

## Dance & Disability Panel Transcript

October 13, 2018

Luna Dance Institute

Panelists:

**Suzanna Curtis**, autism specialist & researcher

**Jennifer Dennehy**, dance teaching artist from Erie, PA

**Eric Kupers**, Dandelion/Bandelion artistic director & Inclusive Interdisciplinary Performance artist educator at CSU East Bay

**Dwayne Scheuneman**, AXIS Dance Company member & inclusive dance teacher

**Julie Slater**, special education teacher, Grass Valley Elementary, Oakland

**Judith Smith**, founder, AXIS Dance Company & inclusion advocate

Facilitator: **Nancy Ng**, Director of Creativity & Policy, Luna Dance Institute

*This is an excerpt from the panel conversation, starting after introductions.*

Nancy: In talking about how you address that in your work and how might be, like we're all sitting here. How can we also just explore that?

Eric: Well I think having these conversations is really important and over and over again and committing to these conversations long term 'cause I think it's really good for everybody at whatever their entry point is dance and or disability to be continually questioning, what do I mean by dance? And, what do I mean by disability? And, it serves all of us to refresh that over and over again. And, I think there's something, like each of us doing whatever we can in the position that we're in to sort of bring forth these values of inclusion and seeing dance and education in a more inclusive way. So, for instance at the university there's just such a push toward online classes right now because you can get huge numbers of students in and you don't have to use a room.

Nancy: Right, it's more money for the college.

Eric: Right, and students don't have to come in and I've just, one of the things I can do is say I'm never going to teach one of those classes. I've made that clear, and I just refuse but it's sort of a losing battle 'cause those classes are probably gonna come but I can say I'm not going to participate in that and hold firm to that. And, I feel that whatever way each of us interact with these issues in the way we live our values it spreads and it impacts the system, the whole system. And, the other thing I was thinking about was that question, how do you let funders know, or in my case administrators know, that high impact doesn't just mean numbers, is somehow being able to make the case for looking at systems, and how

the fact that there is this small class of 4 people with disabilities is helping to balance our larger society. And, maybe some classes it does have 100 people in it and it happens online for something else but, to have a balanced, thriving human community we need to have these intimate spaces.

Judy: I think that it's kind of what I started with about entry points. That there needs to be a huge range of artistic styles and I don't want to say quality but, what you create for the proscenium stage when you are trying to get funding from the major national funders and you are trying to get on the stage at the Kennedy Center of Yerba Buena. Somehow that, that there is a range of work being funded and looked at for different reasons. So, instead of just having one criterium for what quality is, and I think that this is something that contemporary dance has grappled with through the years, what is artistic quality? And, it's different for everybody, funders and artistic panels. And, I don't know how to do this and it's not something I figured out in my 30 years of working in the field, how are companies that do really want to strive for that level of artistry, kind of within the framework of contemporary dance, how are they able to do that and able to grow and how are other companies able to grow into that and how are companies able to do the kind of work that Eric does or improvisationally-based or jazz-based or hip-hop based and be able to be seen for being valid and important in the canon of the work that's doing, being done for people with people with disabilities? And, I think that's something that the field is always grappling with. With contemporary dance, you know when you're dealing with inclusive work but you know it's still so new for a lot of people and a lot of funders. You know 'cause there are going to be those people that really want to go in and know they came out of a dance rehearsal and know that they danced their asses off and I want them to be able to do that whether they're disabled or not, and to be able to really achieve some level of technical expertise, whatever that is for them. And, at that same time I want people to also be able to have an experience of dance that's positive. And, I don't know if I'm being articulate in this but, you know it's this tension in what's seen as artistic quality and what's not seen as having artistic quality.

Patricia: Can I ask a question about that?

Nancy: Yeah I have a question, too. Go ahead.

Patricia: Well, one of the things that comes to mind for me is I'm thinking a lot about opportunities to learn, right? And, so I don't believe any person alive wants to be given an opportunity to call themselves a dancer or performer on a big stage without an opportunity to get better, in their own artistry, whatever that means, in different situations. So, is part of what you're saying when you say multiple entry points actually just having lots of opportunities for people to grow in their artistry as opposed to, and it's not that there's, just, well, there might be levels, somebody said the word standards, there might be standards, just that the whole world is so rich in opportunity. . .

Judy: Everybody can find their place.

Patricia: Eric wants to see no lines, wants the lines blurred, and that's really compelling to me. And, at the same time, as a choreographer, I want to get better and better and better at my choreography, and I

know that for me, that means there's a rigor to that that only I can define. So, that's something that I don't know is just coming up for me. Like, I long ago let go the outside world, the Yerba Buenas define what that was for me. I'm also not trying to perform there.

Nancy: And then when we take this kind of idea of the definition of rigor and quality and where the entry points are and, I'm actually thinking about it now in terms of the grant proposals and applications that I write and the 3000 character box, the 2000 character box that I have to stick in the fund our program at Grass Valley and they're asking, the CA Arts Council is asking, what do you do to work with kids with special education, what do you do with those kids? Thinking about, you know I have to use the word quality in my thing but, thinking then what does that really mean, do you know. I mean I'm competing against, our grants, against all the other people are also wanting to bring arts education, dance education to all these other communities and school communities and what are we really, and they're the panelists, what do they think I even mean by what I'm saying or what the other folks are saying and I, yeah. I'm just going to say that because I struggle with that because it should be, yeah, and I'd love for some of the folks that work with kids here comment on this because it should be what really is engaging to the child, and it's not about necessarily someone else's definition of –

Patricia: Transforming their education experience.

Eric: Can I, before we go into that just comment on what Patricia said? Because I think you're setting up a false dichotomy.

Patricia: I might be. Yeah.

Eric: In work you said is boundary-blurring and on the other hand, work that has a lot of rigor.

