind of dictates to me that filming must be on Saturdays to be more fresh in minds and get the best ‘takes’ ☺**

Worked on the happy and sad movements again and the transition between them, individual, creative, happy movements, with two happy freezes and a slow transition to gloomy. The freezes were tricky for a few members (wanted to keep doing happy dance) but **after a few tries and clear vocal cues there was incredible beauty in the moves.** Diverse, dynamic, completely different styles but such clear feelings within their bodies. We didn’t have time to get through everything I wanted but I wanted to celebrate that moment for the entire group (I wish they could have seen it as an entire class – we’ll have

to have a **showcase moment tomorrow where we can do some audience time and stage time.**

The drawings of stick figures was OK – I knew this was going to be challenging – but it worked (spatial awareness with bodies and drawing is very tricky)...but we created a quick gallery of happy and sad positions for people to look at and get inspired by. We saw the movements modeled with the picture and everyone had the chance to create, model, display, etc. Tomorrow we'll build on this and get everyone to build a gallery together and people will have to try and match the sculpture to the drawing – it's a fun game idea but I know it will be tricky – I'm hoping we can do it with partners again – just different partners to give more connections.

Today I feel the pressure of ethics and other time constraints. I am desperate to start filming and reviewing pieces of the film to help with my reflections. I want classes to be longer – but realize the monetary piece (CASA has already been great with the space as is), the items purchased to make this project work – tech, props, etc...

I think it all comes from the goal of having 3 videos done by December 3 for the IDPD – I just don't want that external piece to cause extra pressure on the class or with pushing too much too fast – knowing that **Fridays class is seeming to become more of a reminder** – I'm hoping that I see better progress tomorrow to verify that theory, fingers crossed, then I can work with that and keep that as part of my regular plan.

September 5, 2015

Today's class – 2 withouts and 5 with

Used a bit more structure to help move through some creative movement transitions (creative movements refers to independently made pieces from the class), was OK – but not sure how I would have done it differently with the group that turned up today. It was a direct build off of yesterday, so I was hoping it would be fresh. It was about taking our 'movement gallery' that members drew yesterday and moving 3 images around the room. Thinking about it now, we probably should have just started with moving across the space together as group. I did ask for members to partner up to go through the space and pick their spots and pick their moves – but the ratio was off and there was confusion. By going as a group we would have done it all together and limited the confusion. **Start big – collaborative, whole group – then partner down, then allow for individual attempts** – especially with our group dynamics, unless we get about 5 more without, **most exercises will have to go through this process.**

We got there and all members took their three movements and moved through the space and we were able to build on it and add our accessory to help really show the emotion...some items move through the space and swirl and are light to go with the happy movement, but then can also constrict and constrain to show the opposite (sad, frustrated, angry, etc...)

We didn't do much of a warm-up – breathing and roll downs and we jumped in the movement pieces. Before the end of class we did our happy jazz squares – the feet more or less have the quality so now what I want the class to start doing is bring the movement into their bodies, happy faces, happy arms, happy bouncy qualities – and WOW did this ever pick up – we were happy and sweating at the end of class. It was a good cool down and **remembering of what we did and I really like that wrap-up part of class.**

Repeating what we did, what we grew with and hopefully making sure people remember those qualities of movements from this week to next.

I guess I'm so used to individual differentiation that it's difficult for me to treat the group as one, but until the numbers allow for more partnering – group work will also allow for that collaborative team building feeling – the closer connections will come over time.

September 11, 2015

3 without and 6 with (1 new with)

Today was such a great class. I decided to spend a majority of the day on mirroring and limit the amount of changes that we were going to do. An hour goes by extremely fast and I wanted to try something that I hadn't done before. **I used yellow wrist bands that we placed on our wrists and feet to help line up with our mirror reflection – it worked extremely well**, previously there was a lot of confusion with some of the members but this really helped. I stopped and asked after a couple of exercises and most everyone agreed it helped, even those without agreed it was a good reminder. We did a slow build of mirroring a partner – taking turns, then moving up to combine two partners in one group with one leader. We switched the leaders twice and something beautiful happened. Two withs were leading the activity to the music we'll be using and extremely different movements developed, one was balletic – light, happy, there was joy in her qualities of movement. The other was direct, strong, serious in his movement – so different, but still so incredible to see those differences in the qualities of movement – we did a small audience showing of the different qualities and then we did the last build, two leaders for the whole group – where the followers could switch between who they were following, which we built into a move through the space, do your own movements or copy what others are doing – even with just 9 in the space, we filled the studio – there was so much life and energy. This music lends itself to a personal approach of the dance. I'm thrilled that **the box steps we've been doing to the music is a good fall-back for some of the members, that if they are unsure of what to do, they go right into the bouncy jazz square, they hear the beat and just go with it and then at times are still able to copy what others are doing – it's perfect mixture of 'choreo' with improvised creation**. Everyone was moving and there was so much smiling. This class went by the 'fastest' out of all of them (good and bad), I love that we were all having fun and there wasn't a 'down-time' in the class, but it would have been amazing to keep that energy going. **I love the energy that the wristbands gave to everyone, they were excited to get this small little costume piece and it inspired me in the direction of how to stage the filming and creation of the first piece** (my earlier thoughts were not quite coming together like I had planned – but this one, I think will work WAY better). I still want the dance to be a focus of change, in this case it'll be a change in emotion and movement quality (sad-gloomy movements to happy light fun ones)... tomorrow we work with umbrellas – the next section of the routine, playing with them, using them to move with, experimenting with their qualities – a little nervous about them (could be dangerous, but this is also a group that is very aware of the space around them and I think if structured in a way to start with just 1-2 umbrellas in the space, then add 1 at a time to make sure it doesn't get too busy too fast...add when ready/if ready).

