

**“Everybody Can Dance the Colour Pink”: A Phenomenological Exploration of the  
Meanings and Experiences of Inclusive Arts Programs for Practitioners**

by  
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## Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

## ABSTRACT

While the arts have gained a more prominent place in inclusive educational settings, inclusive arts programming in the context of community recreation requires further exploration. In my practice I have found that while inclusive arts opportunities are in high-demand, programs that run are typically infrequent and short-term, leaving many potential participants without a space to explore the arts. In this research I undertook a phenomenological inquiry into the experience of ten practitioners providing inclusive arts programs. Practitioners were drawn from Southwestern and Northwestern Ontario, and from a variety of arts-based fields. This exploration examined practitioners' images and understandings of inclusion, disability, the arts, and their experiences with inclusive arts programs. The key essences which emerged as components of the inclusive arts experience for practitioners were: *Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space; Exploring Potential through Creative Expression; Flexibility, Adaptations, and Possibilities for Inclusion; Valuing Sameness and Difference in Ability and the Arts; Practitioners' Experiences of Receiving Gifts and Feeling Strained; and, Embodying Inclusive Arts Values*. Practitioners' experiences within inclusive arts programs were impacted by the values associated with inclusion and the arts. Practitioners who embodied those values in their everyday life found inclusive arts programming to be highly rewarding and meaningful, despite sometimes significant financial and emotional challenges. The essences are also discussed in relation to three cross-cutting aspects of the practitioners' experience: the medical and social construction of disability, art as inclusion, and the notion of embodiment.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Over the centuries we have created the concept that artistic creation is the responsibility of a few gifted individuals. In so doing, we have denied the majority of individuals within our urban and technologically advanced society their birthrights: that as a human being, everyone has the right to make his or her own “unique creative thumbprint” – one that no one else could make. We all have a need to make this “mark”, not because we necessarily wish to be the reminders to a future generation of a long-lost culture but because each creative mark reaffirms the self. It says “I am here”, “I have something to express”.

(Warren, 1993, p. 3-4)

In high school, at the urging of my father, I became a volunteer coach for the Ontario Special Olympics chapter in my hometown of Thunder Bay. Resistant at first to working with a group of individuals whose life experiences were foreign to me, I had difficulty adjusting to my volunteer position. “See the season through, and you can withdraw at the end if you’re still not happy”, advised my father. I carried on, and by the end of the year I could not imagine leaving the wonderful community of coaches and athletes with whom I had grown so close. Four years later, I left the team to study Therapeutic Recreation (TR) at the University of Waterloo. I had a great interest in programming for people with disabilities, inspired by my early experiences with the Special Olympics. However, rather than focusing strictly on the value of segregated programs, I found that my university experience challenged my notions of what it meant to experience true participation. Late in my undergraduate studies, the idea of inclusion emerged as an important area of inquiry for me.

Throughout my undergraduate degree, the notion of inclusion was consistently addressed; that is, the cultivation of a physical and social environment free of barriers, exclusionary practices, and rejection (Schleien, Tabourne, & Dart, 1995). Discourse on

inclusion practices began to develop in North America in the mid-1980s (Lord & Hutchison, 2007). Currently, inclusion programming is becoming more common, in part because of legislation such as the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act* which mandates access to customer service and barrier-free facilities (see Government of Ontario, 2005). However, although increased civil rights have fostered a climate conducive to improving access for people with disabilities, “they have clearly not guaranteed that a better quality of life will follow” (Lord & Hutchison, p. ix). The disconnect between increased access and increased quality of life occurs because current approaches to community programming often overlook the social aspect of inclusion (Lord & Hutchison). Understandings of inclusion vary widely, though in general, definitions of inclusion emphasize the importance of equal access and significance of developing social connections. These concepts are exemplified in Bates and Davis’ (2004) conceptualisation of inclusion: “ensuring that people with disabilities have full and fair access to activities, social roles and relationships directly alongside non-disabled citizens...rather than conducting their whole lives within segregated disability services” (p. 196). Inclusion differs from the idea of integration; integration suggests that people with disabilities are being permitted to join in specific activities or places (usually temporarily), rather than being fully included in the social space of a community.

According to Lord and Hutchison (2007), society has constructed negative perceptions of disability, and must now be responsible for initiating the shift to a more positive view of people with disabilities. The responsibility for creating this new outlook falls upon all sectors of society, from individuals to governments (Lord & Hutchison). Certainly the recreation practitioner and community programmer have contributions to

make in terms of building and supporting an environment conducive to inclusion.

However, Lord and Hutchison caution that “the exclusion many Canadians experience demands new approaches” (p. x); now is the time to think creatively about positive solutions to exclusion.

Despite much progress, negative perceptions of people with disabilities are pervasive in today’s society, largely due to misunderstanding and stigma associated with disability. The ways in which we use terms such as “disability”, “handicap”, and “impairment” all refer to people in a negative way; “something in the body is *not* there, *not* right, *not* working, *not* able” (Titchkosky, 2003, p. 51). According to Jones (1996), “a new framework for understanding disability is needed to challenge assumptions upon which prevailing definitions exist” (p. 348). Disability is not easily defined, although there have been many attempts to encapsulate what a disability is with a single definition. However, part of the challenge to defining disability is that it exists in many forms, and within many models, as expressed by Crutchfield and Epstein (2000): “Wheelchairs, canes, and walkers are visible markers of disability. Aches and pains, scars, poverty and immobility, political science, discrimination, cruelty from others, and dependence mark disability” (p. 7).

Defining what it is to have a disability has largely been determined by those who exist outside of this classification; that is, disability has been constructed predominantly by those in society who are considered non-disabled (Jones, 1996). According to Swain, French, and Cameron (2003), tragic views of disability have a disabling effect on people with disabilities. Viewing people with disabilities in a negative light “denies their experiences of a disabling society, their enjoyment of life, and even their identity and

self-awareness as disabled people” (Swain et al., p. 71). An alternative to negative views of disability is voiced by disability advocacy groups. For example, the website of People First of Canada (2006), an advocacy group with a focus on rights and equality, states their position on labeling:

Over the years people have been called *mentally handicapped, developmentally disabled, cognitively challenged, intellectually disabled*, and many other labels. In order to avoid hurting peoples' feelings and to avoid using labels when we talk about the many different members of People First, we will use the term *people who have been labeled*.

Preferred definitions of disability are likely to be as diverse as the people or organizations utilizing them. As Crutchfield and Epstein (2000) explain, the debate over the definition and representation of disability will likely persist into the conceivable future. As they summarize, “every day of our lives in America, those who are disabled think ‘we’ know who ‘we’ are and who ‘they’ are. ‘They,’ after all, know who ‘they’ are: dominant culture assumes an able body” (p. 7).

For the purposes of this research, I have employed “person first language” in my discussion of people with disabilities (Dattilo, 1994). Person first language involves linguistically placing the person before their diagnosis; that is, saying “person with a disability” rather than “disabled person” (Smith, Austin, & Kennedy, 2001). According to Linton (1998):

When disability is redefined as a social/political category, people with a variety of conditions are identified as *people with disabilities* or *disabled people*, a group bound by common social and political experience. These designations, as reclaimed by the community, are used to identify us as a constituency, to serve our needs for unity and identity, and to function as a basis for political activism (p. 12).

The term “disabled people” is often used instead of “people with disabilities” by people within disability studies and disability advocacy groups as a way to centre disability as “a marker of the identity that the individual and group wish to highlight and call attention to” (Linton, 1998, p. 13). Although it has been argued by some (see Titchkosky, 2001) that people-first language only serves to separate the concept of disability from the notion of personhood, it remains my preferred terminology to recognize that I am viewing people as being unique individuals, not strictly tied to a disabled identity. Although person first language recognizes that disability may be an important part of a person’s identity, it does not place sole emphasis on that characteristic.

In the 1970s, headway was made toward recognizing the rights of people with disabilities (Schleien et al., 1995). As part of this burgeoning movement, deinstitutionalization was emphasized, as was a move towards creating accessible community programming (Schleien et al.). However, although some communities are beginning to recognize the importance of putting a municipal inclusion strategy in place, inclusive programming remains a challenge. Many reasons have been cited to explain the non-inclusion of participants with disabilities in programs and services, including:

- challenges associated with the interpretation and implementation policies and regulations related to accessibility (Rimmer, Riley, Wang, Rauworth & Jurkowski, 2004);
- staff were not trained to facilitate people with disabilities in terms of physical access or the development of social connections (Anderson & Heyne, 2000; Lord & Hutchison, 2007; Schleien et al.);

- negative reactions, stereotyping and misconceptions as barriers to participation (Anderson & Heyne; Heyne & Schleien, 1996; Peat, 1997; Rimmer et al.);
- a lack of knowledgeable, trained staff available to serve, and work with, participants with disabilities (French & Hainsworth, 2001; Rimmer et al.);
- facilities and/or equipment are non-accessible (French & Hainsworth; Heyne & Schleien; Rimmer et al.);
- patrons without disabilities would avoid participating with people with disabilities and use different facilities (Schleien et al.); and
- low usage of recreation services by people with disabilities has been interpreted by service providers as a low demand from that population, thus, accommodations are not being made for these participants (French & Hainsworth).

As a result of these and other challenges, inclusive recreation programs may be limited in their scope and availability. While children without disabilities are able to choose from a variety of program schedules, locations, and activities, children with disabilities may find far fewer inclusive programs available. Furthermore, although administrators are required to remove structural barriers, it has been found that “physical accessibility and physical proximity between people with and without disabilities do not, in and of themselves, ensure positive results” (Schleien et al., p. 6). Rather, an emphasis on social access is required to foster an open, welcoming, truly inclusive environment (Schleien et al.).

In considering creative programming solutions to the challenge of inclusion, this study explored the arts as a context for examining inclusion. I previously completed an undergraduate thesis on drama therapy. Through an online survey of recreation therapists in Ontario, I explored their use of drama techniques as a therapeutic practice. I discovered

that, while practitioners value certain qualities of drama therapy programs (e.g., enhancement of self-esteem/self-confidence, opportunity for self-expression, and the incorporating a sense of fun into treatment), few were sure how to implement such programs, or how to justify a need for drama-related funding to administrators (Rafferty, 2008). I then became increasingly interested in the use of the arts as both a programming and inclusion tool.

My emphasis was less focused on the arts as a treatment intervention (i.e., therapeutic modality), and centered more on the experience of the arts. Following my undergraduate career, I participated in an inclusive arts camp development university course, and worked closely with a children's musical theatre program. These experiences instilled in me a strong belief about the value of arts programming for children. However, through my work with the children's theatre, I could not help but be cognizant of the fact that children with disabilities were notably lacking from participation in community arts opportunities. It occurred to me that inclusive arts programs were offered infrequently, despite hearing from families with whom I worked that they are in high demand among families in the disability community. Why was this? I believed that the arts are an ideal medium for inclusive programming as they: are non-competitive, foster self-expression, do not have wrong or right ways to participate, have no winners or losers, celebrate differences, and provide an opportunity for everyone to experience the art-making process in a unique and personal way. As expressed by Lynch and Chosa (1996), "individuals with disabilities often lack successful experiences in academics and sports due to their cognitive or physical limitations. The production of art can provide them with a sense of competence and mastery, which in turn builds self-esteem" (p. 76). While the

arts have a traditional therapeutic function (Knill, Levine, & Levine, 2005) and a use in advocacy, as Kelly and Freysinger (2000) note, “performance and creation are not strange and alien activities. Children draw, act, sing, and dance their way through the day. Expression is a part of human nature” (p. 229). The arts have the potential to appeal to a variety of senses (i.e., visual, tactile, auditory), and arts activities can be modified to accommodate a variety of needs, interests, and challenges.

The practitioner’s perspective on inclusive arts programming has been largely overlooked in research. Little has been documented about the meanings and experiences of inclusion in the arts for practitioners. Thus, there are few insights into how practitioners conceptualize ideas such as inclusion, disability, art, and how they describe their experiences with inclusive arts programs. Understanding practitioners’ perspectives could illustrate how practitioners experience the delivery of inclusive arts programs, and how this experience can be enhanced to promote further program development.

#### Problem Statement

Inclusive arts programs are still emerging within the recreation field. While the arts have gained a more prominent place in educational settings (see Brouillette, Burge, Fitzgerald & Walker, 2008; Uptis & Smithrim, 2003), inclusive arts programming in community recreation requires further exploration to support its development.

Opportunities for inclusive arts within Northwestern and Southwestern Ontario are fairly limited. While municipal websites often contain information about programs and initiatives for inclusion services, they are primarily limited to outdoor summer camps and sports activities (see City of Brampton, n.d.; City of Burlington, 2008; City of Dryden, 2009; City of Hamilton, 2007; City of Kitchener, 2009; City of London, 2009; City of

Mississauga, 2009; City of Thunder Bay, 2009; City of Windsor, n.d.; Town of Markham, 2009; Town of Newmarket, n.d). It should be noted that, although they may exist, I was unable to locate information about inclusive recreation initiatives on the municipal websites for the Town of Fort Frances (2009) or the City of Kenora (2005). A look at the other municipalities' local leisure guides would indicate that the arts and culture scene for children is a burgeoning market, yet few program advertisements indicate that they offer inclusive programs in this area. The inclusive arts programs that do run are often infrequent and short-term. In my experience with children with disabilities and their families, I have found that programs such as this are in high demand, and inevitably, children are turned away due to a lack of program space.

The connection between disability and the experience of the arts remains a fairly small body of research (see Reynolds, 2000; Reynolds & Prior, 2003). Though there has been much research in terms of employing the arts as therapy (for recent examples, see Devereaux, 2008; Gussak, 2009; Somov, 2008; Young, 2009), the purely experiential component has yet to emerge into the forefront of inquiry. The arts need not always be used as a means to an end; rather, additional exploration is needed in terms of the arts being utilized as an end in themselves. This is akin to Sylvester's (1996) discussion of the uses of recreation and leisure. In this case, utilizing the arts as an end denotes that the activity will be undertaken for its own sake, and not to reach some other end or goal. Utilizing the arts as a programming approach fills a gap between the recreation services available for people with disabilities, and recreation services that are *needed* for people with disabilities (Austin & Crawford, 2001). Typically, programs offered for young children with disabilities "have focused on a small set of activities so predominant in this

area that they have become stereotyped. These include bowling, swimming, arts and crafts, field trips, and car rides” (Austin & Crawford, p. 162). In the context of this quote, the term “arts and crafts” denotes an activity which is done in a prescribed way, and the same way, by all participants. For example, colouring in a colouring book, cutting out a pre-drawn figure and gluing it to a Popsicle stick to make a puppet. Arts, in the context of this research, are considered to be activities which emphasize creative expression, and the exploration of art-forms from a variety of approaches. While the definition is very open, the emphasis is on creative expression, not on pre-determined artistic outcomes.

### Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the meanings and experiences of inclusive arts programs from the perspective of practitioners. For the purposes of this research, the practitioners included arts and recreation practitioners who had experience delivering one or more inclusive arts programs. This exploration examined practitioners’ images and understandings of inclusion, disability, the arts, and their experiences with inclusive arts programs. Although there are many forms of phenomenological inquiry, the essential question of phenomenology asks: what is the nature of this phenomenon, what qualities of this phenomenon make it what it is? (Patton, 2002). Examining the practitioner experience was important, as both researchers and practitioners lack a thorough understanding of practitioners’ experiences with inclusive arts encounters. According to Stoiber, Gettinger and Goetz (1998), in their article about early childhood inclusive education:

It is important to understand the beliefs of parents and practitioners in that beliefs influence both the process of change and standards of practice. Although

conventional research on innovation in early childhood education has focused mainly on practice, the beliefs of parents and practitioners are also key personal and sociopolitical elements that deserve investigation (p. 108)

I think that connections between the field of early childhood education and children's leisure can be easily drawn. I would argue that the beliefs of parents and practitioners in both cases have the potential to influence change. Images, understandings, and experiences are integrally linked, each shaping the other. Images, understandings, and experiences also influence actions taken in practice. How practitioners view and understand disability, inclusion, and the arts, and how these are experienced, influence how practitioners act in relation to all three. The research questions guiding this study were:

1. What are practitioners' meanings, images, and understandings of inclusion, disability, and the arts?
2. How do practitioners describe their experiences with inclusive arts programs?
3. How do practitioners' meanings, images, and understandings of inclusion, disability, and the arts shape their experiences and actions with inclusive arts programs?

### Significance of the Study

Therapeutic recreation practitioners perceive art programming to be, in some cases, a highly complex and specialized field (Rafferty, 2008). A lack of knowledge and awareness about inclusive arts programming has created barriers to program development and availability. Through the exploration of practitioners' experiences with inclusion in the arts, I examined the images, understandings, and actions associated with such

programs with the intention of gaining insight into the experience of delivering inclusive arts programs.

Examining arts programs separate from their potential therapeutic purposes is an area which remains fairly underexplored, particularly in the context of recreation and leisure studies literature. This research considers programs which use the arts as a recreation programming tool without a specific emphasis on therapeutic outcomes. Due to the specific nature of the arts field, an amalgamation with another field – namely, recreation – would help to expand its research base and professional visibility. Additionally, integrating the arts with the field of recreation and leisure studies may bridge the gap for practitioners, moving the arts away from being a separate and highly specialized programming avenue, and toward the idea of the arts as inclusion.

It was important to examine practitioners' experiences with inclusive arts programs. The development and implementation of recreation programs is largely dictated by practitioners, their understandings and experiences will surely shape the final program experience for participants. As discussed previously in the context of early childhood education, practitioners' beliefs can have a significant influence over changes in practice.

### Summary

Chapter One has provided an overview of the study including the problem statement and significance of this study which explored the meanings and experiences of inclusive arts programs from the perspective of practitioners. The chapter has provided an introduction to the methodology and highlighted the main essences that emerged from this phenomenological study.

As a foundation for this study, the literature review in Chapter Two examines three main areas: the arts, the social construction of disability, and inclusion. The section on the arts examines how the concept of art has been defined, how it is used as a therapeutic modality, how it has been employed as a vehicle to convey and symbolize social and political messages, and finally how it can be used as a recreation programming tool. A review of the social construction of disability literature describes how the concept of disability has come to be perceived and defined in society over time. Drawing from the literature, the section on recreation and inclusion includes an examination of the challenges and benefits associated with inclusion, as well as strategies for creating inclusive environments.

Chapter Three describes my research methodology. This includes a discussion of phenomenology, and an outline of my data collection, analysis, and interpretation strategies. Additionally, my role as researcher, ethical considerations related to my research, and strategies for trustworthiness were acknowledged.

Findings of this research are provided in Chapter Four along with a discussion of the larger theoretical and practical implications related to those findings. Drawing from phenomenology, six essences emerged from the data: Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space; Exploring Potential through Creative Expression; Flexibility, Adaptations, and Possibilities for Inclusion; Valuing Sameness and Difference in Ability and the Arts; Practitioners' Experiences of Receiving Gifts and Feeling Strained; and, Embodying Inclusive Arts Values. Inclusive arts practitioners inherently embody these essences in relation to their inclusive arts experience. It felt natural to me that the findings and discussion too should be interwoven. It was my belief that a report of the essences

independent of a discussion about how they connect seemed to only reveal half of the story.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of three aspects of the practitioners' experience which cut across the six essences: the medical and social construction of disability, art as inclusion, and the notion of embodiment. Chapter Five also contains a discussion of the research implications, strengths and limitations, and makes suggestions for future research. Implications for this research are both practical and theoretical. In a practical sense, gaining a better understanding of the experiences that practitioners perceive to be associated with inclusive arts programs improves knowledge for future programming. Theoretically, exploring the practitioners' images and understandings about inclusion, disability, and the arts informs our knowledge about inclusive arts practice. As well, this research sheds light on how practitioner's images and understandings of these concepts could, and do, influence their actions. There is value in honouring individuals' lived experiences by trying to understand how different phenomenon are understood and experienced. If we can understand the essences of the inclusive arts experience, and what serves to shape them, we can identify ways to enhance and promote more rewarding experiences for both practitioners and program participants.

The title of this thesis was drawn from a statement made by one of the practitioners interviewed for this study. Nancy described how creative expression can be experienced by everyone in a unique way. She explained that everyone can take on a creative challenge – such as trying to dance like the colour pink – whether they have a disability or not. According to Nancy, in a process-based arts program, openness to different ways of exploring creative challenges allows everyone to experience success. I

chose her quote to include in the title because I believe that her words embody many of the inclusive arts values that practitioners shared with me throughout this study.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this review of literature, I explored how the arts have been defined and have attempted to place the arts in the context of recreation. Literature related to the definition of the arts, the arts as therapy, the arts as advocacy and awareness, and the arts as recreation were examined. The social construction of disability was explored in terms of how the medical and social models exist as the predominant constructions of disability in Western societies. Examining the meanings and understandings that society associates with the experience of disability is important to better understand how beliefs and assumptions impact the programs and services delivered. Finally, the concept of inclusion was explored, and the benefits and challenges associated with inclusive practices were discussed. The chapter ends with a discussion of the role of the inclusive recreation practitioner in promoting/facilitating inclusion.

### Defining the Arts

Art is a concept which defies conventional definition. The debate about what exactly constitutes a work of art will always be discussed by art researchers, educators, and artists alike (Levinson, 1979). I had a difficult time finding literature that defined explicitly what art *is*. To me, art seems to be loaded with opposing concepts. It is at once deeply personal, and very public. It exists in many forms, and can be created and experienced by people of all ages and ability levels. Some people, considered experts or critics, attempt to rate art as good or bad, but some art-makers resist being graded at all. Art is for pleasure, for money, for therapy, for shock value. Art is dynamic. As related by McNiff (1998), “when asked to define what is a work of art, Pablo Picasso was reported to have replied, ‘What is not?’” (p. 11).

McNiff (1998) describes three differing schools of thought when it comes to defining art and creativity:

There is a tradition within the arts that perceives every aspect of experience as an element of the creative process. Although many of history's greatest artists have identified with this vision, it has been opposed by those who advocate "art for art's sake" and others who favor strict or "pure" specialization. (p.11).

Taking a different view, Alexander (2003) believes that art yields a product, something that is tangible in some way, such as a book, a song, a performance, or a painting. Art involves communication with some kind of audience, not necessarily on stage or in a gallery, but it is experienced by others publicly or privately (Alexander). Art is related to the experience of enjoyment, which can be encountered in many forms, for example, as fun or escape (Alexander). Art is about expression; the expression of a truth, a fiction, a belief, or a feeling (Alexander). Lastly, art is defined by its physical and social context. For example, what may be considered "art" in a gallery might be judged as vandalism in an alley way (Alexander). Ultimately, a definition of art remains a fluid concept, one whose conceptualization will vary from one person to the next. As expressed by McNiff (1998), "each of us finds our personal basis for exercising creative expression" (p. 18).

The arts have developed into a much wider field than strictly performance-based initiatives. As discussed in the following sections, drama, music, visual art, and dance have been used as therapeutic modalities, as vehicles for conveying social and political messages, and as recreation programming tools.

### *Art as Therapy*

The artistic mediums of visual art, music, dance, and drama have been used extensively as modes of therapy. Art therapy, as defined by the Canadian Art Therapy Association's website (n.d.), "combines the creative process and psychotherapy, facilitating self-exploration and understanding. Using imagery, colour, and shape as part of this creative therapeutic process, thoughts and feelings may be expressed that would otherwise be difficult to articulate." The non-verbal aspect of art therapy facilitates clients "listen[ing] with their eyes," which has the added benefit of preventing clients from tuning out the spoken messages of therapy (Landgarten, 1981, p. 4). Another advantage of utilizing art as therapy is the fact that it enables clients to document their own therapy process in a personal and meaningful way (Landgarten). Recent research studies document the scope of clients who are involved in art therapy treatment, including males and females who are incarcerated (Gussak, 2009), women with breast cancer (Öster, Åström, Lindh, Magnusson, 2009), and children with aggression (Nissimov-Nahum, 2008). Some reported benefits of art therapy include: social skill development (Elkis-Abuhoff, 2008), the exploration of new roles (Öster et al.), and increased self-esteem (Ravid-Horesh, 2004).

According to Newham (1999), "song-making and singing has, for thousands of years, formed part of healing ceremonies performed by cultures all over the world" (p. 97). Arguably the most commonly recognized of the art therapies, music therapy has developed from, and is practiced in, a wide variety of contexts. As such, definitions of music therapy will vary according to the therapeutic tradition or culture from which they emerge (Wigram, Pedersen, Bonde, & Aldridge, 2002). The Canadian Association of

Music Therapy (2006) has attempted to develop a holistic, encompassing definition as follows:

Music therapy is the skillful use of music and musical elements by an accredited music therapist to promote, maintain, and restore mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health. Music has nonverbal, creative, structural, and emotional qualities. These are used in the therapeutic relationship to facilitate contact, interaction, self-awareness, learning, self-expression, communication, and personal development.

It has been proposed that music is an efficacious form of therapy because sound is a part of our lives from the time before we are born; we communicate and express ourselves through sound, our hearts beat in a rhythm, we move “in time” (Darnely-Smith & Patey, 2003, p. 6). Even if music cannot be heard, it could be argued that music can be felt (i.e., through vibrations in instrument or voice). Music therapy is one of the most well-established of the art therapies, and has been used with a variety of client groups. Recent research has documented the use of music therapy with adults with mental illness (Kooij, 2009), adults with cancer (Young, 2009), and Holocaust survivors (Clements-Cortés, 2008). Some reported benefits of music therapy include: improving quality of life (Young), engagement with the community (Smith, 2007), and creating a sense of belonging and togetherness (Bensimon, Amir & Wolf, 2008)

Dance therapy offers clients an opportunity for self-expression through movement. Similar to the way that music therapy claims to connect to the natural behaviours of human beings, so too does dance therapy. According to Warren and Coaten (2008), “the body is an instrument of expression and in childhood it is through the movement of our bodies that we start to build a picture of our world” (p. 64). Separate from the pure physicality of dance, there is a connection between dance and emotion. At

the heart of it, “dance is a statement of emotion expressed through movement” (Warren & Coaten, p. 65). According to the American Dance Therapy Association (2009) website, dance/movement therapy can be defined as “the psychotherapeutic use of movement to further the emotional, cognitive, physical, and social integration of the individual...Body movement as the core component of dance simultaneously provides the means of assessment and the mode of intervention for dance/movement therapy”. Dance therapy can be implemented by dance and movement therapists in a variety of acute and long-term care settings, including hospitals, mental health, rehabilitation, nursing homes, and day away centers (American Dance Therapy Association). Recent research demonstrates dance therapy’s unique uses with client groups such as families exposed to domestic violence (Devereaux, 2008), incarcerated women (Seibel, 2008), and older adults (Lima & Vieira, 2007). Some reported benefits of dance therapy include: a reduction of depressive symptoms (Koch, Morlinghaus, & Fuchs, 2007), the provision of an outlet for transforming violent behaviours (Milliken, 2002), and social support development through partnered dance (Hackney, Kantorovich & Earhart, 2007).

The body of drama therapy literature demonstrates that the medium has multiple social and emotional benefits. Drama therapy has been described as an expressive creative art therapy. It involves a relationship between a therapist and client(s) who engage in a creative process in order to explore and change their life challenges and experiences (Landy, 2006). According to the National Association of Drama Therapy (n.d.) website, drama therapy can formally be defined as “the intentional use of drama and/or theater processes to achieve therapeutic goals.” Drama therapy continues to be a developing field, and research shows that it is being used with a variety of client groups,

such as people with schizophrenia (Yotis, 2006), drug and alcohol use relapse prevention groups (Somov, 2008), and people who have experienced trauma (Haen & Weber, 2009). Some reported benefits of drama therapy include: the expression of emotions (Moneta & Rousseau, 2008), the development of coping skills (James & Johnson, 1997), and the exploration of healthy social behaviours (Somov).

In the early 1970s, expressive arts therapy emerged as a unique field with the development of an Expressive Therapy Program in Cambridge, Massachusetts (Levine & Levine, 1999). Rather than specialize in one art form as most programs had previously (i.e., art therapy, music therapy), expressive therapy was interdisciplinary, with an added focus on philosophical theories such as phenomenology and deconstructionism (Levine & Levine). According to Levine and Levine, “expressive arts therapy is grounded not in particular techniques or media but in the capacity of the arts to respond to human suffering” (p.11). Expressive arts therapists employ various techniques as they suit the client, and do not necessarily specialize in one particular art modality (Levine & Levine). Rogers (1999) states that the role of the expressive arts therapist is to employ a variety of modalities “in a supportive setting to experience and express feelings” (p. 115). Technical efficacy is not what is important in expressive arts therapy, rather, “any art form that comes from an emotional depth provides a process of self-discovery. We express inner feelings by creating outer forms” (Rogers, p. 115).

Though the expressive arts as therapy stands alone as a unique field, the expressive arts are also used within the field of therapeutic recreation (Devine & Dattilo, 2000). The expressive arts is a term which highlights the methods within a variety of art forms, including dance, drama, music, poetry, and the visual arts (Lynch & Chosa, 1996).

The emphasis here is not on the therapist having efficacy in specific artistic domains; rather, the therapeutic recreation specialist will embrace and utilize a variety of artistic modes through a variety of activities (e.g., puppets, improvisation, painting). In the therapeutic recreation domain, Smith et al. (2001) note that art relies on one crucial element: creativity. It is the presence of creativity which enables the art participant to have a completely unique and personal encounter with the arts (Smith et al.). According to Diamondstein (as cited in Smith et al.), creativity involves “the capacity to be open to experience, to welcome novelty, to be intrigued by discovery, and to exercise new dimensions of imaginative thought” (p. 183).