Patricia: Oh, I didn't mean that so thank you for saying.

Eric: You know, that's my pet peeve in general, that rigor can mean so many things and it can be physical rigor and muscular rigor, it can be rigor about communication techniques, it could be rigor about learning to hang out in a space where we don't know what's happening and it's very uncomfortable and we have to deal with that. It could be rigor in dealing with racism and sexism and all that, and I think sometimes we equate rigor and technique and quality with the Yerba Buena and the highly funded, socially accepted greats of dance and, I think that's a mistake and that to me what drew me to modern dance and looking at the history of modern dance, is modern dance is what I believe is a discipline of questioning and questioning and questioning and inclusive dance is the edge of that question right now, and that so much of the dance community has gotten really canonized and lost on these old aesthetics and being a questioner or challenging authority means that we often exist on the margins a lot and I think actually there's value.

Patricia: Yeah, .... I feel like what you're doing, there is rigor, rigor in creativity. But it's more, my thinking was more, you've been working with an established company for a long time so AXIS says is there a place for a beginner to come in there and then is there an opportunity for someone who's a veteran

level of that work to still continue to push the envelope. That will always be true regardless of our approach. We have to allow beginners to come but we have to keep pushing the veterans to go deeper with their inquiry, something that I wanted to clarify.

Eric: I have thoughts on that but I want to . . .

Nancy: Thank you.

Julie: Well, kind to . . . back on children and dance 'cause I'm not a dancer by any means and Luna was a really big experience for me to have to go into and define what I thought of as dance because I thought the kids were going to line up, and do a plié and that whole step and that was going to be, and they just started running and jumping and leaping and laughing and that very first year I had to bring my laptop and just sit in the corner on my laptop because otherwise I would just interrupt the dance teacher the entire time going, "But, they're! But! But!" I just couldn't deal with the lack of control and what I didn't see at the time was it was extremely controlled, that the kids were kind of setting the pace for the whole thing. That if you want to talk about what defines quality I think as a teacher over the past 20 years I have noticed that the students coming into my classroom come in with fewer and fewer skills and the one constant that I can put on it is our battle against videos and the gaming technology and the influence that has. And, children are losing social skills and they're losing the ability to see anything that's outside of a 1 ft range around themselves. And, dance for me right is that opportunity where they run into each other and they have to figure out how to go about it, where they trip over each other and they need to apologize and help the other person up and then continue on and listening to what your teacher is saying at the same time and creating something that's really, really beautiful without a screen involved at all. And, when I see that at the beginning of the year, I have the most difficult class I've ever had, the most challenging class I've had in years and I'm baffled at what to do with them but in dance I don't have to worry about that. They can find their own voice and they can find their own space and if there was a way to measure that you would get every grant you ever applied for, I just don't know how to measure that. But, I do see it. I see it in their excitement as they walk up the ramp, I see it in their breathlessness as they leave for the day and they're calmer and they're more focused when they're done with their dance class.

Judy: Yeah, it's that kind of fear you know the technology that is so available to kids that is like squelching imagination. You know, they want everything defined.

Suzanna: Do you also find that the childrens' parents have lower expectations for them? The exceptional students.

Julie: I think so and Grass Valley is a unique school we are 270 children and we have 5 special day classes. So, 1/3 of the student population are in special day classes. So, the expectation of the school community is high. We expect you to follow the behavior patterns we're going to set. We have high expectations for them. And, I do think the parents, well my best example is when they pick their child up and the child doesn't say hello just immediately reaches into the parents' pocket and gets the parent's

phone and then it's quiet for the parent, and, believe me, I've got 4 kids. I love quiet, I understand how important it is, but it's taking away that most important human connection time. And so I do think expectations are getting lowered because of that.

Suzanna: I was saying so because I believe if that for exceptional children at least, or neurodivergent children, a lot of people who don't know better have lower expectations for them and this persists throughout adulthood. I've been on panels as a researcher and asked hard questions we talk, we think are rigorous. I've been on panels as an autistic person and they don't ask us anything. They email us all the questions beforehand and they're very, very simple and we go around the room and we each say a few words. They assume we can't have a conversation. And, I think that holding people, holding disabled children to high standards is very important.

Julie: I agree with you.

Suzanna: I have a friend who works in direct care so she deals with a lot of autistic children and a lot of times the parent will say the child is incontinent or not potty trained and then she says when she deals with them they have no problem using the potty, it's the parents who say they can't. And, I don't want to extrapolate and say that'd be the case with every kid, the parent didn't try hard enough but I do wonder how often someone just gave up.

Dwayne: So, I was thinking about later coming up in the systemic change but, thinking about what Suzanna just said now and, if we get more studios on board with including students with disabilities then we have to find a way to get those dance teachers to understand education procedure for students with disabilities and how to set high standards for those students in their dance class. And, right now we're at the very beginning level of just getting studios to open their doors. I mean that's just pretty much right? Okay. So, then we have all these other steps to go and as long as we've been working on this we still are like on the first one. And, high standards is like . . .

Judy: Yeah, I feel like we're still at the tip of the ice berg and you know in some ways the questions we were having 30 years ago we're still having the same questions and we're getting closer to articulating some answers to them but, we're just still like a brand new field in that way I think. And, the more that we introduce people to it kind of the more educating need to be done. Because I as a disabled person I've talked to so many of our disabled dancers who show up at a dance class and they're supposed to be able to welcome but they end up kind of in the back of the room, trying to figure things out for themselves. And, that's not an uncommon occurrence for those of us with disabilities who are attempting to train and take class in the community. And, the more disabled you are, the more true that is.