The idea in mind, but creating organically has been much more positive than I expected, but given the make-up of the class (many more with) it's become quite

necessary to structure it this way – with more withouts it could easily have been different, but for now, this is working the best way possible.

September 12, 2015

3 without, 7 with (1 new with and 1 new without)

The biggest portion of the class was working with umbrellas. We did group work (2 groups of three, 1 group of four), moving with the umbrellas closed and showing off our work. Great build and creativity with them, individual creation and group creations. In the same groups – we opened the umbrellas and did another 4ish minute creation within groups. We took the time to watch all of the creations (some with music and without), they were awesome. The next build was adding 3 more umbrellas, 6 total, so we could all be as group behind them for one small group activity – this was more structured and allowed me to see a small issue with the idea – it might work, but I won't be able to really see it in action until the shirts (costumes) are in 'play' – we might have to break the structure a little bit, keep the basic change the form?

We then broke into free dance with and without the umbrellas – everyone was involved...it was lively, we mirrored, some did the jazz square steps and the emotional movements (happy moves mainly) – one audience for a bit (she was ALL smiles – watching and making eye contact with everyone in the group – have a big idea for her to be involved and limit the chaos).

The last piece was slow squares and jazz squares, then to break out into BIG dance...this has become a little bit of a routine with this dance and I love ending our class on such an UP feeling. The umbrellas were put away before our squares.

We wrapped up with a calming review and talk through what we did that class while everyone did some personal stretching or relaxation. This is a personal favourite where everyone gets a chance to review and we talk through the class.

The piece is really coming together – I think we can start piecing things together next week – knowing that the week after there is no class...have to really think how the weeks line up and how the collective creation is coming together. Should be able to film the first weekend in October – maybe the Friday following – but it might be too dark, the next day is off (Thanksgiving holidays)...feeling the time as the biggest pressure right now...might only get two videos done by December 3rd for IDPD celebration.

The worries continue for sustainability – it is important work...but I've just had another without person back out only to ensure that another with can come and join the group – it's becoming less and less about making connections, it's more about a drop off or community respite class – no longer 'inclusive' but in a sense secluded.

September 18, 2015

(3 without – 7 with)

Lars and Randy joined us after being away last weekend. They worked well and caught up to putting it all together. Yellow shirts went out – big smiles with that.

We started at the beginning and worked our way through the song, stopping and reviewing the parts as we went. Hard part is, remembering the parts from previous week or weeks. The class was really patient and we were able to run the dance 3 full times. A

few pieces are still being rushed, but the shape is there. Tomorrow we'll break the areas down to revisit the mirror activities that we did, some of the steps (slow square and jazz square), I'm hoping in two weeks Friday to rehearse in Galt Gardens – with the hope that the next day we can film – but that depends on ethics...otherwise it could get postponed for a few weeks with the holiday the weekend after, etc...

This class was exactly what I hoped it would be, there were times that I thought things were happening too slow, but everything was at a good pace. I want to chat with others to see what they think about the timing/pace of the class and the amount that was covered. I know tomorrow I'll have one less without – so I did want to cover as much ground as possible, knowing that I can clean the smaller pieces with the withouts more one-on-one if needed.

I really like the breakdown of events – yellow sweatbands, move/transition to yellow shirts, move to yellow umbrellas. **Being able to speak and help give direction with the music is great and may be needed** – especially if there aren't a lot of withouts in the filmed performance. I love the shape of the piece and am looking forward to seeing it on film.