#### *Art as Advocacy and Awareness*

Over the last few decades, a movement called disability arts has emerged. It is a fairly new, yet widely recognized, part of the disability advocacy movement (Swain et al., 2003). The disability arts movement is developed from the social model of disability, and concentrates on “cultural and media representation, and...the further self-identification of disabled people while drawing on and contributing to wider political campaigns” (Barnes & Mercer, 2001, p. 529). Through the employment of a variety of arts-related activities (e.g., music, visual art, drama, dance, poetry) disability arts proponents attempt both to gain equal access to artistic programs and opportunities, as well as to communicate “the distinctive history, skills, customs, experiences, and concerns of disabled people, which many believe constitute a distinctive lifestyle and culture” (Swain et al., p. 71). A key facet of disability arts is its collective nature. This collectivity facilitates the expression of the experience of disability from the perspective of people with disabilities themselves (Swain et al.). This expression is significant in that

these experiences are often contrary to typical societal perceptions of disability.

According to Crutchfield and Epstein (2000), art can support people with disabilities in “generating original perspectives of the world, the image and experience of disability” (p. 19).

Barnes and Mercer (2001) describe three of the key aspects of the disability arts movement. First, disability arts proponents are concerned with people with disabilities having equal access to mainstream arts opportunities through both arts appreciation and participation. Second, disability arts include “impaired-focused art” that examines the experience of living with a disability (Barnes & Mercer, p. 529). Last, disability arts provide a critical reaction to the “experience of social exclusion and marginalization” (Barnes & Mercer, p. 529). These aspects of disability arts are exemplified in the mandate of Kickstart (formerly the Society for Disability Arts and Culture), whose objectives are:

- to produce cross-disciplinary festivals of disability arts and culture,
- to encourage and support artists to create and present authentic interpretations of the disability experience,
- to provide opportunities for the development and advancement of artists with disabilities, and
- to promote practices that will make the arts more accessible to all members of the Canadian public.

(Kickstart, n.d.)

Separate from a disability-specific mandate, there are other arts organizations and movements focused on utilizing the arts to send a social or political message. While these may not be related exclusively to disability, they illustrate how the arts can be used as a powerful means of educating audiences about the experiences of an oppressed or

disadvantaged group. The following three examples, Theatre of the Oppressed, *The Vagina Monologues*, and *Embracing the Sky* further demonstrate how art can be used to convey messages about disability and other experiences, in this case, through theatre performance, drama writing, and poetry.

Theatre of the Oppressed was developed as a means of utilizing theatre exercises to promote awareness of one's limited social status, and to initiate dialogue and change through performance (Boal, 1992). The Theatre of the Oppressed is defined by Boal (2004) on International Theatre of the Oppressed website as:

...a system of Games and special Techniques that aims at developing, in the oppressed citizens, the language of the theatre, which is the essential human language. This form of theatre is meant to be practiced *by, about and for* the oppressed, to help them fight against their oppressions and to transform the society that engenders those oppressions. The word Oppressed is used in the sense of s/he who has lost the right to express his/her wills and needs, and is reduced to the condition of obedient listener of a monologue. It must be used as a tool of fighting against all forms class oppression, racism, sexism, and all kinds of discrimination (Boal).

According to Agnew (2001), in the Theatre of the Oppressed, community members create a representation of their oppression onstage which reflects the reality of their oppression in life. The technique advocates for an exchange of information and ideas between the performer and the spectator (Agnew). As far as Boal (1992) is concerned, "theatrical language is the most essential human language" (p. xxx). The theatre is an ideal means of communicating issues of oppression because "theatre is a form of knowledge; it should and can also be a means of transforming society. Theatre can help us build our future, rather than just waiting for it" (Boal, p. xxxi).

In late 1996, Eve Ensler wrote and began performing *The Vagina Monologues* after interviewing 200 women and turning their stories about life, love, and their vaginas into a set of short dramatic monologues (Bell & Reverby, 2005). Each monologue describes a woman's experience with her vagina, ranging from stories of rape, to first sexual experiences, and even the rant of an angry vagina. Since 1998, the play has been staged annually on or near Valentine's Day as part of the V-Day campaign. According to the organization's website, V-Day is "a global movement to stop violence against women and girls" (V-Day, 2009). Their main causes include battling rape, incest, battery, genital mutilation, and sexual slavery (V-Day).

Seemingly frivolous to some, *The Vagina Monologues* have come to stand for the resistance against oppression and indignities faced by women throughout the world; indignities that are often justified by the place that women hold in their social context:

By shining the spotlight on the female body, women's theatre invites actresses and female spectators to talk about, write about and act out the essence of their being, their female sexuality. Denouncing repression, negation, fragmentation and reification, the new body language refuses passivity and encourages psychosexual liberation through the discourse of the female body

(Moss, 2006, p. 26).

This show is particularly significant to me. During my Master's course work I completed a paper related to the play as the final project for the class "Gender, Leisure, and Use of Time". In the paper I explored two women's experiences as performers in the production. Performing in *The Vagina Monologues* was described by the actors as a fulfilling, empowering experience which connected them to each other and their experience of being a woman.

On a more individual scale, artists can create works of art which articulate the personal experiences and challenges associated with being a member of an oppressed or disadvantaged group. In *Embracing the Sky: Poems Beyond Disability*, author Craig Romkema shares his experience of being a young man with autism and cerebral palsy. His poems explore a range of topics, from the experience of horseback riding to the impatience he sometimes feels with his physical limitations. In the following excerpt from the poem “The Dance of Language”, Romkema expresses how the written word has served as a means of comfort and reassurance in his life. His language also illustrates how the written word, which is his chosen mode of expression, also takes on qualities of other art forms, such as “rhythm” and “dance”:

It was the words that showed me.  
I don't know where understanding begins,  
but it was there.  
I found it in the stories people read to me,  
in the rhythms of poetry, and the dance of language,  
I found comfort,  
and soon the words began to explain  
the chaos of my life  
(Romkema, 2002, p. 16)

The arts provide a safe space where an actor, performer, or artist can explore and communicate roles without feeling as though their expression will be inhibited or judged (Devine & Dattilo, 2000). This is particularly relevant in terms of how the arts can serve as a venue for oppressed populations to express their challenges, struggles, and hopes for change. Within this framework, marginalized groups – such as those with disabilities –

can engage an audience in a dialogue about significant issues and ideas, challenge current images and understandings, and trigger transformations at the personal and societal level.

### *Art as Recreation*

Lastly, and the primary focus of this research, the arts can be used as recreation. While much of the discussion of the arts within the body of recreation literature surrounds the use of art as a therapeutic medium (for examples, see Gerdner, 2000 and Iwasaki & Bartlett, 2006), I have chosen to emphasize the use of art for art's sake. According to Sylvester (1996), recreation can be utilized by an individual as an end, a means, and as a means-end. As an end, "recreation or leisure activity is enjoyed 'for its own sake'" (Sylvester, p. 92). In this context, art as recreation would be free from external agendas such as therapy or social messages; art for the experience of art. Some practitioners balk at the notion that arts participation should become "therapy" simply on the basis that participants have disabilities (Warren, 2008). As expressed by Warren (1993, p. 4), "art is not a medicine that must be taken three times a day after meals. However, it can feed the soul, motivate an individual to want to recover and, in certain circumstances, cause physiological changes in the body". Although I believe that the arts can be very effective as therapeutic mediums, I ascribe to Warren's mindset that art should not strictly be used as a prescribed cure for people with disabilities. I feel that the opportunity to participate in the arts as a freely chosen recreation activity can be immensely transformative and fulfilling for participants, whether it is guided by a trained therapist or not. In my opinion, there is a danger in over-medicalizing a pursuit which inherently promotes creative expression, freedom to explore and experiment, and opportunities for success – attributes of the medium which are not always readily

available to people with disabilities within other activities. According to Smith et al. (2001), art participation "...offers a person the chance to have an aesthetic experience on one (or more) of three levels – as the *creator*; the *performer*; or the *perceiver* of a work of art. The *creator* of an artwork, no matter what medium is used, is providing an expression of his or her own being" (p. 184). All three of these ways of participating in the arts involve a measure of creativity (Smith et al.). Kelly and Freysinger (2000) describe the unique quality of art creation in this passage:

There seems to be something special about arts production. Doing and creating in the arts primarily for the experience, as leisure, are different from even the most informed appreciation. There is an investment of the self and an identification with what is created that is missing in appreciating the work of others (p. 228).

Through recreation, participants may also choose to engage in the arts as a means; that is, as "a tool or instrument for bringing about an external result" (Sylvester, 1996, p. 92). This differs from art as a means-end because a means-end implies that the participant is motivated by both external rewards and "the intrinsic pleasure or meaning" that the activity holds (Sylvester, p. 92). While my interest is on exploring the use of the arts as an end, I have found that the area of recreation research which focuses on arts programming for people with disabilities primarily emphasizes utilizing the arts as a means (i.e., the use of arts in therapeutic recreation). Some demonstrated benefits of arts as recreation programs for people with disabilities include:

- empowerment (Hacking, Secker, Spandler, Kent, & Shenton, 2008)
- self-discovery (Kossak, 2009; Smith et al., 2001)
- improved self-concept or self-esteem (Lynch & Chosa, 1996; Reynolds, 2000; Smith et al., 2001)

- enhanced societal perception (Lynch & Chosa, 1996; Reynolds, 2000; Smith et al., 2001)
- opportunity for self-expression (Devine & Dattilo, 2000; Reynolds & Prior, 2003; Rogers, 1999; Warren, 2008).

In a study undertaken by Hacking et al. (2008), it was found that participatory arts projects for people with mental health needs resulted in a self-reported increase in their sense of personal empowerment. In this study, the concept of empowerment was comprised of four related concepts: self-worth, self-efficacy, positive outlook, and mutual aid. Some other key components of empowerment include: self-esteem, assertiveness, and the ability to make choices (Smith et al., 2001).

According to Smith et al. (2001), self-discovery is an outcome of arts participation because the medium facilitates the participants' awareness of their individuality through creative exploration. In some cases, gaining a better understanding of one's emotional or physical feelings and responses through art can allow us a better sense of who we are. According to Kossak (2009), engaging with the arts can be "a way of knowing and a means of discovery, which can lead to a deeper connection to material, sound, body, and space as well as a deeper felt connectivity to self, and others involved in the creative experience..." (p. 15).

During recreational participation in the arts, the emphasis is on creation rather than the evaluation of a set of artistic skills. As such, participants are able to build a sense of accomplishment and capability, which directly leads to an increase in self-esteem (Lynch & Chosa, 1996; Reynolds, 2000). It was found by Reynolds, in her study of

women with depression who participated in needlepoint, that the enhanced social support involved in a shared art activity contributed to an increase in participants' self-esteem.

When people with disabilities participate in the arts, it illustrates to others that they are capable members of society who have valuable contributions to make (Smith et al., 2001). Receiving accolades and recognition from family, friends, and instructors for their artistic creations is both rewarding for participants, and serves to enhance the societal perception of people with disabilities (Lynch & Chosa, 1996).

Finally, artistic pursuits provide an opportunity for self-expression. According to Warren (2008), the arts offer an outlet for the representation and articulation of both physical and emotional feelings. Reynolds and Prior (2003) found that women with disabling chronic illness relied on art endeavours to express the grief they experienced throughout their illnesses. The value of the arts as a channel for self-expression is that it is perceived to be a safe place, free from the judgments of others (Devine & Dattilo, 2000).

Utilizing the arts as recreation need not be restricted to traditional art forms. Rather, the use of newer artistic mediums as a form of leisure is an emerging area in recreation programming. For example, Lashua and Fox (2007) describe their work with Aboriginal youth, which involved using a technological music program to assist participants in developing their own rap and hip-hop remixes. This involved sampling various sound recordings (i.e., spoken word, music) to create an entirely new musical piece. According to Lashua and Fox, "rap music has, thus, become an important site of young Aboriginal people's leisure activities and for many rap music is a sustaining creative force in their lives" (144). Lashua and Fox add that an exploration of the

connections between leisure and music-making (in particular rap and hip-hop) is a significant gap in the leisure research.

The arts have been, and continue to be, defined in a variety of ways, depending on the group that is utilizing them. Various art forms have been used as therapeutic modalities, a means to convey social messages, and as tools for recreation programming. The arts remain a field that is constantly developing, evolving, and gaining greater recognition within the spheres of health treatment, social movements and advocacy, and programming.

### The Social Construction of Disability

To create an arts-based program and understand how practitioners perceive the inclusive experience, it is important to first examine how the notion of disability has developed over time, that is, the social construction of disability. According to Devine and Sylvester (2005), “social constructionism [of disability] is concerned with the meaning given by society to physical, cognitive, mental, and emotional impairments” (p. 87). This meaning is created when a societal majority shares the meanings they assign to “behaviours, objects, and language” (Devine & Sylvester, p. 86). Essentially, social constructionism considers knowledge to be derived from, and rely upon, social context; it may differ from one society to the next and from one time period to another (Devine & Sylvester). Often, those making assumptions about the nature of disability are among the members of society who define themselves as non-disabled (Lord & Hutchison, 2007). As such, people with disabilities often find themselves at a disadvantage in terms of social, economic, recreational, and civic opportunities (Lord & Hutchison). Though

legislation has garnered some rights in terms of access and inclusion, an improvement in quality of life is not guaranteed without effort to include people with disabilities into the community in more than superficial ways (Lord & Hutchison). According to Devine and Parr (2008), in spite of legislative efforts, “individuals with disabilities continue to experience feelings of isolation, marginalization, and powerlessness on both individual and societal levels” (p. 391).

Historically speaking, disability only became a distinct social category after the eighteenth century (Braddock & Parish, 2001). According to Swain et al. (2003), “disabled people have been viewed as inferior, dangerous, tragic, pathetic and not quite human. They have been kept apart from other people by the practice of institutionalization and by hostile attitudes and an inaccessible environment” (p. 67). Beginning around 1760, the Canadian government gave the church full responsibility for society’s “unfavourable” citizens, among them, people with disabilities (Hutchison & McGill, 1992). During this period, people with disabilities were classified as “holy innocents”, or “saints serving a divine purpose” (Hutchison & McGill, p. 22). Between this time and the late nineteenth century, people with disabilities were mainly institutionalized in jails and asylums (Hutchison & McGill). By the late 1800s, a general intolerance towards people with disabilities became the common sentiment; hope for curing disabilities was replaced with a sense that people with disabilities were dangerous (Braddock & Parish). The intolerance toward people with disabilities developed slowly from a variety of factors. The National Institute on Mental Retardation (1981) describes this process as “age-old attitudes about deviancy and religion, plus the trends of the late 1800s towards isolation, enlargement, and economization of services, combined with

scientific information to shape a new concept of mental retardation [*sic*] and retarded persons [*sic*] as a menace to society” (p. 10). The belief that people with disabilities were a threat to society resulted in them being “isolated, segregated, neglected, sterilized, restrained, abused, and institutionalized” (Hutchison & McGill, p. 23). Throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century, and into the early twentieth, there was a heavy focus on institutionalization, and keeping people with disabilities separate from able-bodied society (Braddock & Parish). In the early 1900s, the suggestion was first made that people with disabilities should be moved from institutions into the community, but it was not until the late 1950s that this notion would begin to influence the treatment of people with disabilities (Hutchison & McGill). Throughout the 1920s to the 1970s, people with disabilities were still denied full participation in society, but were beginning to get support and training to take on jobs (Jongbloed, 2003).