Dwayne: Can I share a little brief experience with that? That a dancer who has come into, sort of, I'll say this has come into a professional experience but has taken class in the community a lot and, they're being expected to reach a certain level now they're performing as a professional. And, the first little bit of time that they were in this environment because, as they were taking dances in the community, they

were showing up in these local open classes to the community and it was, the person teaching the class was fine with everything they were doing. “Oh, you look good, you look good, you look good.” And, so they’ve come into this professional setting now and in the beginning they were like, “Oh, this is what I see” and there was just a struggle there because they just weren’t pushed and then they enter this other setting where the expectations were higher than what they had been used to. But, they’re getting it figured out now.

Eric: Well, I feel really challenged in all of my teaching because, well I’ve taken some classes with AXIS and that’s been helpful with understanding how to teach dance in a different way, you know, and I’ve experimented with different things but, this is something I’ve really devoted my career to and I’ve spent a lot of time. But, training is all kind of, the training that I had as a dancer and the training that I fall back on immediately when I walk into the dance studio is all a certain kind of body doing a certain kind of movement and those exercises that I remember by heart are the ones that I did when I was a teenager over and over and over again. So, I feel at a loss a lot of times how to make my classes more inclusive beyond saying, “Yes, just come on in.” Then I don’t always know what to do.

Judy: Eric, I want to comment on that because I think that that’s not uncommon for people teaching and my idea is that you know, there needs to be more labs, and more R&D where people get to really, for, god, if we had funding, get in the studio for a month and look at these exercises with different disabled dancers and say, “How do I translate this? And, how do I begin to articulate the work and using inclusive language in a way that, you know dancers with many different kinds of abilities are able to follow along?” And, you know, to really learn, but we don’t have that opportunity to lab and to R&D very much. And, field-wide, I think that’s what’s going to be necessary to get inclusive dance up and going at a lot of different levels, is that time to lab.

Nancy: Yeah, I think that’s a really great point, cause even for myself as a teacher, I’m like, I stumble, I know that, I know that I stumble with my language, my words and I have to pause and think before I give a teaching prompt so I just really appreciate that, yeah. Thank you for sharing that because I do think, so that we as teachers can also just have that permission-

Judy: That you’re set up-

Nancy: That it’s okay to make a mistake basically.

Judy: And, that was the great thing about bringing choreographers in to set work with AXIS. You know, we gave them a safe container, to come in and try all of the ways you know, that they worked with their own company, with us. And, they didn’t have to be afraid or nervous about. Bill T. Jones, the first thing he said to us is, “I’m really intimidated.” Like, “You’re intimidated, buddy?!” But, it is because we really don’t have the language yet, but it’s not a familiar language to most people and so you know, just being able to set up that container to do choreographic labs with disabled dancers and integrating companies so that we have the opportunity to develop that language and that skill in a really safe container, where everybody’s really going to be challenged, and we’re gonna get people more comfortable.

Eric: One question I think that Patricia, you asked, was how to we create training opportunities where someone coming in off the street for the first time can dive in a really seize an experience with people. And, the model that I really use is the model when I studied Aikido, which was that not for all the classes but the black belt and the completely new students were all training together and it was considered that to be a good highly advanced black belt Aikido practitioner you have to be able to, it's really easy to make these things look good for somebody who knows what's going on but for somebody who has no idea what's going on, to find that same flow and connection and, I try to use that in my teaching and want that part of an advanced dancer's training is to be able, easy for advanced dancer to feel really great when everybody else is at the same level but can you feel engaged with people at very different levels and could the training be that as you grow you're also learning how to help other people? That you're constantly going back and forth I think between then different levels? And, that that's a part of technique and rigor to do that.

Jennifer: I love the way you bring Aikido into this. I've been studying Aikido for 2 years now and just doing the same technique with different people, and different people who all do it well, just with different black belts, it doesn't often feel even the same, but no one's doing it wrong.

Eric: Right, right.

Jennifer: They're all doing up to really high standards, and then I can do them sometimes.

Eric: Well, and a great thing about a form like Aikido is working with a partner and so it's not the sole responsibility of the teacher to make sure that everybody's learning. That everybody's learning from each other.

Jennifer: The student must really dive in. Like, you do not rush your opponent.

Eric: No.

Dwayne: I'm just going to say in all this I keep thinking about what you said about the different types of rigor. I'm going to talk!

Eric: Okay.

Dwayne: I'm gonna come over and hang out this week.

Eric: Kay!

Nancy: Something that Eric said, anyway I wrote it down, kind of this idea of existing in the margins and when you're existing in the margins there's an opportunity, right? And, I know that I gave some of you, well, all of you, as panelists, I shared some questions that I might ask, and one of them was thinking on a macro and micro level, like how can we change the system, and I think having a lab like that would be obviously, one way but, thinking about that, and this idea of existing in the margins because you're all working with populations and people that have existed in the margins. Some of you in your artistic work

have existed in the margins, so, thinking about that, what are the opportunities? I'm curious because you had commented, yeah, in terms of that and this topic that we're on. This is an open question to everyone on this panel, not just Eric.

Jennifer: So, if you're in the margins, if you're not being done yet, it frees you up to do anything like, so I think that's a beautiful thing. Like, I think hooping is a great example. There aren't many hoop dance fusion people. I can kind of create whatever I want within that context and it's new and it's different and it's constantly growing. And, I feel like, even in my community there aren't. There's one other person who's a dance educator who's even interested in working with anybody who's not traditionally trained, right. So that opens up opportunities for me to contact partners such as the Parkinson's Foundation or social service organizations and I feel like, then it's more open, right, because nobody's doing it, so then I can see at the margins is a wonderful place to be when you're starting something.