Bill continues to ask about others coming to the class – Cam, Hailey, etc. It's hard to believe that out of the large cast, there are no students that want to get involved. I was hoping to get short term members (come for 4 weeks at a time) or something similar which would be a great commitment but still seems to be too much for everyone. **I find myself reflecting more on the withouts than the withs...not sure if sustainable fits for that population?**

Couple broken umbrellas today (1 beyond repair, 1 that might be OK for a few more uses in rehearsal) Might be good to do a walk through in the space tomorrow, get used to it earlier than later, it will be a big change from the space we're in. Start it there and move to the studio afterwards? Play it by ear tomorrow.

September 19, 2015

(2 without – 7 with)

Saturdays reaffirmed for me today that Fridays are the teach and review class and Saturday is filming day. The class was exceptional today and with very little help and coaching in the dance. I still gave vocal cues, but the group remembered everything and helped each other through the complete routine. **Maggie joined in, it took me showing first, then Maggie and me doing it together, then she was able to do it all on her own, twice.**

We were able to go on a field trip to Galt Garden and the performance space we'll be filming at, even with all of the extra people there (Zombie Walk), everyone was focused and did incredible (no music, no props, and not full costume), I spoke through the routine and they all followed and went full out with the performance. **I may still talk through (if I have to film) but I think they have it down...since they built, they have it in them, they have embodied the dance and I think they will remember it even with an extended break** (no dance next weekend – Vancouver trip) – Maggie did everything and danced full out with the group – throwing leaves and playing, she is perfect as the embodiment of joy, her roll is perfect and it's the perfect piece for her. Julia and Blake

fall back to lively jazz squares, Bill and Lars are superb in their style of dance, Nicole does her thing and fits the music, participant is a little bit more reserved/maybe shy or uncertain, but she still moves – we might do an extra mirror exercise to have her join in further with the others.

I've tried calling (visitor) maybe 7 or 8 times now, 6 just in the last two days still no answer or just busy – many parents are worried about getting more bodies in the class as am I – but short of paying others I'm not sure how to get them to stick – I will present to the EUS to see if there are any eager teachers in that mix...but at least for this first video, **they show their ability to truly do this on their own...just not as inclusively as hoped.**

October 2, 2015

(2 without – corey and amy, 8 with – blake, Maggie, Nicole, lars, randy, bill, Julia, participant)

Today was all about foot, re-freshers, and forms...

It's good to point out that at this point I have had x-rays and bloodwork and physio to work on my right foot...which has now resulted in the need for a change in meds, more tests...and the request from my doctor to obviously not dance, not an option, but I am going slow and changing as much as I can what I have planned, or at least what my role is. **Amy has been GREAT!!!! Wow, what a great support** (often late and leaves quickly after class – but I understand that 100%!). She has been pretty consistent with attending the classes and is a great extra support in the class as is Nicole and **Bill (he remembers so well and at times gives reminders for others), Blake has the music down and clearly shows the change that I want to happen from the beginning of the song through to the end.** Julia has a very hard time doing the sad dance – she is just so happy all the time – what a joy ☺ **Maggie is participating and doing more every class, she sometimes says no and I quickly rephrase the question and she joins in no time – I think it might be habit for her to reject the offer, but you can see her happiness when she does join.** Lars and Randy – two natural performers in very different styles. **Randy you can see thinks about his choices and really connects – Lars slow/sad dance is superb and his happy dance is all instinct** – he just goes and does and doesn't think twice. What a great group – that has helped to create an incredible first dance – **I just hope filming it, does it justice for what the process is.**

So after being gone for two weeks – they picked it all up no problem!

We cleaned, and had some great 'dress rehearsals'...the hope is to film tomorrow – however, it's expected to rain, in which case we might just film some of the pieces in the studio, give me an idea of how it all looks.

The forms went out today/were signed in the class (assents and few consents)...This was an eye opening experience – from the beginning to now it's been a long process, but after reading through the form with the dancers – I see the worth and value in it all (as before I saw it as a hoop to deter this opportunity from taking place – what I liked most was all the dancers signing and enjoying their rights, they own this involvement.

I couldn't be more happy. Some have had to rely on verbal and email consent for filming tomorrow as they are out of town and there wasn't a chance to get them out sooner, but all will sign within the week as retro-dated.

I hope Callista is back in time tomorrow but assume she'll be missing this class. All attempts I've had to bring in others have kept crumbling. I've contacted EUS (Education Undergraduate Society) to see if I could get students to come participate in a workshop with the class – in doing so, with enough other courses, they can get certificates for their portfolio. I'm hoping this goes forward and pulls a few others in...8hrs/month is not a big commitments, but with it being on the weekend does pose problems for most student work...that seems to be one of the many stumbling blocks. I will approach Kim again this next week to see if any sorority or fraternity groups are interested as information has now circulated through their groups.

Teaching wise – it was review, cleaning, and keeping it light – the class flew by and the students left happy and excited for tomorrow. I'm so excited to see what it looks like on camera – fingers crossed!