In the 1970s, the view that disabilities were a problem of individual limitations was challenged. In its place, the idea that disability is the result of society failing to accommodate people of varying ability levels emerged (Jongbloed). It was after this time that associations and organizations began to form in the name of disability advocacy, and the deinstitutionalization movement began (Braddock & Parish). Throughout the 1970s to the late 1990s, there was a strong emphasis on people with disabilities living within the community, supported by family, friends, medical, and community resources (Braddock & Parish). Advocacy groups, such as The Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped (COPOH) and the Council of Canadians with Disabilities (CCD) were formed to represent and protect the interests of people with disabilities (Jongbloed). As well, legislation was enacted to protect the rights of people with disabilities. In a

Canadian context, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) recognized that people with disabilities were a disadvantaged societal group, yet should be treated and protected as equal citizens (Jongbloed).

Looking at disability as a socially constructed phenomenon involves challenging mainstream beliefs about disability and their associated meanings (Jones, 1996). There are many different constructions of disability, but the two most common, as identified by Devine and Sylvester (2005), are the medical and social models of disability. Much of what has governed society's views on disability is based on the medical model (Arehart, 2008). The medical model views disability as a physiological problem that requires medical intervention; the focus is on overcoming the disabling condition (Areheart). Under this view, disability is perceived as "a tragedy afflicting the individual" (Devine & Sylvester, p. 87). People with disabilities are viewed as deviating from the norm, and medical solutions are implemented in order to normalize their functioning level (Devine & Sylvester). The medical model often typifies people with disabilities as being incapable and dependent (Areheart). In this model, disability is perceived as a problem intrinsic to the person with the disability, and barriers and limitations that the person experiences are attributed to the disability itself (Devine and Sylvester). Disability is seen as the individual's personal hardship, and the associated challenges are unrelated to societal influence or responsibility (Areheart). In the medical model people with disabilities are viewed as having problematic lives due to their impairments. There is no recognition of "the failure of society to meet that person's needs in terms of appropriate human help and accessibility" (Swain et al., 2003, p. 68). In comparison, the social model deems disability to be "the result of social discrimination against individuals who are

different than the norm” (Devine & Sylvester, p. 87). Rather than focusing on the person with a disability as the problem, the social model views society to be the challenge (Devine & Sylvester). When society is not accepting and accommodating towards people with disabilities, that is when disabling conditions develop (Devine & Sylvester).

The social model of disability attempts to reframe the meanings attached to the notion of disability which have been influenced by the medical model. While the social model is not denying that there is a mental or physical limitation, it aims to illustrate that limitations can be rendered irrelevant in a social, political, cultural, and built environment where fewer oppressive social structures exist (Jones, 1996). Some critics have suggested that the social model could be strengthened through an acknowledgement of the embodiment of disability rather than focusing strictly on its disembodiment (Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Shakespeare & Watson, 2001). According to Hughes and Paterson, proponents of the social model must launch “a critique of its own dualistic heritage and establish, as an epistemological necessity, that the impaired body is part of the domain of history, culture and meaning, and not – as medicine would have it – an ahistorical, pre-social, purely natural object” (p. 326). Exploring how the notion of disability has been understood in a historical and social context, and acknowledging that societal views are dynamic, enables practitioners, advocates, families, and government agencies to plan less stigmatizing programs and services that are accessible and effective (Jones).

I was unable to locate literature surrounding recreation practitioners’ perspectives on the meaning of disability. However, some work exists in terms of examining education professionals beliefs and opinions about disability. It has been found that while practitioners are open to having children with disabilities in their classroom, a hierarchy

exists in terms of disabilities which are perceived as more conducive to being included.

According to Stoiber et al., 1998:

Practitioners indicated that children with speech and language delays, learning disabilities, and mild cognitive disabilities can be most easily accommodated in early childhood inclusive settings, which corresponded to the children with disabilities for whom they felt most prepared to provide services. In contrast, children viewed to require the greatest accommodation were those with autism and neurological disorders, and similarly, practitioners reported being the least prepared to work with children with these disabilities (p. 107).

As well, in some cases children with behavioural challenges have been perceived as more difficult to work with, and a potential danger to other children in the classroom (Grider, 1995). It is the perception of some teachers that children with disabilities in the classroom will be the cause of “personal anxiety” for the instructor (Ballard, 1997, p. 246).

However, Ballard attributes fears about children with disabilities to the fear of the unknown. When teachers had more contact with children with disabilities, especially in a positive context, their beliefs and fears were shifted to a more positive view of disability. In fact, many teachers acted as advocates for children with disabilities, supporting their rights to inclusion (Ballard).

The social construction of disability is a complex issue dating back to the first conceptualizations of disability in the early nineteenth century. Although progress has been made in terms of disability rights and legislation, the social acceptance of this group has developed more slowly. While the medical model of disability has dominated societal discourse on disability, there has been a movement toward examining disability through the lens of the social model. Governmental officials, disability advocates, educators, programmers, and people with disabilities themselves continue to discuss and debate the definition of, and perceptions about, people with disabilities.

## Recreation and Inclusion

The history of people with disabilities in Canada has been marked by persistent exclusion, often resulting in the population's relegation to second-class status (Canadian Association for Community Living, 2008). Typically this second-class status is manifested in the continuing "denial of opportunities for inclusive participation" (Frazee, 2005, p. 105). According to Susinos (2007), social exclusion can be defined as follows:

a structural rather than circumstantial phenomenon, which is on the increase in our society and is related to certain social processes that lead to the isolation of certain groups and individuals who are marginalized by the organizations and institutions by which society is organized. This process entails a loss of the sense of belonging on the part of the individual, as well as the denial of certain economical, social, political, cultural and/or educational rights and opportunities (p. 118).

The notion of inclusion is a concept which emerged in North America in the mid-1980s (Lord & Hutchison, 2007). At the heart of many definitions, inclusion means that "people with disabilities become full, active, learning members of the community" (Dattilo, 1994, p. 7). According to Austin and Crawford (2001), "inclusion is about ensuring choices, having support, having connections, and being valued" (p. 141). Lloyd, Tse, and Deane (2006) combine these two ideas in their definition of inclusion:

Social inclusion involves being able to rejoin or participate in leisure, friendship and work communities. Inclusive communities provide equal opportunities for sharing power and resources amongst different people in society. Connectedness and interdependence are fostered among community members by sharing values, beliefs and visions. Individuals not only meet their own needs but reach out to meet the needs of others (p.1).

The Institute for Inclusion's website (2008) describes several key elements of the inclusive process:

- Making an effort to include a variety of people in the collaborative process to capitalize on the unique and valuable contributions that each individual can make.
- Involving key people (regardless of status or position) in decision-making and leadership as it pertains to common goals.
- “Learning to live and work together”.
- Promoting an environment which fosters and expresses the qualities of “openness, respect, collaboration and appreciation of the validity of different points of view”.
- Acknowledging and appreciating the value of each and every individual by the development and implementation of circumstances which “foster equity, empowerment, awareness and competence at the personal, group and organizational levels”.

One aim of inclusion is to bridge the social distance divide between “us” groups and “them” groups; “them” representing typically socially segregated groups such as people with disabilities, and “us” representing mainstream society (Lord & Hutchison). Inclusion is closely tied to the concept of community; that is, exploring what it is that makes a person experience a sense of belonging (Hutchison & McGill, 1992). Ideally, a community is a place where all people feel welcome, and where community members are open to change as the concept of what it means to be an inclusive community evolves (Hutchison & McGill). Leisure is an important avenue through which a sense of community can be strengthened (Arai & Pedlar, 2003). People may discover through their leisure pursuits that they can contribute to their community, possess skills and talents, have added meaning to their lives, and are more connected to a larger group

(Hutchison & McGill). As expressed by McKnight (2005), “the best community...is one in which all kinds of methods create all kinds of situations in which each of us finds relationships where our gifts are recognized and magnified” (p. 117).

The definitions of inclusion utilized in research, practice, and policy vary widely among researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. One important distinction that has been made is the difference between the terms “inclusion” and “integration.” As explained by Lord and Hutchison (2007):

At a more practical level, society is now learning the difference between “integration” and “inclusion”. We are learning that many people are typically “in the community” but not “of the community”...simply being in the community did not guarantee social acceptance and full participation. In a social inclusion picture, communities are welcoming, diversity is respected, full participation or engagement in all aspects of community life is encouraged, and conditions enable everyone to be valued, contributing members of society (p. 12).

Where the term “inclusion” denotes that every person should have the right to be accepted and included from the beginning of their lives, the term “integration” alludes to the notion that people with disabilities have been removed from society in some way, and are now being reintroduced (Austin & Crawford, 2001).

The practice of integration was established within the education system in the 1980s, and a shift towards inclusion occurred in the 1990s (Vislie, 2003). Following the United Nations’ development of the *Salamanca Statement on Principles, Policy, and Practice in Special Needs Education* in 1994, inclusive education became part of a “global agenda” which impacted countries in the developed and developing world (Dyson, 1999, p. 36). The education field continues to be an area where inclusive practices are developed and promoted. Ryndak, Jackson, and Billingsley (2000) analyzed

a variety of different educators' definitions of inclusion, and found that seven major themes emerged, specifically:

(a) placement in natural typical settings; (b) all students together for instruction and learning; (c) supports and modifications within general education to meet appropriate learner outcomes; (d) belongingness, equal membership, acceptance, and being valued; (e) collaborative integrated services by education teams; (f) systemic philosophy or belief system; and (g) meshing general and special education into one unified system (p. 101).

Though a number of these themes are education-specific, the general notion of inclusion is encompassed within these ideas, namely, the ideals of natural settings, belongingness, equal membership, being valued, and collaboration.

A difference is noted between the notions of physical inclusion and social inclusion. While physical inclusion is mandated by law, and includes accommodations such as widened doorways, ramps, curb cuts, and automated doors, it has been found that adapting the physical environment in no way ensures programmatic participation (Schleien et al., 1995). Inclusion strategies must impact the social domain as well, which means fostering a climate that is physically and socially “barrier-free, zero exclusion...where no one is rejected” (Schleien et al., p. 6). According to Austin and Crawford (2001), “the focus of social inclusion is on the recreation experience of the individual [with a disability] and his or her perceptions of membership and belonging made by his or her peers” (p. 163). Belonging to a group is different from simply being present in a group. “Belonging” implies that the social environment is fully accepting of the person with a disability, while “being present” implies that it is merely tolerant of their attendance (Austin & Crawford, 2001). It should be noted that, in relation to phenomenology, “being present” is not a negative attribute. Rather, the notion of

presence is connected to the Buddhist tradition of mindfulness; that is, being attentive to and engaged with what is taking place in the moment (Brown & Ryan, 2003). According to Brown and Ryan:

Mindfulness may be important in disengaging individuals from automatic thoughts, habits, and unhealthy behavior patterns and thus could play a key role in fostering informed and self-endorsed behavioral regulation, which has long been associated with well-being enhancement. Further, by adding clarity and vividness to experience, mindfulness may also contribute to well-being and happiness in a direct way” (p. 823)

It was found by Lynch and Chosa (1996) that participants in a community-based expressive arts program for people with disabilities felt that their involvement positively influenced the way others viewed them. According to Devine (2004), “one indicator of privilege, status, and values within an inclusive leisure context is social acceptance” (p. 138). Additionally, social acceptance is the first step toward building friendships, being included socially, and breaking down negative stereotypes (Devine). There is little available research on the benefits of inclusive arts, and not very much in terms of inclusive recreation programs in general for people with disabilities. However, some benefits of inclusive programs that have cited for people with disabilities include:

- the development of new leisure experiences and competencies (Anderson & Heyne, 2000; Heyne & Schleien, 1996)
- identification and familiarity (Austin & Crawford, 2001)
- a sense of being liked or accepted through social connections (Austin & Crawford; Heyne & Schleien; Hutchison & McGill, 1992)
- increased self-confidence (Anderson & Heyne)
- stimulation and motivation (Schleien, Ray, & Green, 1997)

- promotion of equality (DeGraaf, Jordan, & DeGraaf, 1999)
- feelings of success (Anderson & Heyne)
- respite and empowerment for families of participants (Heyne & Schleien).

Likewise, there are benefits for participants without disabilities, such as enhanced "self concept, social cognition, reduced fear of human differences, increased tolerance, and new friendships" (Schleien et al., 1997, p. 17). Despite a continued controversy surrounding the topic, the literature tends to show that there is no evidence to support the idea that participation in an inclusive program is detrimental to the experience or learning processes of non-disabled participants (Devine, 2004; Gandhi, 2007; Schleien et al., 1997). According to Miller and Katz (2002), "inclusion is a way of joining in a positive manner in the interest of a positive outcome, not a strategy for avoiding conflict, settling for the lowest common denominator, or assimilation. Inclusion creates a sense of belonging..." (p. 16-17).

It should be noted that segregated programming remains the preference for some participants with disabilities. There are many benefits to segregated programming, including the provision of "a safe, structured, and secure leisure experience" (Schleien et al., 1997, p. 25). Additionally, segregated programs may provide knowledgeable staff and specialized equipment which can contribute to a more fulfilling, successful leisure experience for people with disabilities (Schleien et al.). It was found by Connor and Ferri (2007) that, in some cases, inclusive environments can result in alienation for people with disabilities who do not have a peer group to identify with. Unqualified staff and inappropriate activity modifications in inclusive programs may lead to experiences that are not meaningful for participants (Connor and Ferri). As such, special care should be

taken by practitioners, when creating an inclusive environment, that issues such as social inclusion, physical access, and appropriate modifications are considered.

*The Role of the Recreation Practitioner in Creating Inclusion*

According to Miller and Katz (2002), “all groups possess the inherent potential of diversity, but to truly leverage it you need inclusion” (p. xi), however, this may be easier said than done. There are certainly some challenges with creating an effective inclusion program. As has been found in the education system, “...placing a special education student in a regular education classroom and expecting that he or she will be accepted and included socially is unrealistic” (Johnson & Bullock, 2005, p. 215). The inclusion process is more involved than simply placing children with disabilities in a room with non-disabled children; it involves treating all children as equals (Johnson & Bullock). Additionally, some leadership strategies are required to help connect non-disabled participants and participants with disabilities together in an inclusive setting. According to Heyne (1995), “for young adults, the most commonly reported obstacle to social and recreation inclusion is the lack of a companion, friend, or advocate to accompany the person with a disability to a community activity” (p. 25). It has been found that around only one third of people with disabilities have even one non-disabled friend. Some perceived challenges to the development of these friendships include discrepancies in communication abilities, income levels, and freedom of choice (Bates & Davis, 2004).