Suzanna: There's another cool margins thing about, because I'm part of it, it's a group for autism, autistic researchers, we share resources with each other, we talk and it's a small group because not everybody gets to call themselves a researcher. You kind of have to get to a weird point in academia where you can call yourself that. And, some of the people that I've come across are doing things that, really rigorous things, really high standard-y things and one woman in the group is in the PhD program doing alternative communication, she uses the touch thing and there's this other woman who's non-speaking entirely and has an aide who does typing and she writes book chapters and articles that are published. There are lots of people who are doing things from the margins and it looks different but, it's immeasurable how valuable it is.

Judy: Well the thing that has kept me endlessly fascinated with integrated dance, inclusive dance is the opportunity to create new movement. You know, when you bring people who move very, very differently together in different apparatus, you know the vocabulary is radically expanded, rather than limited, so I think that's one of the opportunities that, expanding that movement and that possibility. And then, if you want to talk about it on a social justice level, you know whenever we start to bring people with disabilities, disabled people, got left out of multiculturalism in the '80s, diversity in the '90s and early 2000s, and we're getting left out of equity now. We're not including in that laundry list of race, gender, sexual orientation, class you know, age, disability is rarely mentioned so, those of us that are seriously doing DEI, Diversity Equity Inclusion work, you know, I say this every time I'm on a panel, every time I'm talking to you know, someone about DEI if you're not including disability you're not doing it, fully, you're doing a version of it. And, this is something Darren Walker from the Ford Foundation, they launched their equity platform in 2016 and all of a sudden he was getting emails and tweets and calls from people in the disabled community who said, "Wait, what about people with disabilities?" And, he wrote a mini manifesto that you can find online, it was published in September basically saying how he as a gay Black man had missed the mark in developing Ford's equity program and now they've gone back and they're trying to embed disability in every one of their programs but, the problem with that is that you know, people who are receiving Ford Foundation money are operating at a certain level and for most disabled organizations, artists with disabilities, I feel that there needs to be this whole remedial

**LUNA DANCE INSTITUTE**

creativity · community · change

and growth inducing, growth supporting effort from the funders, so that those of us who have been left out, you know, for the history of funding, for example, that we can get what we need to catch up and be at that level because, you can't expect to go from zero to ninety you know, just because you happen to have a disability or you are serving disabled people. So, that's kind of where a lot of my focus is going right now, is just in getting funders on board with equity and different organizations that are talking about DEI to understand. Did anybody see that video that was going around by Gracie and Rachel called "Her"? And, it shows just image after image after image of powerful women. And, I posted on their Facebook page this is really lovely but, why aren't you including women with disabilities, disabled women and when are you going to start to include us in your movement? And, you know, and they wrote back and they said, you know thanks we appreciate, you know, this being brought to our attention and, there was kind of a disclaimer, there were so many women we wanted to include, so I wrote back and I said, well that's great and you know, doing it more is not enough. Including more disabled women in more projects. I said it needs to be there every single time. And, if you need help finding strong disabled women leaders of the civil rights movement I can hook you up. But, it's constantly, constantly fucking calling it out, for 41 years that I've been disabled and I don't see it stopping anytime soon. But, you know when we see disabled people missing from a video that's going viral, when we see you know, San Francisco Foundation has focused so much on race, and I don't want to pit race and disability, it's not an either or it's a yes and, both, but they've basically written disability out of their equity platform. So, those of us who were getting funding who were working with disability organizations are not getting funding. Arts organizations that were working with a wide variety of funding are not able to get funding from the San Francisco Foundation so I think we constantly have to call out this, you know, equity issue for people with disabilities. Blah, blah, blah! (laughter)

Eric: Well, it seems like this word is used a lot now but, I really like it, this intersectionality of all of these issues that, to me it becomes a practice that each of us has to do to, none of us are really completely, really living our life with full diversity and inclusion and that we all have to keep looking at where are my blind spots, where are the places that I'm not, including or not considering this possibility or there people and, how can I widen my thinking, how can I widen my creativity around it? 'Cause I think what often happens in movements for social change is that they become so external and we're going to put this policy in place, which is what has to happen, on a social justice level, but I think what also has to happen is, and I think dance is the perfect place to do this, I think there has to be this internal, embodied experience that changes them that they're then able to see in a new way.

Nancy: Well, you both just addressed, which I knew was going to happen which is why I put it as an alternate question, which is thinking about systemic change and kind of macro and micro level and what needs to happen, I think that was perfect thinking about the macro level and as individually what do we bring to this table?

Eric: Well, especially as educators, what do we see from the next generations? That's a powerful place to be, infiltrating their minds.

Judy: And, dance is such a beautiful way to do that. In AXIS, when I took over the artistic leadership of the company in 1997, we stopped doing things directly about disability because I felt like dance could say enough about inclusion and about collaboration and about ability by not always making it about disability. And you know, had the opportunity, and still do, to perform for thousands of kids who are getting a very, very different look at what dance is, what ability is, how people work together, across difference, so that's the great thing and that's the opportunity that our field has, is that we can go in and we can model these different levels of equity and these different ways that we're including people and it's just what we do.

Dwayne: Judy was talking about visibility and that's what I was thinking about, in terms of, for dance education specifically and including opportunities for people with disabilities, students with disabilities, how do we create change systemically, I think it is about visibility as well, having greater, I mean we're still fighting greater representation in dance classes, in dance teachers and studios on a regular basis instead of just a guest coming to the studio from time to time. We still have a lot of work to do to increase the level of visibility in those programs and we're just in the minds of people who are funding and designing those programs. I mean, when they think of dance still, what was touched on, okay we're going to do all these dance classes and we're going to do this other dance class for the students with disabilities. You know, in Tampa one thing we've been thinking about lately, the people that I've been working with in Tampa and, just to try and change that, I don't know how much of a change it'll be but, we're creating a program that we're just going to take to different dance studios around the area because we feel like if the students growing up in those classes it just becomes second nature to them the programs and the funders and the arts administrators, someone won't have to ask them, "where are the people with disabilities?" They will just ask themselves, where are our dancers with disabilities in this program?