October 3, 2015

(2 without – corey and amy, 7 with – randy (late), Lars, Bill, Nicole, Maggie, blake, Julia)

Day 1 of being able to film!

I have one performer (participant) that doesn't want to be filmed that I might be able to train to be the filmer, we'll see – builds that extra piece of sustainability and shows the full inclusive idea (thinking about having Nicole take on a small creative role as well – even if it's a personal solo for a piece?)

I loved the structure of today (**all about flexibility**) – We filmed the first rehearsal (in studio – weather was not suitable for filming the production piece). Camera died. Ran one more rehearsal run, **I am fully committed to speaking reminders during filming**, which will obviously require editing and overlaying the music to match – but worth it.

I love hearing the support that Lillian and Amy are trying to bring in others. I keep trying to get more involved so it's nice to hear others are trying the same. I keep thinking that if it were more mixed, what is already great – could be even better. I'm having a hard time trying to get Blake to interact with others in the dance – this is where it would be really helpful if another without were around to pull him in and interact with him. I think Randy has a hard time getting involved in the happy dance, again it would be nice to have someone interact with him and bring him in a bit more.

We also started working on the next creation – all about 'understand'ing others. Thinking about the negative labels we have and how they bring us down – then all the positives. I have ideas about this one being in city hall or other areas – masks that hide our identities, where people judge others before getting to know them, it may be a more solo inspired piece – negative label with positive label cutting in, personal strengths shown. Small vignettes throughout the space...things to think about in creation and offer with the performers. Thinking about what I can do off of my foot? Unsure...

October 9, 2015

Today – pain.

3 weeks of trying to deal with this and it just gets worse – but it made me think, this is 3 weeks of me being in pain and uncomfortable – with the crutches, getting looks, etc – it’s one of those reminders that normally my life can go by unnoticed, but for the dancers, do they ever feel stared at? Looked at?

I did have to sit for the dance class – I cannot put any weight on my foot, but come 2/3pm it is so painfully swollen that it hurts no matter what I do – it forced me to change my plans. I was SO glad to have Callista there tonight and new comer Jasmine, she jumped right in! It was so great to have her and the class was so welcoming (as always).

We did clay sculpture – making images of the negative words we worked with last week - gallery walk and chat with partner, and did it again. I loved the descriptions that came from it and I think it put them in the space that I wanted for when we started making our masks. They really enjoyed writing and decorating their masks with the negative words, knowing that this next piece is all about getting rid of those labels and seeing the talents, strengths, and positivity inside...they were all eager to get filmed in areas of their strengths...a lot of logistics and juggling and me moving slow might make this difficult...might have to develop a plan B?

Found out a big chunk of the dancers are away next Saturday – so going to try and schedule an earlier dance class Friday – it sounds very possible, fingers crossed!

I love the family that is in the dance space, I love that even if things don’t go as planned – all are happy to perform and be there.

We performed and included Jasmine in ‘Yellow’ she was awesome – I’m hoping she had fun with it and enjoyed it enough to come back – it’s a worry that lingers – what could I have done to make it better? If I could actually dance and do as I intended to do, would it have been a better class – more enticing to come back to?

I just want to get this first one filmed and out there. I want there to be something continuing the awareness of last years initiatives...just feel things so slow...and now slower and more encumbered with injury.

If I couldn’t do the dances I planned – is there someone that could take these classes on? I think it’s another one of those sustainable things – this is obviously a priority for me and for many of the performers with, but it’s one of those things that gets lost in the hustle of others lives...toes feels like they’re going to explode – it’s kind of ridiculous!?

October 16, 2015

FILMING DAY!!!!

What a great day – busy but great.

I loved the gathering of everyone, the excitement, the smiling faces, everything was just a push to all things ‘yellow’ ☺

I was so thankful for the support in carting supplies over – the parents sticking around as audience, Lisa helping to run a quick warm-up and get the space ready – it couldn’t have gone much smoother.

Just like most Fridays – it was clear there was review needed to get heads back into the space and the dance we’ve created – after a review the following takes were much cleaner, it’s what I’ve noticed in all things Friday.

Now the hard part – editing. I’m hoping to get some help from a tech guru in the education faculty and since it’s an intended social media share – others can see these takes and help with that process.

The video will add a new dimension for reflection as will the pending focus group based on the release of the video, social media, the class interview, there are so many facets that are now opening up and being added to the project...it’s all happening now.

October 17, 2015

Small class today, Julia, Nicole, Maggie, Lars and myself...but great headway on the next piece “Understand”. Together we did some movement improv, some freezes, work on our masks, and the creation of a choreographed piece that will be repeated throughout the song.

I really liked this chance to work with each dancer one-on-one and it will work for next weekend to have them help teach the other dancers.