According to Smith et al. (2001), attitudinal barriers are the most limiting barriers to participation, additionally, they are typically the most difficult to overcome. However, recreational settings provide an ideal venue for altering negative attitudes towards people with disabilities. A recreation environment which provides an opportunity for non-

disabled people to participate with people who convey positive images of people with disabilities is an ideal situation for changing some of the negative perceptions of disability (Smith et al.). Leisure experiences provide a basis for the development of friendships (Hutchison & McGill, 1992), and recreation is a key means through which positive relationships for people with disabilities can be supported (Heyne, 1995).

Inclusive programming involves a focus on program design and implementation that ensures people with disabilities are included in a way that is more meaningful than simply being physically present (Austin & Crawford, 2001). Rather than simply reducing structural or accessibility barriers, true inclusion involves program design and leadership which results in the social inclusion of participants; that is, being part of a peer group, having conversations, making friends, and feeling connected (Austin & Crawford).

Though recreation settings can provide an ideal location for inclusion to take place (Lieberman, 2003), “recreation activities in and of themselves, do not create relationships” (Heyne, 1995, p. 26). There are some steps which recreation programmers must take to produce a leisure environment conducive to inclusive relationships. Heyne outlines six major steps towards creating an effective inclusive environment. First, education is an effective way to make children aware about what it means to have a disability, thus decreasing the prevalence of negative stereotypes, and increasing positive perceptions about people with disabilities. According to Dattilo (1994), “public attitudes and perceptions become increasingly positive as people become more knowledgeable about and familiar with people with disabilities” (p. 49).

Second, cooperative learning arrangements remove the focus from winning and losing, and redirect efforts to emphasize a participant’s contribution to the group effort.

The conventional structure of many group activities results in one or two winners, with the remaining participants considered to have lost the game (Rynders, 1995). Often, people with “task-related” disabilities will struggle to succeed in a competitive environment such as this, finding themselves on the losing team an inordinate amount of times (Rynders, p. 27). Restructuring group activities in a cooperative way can serve to enhance peer socialization, create interdependence, and encourage positive social interaction (Rynders). The group leader is an important front-line staff member in terms of demonstrating positive behaviours both for participants with, and without, disabilities.

Third, teaching leaders how to structure activities and interactions to promote inclusion empowers them to encourage communication between group members and establish an accepting social climate. According to Dattilo (1994), “leisure is an excellent social context for the development of friendships and for the expression of social identities” (p. 187). A cooperative activity design structure is effective in facilitating inclusion through an emphasis on group interdependence; each member of the team will have something to contribute to the achievement of group goals (Dattilo). It is important that facilitators bear these ideas in mind when structuring activities; developing cooperative group activities are likely better for promoting inclusion than competitive independent activities.

Fourth, by carefully adjusting the rules, setting, or equipment related to activities, programmers can facilitate participation for children with disabilities while retaining the original design of the activity. Smith et al. (2001) offer nine considerations when selecting and modifying activities for inclusive programs:

- (1) change as little as necessary;
- (2) if/when possible, involve the person with the disability in the selection and modification process;
- (3) get to know the person with a disability before you make assumptions about their activity interests or ability level;
- (4) consider the elements of competitiveness which may be involved in an activity;
- (5) offer the same type of activities that are typically played by child's age group;
- (6) where possible, activities should have common denominators so that everyone plays the same way;
- (7) whenever possible, encourage full participation over partial participation or spectating for the person with a disability;
- (8) do not assume that participants need to start at the lowest level of play, assess functioning level accurately; and
- (9) offer individuals the opportunity for free choice in activities (p. 125).

Fifth, providing social skills instruction through “role-playing and problem solving” can teach both children with disabilities, and those without, how to better interact with their peers (Heyne, 1995, p. 26). According to Dattilo (1994), “programs that teach children with disabilities social skills or how to initiate and respond to peers’ social contacts can promote positive peer interactions” (p. 188). Likewise, participants without disabilities should be educated about how to be accepting, understanding, and positive towards people with disabilities (Dattilo). Competence in conversation skills, learning how to make appropriate comments, and problem solving are examples of areas from which all children may benefit from additional coaching (Heyne).

Finally, the collaboration of community organizations, schools, parent advocacy groups and other networks creates a system of support that “can work together to build a vision that supports the nurturance of relationships” (Heyne, 1995, p. 26). There are a variety of roles that network partners may take on throughout the inclusion process, including: information gathering, needs identification, program selection, publicity and

recruitment, registration, implementation of inclusion strategies, program implementation, program evaluation, feedback, and future planning (Schleien et al., 1997).

There are different ways to create inclusive programs, three of which I will discuss briefly here. The first way to create an inclusive program is the “inclusion of generic programs” which involves helping place a participant with a disability in an age and interest-appropriate community program which is not specifically designed for people with disabilities (Schleien et al., 1995, p. 7). The advantages of this type of program are that the activities tend to be high-interest and age-appropriate, and they exist within the community network, offering the opportunity for social interaction between non-disabled participants and those with disabilities (Schleien et al.). The second way to create an inclusive program is called “reverse mainstreaming”, which essentially means modifying a segregated program for people with disabilities to attract non-disabled participants (Schleien et al.). The challenge with this type of program is how to modify it to attract non-disabled participants. However, once the program is underway, opportunities similar to the previous method exist in terms of facilitating social interaction between peers (Schleien et al.). I believe there is a third way to create inclusive programs, although Schleien does not discuss it specifically; that is, to create an inclusive program from the ground up. This process would involve developing a program with the intention that people with and without disabilities will be actively recruited to participate. Rather than being open to making accommodations for people with disabilities in the future, a program of this nature would consider the space, activities, and

leadership so that participants of all ability levels will find a place within the program from its inception.

The literature surrounding the practitioner perspective of delivering inclusive arts or recreation programs is limited. However, some work exists in terms of how school teachers perceive inclusive classrooms. It has been found that, in general, the greater amount of knowledge and experience that a teacher has, the more positively they tend to view classroom inclusion (Stoiber et al., 1998). Teachers have cited a variety of benefits of inclusive classrooms, including:

- children without disabilities learn to be more comfortable with, and tolerant of, children with different needs and abilities (Lieber, Capell, Sandall, Wolfberg, Horn, & Beckman, 1998)
- children without disabilities learn to be helpful and accommodating of others' needs (Lieber et al.);
- children with disabilities learn appropriate behaviours as modeled by their peers without disabilities (Grider, 1995; Lieber et al.);
- children with disabilities form friendships (Lieber et al.);
- children with disabilities develop social and cognitive behaviours at a higher level (Lieber et al.; Smith & Leonard, 2005)

Despite the cited benefits of inclusive classrooms, some challenges have been identified as well. Although many practitioners believe that inclusive classrooms are valuable, many have difficulty designing and maintaining effective inclusive classrooms (Lieber et al.). Some identified barriers to improving inclusive practices include:

- feeling unprepared to provide an inclusive course or classroom (Ammah & Hodge, 2005; Grider, 1995; Smith & Leonard, 2005);
- “limited time and limited opportunities for collaboration” (Stoiber et al, p. 107; Smith & Leonard);
- overcrowded classrooms and lack of support (Ammah & Hodge; Grider; Smith & Leonard)
- friendships formed between children with disabilities and without are not mutual/real (Grider)
- students with disabilities will learn negative behaviours from their peers without disabilities (Grider)

Additionally, there seemed to be a disconnect in terms of what teachers believed their students with disabilities were capable of, and how they actually acted to facilitate their development (Lieber et al.). Teachers have indicated while inclusive classrooms are a good idea in theory, they can be problematic in practice due to the potential challenges which may be encountered (Ammah & Hodge; Grider, 1995). The primary concern of teachers is that when inclusive programs cannot be delivered in an effective way, they run the risk of becoming a negative experience for the children with disabilities (Ammah & Hodge).

Inclusivity has emerged to the forefront of disability discourse as a significant issue of rights and access. Inclusive practices involve creating environments where every person, regardless of ability level, is welcomed as a contributing, active participant. Best practices, as they relate to inclusive programming, are still being developed in the recreation and leisure field. While some participants prefer the setting and atmosphere of

segregated programs, there is a movement towards facilitating environments where everyone can be included in a meaningful recreation experience.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the meanings and experiences of inclusive arts programs from the perspective of practitioners. This exploration examined how practitioners' images and understandings of inclusion, disability, and the arts shaped their experiences and actions in inclusive arts programs.

The study of phenomenology begins with the question: what is lived experience? (van Manen, 1997). Lived experience is both the beginning and end of phenomenological inquiry. The research questions guiding this study focused on the lived experience of the practitioners who have been involved in the delivery of inclusive arts programs. The research questions were as follows:

1. What are practitioners' meanings, images, and understandings of inclusion, disability, and the arts?
2. How do practitioners describe their experiences with inclusive arts programs?
3. How do practitioners' meanings, images, and understandings of inclusion, disability, and the arts shape their experiences and actions with inclusive arts programs?

### Phenomenology

According to van Manen (1997), "phenomenology is the study of the lifeworld – the world as we immediately experience it pre-reflectively rather than as we conceptualize, categorize, or reflect on it" (p. 9). The role of phenomenological researchers is to attempt to view the world from the perspective of their research

participants (Daly, 2007). van Manen describes the essential objective of phenomenology:

to transform lived experience into a textual expression of its essence – in such a way that the effect of the text is at once reflexive re-living and a reflective appropriation of something meaningful: a notion by which a reader is powerfully animated in his or her own lived experience (p. 36).

The expression of an essence is less enigmatic a process than it may sound; rather, it is simply a communicated description of a phenomenon. The description serves to illuminate the “nature and significance” of the lived experience in a way which was previously unrealized (van Manen, 1997, p. 39). Patton (2002) describes how the notion of essences differentiates phenomenological explorations from other qualitative methods: “these essences are the core meanings mutually understood through a phenomenon commonly experienced” (p. 106). According to van Manen:

When a phenomenologist asks for the essence of a phenomenon – a lived experience – then the phenomenological inquiry is not unlike an artistic endeavor, a creative attempt to somehow capture a certain phenomenon of life in a linguistic description that is both holistic and analytical, evocative and precise, unique and universal, powerful and sensitive (p. 39).

Thus, the fundamental question that phenomenology asks is: “what is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (Patton, p. 104).

Phenomenology, as a methodology, makes inherent sense to me. Even as a child, I was adamant that no one could tell me that I was wrong for perceiving my experience of a situation or event in a certain way. For example, although my parents thought that my little sister’s antics were charming, I experienced them as annoying, so I kicked her. Although I may have been wrong to kick her, my parents could not tell me that she was

not being annoying because they did not have the same experience of being an eldest sister. I was a proponent of phenomenology ahead of my time. Although this is a lighthearted example of why I believe in phenomenology, the core idea remains the same. I believe that the experience of individuals is significant, and that valuing these experiences, without trying to predict or change them, is important. It is akin to walking a mile in someone else's shoes, so to speak, and when was a journey through someone's unique experiences ever a wasted effort?

The beginnings of phenomenology can be traced to the field of philosophy during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It was during this time that philosopher Edmund Husserl was exploring the question of "how objects, actions, and events appear in the consciousness of the actor" (Daly, 2007, p. 94). Husserl believed that the outside world could be disregarded to allow an individual's personal reality to become their unqualified reality, uninfluenced by the external environment. According to Patton (2002), an individual does not have an objective reality, there is simply a subjective reality; how one attaches meaning to an experience of a phenomenon is how one creates his/her reality.

Groenewald (2004) explains this notion further:

To arrive at certainty, anything outside immediate experience must be ignored, and in this way the external world is reduced to the contents of personal consciousness. Realities are thus treated as pure 'phenomena' and the only absolute data from where to begin. Husserl named his philosophical method 'phenomenology', the science of pure 'phenomena' (p. 43).

It was Alfred Schutz who took Husserl's notion of phenomenology and introduced it to the realm of social science research (Daly, 2007). Schutz believed that the way individuals interpret their world is largely based on their personal experiences (Daly). He

introduced the idea that researchers, in researching people's interpretations of their world, are in turn imposing their own meanings to the subjects' understandings (Daly).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty was a significant voice in the study of phenomenology during the first half of the twentieth century. He described phenomenological research as "the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to finding definitions of essences" (Merleau-Ponty & Smith, 2002, p. vii). By "essences", Merleau-Ponty was alluding to the fundamental meanings of an experience as they are constructed and communicated by the actor in that experience.

All phenomenological research examines the way the "human lifeworld" is constructed (van Manen, 1997, p. 101). According to van Manen, "our lived experiences and the structures of meanings (themes) in terms of which these lived experiences can be described and interpreted constitute the immense complexity of the lifeworld" (p. 101). There are four fundamental existential themes which are found in the lifeworlds of all people, despite differences such as age, culture, or social context (van Manen). Nearly any human experience can be explored in the context of these four key existential themes. van Manen (1997, p. 102) identifies the fundamental themes as follows:

- Lived space (spatiality): this refers to felt space, separate from the notion of mathematical space such as height, width, and distance. It is the way that different spaces make us feel, or, how we "become the space we are in" (p. 102).
- Lived body (corporeality): this refers to our physical body, through which we are always revealing and concealing things about ourselves.
- Lived time (temporality): this concept focuses on subjective time, that is, the speed at which time feels to pass in different situations. It also refers to the way

we conceptualize temporal dimensions such as past, present, and future. This dimension involves both memories and aspirations.

- Lived human relation (relationality or communality): this is the “lived relation we maintain with others in the interpersonal space that we share with them” (p. 104). This involves our corporeal encounters, our first impressions, and growing relationships which give us a social sense of purpose and meaning.

According to van Manen, the fundamental lifeworld existentials “serve as guides for reflection in the research process” (p. 101). As such, I kept each of the lifeworld existentials in mind as I undertook my journaling and intuitive writing. As I will discuss in more detail later, the notion of lived space emerged as an important idea for practitioners when describing their experiences with inclusive arts programs.

Phenomenology, as a research method, is undertaken with attention to some basic conceptual ideas which shape this type of inquiry. Four of the theoretical concepts put forth by Daly (2007) that shape phenomenology include: intentionality, intersubjectivity, stock of knowledge, and the nature of objective reality. “Intentionality” is focused on the way that individuals create subjective meaning based on their experiences with the “objective world” (Daly, p. 96). “Intersubjectivity” implies that all individuals share, on some level, a common life experience; that is, intersubjectivity is the continual process of contributing to shared meanings through social interaction (Daly). Through these shared meanings, individuals develop a sense that life, our basic reality, is typically predictable. “Stock of knowledge” refers to the personal experiences that are amassed by an individual over the course of their engagement with society (Daly). Through their stock of knowledge, individuals develop ways of understanding, and functioning within the

world. Finally, “the nature of objective reality” is significant because it cannot be separated from the way it is interpreted subjectively. Individuals will view the objective reality in a unique way “because of their different position and relation to it” (Daly, p. 97). Despite the importance of the subjective experience in phenomenology, the objective reality must be acknowledged because it is within that world that these subjective experiences exist.