Judith: Yeah, that's the tip of the iceberg thing. You know where we're starting to get this but there's so much work to do.

Julie: We'll start you know in the elementary level, we'll do inclusion classes later on this year where we'll combine students with exceptional needs with general ed classes and what I think would be really wonderful is if we hold your students who have had, who I've had since kindergarten they are now 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders, they were those leaders who took on a GenEd kindergarten class, let them, they're the experts, they're the ones who have been dancing, four or five years, have this kid .... And start to give this sense of pride and this sense of ownership to define yourself, to define yourself as a dancer. It can start very young, and if it does, I feel like that's the best way change is... with those little kids –

Judith: Planting those seeds.

Julie: The way they see themselves.

Dwayne: Yeah, 'cause I'm just thinking about what Judy said and I'm sure when people are designing dance programs they think, alright where are the people of color in these programs?

Judy: Or, LGBT.

Eric: Well, we're lucky if they think that.

Patricia: Yeah. That's a big assumption.

Judith: It's more often-

Dwayne: It's more often than the ones, that thinking about the dancers with disabilities.

Nancy: - In any, in any of that if the door is not open for you when you're young-

Judy: You're not going to be –

Nancy: You're not going to assume that it will be, already your world is closing.

Suzanna: What you were just describing reminds me on the Integrated Playgroup model run by my mentor is famous for.

Nancy: Can you talk a little bit about that?

Suzanna: I'd like to. So, she came up with an integrated playgroup model where there'd be anywhere from 3-5 children and 1 or 2 of them would be autistic and 1 or 2 of them would be expert players, and the autistic children would be the novice players, and there'd be 1 master who doesn't really do anything except get people started then disappear. So, everything is child-led. And, it's actually gotten really good results. It's international now, there are programs all over the world of the children teaching each other how to play and all of those children have had really good outcomes.

Julie: What I like about that model is it's a give and take. It's not just these master players teaching the novice players how to play. They're teaching each other.

Suzanna: They really are, and there's never any attempt to use, any therapies to make the children stop behaving the way they behave, they're included the way they are. If they're doing something a little different everybody gets used to it, and that's very ---.

Julie: It's just what I have to wrap my brain around as an elementary school teacher, there is no wrong way for these kids to go into dance class, they're going to go in, and they have taught me that.

Patricia: And that's been a real struggle for us, frankly, working for public schools because so for example, I was watching a class a couple years ago, it was a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade class and our teacher, a Luna teacher was having a hard time with the classroom teacher, she wants to pull out kids from dance, and I said, "well, let me come watch", the dance teacher was new to us so I said, "well let me come watch the class". And, it was like the best class I ever saw. The kids were doing really, I mean the bar was high. Expectations were super high of what kids were going to be able to do in class and one child periodically would pull himself out and walk around the edge of the class you know and then come back in, you

know, I think he did that two times while I was watching. And, another kid came way too close to her during the group and she said I need some space but, that was it. Otherwise, the class was like something I'd want to put on TV, you know as a great dance class and, afterwards the teacher said, "that's it I'm pulling out of dance class because these kids just can't handle it." And, she ended up quitting her job so there were other things going on, too, but I was for me, the question I need to learn how to ask because, other people, yes we wish everyone would learn how to change but, the question I need to learn how to ask, is find out from the teacher, "what are you seeing that I'm missing?" 'Cause I think what she's seeing is her own fear magnified and maybe there is something that I'm missing, I don't know, I've been teaching for a long time. But, if not and she could just get in touch with her own fear, maybe there's a dialogue that can, you know move things along. 'Cause what I was seeing was that kid who was walking around was self-regulating.

Julie: Yeah.

Patricia: And, that's what everybody says, the ability to self-regulate as soon as kid pulls himself out, we'd say okay dance class is over! (Lots of talking agreeing . . .) And, I was like wait, wait, yeah so it's a you know, it's a long journey.

Eric: Yeah!

Julie: What you said though about the teacher saying they can't handle it, I hear that a lot, from colleagues, the kids can't handle it, no, *they* can't handle it, that lack of control and we can't handle the way it looks different than math class and that goes full circle back to that idea of high expectations that by setting the expectation high, in your competence they should be able to pull themselves back and get to when it's time to do your language arts program, they'll pull themselves back to where they need to be.

Patricia: Yeah, and it'd probably help a little bit by having a wind-down before the end of class but, you know, everybody in this group really believes in the power of play and the power of dance and if we don't let kids play and let kids dance or move then they don't learn how to, you have to get too close to somebody before you know you're too close. You have to fall over before you can walk and that's . .

Julie: And, this doesn't teach you how to do that. Giving a lot of time at the end.

Nancy: Yes we'd have to have a whole other panel. But, let's open this up to just questions in general. So, um, yeah. We have great folks here who've thought a lot about this. And, so have you all the audience. So they're, I see someone's notebook is open. So, do you have questions?

Audience: Well, I teach a preschool and we just started dance 2 weeks ago and I've been thinking a lot about, I've definitely already seen like impact happening, like we've done Brain Dance and it's helped a lot. I guess I want to think about how to measure, like we were talking about like, quality and not quantity. And so how to measure the impact and I don't know, I've had the same experience. I've been sprinting in circles and they were totally fine with it and I was like, whatever, and I'm thinking this will

translate to the classroom but, actually the opposite happens, like they were done with dance and they came in were totally calm. So, that's impactful and that I can directly see. But I guess other ways that you guys think about measuring the impact in dance programs especially in schools.

Eric: Is it measuring for you, sort of as the teacher for how it's impacting them? Or, I feel like a different question than measuring impact to tell the administrators.