Not a lot of realizations with today – just a repeated sense of the need for balance in numbers with this project, it would allow for this type of progress and accomplishment, pride for all members every time.

This dance will allow for more independent contributions – less of an entire group creation, more of a group and individual strengths.

I am a leader

I am an athlete

I am a dancer

I am a hard worker

I am a musician

I am compassionate

I am responsible

I am an artist

These are the types of statements that I want as messages for the audience – after removing the masks of negative judgment...etc.

October 23, 2015

Today I had the best turnout so far – out of 240 ed students I finally had one show up!!!!

So Callista (Jackson), Amy, Lucia, and myself (still physical issues with my foot and aircast – x-ray again on Monday – fingers crossed)...then Lars, Julia, Maggie, Blake, Randy, Bill, participant – we pushed through a lot today!!!!

I had to take advantage number one of the numbers, but also the fact that tomorrow is meant to be mostly a review day (Callista is teaching because I have a conference in Canmore from 9-1:30 and won’t make it back in time)...anyways. We pushed. It’s always tricky to fit so much in, in such a short time but with the almost balanced numbers – it worked really well and although was a little bit quick paced – it was really good!

I felt so driven to get as much in, again timing wise, no class next Saturday – might film some stuff in class on Friday – also need to do an interview with the class to get a quick read on what they're thinking, that will likely be the first weekend in November.

I've altered plans to record people in various places – getting around is hard enough, to add those extra pieces on now, is too much to try and schedule – instead it'll be large signs of affirmations.

It was nice solo work, partnering, and in a sense full group collaboration – it was nice, but I also find myself thinking in terms of camera work and less in 'choreo' work, which I think is also difficult for the class to follow it seems maybe a bit more fragmented, but a needed way for me to conceptualize the work – not sure how to get my kind of broken video work to make sense to the music portion of the class.

Really glad to have Callista working with the group tomorrow, 1 new addition and everything else review based on what we're doing today...I can't wait to hear how things go with her and the class.

October 30, 2015 (Pre-class)

Getting the video edited was OK (thanks to expertise of an education staff member) – which also means showing the video to the class tonight and setting up the focus group. Email went out this afternoon and have already received replies and correspondence in agreement to participate!!!! I know it's unlikely to get everyone together at the same time, so I've invited the option of individual interviews as well (not ideal – but I welcome the feedback and diverse views of the invited focus group members).

Post-class

Class today was packed...we danced, we watched the first video, and we interviewed...Lars did not handle this well – he got very irritated but eventually warmed up a lot. Maggie was off as well but I got her up and dancing eventually.

In terms of the interview there wasn't a lot of new ideas or information that I got – **I knew based on previous interviews the questions that were asked would have unclear answers from the participants, but I still wanted to try, the clearest idea was that they wanted more structured choreography which I know the group can do really well – with time, that's the tricky part.** There is more structured choreo in this 2nd dance that we're working on...what is more clear than anything, after seeing Callista's professionally filmed and edited social work video – my amateur quality really shows. I knew that going into the project that the videos would not be perfect, and this first one is not, but I hope the message is kind of communicated in it? As I told the group after watching the video with them, the worst part is the person filming it (ME!)...it was jerky, the zoom was not smooth – I hope that my poor camera and editing skills doesn't take away from the concept? The focus group will come in handy for this – so far 4 of the 9 have said yes, they'd love to be involved...what I wonder, is if I should restructure my finances and budget for better filming and editing – between time and money I'm just not sure I can give more to it but I know it would be worth it in terms of quality – doing that would also allow me to be part of the dance as well...I guess I just have to suck it up and do it.

November 6, 2015

Had participant, Nicole, Maggie, Lars, Julia, and myself tonight (so many away for holidays etc...) It was a wonderful class, Maggie was goofy, Lars was in a great mood, and Nicole, who had been away for the last two weekends was back and as always wonderful. **Today I looked at growth – Julia has been getting so much better at mirroring – she still needs reminders but wow, she’s getting so much stronger even with taking risks with balances and shifts in weight. Participant is also coming out of her shell. She came by herself tonight, without Amy, and she cut loose a few times and danced freely – she still laughed and closed in a few times, but it’s been very difficult to get her to open herself up. Maggie was dancing all class, she mirrored, she freestyled, she led a warm-up activity with her legs and arms (small coaching) but something she definitely would not have done a year ago, even a month ago she wasn’t doing this much.**

Today, after doing our rehearsal and dancing through the dance piece a few times – I think we can definitely get this one recorded quickly. I’ve dropped off the raw footage to Kyle now and am hoping he has something ready for next week with my focus group??? Whatever it is, it’ll be better than what I created, but at the same time, not sure what is going to be good enough to make it into the final cut (I didn’t give much good stuff to work with).