Phenomenological approaches have been utilized in many disciplines, and in many different ways (Daly, 2007). Although there a range of approaches to phenomenology guided by assumptions from different methodological orientations, I have chosen an interpretivist approach for my data collection and analysis as it aligns best with my worldview. The interpretivist approach to phenomenology fits with my belief that reality is subjective and socially constructed, and with the importance that I place on the lived experience. Interpretivist approaches allow the researcher to draw connections and identify patterns in the data, rather than encouraging strictly linear thinking (Samdahl, 1999). Interpretivist approaches allow for the researcher to co-construct meaning through collaboration with research participants, and acknowledges that the researcher’s own perspectives and experiences will play a role in the research (Groenewald, 2004). Far from being a negative aspect of interpretive research, I believe that accepting this process of shared meanings and understanding recognizes that research is a human experience which involves an interactive relationship (Daly, 2007).

Leisure experiences have been recognized as a construction of both personal and social factors. As such, phenomenology has emerged as a viable research paradigm to explore the “subjective, intra- and inter-individualistic, dynamic, and value laden nature

of leisure” (Howe, 1991, p. 49). The thick description of experiences that phenomenological inquiry yields has been identified as a way to better understand leisure experiences (Howe). It is my assumption that if phenomenology can be applied to examining the leisure experience, so too can it focus on the experience of delivering leisure, a much less explored area of inquiry.

### Research Participants

The ten participants selected for this research were program developers, coordinators, or managers from Northwestern and Southwestern Ontario who have worked as front-line staff for at least one inclusive arts program. Practitioners were purposefully selected to represent staff from a range of inclusive arts programs. This was done in order to avoid interviewing participants from the same program, because many of my contacts were involved in one inclusive organization in particular. I felt that interviewing practitioners from a variety of programs would better illustrate a range of inclusive arts experiences, which was important to me. Purposeful sampling is ideal for focusing in-depth on a small sample group (Patton, 2002). According to Patton, “purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study” (p. 230).

Initially, I intended to examine Southwestern Ontario exclusively, as I was easily able to travel to most sites within this area for interviews. However, I found myself limited by the relatively small inclusive arts community, and rather than interview several people from within one program, I branched out to include practitioners in Northwestern Ontario. The region of Northwestern Ontario was chosen because I spent nearly half of my life there, and was fairly involved in the arts and culture community, particularly

throughout high school. I was able to reach former contacts from within the arts field through email, and this snowballed into the involvement of 4 participants from Northwestern Ontario.

As indicated by Holstein & Gubrium (1995), the selection of study participants can be an ongoing process, and may change as the research study develops. This was certainly the case for my research, as my initial contacts felt that their experience was not entirely inclusive, and directed me to other potential contacts within the arts field. The method of snowball sampling was well-suited to the evolving nature of the active interview process, as it allowed me to access participants who had insight into the experiences which emerged as relevant. Snowball (or chain) sampling is “an approach for locating information-rich key informants or critical cases” which involves asking research participants to suggest personal contacts who may also agree to participate in the study (Patton, 2002, p. 237). As more interviewees were asked about key informants, the “snowball” grew as potential contacts were gathered. Utilizing this method of sampling is typically well-suited to interviews, as research participants may have good knowledge in terms of who else could offer rich insights into the topic of interest (Patton).

To begin with, ten potential participants previously known to me through work or volunteer experience were sent a Recruitment Flyer (Appendix A) and an Information Letter (Appendix B) via email requesting that they contact me if they were willing to participate in order to hear more about the study and set up an interview time. The Information Letter outlined in detail my study’s purpose and the commitment required of research participants. Once potential participants indicated a willingness to participate and the individual interview times were arranged, I met the study participants at an

interview location of their choice (usually their business or studio). At the beginning of the interview, I explained and discussed with participants the Informed Consent form (Appendix C). A discussion of informed consent typically answers questions such as why I am collecting this information, how this information will be used, how the issue of confidentiality will be handled, and the potential risks and benefits for interviewees (Patton, 2002). Each contact was asked to forward the entire email, including attachments, to at least one colleague who they thought would also be willing to participate. If the practitioners were willing to participate in my study, they contacted me through email or telephone to arrange an interview time. I sent emails to 10 personal contacts, and was told that they were passing the email on to 15 contacts in total. Additionally, I sent the Recruitment Flyer and Information Letter to four arts organizations in the Southwestern Ontario region following recommendations from primary contacts. Although many people contacted me with interest, they were not interviewed because many were either in non-arts inclusive programming, or non-inclusive arts programming. In the end, I interviewed six people from Southwestern Ontario (four of which were primary contacts, and two which were snowball contacts), and four people from Northwestern Ontario (one of which was a primary contact, and three of which were snowball contacts). I selected practitioners to be interviewed on a first-come, first-serve basis. Two snowball practitioners from Southwestern Ontario, and one from Northwestern Ontario contacted me in mid-July with an interest in being interviewed. I emailed them back thanking them for their interest, but explained that the data collection stage of my research had been completed. All four participants from

Northwestern Ontario were interviewed over the telephone rather than in person, due to financial and time restraints associated with travel to the region.

I have developed an aggregate profile of the research participants, which briefly describe their backgrounds. Although the development of more detailed individual profiles would have helped me place the participants' individual experiences in context (Dupuis, 1999), it would have been a violation of confidentiality in this case. The inclusive arts communities in both Southwestern and Northwestern Ontario are fairly small and connected. As such, even without using participants' names or the names of their organizations, a detailed description could have potentially allowed them to be identified by members and patrons of the inclusive arts community, which is contrary to my ethical guidelines. Eight of the participants were women, and two were men (both men from Northwestern Ontario). The ten practitioners interviewed were purposefully selected to represent staff from a range of backgrounds. Participants represented the private sector, public sector, and academia. Participants included:

- 1 inclusive visual arts business owner
- 1 drama teacher
- 1 inclusive dance business owner
- 1 university instructor
- 1 museum curator
- 1 full-time visual artist
- 1 occupational therapy student
- 1 dance and movement artist
- 1 pastoral assistant

- 1 professional musician

These 10 participants worked in 7 inclusive arts programs. Three participants were involved in a large-scale, multi-organization inclusive arts partnership. All three interviewees had front-line experience in the program, but at different levels in terms of seniority and involvement with participants. Two interviewees were involved with an in-school curriculum-based inclusive arts program. Although the interviewees were involved in the same broad program, they undertook different arts projects in separate schools. The remaining five programs were an inclusive pottery class, an inclusive dance class, an inclusive arts-based Sunday School program, inclusive children's music and songwriting workshops, and an arts program within an emergency youth shelter.

Although the participants came from a variety of backgrounds, and worked within different programs, my interview experiences were similar in that the participants were passionate and eager to share their knowledge and insights. There was a sense that those involved in the inclusive arts are part of a small community, and as a student engaged in research with that community, I became a part of it. I found the participants to be very open, and willing to share their experiences candidly with me.

#### Data Collection Procedures

The evolving nature of qualitative inquiry allows for the research process to change as the researcher begins to learn more about the research participants and the types of questions they wish to seek answers to (Creswell, 2003). According to Samdahl (1999), qualitative researchers do not need to predict precisely how their methods will unfold; rather, they construct this process as the research progresses. Rather than design research methods in such a fashion that the researcher can remain removed from the

research subject, qualitative researchers utilize methods as a means of engaging the research participant at the level of their subjective reality (Samdahl). According to Daly (2007), in-depth interviews are often used in phenomenological studies to “understand how participants use everyday language to give shape and meaning to their typified, familiar world” (p. 98).

Data were collected over a one month period, during June 2009. Data consisted of semi-structured, active interviews (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995) with 10 research participants. Adopting active interviewing as an interview method denotes an acceptance of the notion that interviews are essentially a “social interaction” (Patton, 2002, p. 404); that is, they are a collective meaning-making process (Patton). When a researcher chooses to employ the method of active interviews, they must acknowledge that, despite the fact that the interview process is one of shared meaning-making; the interview is still driven by the interviewer and their research objectives (Dupuis, 1999). As such, the researcher’s stance and research interest must be shared openly with the study participants (Dupuis). An active interview is conversational, directed by an interview guide. However, the interview guide may be adhered to, or it may be discarded in favour of allowing the research participants to direct the conversation based on what they perceive to be important aspects of the experience (Holstein & Gubrium).

The interviews lasted between 40 to 60 minutes, and were comprised of open-ended, guiding questions. My interview questions focused on how participants understand the concepts of disability, inclusion, and the arts, how they experienced a specific inclusive arts program, and how their meanings, images, and understandings of

inclusion, disability, and the arts shaped their experiences and actions with inclusive arts programs. The interview guide for this study can be found in Appendix D.

Throughout the course of the interview process I maintained a reflective journal. The purpose of this journal was twofold; first, to help me retain emerging ideas immediately following interviews, and second, to record thoughts which occurred to me during the transcription and analysis processes. It was my hope that the preservation of my impressions throughout the interview process would help inform my interpretation of the data. According to Dupuis (1999):

a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of what leisure means to different people and how leisure is experienced in different contexts can only be enriched by a fuller use of the self in leisure research, not by the omission of the self (p. 48).

The use of my self in this research was demonstrated in three main ways. First, it was exemplified by the use of first-person terminology in my writing, which denotes a sense of ownership over my research design, interpretations, and findings (Dupuis). Second, I acknowledge that the outcome of my data analysis is not the discovery of new knowledge, but rather, it is what I have drawn out of the data through my interpretation of the research participants' interpretation of the phenomenon (Dupuis; Creswell, 2003). Finally, throughout this research I have included a discussion of how my experiences and emotions have impacted my work throughout the research process (as per Dupuis). This final point is discussed further in the section called Strategies for Trustworthiness.

#### Data Management

Interviews were digitally audio recorded and downloaded onto my personal computer, of which I am the sole user. The MP3 files were saved on a password protected

memory stick. Following the files being downloaded on my computer they were deleted from the digital voice recorder, and once the files were transcribed verbatim, they were deleted from the memory stick. The interviewees were given pseudonyms in my interview transcriptions, and any identifiers (e.g. names, organizations) were removed or changed so that they could not be attributed to anyone specifically. I kept one hardcopy of a chart which identified the actual identities of the participants, along with their pseudonyms, in a locked drawer in my desk at the University of Waterloo. The purpose of this was to help keep my data analysis in context. Following data analysis, this form was destroyed.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

According to Creswell, qualitative interpretation includes, “developing a description of an individual or setting, analyzing data for themes or categories, and finally making an interpretation or drawing conclusions about its meaning personally and theoretically, stating the lessons learned, and offering further questions to be asked” (p. 182). Typically, phenomenological researchers do not follow a standardized, identical research process (Groenewald, 2004). My analysis process is informed by the phenomenological guidelines suggested by Halldórsdóttir and Hamrin (1997) as shown in Figure 1, Daly (2007), and additional qualitative research design information from Creswell (2003). My process can be divided into four major sections with corresponding sub-components (see Figure 1).

#### *Step One: Introduction to the Data Set*

When undertaking this research, I began with the “description of lived experience” as related by the research participant (Daly, 2007, p. 219). In this case, the

descriptions I used were the transcripts from my active interviews with practitioners from the regions of Southwestern and Northwestern Ontario who had been involved in at least one inclusive arts program as a front-line practitioner.

**Figure 1: Phenomenological Data Analysis Guidelines (adapted from Halldórsdóttir and Hamrin, 1997)**

- Intuitive writing**
1. Introduction to the data set
    - a) Reading and re-reading the transcript
    - b) Highlighting the key statements
  2. Identification of themes and structures
    - a) Naming the highlighted themes
    - b) Identifying the essential structure(s) within the highlighted themes
    - c) Identifying the essential structure(s) of the phenomenon
  3. Verification of structures
    - a) Free imaginative variation
    - b) Comparing the essential structure with the data
  4. Conveying the findings
    - a) Rich, thick description (Creswell, 2003)

My first step was to read and re-read each of the transcripts in an attempt to understand the participants' unique experiences. This was similar to Daly's notion of "attending to the phenomenon being studied" (p. 219), which facilitates an appreciation and deeper understanding of the research participants' experiences. After I was familiarized with the data, I extricated meaning units from the transcripts' descriptive passages, a process called "the constitution of parts" (Daly, p. 220). The data that I felt was important, as it pertained to my research questions, was identified by highlighting specific data in the transcripts. As indicated by Daly, active interviews are likely to yield long transcribed passages. This was true for my interviews, and highlighting key

statements helped me reduce the descriptive sections into condensed, yet meaningful, parts.

In the first stage of analysis, I began my intuitive writing. The purpose of intuitive writing was to record my reflections during the research process so as to avoid losing insights and connections that may have become significant later. This is similar to Groenewald's (2004) notion of memoing. My intuitive writing was fairly informal; handwritten notes were kept in a notebook with the intention of retaining ideas which may have become significant in the discussion of my analysis. For example, in my analysis of Paula's interview, I noted that she spoke at length about how having a disability could impact the experience of relationships. In particular I thought this passage was interesting:

*“If the person is really dependent, then that could be very draining in the relationship. If the person with a disability needed a lot of attention, or a lot of care, that could be a huge drain. You know, maybe the relationship wouldn't feel equal, so it sets up the dynamic of someone taking care of someone else, or there's, you know, pity or something else. But it's not an equal friendship. I just think that there are a lot of possibilities. On the other hand, I think there are a lot of relationships that are healthy and equal. I don't think that disability is necessarily a threat to a healthy relationship, but I think there are lots of barriers and challenges to that” (Paula).*

I wondered if perhaps there would be more to this idea, and that the nature of relationships between people with and without disabilities might play a role in developing my essences. In my intuitive writing I noted:

*“What is the language used to describe relationships? Think about specific words, e.g., drain, caregiving, pity, healthy, equal. How are relationships perceived or understood? Does this impact how an inclusive space is set up? What is the dynamic between people with disabilities and without...Explore further!” (Zara, in intuitive writing).*

Paula was one of my last interviews, and as I looked through my other transcripts I found that the other interviewees did not have as much to say in terms of how relationships between participants with and without disabilities look or unfold. Most of the practitioners discussed their ideal relationships, or emphasized the importance of respect and equality in relationship dynamics. Although I thought I had an interesting start with the quote from Paula, I ended up being unable to develop it further. Unfortunately I did not probe this issue further with Paula. Nevertheless, it was a valuable venture, because I included a discussion of relationship dynamics in my suggestions for future research.