Audience: No, I think like for myself and I also have a grant that is funding it so, I do want to be able to, and I think report on, so impact for that but I guess for me to be able, like I can see it, but to be able to name the impact for other people.

Julie: Well, my favorite story, I have multiple occupational therapy stories that I can share but this is the one that really stood out for me. So, most of my kids do get occupational therapy services mainly for their handwriting and how it impacts . . . and I had one girl who just could not write with one hand. Her W's were this and then she'd switch to this hand or the M's were the same way and she'd go back and forth would never cross that midline and she had been in OT since she was in early childhood so probably by the age of 2 she was starting to receive services. And, after about 4 or 5 months of Luna Dance and really talking with the instructor and also, I was working with an amazing OT at the time who really understood the importance of that full-body experience and really understood the importance of that midline cross this child finally starting writing in appropriate manner. And, I always say that Luna accomplished what the OT was not able to get to. Because, the OT is going to work with this and she had 50 kids she has to see for half an hour every week. She doesn't have time to do the whole full-body experience but, Luna really addressed those needs. I think you'll probably find, especially with those little guys, you're really going to find – in their fine motor skills.

Patricia: Well, I want to say something about evaluation because I'm the evaluator and then I also put myself back in graduate school, so I'm doing a lot! And, I think to Judy's point, to all of your point, I think that, without that R&D, asking people to evaluate anything that everybody in this room is doing is putting the cart before the horse. So, I'm thinking about Pamela's work that Suzanna mentioned. You know, Pamela has been doing that work for like 30 years, and she's done a lot of research on it and published her research and had graduate students . . . be assistants for her and that's the way that you measure the impact, "is this working?" You ask yourself a question, maybe find methodology to examine it. People's scale, we're not there yet. That's so cart before the horse. The kind of thing you can scale is you know, if people are drinking organic milk vs non-organic milk do they have fewer health problems and that you need a control clinical study, you know the milk industry will pay for that will cost hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars. We don't have that in education and we don't have that in the arts so what we see is totally unconscionable that funders would ask that. So, I take, I have the audacity to say, "they don't what they're talking about" and just because they have a space on their form for numbers does not mean they're going to evaluate me and my program. It's my job to tell them how to evaluate me differently and that's an uphill battle, too. So, you're speaking about 41 years of similarly on speaking out on behalf of children, too my whole lifetime but, I do want to say to all of us that this work that we're doing but more and more conscientiously, we're all talking about how to get it better

**LUNA DANCE INSTITUTE**

creativity · community · change

and yes how to get more people how to understand it but, we're all talking about how to get it better we're always going to be kind of ahead of the curve so we should just own our expertise and say, so my quick answer to you is, I would just document, I would keep a teacher journal and I would just document what you see happening as if you were doing a little case study on yourself. Because that's the kind of research that would be appropriate to your question – "What's happening here?" And, then when you collect enough case studies and then you have some evidence and do a quantifying, but I think that's part of it around numbers is, it's an impossible request.

Eric: And, it often doesn't take into account all the other factors of their lives and . . .

Patricia: Of course not. And, to really say cause and effect for human subjects is next to impossible but, the beauty of what you're all trying to do is you're not trying to prove dance as a treatment to this thing, what you're trying to do is present evidence to people with disabilities you know, in 2000 there was no accessibility except AXIS Dance Company and in 2018 here's the accessibility and here's the questions we're asking in 2028 and here's the level of accessibility and here's the next level. That's the thing to document I think. And, we just have to tell funders that's the thing we're documenting and we're not counting the number of individuals in each program, we're counting the . . . if that makes sense.

Dwayne: Do you think your class, workshops coming up on Reflective Practice might be helpful?

Patricia: Maybe.

Dwayne: Just trying to plug that for ya.

Nancy: Do you have a question, I saw your hand.

Audience: Yeah, I saw your workshop on teaching teachers how to . .

Judy: Yeah, AXIS is doing that.

Audience: Should I give you my email?

Judy: You can go to [axisdance.org](http://axisdance.org) and you can sign their mailing list there.

Audience: If I can just ask you a question a very specific question. I work a lot with elders who can't stand up too well in dance because of their balance maybe 90% can still walk a little bit and kick their legs but about 10% can't but have more upper body things, but there does come a time when they ask for leg movement. How can I reimagine that for people who don't move their legs?

Judy: Many years ago it was when Eric and myself and Yurick Hope who was at University of Washington we got a bunch of us together who were doing inclusive work, just to talk about issues and one of the things that I came out with that was that I was going to stop using the word 'adapting' and I was going to start using the word 'translating'. So, instead of thinking not everybody can use their legs let's not do that, okay some people are going to be doing this, what is a translation for that, that's using different

**LUNA DANCE INSTITUTE**

creativity · community · change

parts of the body? So, I think moving from that, this is what we have to do and not everybody can do that, how do we translate it into our own bodies. And, you know in AXIS we translate things back and forth, disabled dancers and translating non-disabled dancers movement and non-disabled dancers and translating disabled dancers' movements so I think that using that basic kind of change of your idea is going to work, you're going to find a way. And, not only that but your people are going to find a way.

Audience: Right. I'm not telling them how to do it. I'm asking them can you translate this.

Judy: Exactly. And ... just the disabled dancers and just the people that are unable to stand you know you want the translation to go across. And, you know if you're able to use your legs how else would you translate that.

Eric: One of the things I like to look at in dance we think of a dance teacher shows the movement and we do the movement and it's kind of in unison and to take apart what unison means and it might mean, using your legs and it might mean the rhythm of the movement that happening and trying to capture that rhythm or the directionality of it or the quality and that, this is how. I agree, that time I took away this is how not to use as much arms and legs but say, a head could be a limb. And then to look at what is the one element of this movement you can tap into and to translate.