Back to the dance part, class went great – I used everything from the focus group – did a little bit more with warm-up, had more structured partner work, reviewed the dance and built on it, had a dance party moment before winding down and doing some personal stretch and review time of the class. We did some free-form movement, mirroring in the space and it was such a great moment – one I wished I had recorded, all participated fully, all interacted, all moved through the space, all were present and just in that moment – **I closed off the mirrors before we did this part and I think it really helped pull everyone into their own body awareness and closer awareness of those around them – rather than always staring and focusing on the mirror** – what works so well as a dance teaching tool, does not work the same in this class – works for the structured pieces but definitely not the independent creative pieces. Looking forward to doing more with this. I wish everyone was back next weekend – we’d be ready to perform and dance through the CASA space – I think that’ll be where we create our next video - bust out of the studio and into the hallways, etc...I’ll have to check and see if that’s an option? Could work?

November 7th, 2015

Besides being my mom’s birthday, it was a great class today. We had Jasmine, Callista, participant, Lars, Maggie, Nicole, Julia and myself. We taught those that were away yesterday the whole routine (it’ll look very different when videotaped – at least in my head) but it will work great for a live performance in the Community room for IDPD. **I have loved these last two classes – we have more dance breaks, more fun, and there’s more sharing happening.** Still difficult to get a few things across – the movement tag is a hard one for Julia – she knows when to move (most of the time) but doesn’t understand the freeze as a mirror of someone...maybe I’ll just change it to take a

freeze and pass it with a tap...something that would work for Julia...Maggie gets the freeze and pass idea, but she doesn't want to dance in between – she dances at other times, but not during this part, she just walks over to someone, same with participant, less movement – more walking, but they dance during other times in the class.

Lars has been in great moods these last two days – I wonder if he enjoys being the only guy in class (no Bill, Blake, or Randy)?

We have the majority of the dance piece ready for filming – the hard part is practicing it in different spaces – I'll have to chat with CASA to see if there's a possibility of moving and filming in the entire space...

Have had switches happen in our schedule – we were bumped by another booking – no Friday or Saturday rehearsal on the 20th and 21st, but we have a space on the 22nd – email has already been sent out and reminder will be given repeatedly about this change.

Had some great collaboration with everyone today, mirror partners that switched and moved around, dancers pushing themselves and their partners – I had to applaud at one moment because of how symmetrical the class was with a shared mirror line – it was quite stunning to see the freeze, I was thoroughly impressed and even said as much as I applauded the group.

I'll think about a change in the tag game – maybe just base it on a freeze in front of the person and that's the pass...maybe work with a negative space aspect – that could work...we'll see.

November 13, 2015 – FOCUS GROUP

The focus group proved to be extremely valuable, although 1 didn't show-up and 2 cancelled to make rain-checks at later times, the two that were there were great sounding boards for ideas and discussion. Their comments were thoughtful and resonated with me. A few standouts – needs to be shown in educational settings – university and high school, as well as in community contexts – meetings and/or gatherings with this as a potential agenda item for discussion.

The views on 'Yellow' as different themes came across as did suggestions for making the overall message clearer – gray start, move to colour with Maggie introduction, etc...

They weren't at all thrown off by the camera work and shaky quality, it's a normal thing in videos these days, etc.

They both struggled with how to make it more of a lasting impact and not just a flash in the pan – **it's definitely the biggest struggle with this work, how does it make a change in the audience?**

November 13th, 2015

Class tonight we had Amy, Callista, Nicole, Lars, Randy, Blake, Maggie, and Julia...the class flew by and we made great strides in a portion of the introduction for the video – using various movement qualities and getting down and back up, solo and trios, etc... We showed each other our pieces, a little group share with applause. Then we worked with our pre-video intro, working with improvised movement and different ways of holding and showing our letters for 'UNDERSTAND'. I'm more excited to get Kyle's eye in the filming for this one and make sure that the quality is a step-up from the 'Yellow'.

It's going to be hard to lose a class next weekend and change a date and miss a few of the dancers...no Friday or Saturday and a move to Sunday...won't be great, but best option available.

November 14, 2015

Today we had Jasmine, Amy, Randy, Julia, Maggie, Nicole, participant, and Blake – and I stopped with the masters project stuff and just said, today we're doing choreography 'The Chain' as requested from the mid-round interview – well, I was floored! They did incredible! **The entire group picked up and did so much of the choreo so incredibly. We spent the entire class learning approx. 1 minute and 30 seconds of the song, we did partner cleaning, talking through the song, repetition, using the mirror, fake it till you make it.**

Had an epiphany about my research focusing on the 'reverse inclusion' idea...Yellow, was a great example – I asked them to work on the umbrella pinwheel, but it was a tricky thing – they were conforming to my vision – it didn't work well, what could have happened if I just said – here's the umbrella's – go!?