### *Step Two: Identification of Themes and Structures*

Next, to convert significant meanings in the data from implicit to explicit (Daly, 2007), I took the highlighted passages and identified relevant themes by underlining them, and applying word labels that summarized the passages' major message; these became the meaning units. In identifying the meaning units, I attempted to utilize the participants' language as much as possible. After writing all of the meaning units in the margins of the transcripts, I typed them into a Word document. Once the meaning units were assembled in one document, I eliminated the redundancies and combined any like concepts. Following this step, the refined meaning units became sub-themes. At this point, I identified the essential parts of the sub-themes and clustered them into like groups. To do this, I wrote a brief description about what each sub-theme was. Where words and ideas were connected, I clustered them into like groups. The clusters were connected "under broader conceptual labels" (Daly, p. 220) which became the essences of the experience I have explored.

### *Step Three: Verification of Structures*

The first step of the verification process was to complete a free imaginative variation. According to van Manen (1997), free imaginative variation requires that the researcher ask, “is this phenomenon still the same if we imaginatively change or delete this theme from the phenomenon? Does the phenomenon without this theme lose its fundamental meaning?” (p. 107). If the phenomenon remains the same, then the researcher may choose to eliminate the theme because it is not an essential part of the phenomenon. In my research, I used free imaginative variation in a slightly different way; not to eliminate themes, but to streamline my essences. I originally started with several more essences than I ended up with because I had difficulty focusing them. By asking myself, “what makes this essence different from that essence?” I found that I could combine ideas that overlapped to create more comprehensive essences. Following free imaginative variation, my final analysis step was to compare the essences I had found with the data. To verify the structures, I created a new Word document which contained a list of all of my essences. I looked through each transcript and found evidence in the form of quotes that each essence was identified by practitioners in some form. It was not necessary for there to be a quote from each participant for each essence, rather, I was looking for an indication that each essence had been discussed in some way that I felt was important throughout the interviews.

There was a second component to this stage. Before I finished, I examined whether there were some ideas in the transcripts which had not been identified in the essences. If there were, it was up to me to determine whether they should be included or not (Halldórsdóttir & Hamrin, 1997). My intuitive writing played a role here in terms of

allowing me to re-examine themes and ideas that emerged throughout the early stages of analysis. I found that there were no ideas which had been omitted and which I thought should be included in my findings. In retrospect, I realize it is likely because I ended up with a very high number of essences that I did not feel any ideas had been missed. Prior to beginning Step Four, I took my identified essences, a brief description of each, and several quotes which illustrated each one into a meeting with my thesis supervisor, Dr. Susan Arai. I was concerned that I had too many essences, but was unable to see how I could streamline my findings without losing any of the pieces which I believed were important. Dr. Arai and I looked at the quotes I had selected to represent each essence (I had chosen anywhere from five to ten quotes per essence), and found that the language the practitioners used had words and ideas which connected to six larger conceptual ideas. It was as if I had undertaken the final stage of Step Two of my analysis process again, whereby I further refined my essences by clustering my 20 original essences into 6 broader groups which became my 6 new essences. The original 20 essences are listed on the left of Figure 2, and described in detail in Appendix E.

#### *Step Four: Conveying the Findings*

Finally, with my final six essences in hand, I began the write-up of my findings through a detailed description of the larger structures at work when experiencing the development and implementation of an inclusive arts program. According to Creswell (2003), creating a “rich, thick description” (p. 196) helps to illustrate the research findings in a way that makes it significant to an audience. To stay true to the nature of interpretive research, I reported not only the essences of the phenomenon, but the inconsistencies found within the data. The inconsistencies pertained mainly to my

interview with Lana, the sole interviewee who did not identify herself as an artist. Lana spoke of a great disconnect between her interest in inclusive programming, and her difficulties with feeling confident in an arts programming context. Although she had a great learning experience in her inclusive arts experience, she would likely not choose to deliver this type of program again, due to her feelings of being unskilled and untalented in the arts field. This idea was contrary to many of the ideas that I discuss in my findings, including the notion that being an artist is not directly related to technical talent or formal training.

### Strategies for Trustworthiness

According to Daly (2007), there is not one set way to undertake qualitative research. However, although there is no fixed approach to this type of research, it is essential that researchers acknowledge “the broader context of values and practices that can shape the way we design our research studies” (Daly, p. 17). When undertaking a study, researchers begin with a set of beliefs about the nature of how and what they will learn over the course of their inquiry; this is called a knowledge claim (Creswell, 2003). According to Creswell, “researchers make claims about what knowledge is (ontology), how we know it (epistemology)...and the processes for studying it (methodology)” (p. 6). Samdahl (1999) defines these concepts in more detail:

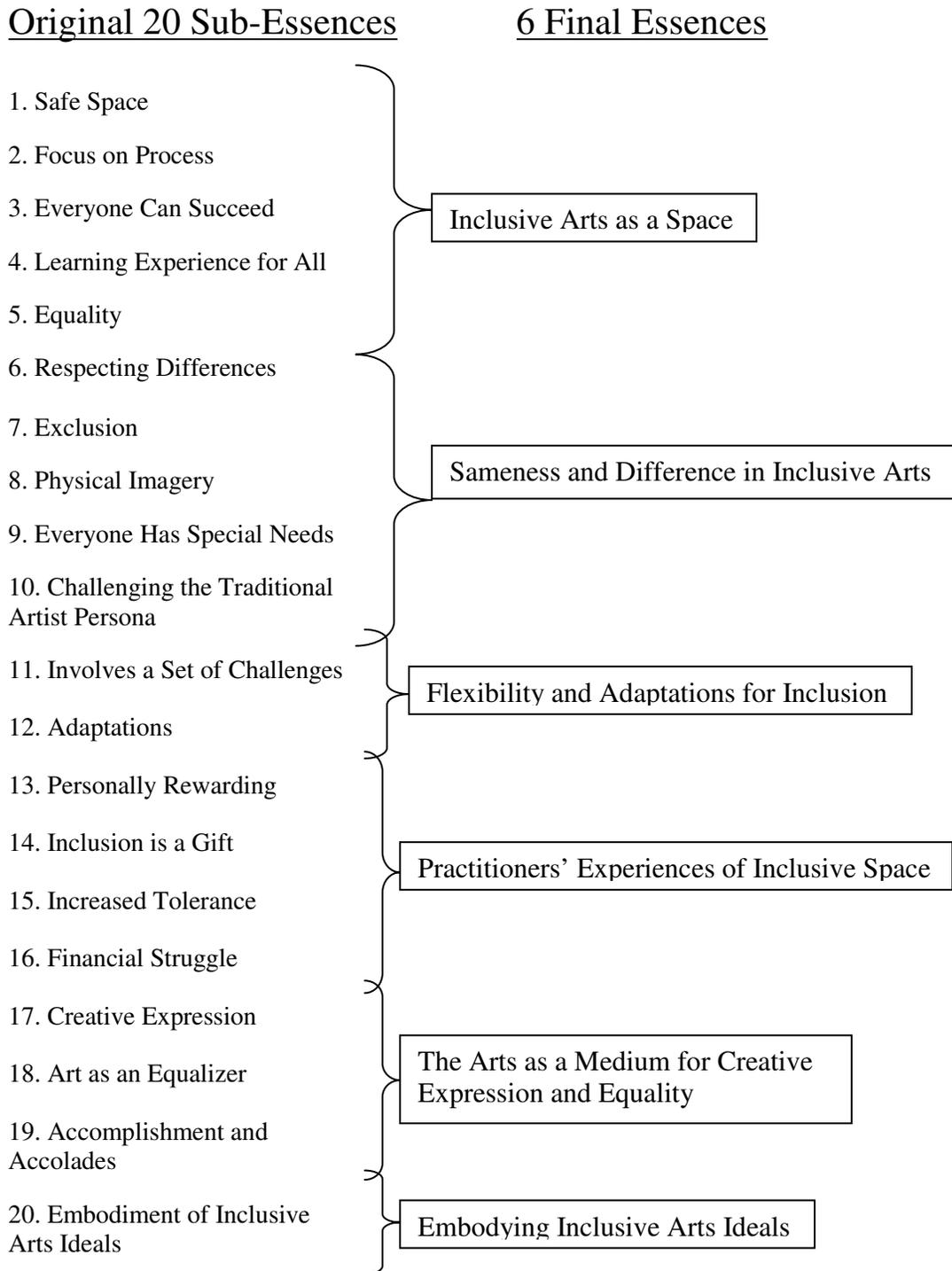
Ontology reflects beliefs about the nature of reality (is reality an objective phenomenon that holds truth or is reality virtually constructed through social, political and gendered meanings); epistemology refers to beliefs about the preferred relationship between the researcher and the researched (should we remain objective and removed from what we study or should we get immersed in it); and methodology refers to the techniques we use for collecting information about the world (should we manipulate and measure variables in order to test hypotheses or should we search for meaning in words and behaviors) (p. 120).

Daly recommends that researchers reflect thoughtfully on these ontological and epistemological values and assumptions because they will ultimately influence the way we design our research methods, as well as the nature of the information we attempt to seek.

According to Dupuis (1999), “demonstrating credible, honest, and authentic research...demands a complete use of both the research self and the human self throughout the research process, and particularly in our writing” (p. 48). My first step towards fostering trustworthiness was to openly share my personal views and beliefs, and how these may influence my research (Patton, 2002). This was done through the disclosure of my positions to my research participants, and by acknowledging my worldview through my intuitive writing and throughout this document. I was honest with my participants about my intentions for this study, and about the fact that I was a strong believer in the value of inclusive arts programming. The outcome of my intuitive writing is shared in the final discussion, as it pertains to my research findings, and throughout this document I have made a concerted effort to share my ideas and opinions on the research and literature discussed. Finally, I have taken ownership of my written product by completing the document using first-person language.

As per Dupuis’ (1999) suggestion, I have attempted to convey how my “human self” (p. 48) has impacted the phases of my research. It was found by Dupuis, when working on a follow-up paper to her Master’s research, that her emotions throughout the course of her project offered her “much insight into the social and emotional world of the people [she] was studying” (p. 50). As such, I have carefully detailed my emotional experience of the interview and interpretation process through my journaling and

**Figure 2: Development of the 6 Final Essences**



intuitive writing. As I predicted, I experienced a range of emotions, particularly in light of the fact that I am researching a subject that I am very passionate about.

Acknowledging my own emotions helped me understand how they may have impacted my interpretation of the participants' experiences, as well as allowing me to better identify with the practitioners' feelings as they relate to the experience. I was careful in my data analysis process to avoid seeing practitioner's responses through rose-coloured glasses. That is, ignoring the ideas which I believed were incongruent with my beliefs about the inclusive arts to focus on the good points which were raised. A commitment to acknowledging inconsistencies was a good way to avoid glossing over some of the negative aspects of the practitioners' experiences with inclusive arts programming.

Another important factor pertaining to trustworthiness is providing a detailed account of how the research process unfolded (Dupuis, 1999). I have taken special care to describe how and why I made decisions I made as the study evolved, the nature of my relationship with my research participants, and the details of my analysis process.

Although it certainly marks me as a "newbie" researcher, I felt it was important to discuss how my data analysis was not complete until the meeting with my supervisor that helped me strengthen my final essences. If nothing else, I have learned that the research process does not ever unfold the way you have planned, and collaboration with my supervisor was a very important part of this experience for me. As expressed by de Witt and Ploeg (2006), the openness of an interpretive phenomenological study is "recognizable through an explicit systematic accounting for decisions" (p. 225). An aspect related to this is the disclosure of the inconsistencies between my participants, as related in Step Four of the section on Data Analysis and Interpretation. Additionally, the final write-up should include a thick, detail-rich description of the research process and findings (Creswell, 2003; Dupuis, 1999). When study findings are written "in such a way that examples are

given that situate the reader concretely in the context of the phenomenon and also link with experiences in their lifeworld”, research rigour is enhanced (de Witt & Ploeg, p. 225).

Issues of disclosure are directly related to the concept of reflexivity (Creswell, 2003; Dupuis, 1999; Patton, 2002). According to Creswell, the reflexive researcher “systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry and is sensitive to his or her personal biography and how it shapes the study” (p. 182). Qualitative research is value-laden in its nature, but an acknowledgment of the values and biases belonging to the researcher further contribute to trustworthiness in research (Creswell). Patton describes qualitative research as the process of “mapping experiences” (p. 27), both those of our research participants, and our own as researchers. Mapping our experiences entails developing an understanding of who we are, and how that self may influence what we learn and know throughout the research process (Patton). Dupuis outlines four key strategies for the reflexive researcher to keep in mind (p. 60-61):

- Reflexivity involves the purposeful inclusion of the whole researcher within the research process. That is, the researcher is acknowledged as a studier of the phenomenon, with a set of specific research questions and objectives, and also as a human being, capable of emotions which may impact their research process.
- Reflexive researchers must acknowledge that they are connected to the world around them and may employ empathy over the course of their work.
- Reflexive researchers accept that interpretive research is collaborative, and that meaning is created through the interaction between the researcher and their

interviewees. This should be reflected in the research methods, specifically through the employment of an active interview approach.

- Reflexive researchers must learn to report their findings in new ways. For example, the use of descriptive participant profiles and the acknowledgement of inconsistencies.

To summarize, Dupuis' (1999) stance on trustworthiness in research seems appropriate. Dupuis emphasized that establishing trustworthiness is the role of the researcher, and the sole way to achieve this aim is "to precisely and clearly explicate how we claim to know what we know in the specific context in which our claims were conceived" (p. 58).

#### Ethical Considerations

Because the true identities of the arts and recreation practitioners were known to me, I could not claim to guarantee anonymity for any research participant. As Patton (2002) says, anonymity is not knowing who the research participants are, and confidentiality is knowing, but not telling, who the research participants are. The Government of Canada's (2009) Panel on Research Ethics defines the duty of researchers in terms of confidentiality as:

the obligation of an individual or organization to safeguard information entrusted to it by another. The duty of confidentiality includes obligations to protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss or theft. Fulfilling the duty of confidentiality is essential to the trust relationship between researcher and research participant, and to the integrity of the research enterprise (para. 4).