Dwayne: It's almost identical, that's right, it's perfect.

Patricia: You know, Jen did this hula hoop workshop for us today and one of the things she did for the warm-up was she had us put 1 person in the group moving the hula hoop and the rest of us had to make our body move like the hula hoop, whatever that meant, in as many different ways, and a hula hoop is so unlike the human body and I found that delightful and fun and something that I think I'm going to steal. And, each of us got a chance to manipulate the hula hoop so there were lots of different varieties and challenges for us but thinking you could do that in a lot of different things, including each other's bodies, which we all do, but thinking about this non-animate object which takes the onus off and also keep the rigor high, for all movers.

Jen: And, you can steal away because essentially I got the idea from you guys attending the Summer Institute from the scarves. Oh! This could work for this!

Audience: I had one question, sorry.

Nancy: No, this is for you to have questions.

Audience: A lot of talk about rigor I'm hearing, what working with elders in chairs, what would rigor be, for you?

Patricia: For me?

Audience: For you or for, because I've been going weekly, weekly with them for year not thinking about rigor, as much as play and fun.

Patricia: Well, maybe that's a better goal.

Judy: Maybe rigor is not your number 1 thing.

Patricia: Yeah, I mean joy and fun is 100% fabulous goal in and of itself. And, for me, what rigor might mean, in general, the rigor is how often and to what extent am I willing to continually show-up to my own ability anew, and that is what I do in every area I do it, you know cognitively, physically, socially, everyday there's something new to learn, more curiosity and that is a rigorous practice. To me, that's more rigorous than doing tendus en croix following some teacher in ballet class because that's, you can just do that with zero rigor, it's really about, what's new for me to find out about today.

Judy: Intention and attention, you know.

Patricia: Right, and if I just want to have fun I don't have to be constantly approving myself, so you might not want rigor.

Nancy: I think that there's a lot to-

Judy: You might notice something and say, "I'm noticing a lot of ...how can we do this differently?" And, so the rigor might be getting somebody who's used to doing this you know, to do it with their head or, so maybe that's ...

Audience: 'Cause my own stories about rigor are technique and getting stronger in technique, so this opens a lot of possibilities.

Nancy: Well, a lot of us grew up with that.

Patricia: And, it's a misconception I think, about rigor.

Eric: And, about technique.

Patricia: Right.

Nancy: And, about technique, which is kind of where we started, which is what is the technique that we're going for here?

Eric: Right, 'cause to be able to translate is a huge technical ability.

Judy: Right.

Nancy: It really is.

Judy: On the fly, to do it and then re-translate. It's great exercise.

Audience: I was just going to say something. I also teach seniors as well, I do creative dance with them. And, one of the things I got back from them last year was that they were like, this gives us the

opportunity to play as adults and they realized how that's not available to them regularly and I feel like if that's the focus, you know, that's okay.

Nancy: You have your hand up.

Audience: I was just going to say the phrase, rigorous and participation is a huge measurement if you will, just doing that, just showing up and trying and participating can be enough. That can be enough of a measurement to quote on quote show the validity of the program or the class or the setting.

Nancy: Well, it's definitely a measurement they use in public school – attendance!

Audience: But, also attentiveness. No, I'm just saying, to put another point out there. I work in the fitness industry and with people with disabilities and whether or not they show up on a consistent basis is huge. 'Cause, you can teach them whatever you want and measure number of minutes on a cardio machine but if it's only a 1-shot deal and they don't show up for a couple of months it's not really a great measurement that they do 10 minutes on Tuesday.

Nancy: Did you want, I saw your hand.

Audience: Yeah, I also teach seniors and this whole thing of showing up. I also teach at the Ed Roberts Campus and I teach a class that's devoted to young people like 20s and 30s and...I approach some of the agencies in the Roberts Campus and that's been no problem, I've had a lot of support from these agencies and it's a time when these young people are finished their day program, so it works out. What's been a challenge is on Thursdays, and that's a BORP class, BORP is Bay Area Outreach Recreation Program, and there's a lot of emphasis on fitness and on wheelchair soccer, wheelchair basketball and there's a wonderful in this, at Roberts Campus a fitness room, has a lot of tai chi and fitness and yoga and when I was introduced to the...dance I asked who's interested in having a dance class there. So, this dance class is on Thursdays when a lot of people are working on Thursdays. I've introduced the class to the people working in the building, I've been there for a few years now, I'm hanging in there and it's very, very low attendance. The people that do come get a lot of benefit out of it, I want it to evolve, I want it to grow and just reaching the people is my, is the issue. So, it's been open to question if there's any ideas to which agencies to go to.

Judy: Have you tried changing the time? Or, maybe that just isn't a good time or day?

Audience: You know, all of the classes, even if it's just in the afternoon, it's low attendance, yeah.

Eric: I think this is one of those opportunities for the microcosm and the macrocosm of what we're talking about to look at, like, why is it important that more than a few people come to this class and there might be a huge benefit for these people to be in a small classes, and there are great things to having lots of people but, I just I think back to my early training as a dancer and I had this very dedicated, incredibly qualified teacher and we were going there every day after school and there was probably 5 of us and often are Fridays I was the only one who would show up and he would do class

with me and it was so powerful and...at the time but to have him devote that time to me and grow... and if some of the other classes are big this might be really great to let it be, and go with the quality of that interaction.

Judy: And another strategy might be, instead of going to these organizations and saying, "yeah this class is happening", "can I come in at lunch time and do something with your staff?" And, then introducing them to what you're doing because a lot of people are just not going to come to a dance or movement class, especially when they're people who have been told their entire life that they're not a dancer or a mover. So sometimes it is as much about going out as it is about trying to get people to come to you.