So then next I thought about Understand, the mirroring tag, etc...it's not working with a few – change it to fit the group...small change for the others that get it – big improvement for the few that don't, etc...

I'm definitely going to film next week – quick review and see what we can do for filming in the community space...they did so great with the learned steps I want to get a copy of it (not for project release, but just something I can look at for the future)...

November 20, 2015

Focus interview with Betty today. Wow – she really got me thinking...we went off script in terms of the interview questions – however, many of her questions and discussion items hit on areas that the interview addressed. The biggest take away I had was **how can I make the audience connect with the performers?** Of course there is a theme evident, it was easy to see and clearly depicted (I think especially with the new edits) – but a **theme and lasting impact aren't one and the same – SO TRUE!!! To make a lasting impact, there has to be a connection made – a narrative of the person, a way to identify them as more than a performer – connect to the person.** Much of what Betty said resonated with me and how I'm approaching the 2nd video, and the style/message/presentation of it...they're quite different.

November 22, 2015

Today we were in the Community Space – most handled this just fine, Maggie was taken aback. Once she saw that it was the same people as the dance studio class, she was much better – but she was still less active for parts of the class.

As promised I filmed 'The Chain' choreography – we reviewed a few times in multiple ways and after the 4th review process – I filmed – they did incredible! Some adapted moves to fit their bodies – pulled cues from other dancers – fake it till you make it – and after each review and the filmed run – **applause (this applause speaks volume to me, congratulations for one another and hopefully a sense of pride – Julia say's it best "I did good!")**

We then moved full on into our 'Understand' work. Knowing that we'll be performing this live and in video – there's likely going to be some confusion as there are going to be slight differences in ways that things are filmed and how it is performed. Today we just focused on the performance in that space. We weren't sure of the size or area for the performance, so I just made a judgment call and hope it's close?!

I think I have most that will be performing for IDPD, and it's a great dance to perform live...still working out the logistics of the words/phrases for projection and clarity of the transformations. Not sure if they'll be ready for IDPD – I meet with Kyle on Saturday to discuss that part – as the principles for the projected words – will be the words that are in the film as well (scrolling or through various transitions).

The last video has to happen very fast in terms of creation and filming – YIKES, it's going to be tight!!!

Had a call from Amy last night – thanking me for the class and for creating such a welcoming environment. She has benefited from the therapeutic side-effect of the work; connecting with others, feeling safe, valued, but also accepting herself and moving beyond insecurities that have troubled her for quite some time – a very vulnerable conversation that showed so much strength, I did inquire as to if she was in need of other mental health support – she has support and has been using that support for a couple years – this has been great progress in that area. Many sentiments that Amy expressed I very much mirrored – this class and the previous course and rehearsal work, has been very healing to me as well – body, mind, and emotion, there are many things I keep private and deal with independently, **I have found these classes to be a very mindful practice for me,** I am a much stronger person now than I was a year ago – I think largely because of the unintended results of this class, **the power of a positive, safe, celebratory community does wonders.**

November 27 and 28, 2015

Gearing up for the live performance for IDPD, rehearsing, and getting video work done. The last two days have been whirlwinds – partly from sick, partly from pain, partly from just being busy – I am proud of the work done in the last two days – I know the filming quality will be WAY better, plus more editing techniques are added...but I think the message is going to be even clearer – but I'm also hoping we've created a little more interaction/connection with the audience to potentially feel more of that impact? I worry more about getting the last video done – it's going to be tricky, more story driven/character driven but also more close movement...again, early thoughts – which can quickly change, it might be in various places, making our way to Esquires as a potential place.

Danced with the boot on – was not fun, but gave me another sense of 'wanting to look good for the camera' but really – it's such a minor thought?!

I think I'll have OK numbers for the IDPD – bigger thing, I noticed Maggie twirling her elastic again, hasn't done that in a long time (is it the videoing with film crew, the bouncing we've done between spaces – community room and studio, is something causing more nerves? Is it the live performance coming up?)

Lars wasn't there today – he's been saying things about covering up his eyes (dancing with sunglasses – after seeing 'Yellow' he said he didn't like his face – wondering if he has an insecurity with that, that I've never seen before?)

December 3-5th, 2015

Busy three days.

Thursday – IDPD – we performed ‘Understand’ in front of an audience. I was worried about a few things (performance size, media issues, nerves of performers, performing in a new space, etc...) The company did GREAT! Maggie went way beyond anything she ever did in class and rehearsal – and nowhere near what she did for the video, she really came out of her shell – there was still issues with the statue tag (Julia and Lars have struggled with this aspect before – it was a tricky thing for them, we tried to cue them but I couldn’t see them in the freeze I was in – but it was fine). More importantly **they loved the performance – they revelled in the applause and although I think the video release is important for them, there is something to be said for live performance and instant gratification of applause.**

Friday – started work on our last video. I feel the crunch of this one – we have 3 classes to set it up and film on the 4th. I debated canceling the filming, but I think we can do it – I am removing the aspect of filming in alternate location – cause that is hard to set-up and rehearse in prior to filming and we just don’t have the time. I think of many of the videos I watch and some of my favourites are in studio with a small audience – it’s filmed straight on and it’s just about the dance and maybe that’s what this one is – no story, no theme or message, just dancing to fun and catchy music. We worked with chairs, and cannon work – it went well...we’ll build on it.

Saturday – brought in the line dance (THANK YOU CALLISTA!) had issues with the counting and Callista was a saving grace in helping me see the gap. The class picked it up well (Randy struggles with rhythm but the others are good), Maggie was not participating today (Nicole wasn’t there – so it’s typical that Maggie doesn’t really dance). We did some great chair work today – still unsure with staging it, but it’s definitely so interesting and fun to watch. Picks up mirror work, cannon, independent dance within a confined structure of choreographed moves.

The classes these last two days were great – we missed Lars and I think it will be hard for him to pick things up because he does like to do so much unplanned movement – which means I might get him to do a solo at some point in the song. We’ll have to see how things go on Friday next week...

December 11 and 12

I’ve been thinking a lot about the shape of the video projects.

Wishing for Yellow – very free, un-scripted, the movements all came from the dancers – I simply framed it with a structure – little to no choreography.

Understand – choreography and free movement with theme or feeling – about half and half in terms of structured/unstructured (maybe a little less in terms of structure).

The One – all structured. It’s 100% choreographed. This wasn’t intentional; it just sort of came together that way. We’ve had way less time to work on this piece, but it’s pretty solid – at least at times...Lars and Randy have a tricky time with this one – Lars

wants to do so much more of his unstructured qualities and Randy has a difficult time keeping up with the movements. **Losing Blake for the filming is going to hurt! He has the dance, the rhythm - the beats down! He is such a leader in this dance.** It was wonderful to see him shine today and really take control of all of what we were doing.

It'll be fun to get the video for this one done and I'm excited to wrap-up, but also going to miss this group, especially if the Wednesday/Saturday classes are larger – **this is a safe place for everyone, we're a close little family.**

APPENDIX C

Instructional Summary Tips (in no particular order)

- **Vocal cues.** All dancers are allowed to give cues and at times it necessary, it's also important to allow for prompts as part of the rehearsal process and performance.
- **Repetition.** Review is crucial with any classroom or studio work.
- **Routine.** Whatever the structure of the class is, it's important to maintain a structure. The structure I adapted throughout the rehearsal process was:
 - Warm-up, review, build new, run, dance party, cool down (with vocal summary all that we had done that class). Even with this routine it's important to be flexible to adapt your focus based on what was planned and what actually occurs.
- **Variety.** This means that although a routine is important, variety within that routine is also equally necessary. Changes in movement styles, songs choices, auditory and visual cues, solo, partner, small group, entire company creation and collaboration.
- **Chunking.** Teach your dances in small intervals. If a warm-up activity can involve aspects of what you're teaching in the creation process, it allows for repetition, but also unassumingly teaches a concept. Continue building the dance through these small 'chunks' of dance movement, building a little bit more or adding the next piece a little at a time.
- **Transitions.** Have clear transitions built within the performance. A clear change is memorable and will allow all dancers to better remember the structure of the dance. Changes in movement quality, location, costume, props, song, etc. are all ways to create variation.
- **Collaborative building.** It's important to have a framework or vision to work within, but it's necessary to allow for ensemble creation. Look for dancer creation and be inspired by their choices – this is a fundamental part of democratizing the studio and allowing for all input as being valuable.
- **Move More – Talk Less.** The concept of “show don't tell” came from all of the dancers, their favourite classes were ones that we didn't speak or talk about the creation, but we just did. This allows for more improvisational discoveries to be made and dancers are encouraged to do what feels right to them, which supports the positive learning environment.
- **Dance Party.** It doesn't have to be this overt, but it's the reminder that there is always time for fun. These are moments when it's possible to connect with every dancer; during creation this isn't always possible, but within a few minutes in a dance party, it's easy to connect with every dancer even if only for a moment.

- Cues. Provide verbal and visual cues within the rehearsals that continue through to the performances.
- Becoming the Audience. It's important that dancers have time to be the audience and also be celebrated as the performer. It may not always work depending on the intricacy and connection with the performers and their reliance on one another – but even if it's in smaller phrases, it's so good to have this aspect in the class.