Nancy: So, I'm going to, it's almost time to wrap up but I want to have time for individual mingling but, before we do that, I would love for and we can just go from, we can go in this direction again.

Judy: Let's go this, the other side.

Nancy: Okay, great we can go from Julie. If there are any resources that you have that you can share with all of us.

Patricia: And, we'll send this out to everybody.

Nancy: So, you can continue to inquire to learn and grow.

Julie: Well, Luna's my main resource and you guys know about that so I'm looking forward to hearing everybody else's.

Nancy: Great!

Jen: So, there's a book that's no longer in print that I handed down it's called, *The Freedom to Move* and I sought it because I feel like I took some things with you guys at NDEO the past few years and I love the translation thing I think that works really well for people with intellectual disabilities as well but I think more, like more knowledge about working with people with intellectual disabilities and it was the only book I could find and it was 3 years of hunting this bad boy down because it's out of print but if you have the opportunities there are some libraries.

Audience: Is it on Amazon do you think?

Jen: Well, if you google it there's one copy's on sale for \$2,727 which is ridiculous because it's out of print so I found it at a local college, Edinburgh University outside of Erie and I borrowed it for the duration of the time that I could check it out and I finally looked again online and I found a copy for like \$30 but, it's a great resource and colleges do have it and I don't think anyone else is checking it out of Edinburgh, they don't have a dance program.

Audience: Do they give you exercises?

Jen: They just have a lot of information about working with various populations specifically people with intellectual disabilities. And, I recently got an Octaband but it was developed by Donna, her last name starts with an N and I'm awful with names, I apologize. She's based out of like Boston area and she developed Dance for Connections, it's a dance program for people with dementia. She made this connection prop because not all people want to touch but we all want to be connected right, so it's a circle in the middle and it has these stretchy bands that you can hold onto and on the end you can hook into, so even if you can't grab or don't have the dexterity to do that you can connect to yourself and play with pushing, pulling and all that stuff but, it's a great prop and it's fun with little kids just for fun. And, so originally, it was 8 legs, there's a 16 leg and she just came out with a 24-leg one. Octo like an octopus.

Eric: So, we just recently renamed our dance program, Dance And Inclusive Performance at Cal State East Bay and are looking for students who want to come and study inclusive performance. I see it as an ongoing lab, basically, and want to invite everybody here to come play with us. I teach classes Monday – Thursday that I love to have community members join.

Nancy: What time?

Eric: They change every semester but right now I teach dance partnering on Mondays and Wednesday from 3:30 – 4:20, it's a 50 minute class and then 5 – 5:50 on Tuesday I teach the interdisciplinary ensemble and we have a lot of community members who are joining that and always experimenting with how to teach dance and music and theater in more inclusive ways. And, then on Thursdays, I can send this out.

Nancy: Yeah, yeah I didn't mean.

Patricia: I'll just you know what we'll do, when I type this up for everybody, which I'm going to, I will put your contact information.

Eric: Yeah, please come, drop in, it's wonderful when new folks come and we do...

Audience: Do we have to sign up?

Eric: No, just show up. Probably don't mention it to the university administrators.

Nancy: Just show up. Don't let anyone know you're there.

Eric: But then I also do something called the Creativity Lab, which is geared toward students with autism but you don't have to have autism to participate but, it's less dance-based and more individual projects.

Suzanna: It's fun, I went.

Eric: Yeah, Suzanna came which was really great. So, please come play with us and check it out. I feel like a lot of times I don't quite know what I'm doing and we're just experimenting together.

Suzanna: Okay, so I'd like to recommend *Play and Imagination in Children with Autism*. It's Pamela's book.

Nancy: we have it in our library.

Suzanna: I recommend that. I'd also like to recommend pretty much anything from Autonomous Press. My Aikido sensei who is autistic is one of the main people on Autonomous Press and they mainly publish what they say, "by weird people" but a lot of people get published by Autonomous Press.

Eric: Where do you do Aikido?

Suzanna: Dwight and 8<sup>th</sup>. So, I pretty much, I should also recommend Nick Walker's resources online. That would be my sensei.

Dwayne: I'm going to defer to Judy 'cause they're going to be similar and she's going to articulate them better.

Judy: Axisdance.org, AXIS Dance Company does a summer intensive, they also do a teacher training in the summer, they do several different teacher trainings, etc. through the year, there's often, depending on touring a monthly community dance jam, that everybody is welcome to come to, check the calendar, axisdance.org and their email list, if you go on their website and look for the advocacy program you'll find the last 2 years that I was at AXIS, actually 3 years, 4 years almost I did a project to organize the first-ever convening on physically-integrated dance, it was a 3-day think-tank in New York. It was cross-sector, funders, dancers, choreographers, etc. and it was also across 3 generations of integrated, inclusive dance. This report is there, in PDF form, I've got 3 copies if you want to take one but it was really looking at the future of integrated dance and I did it specifically because 30 years in some things had not, the needle hadn't moved at all and I said, "Why is this not changing?" And, I felt like the only way to get the needle to move a little bit, and it actually moved significantly, was to get the community together. That was the first time, in this country, that we have gotten together as a field, and it was followed up by 6 regional convenings and so I think that, all told we reached about 350 people, who all felt like they were working in isolation. People were there not knowing there other things actually going on. So, I do have 3 of these reports but, also on that advocacy page is information about the national and regional convenings. There is a huge resource list that is supposed to be getting added to, I'm not sure that it is. Adam Benjamin wrote a book called *Making An Entrance*. He was the co-founder and director of Candoco in London and he teaches at Plymouth University, which is one of the few places that disabled dancers are recruited to go to, so Plymouth University in the UK is also a good resource.

Nancy: Well, thank you to our panelists.