To ensure confidentiality, the participants were not identified by name in the repeating of interview data. All research discussions (i.e., between myself and my committee

members) were held in secure locations and not in public spaces. Digital audio recordings and written transcripts from the interviews were labeled using pseudonyms and stored on a password protected memory stick. A master list of participants' names and the related pseudonyms were stored in a separate and secure location, in a locked drawer in my office at the University of Waterloo. The assigned pseudonyms were used when reporting the findings. No identifiers (e.g., organization or program-specific information) were utilized in the final paper. Participants' names did not appear in the written and oral dissemination of the study; where necessary, pseudonyms were used. All direct quotes were scrutinized to ensure that the participants are not able to be identified. Where verbatim quotes were used they were not able to be linked to specific identities of participants. Following the completion of my research, all digital audio files and paper copies naming the interviewees true identities were destroyed.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Having an opportunity to speak to practitioners after months of developing research questions, a literature review, and an interview guide was a welcome and exciting change for me. The ten inclusive arts practitioners who participated in the active interviews shared great insights into their experiences within inclusive arts programs. Through the active interview process I was provided with a rich and detailed account of how practitioners experienced the inclusive arts, and what their meanings, images, and understandings of inclusion, disability, and the arts were. The 6 essences that emerged from the data were: *Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space*; *Exploring Potential through Creative Expression*; *Flexibility, Adaptations, and Possibilities for Inclusion*; *Valuing Sameness and Difference in Ability and the Arts*; *Practitioners' Experiences of Receiving Gifts and Feeling Strained*; and, *Embodying Inclusive Arts Values*. These essences are described in the sections that follow, and verbatim quotes illustrate each essence. Rather than a separate discussion chapter, it made sense to expand the discussion of each essence drawing from relevant literature. Because I draw, out of necessity, from literature in a variety of fields, combining my findings and discussion section created a better sense of cohesion for me. The first five essences which emerged from the data, although different, ultimately connected to the sixth essence in a way that links my findings together.

The essences are introduced in a purposeful order that unfolded as I examined what each essence revealed and conveyed. *Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space* is the first essence which explores the nature of an inclusive arts space, and what happens in that space. I see this essence as the starting place for inclusive arts programs. This space is not the community centre or studio where the program physically takes place, but the feeling

that is produced by being in that space. Within this essence, practitioners discussed the importance of creating a safe space, promoting the equal treatment of all participants, fostering the notion that everyone can succeed, focusing on process over product, and that being in an inclusive arts space is a learning experience for everybody.

The second essence explores aspects of the arts as a medium, and how this approach fits into an inclusive arts space. *Exploring Potential through Creative Expression* considers the qualities of the arts, and how they are an ideal medium for inclusive programming. The research participants described the arts as a unique forum for creative expression, sharing accomplishments, and providing opportunities for people of all ability levels to participate. The arts were viewed as an essential part of what it takes to create a creative, inclusive space.

The third essence, *Flexibility, Adaptations, and Possibilities for Inclusion* explores the idea that although delivering inclusive arts programs presents many challenges, maintaining a flexible approach, along with a willingness to modify the space and art activities, helps to make inclusive arts programming accessible to everyone. This essence connects to the first two essences, as practitioners explore the potential for success in the space, the medium, and participants.

*Valuing Sameness and Difference in Ability and the Arts* is the fourth essence and it explores the ways practitioners understand sameness and differences among their participants, and how this understanding influences the delivery and experience of programs within the inclusive arts space. How practitioners perceive their participants to be similar or different impacts the adaptations they implement, the way that they structure the space, and the way that they utilize arts activities.

*Practitioners' Experiences of Receiving Gifts and Feeling Strained*, the fifth essence, examines practitioners' personal experiences of delivering the programs. This essence reflects the duality of the experience, in that there are both joys and challenges that come with being a part of an inclusive arts space.

*Embodying Inclusive Arts Values* is the final essence. This essence examines how practitioners embody the ideals of art and inclusion in their programs. They also embody these ideals in their personal and professional lives. Rather than the inclusive arts programming changing their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours about disability and the arts; many practitioners believed that they were drawn to the inclusive arts because they already possessed these values.

#### Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space

The notion of what an inclusive arts space is, and what happens in that space, was a very important idea for interviewees. From the interviews I was left with the sense that regardless of what happens in the outside world, inclusive arts practitioners work very hard to create an arts space that aligns with their inclusive and artistic ideals.

A significant idea for most interviewees was the notion that an inclusive arts space should be safe; this is often the starting place when creating an inclusive arts space. The notion of safe space emphasizes that learning to create a place that is safe both physically and emotionally for participants and leaders alike was an important aspect of inclusive arts planning and programming for my participants. Jane explains how the sense of safety is generated through the rules and rituals that she created in her program:

*the space always creates, for me, this space is extremely safe. This space is extremely comforting, safe, supportive...and the space itself, from the rules we*

*have, to the rituals we do everyday, are to create a sense of safety and respect for yourself and the people around you.*

Although it was essential for the practitioners to create a sense of physical safety for their participants, many spoke to the importance of crafting a safe space in terms of fostering open, creative expression. When asked what her ideal inclusive arts program would look like (question 6), Nancy emphasized that a sense of safety was required for freedom of expression: “...a nice, bright, open space where everyone feels safe and comfortable to be able to express themselves.”

Inclusive arts spaces were seen as an environment conducive to achievement for all in which everyone can succeed. According to participants, the arts are one of few pursuits through which everyone can find a measure of success. Nancy provided an example of how the arts can allow for success at all levels if facilitated correctly:

*we're focusing on creative dance experience, so there's a lot of different ways to express yourself. So, it is kind of accessible to everyone. Um, you know, sometimes you might do something like, "dance like the colour pink", right? And everybody, in their own way, can dance the colour "pink". Whether they're in a wheelchair, or, um, you know, or, or they have full use of their body, they're able to find a way to express "pink". So, in our field I feel like it does intersect well, and um, there is the opportunity for everybody to be successful.*

A focus on creating a non-competitive environment and a space that supports individual expression make the arts ideal for people with a range of abilities to participate in successfully. In this space, the arts create the context for interactions which differ from what participants may encounter at home or in school. The interactions here are purposefully structured to be cooperative, creative, and flexible. Jane explained the benefits of creating a non-competitive space:

*And you don't have a win-lose situation, it's not a fail or success situation. Which can allow for some of the people who, in the rest of the world that is about win and lose, success and fail, that they can have a successful experience here without that feeling of pressure.*

The emphasis on a safe space for creative expression aligns with a focus on process, an aspect of inclusive arts programming that many interviewees highlighted as significant. Although creating a finished product was considered by some to be part of the arts experience, most interviewees stressed that the process was the most important part of a creative arts experience – particularly an inclusive one. According to Jane:

*It doesn't always have to be about the end result, and that's really what I love about this space. And that's what I love about working with pottery. That's one of the lessons about pottery I teach. Pottery is about the journey, not the end result.*

When process is valued over product, a safe space to experiment and explore is created for participants. Process over product was an important principle of an inclusive arts space for participants, and this emphasis was created in a similar way to the notion that everyone can succeed. That is, through the purposeful structuring of activities to emphasize creative expression over artistic product, practitioners can focus on process, thus giving their participants an opportunity to experience the arts in different ways – all of them equally significant. Isabelle discussed how she emphasized process over product in the visual arts and dance:

*To me, I'm more interested in process, you know, let's look at this material, and touch it, and feel it, and play with it, and experiment. Or let's look at moving our bodies from one point to another point, and how does that feel? How can you change or add to it? And that could be anything, versus saying, "okay, we're going to take this material, and we're going to make this. Period.*

At the heart of what many interviewees believed about inclusion, there was a common sentiment that inclusion was directly related to the idea of a common space of equality. According to participants, the idea of an inclusive space is linked to equal access and equal treatment within that space. When asked what inclusion means to them (question 4: when you think of inclusion, what do you think of?), many participants used some version the word “equal” in their answer. For example, when asked what inclusion means to her, Charlotte answered, *“I think of everybody participating equally, having the same opportunities, um, and everybody having fun, cooperating together. And nobody, just nobody being left out, left behind.”* This idea of equality was very much connected to the notion of a common space; being able to break down the physical and social barriers which separate people to create a space where everyone can participate. The notion of a common space was illustrated in a quote from Jane: *“I started to realize that there was such a need in our community to have a space where everybody is welcome, and included.”* In contrast, Paula described an aspect I had not considered, the difficulty for able-bodied people to perceive what exclusive space feels like; that someone without a disability could never imagine what it is to experience exclusion. Paula described this notion as follows:

*I think there's so many little things that would affect someone's, you know, their perception of a space. And I think that would make it feel very uninviting, and very exclusive, and very, just not welcoming. And I think it's difficult, I think it's very difficult for people who haven't been there to possibly think, to imagine what that would be like. And I can't pretend that I can imagine what that would be like. I think so much of our society is just, is not set up for that, to include people.*

As Paula describes, a person with the best intention to be inclusive may create an environment that is not inclusive, simply because it is impossible to put one's self into the shoes of someone with a disability.

Inclusive arts spaces were described by participants as transformative spaces in which there is opportunity for everyone to learn; that is, to be changed in some way through the acquisition of new knowledge or a rich life experience. For example, Jane discusses how being in an inclusive space can help teach everyone in that space to be more accepting of diverse populations:

*And not just with disability, but with racism, and homophobiaism [sic], and all those other things. By having diversity and inclusion in a space so all of us can work with each other, and learn how to be with one another, and not be afraid of each other's differences, but get to know those differences. It gives us an ability to open our eyes about ourselves.*

These learning experiences can also have practical applications, as Charlotte explains.

She found that her experience in an inclusive arts program encouraged her to learn more about how to foster an inclusive environment in her high school drama classroom:

*it just made me sit down and think about how I would arrange my classroom, how I'm going to make sure that it's an inclusive classroom. It made me really want to, to take other courses, like a special education course on there to just make sure that I am fully aware of all the different needs of my students.*

#### *Discussion of Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space*

The idea that the inclusive arts exist as a space is aligned with the lifeworld existentials. Lived space, or spatiality, refers to felt space, the way that different spaces make us feel, or, how we “become the space we are in” (van Manen, 1997, p. 102). There are some qualities of an inclusive arts space that contribute to a practitioner's unique

experience in that space. These qualities reveal how an inclusive arts space can be a space enabling possibility. For example, the feeling of safety which practitioners create and sustain is a key aspect of developing a space where participants can freely explore and learn with opportunities for personal success.

The essence of *Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space* is discussed first since the inclusive arts space is a key part of the entire inclusive arts experience for practitioners. Despite what happens in the context of other activities (i.e., non-artistic pursuits), or in other spaces (i.e., non-inclusive spaces) inclusive arts practitioners placed great importance on creating a space that was focused on equal opportunities and treatment, setting participants up for success, a sense of safety, and an emphasis on the creative process. According to Kitchin (1998), the way that a space is shaped is critical in the creation of inclusion:

Who is felt to belong or not belong in a place has important implications for the shaping of social space. We live and interact in spaces that are ascribed meaning and convey meaning. A city is not just a set of buildings, roads, parks and other infrastructure, a city is also a (cultural) text which we read and react to. Spatial structures and places within the landscape provide a set of cultural signifiers that tell us if we are ‘out of place’ (p. 349).

Inclusive arts practitioners make efforts to create a sense of space that tells their participants that they’re “in the right place” through careful attention to both physical and social aspects. In terms of the physical space, it is designed to be easily accessible, and stocked with tools and materials that can be manipulated by participants of a variety of abilities. In terms of social considerations, practitioners set up inclusive arts spaces to promote the exploration of the creative process rather than to emphasize the importance of artistic skill. Participants with disabilities are treated as members of the group, not

outsiders who are temporarily allowed to be part of the program. Disability is not made to be invisible, nor is it at the forefront of all interactions, it is viewed as one aspect of a multi-faceted individual.

Although it was never mentioned specifically, I left the analysis process with the impression that inclusive arts spaces embodied a different kind of inclusion. This idea was documented in my intuitive writing:

*What is it about inclusive arts spaces? Practitioners speak of them as if they are different (better?) than other inclusive spaces. Some conversation here about inclusive classrooms, and how this kind of “inclusion” feels uncomfortable for practitioners. What makes inclusive spaces REALLY inclusive? (Zara, in intuitive writing journal).*

As I explored the inclusion literature, I found that there exists an idea that space is a critical platform in terms of challenging or reproducing the exclusion that is found in our society. According to Kitchin (1998):

An understanding of how disabled people have become marginalised and excluded within society cannot be understood without an appreciation of the socio-spatial processes that reproduce social relations. Social theorists are increasingly coming to recognise that life and society are not solely constituted in time and history but are also situated, contextualised and reproduced in space (p. 344).

Traditionally, the notion of place has perpetuated traditionally disablist attitudes by valuing able-bodiedness while restricting the participation of people with disabilities to places that are defined as “special” (Paterson & Hughes, 1999, p. 597). In an inclusive arts space, this conventional valuation of able-bodiedness is challenged through an emphasis on everyone in the space having the opportunity to succeed. Rather than creating a place where winning is the ultimate goal, competition is rendered meaningless and achieving one’s personal best is valued in an inclusive arts space.

In their work, Milner and Kelly (2009) found that when policy focuses on place as the primary gauge of inclusion, it fails to help people with disabilities feel like they are truly a part of the community; rather, there is a sense that they are simply “fleeting and irregular visitors” to community places (p. 57). This is connected to Lord and Hutchison’s (2007), differentiation between integration and inclusion asserting that being *physically* integrated within the community does not ensure a person *social* acceptance and inclusion. Having a person physically present in a place does not necessarily equate to an inclusive successful experience. Through the creation of an inclusive arts space, practitioners can develop a sense of social inclusion which emphasizes human connections between participants, rather than simply existing in the same place.

According to Kitchin, “space is instrumental in the reproduction, sustenance and resistance of disablist practices” (p. 354). Whether it is intentional or not, I believe that inclusive arts practitioners are engaged in a kind of resistance against disablist spaces through their emphasis on creating a safe space for exploration and creative expression, the value they place on process, and the prominence of success for all.

As identified by Kitchin (1998), there is a need to explore the “socio-spatial processes which underlie disablist practices and disabled resistances in contemporary western society” (p. 354). A common example of disablist practice in children’s leisure is the emphasis on competition versus collaboration, or product being valued over process. Creating competitive scenarios where individual performance is valued can set children of all abilities up for failure; having only one winner results in many participants losing. However, it is often children with disabilities who are at a distinct disadvantage in these situations. In an inclusive arts space, potential for success is facilitated for all participants

through a focus on process. Focusing on process values all types of participation, and rewards a person putting forth their best effort, regardless of how it measures against the efforts of others. I think this is particularly important in the context of youth programming because young adults are at a critical age in terms of negotiating the “belongingness and shared identity” that come from finding sharing a cultural and physical space (Hall, Coffey & Williamson, 1999, p. 509). If children with disabilities are denied participation in a common space through exclusive practices such as competition and the valuing of skill levels, they may be excluded from an opportunity to find the “valued space for association, expression and the exploration of identity” which is possible from supportive spaces (Hall et al, p. 512).

#### Exploring Potential through Creative Expression

This essence looks specifically at the use of the arts and how they are conducive to creating an inclusive space. The participants described that the arts are unique as they provide a forum for shared accomplishments and accolades, provide opportunities for people of all ability levels to participate, facilitate creative expression, and act as an equalizer. Here the arts were viewed as an essential part of what it takes to create a creative, inclusive space. When asked how their experiences might have been different in another context, Jane responded, *“I think that it would have less meaning. It wouldn’t touch my soul. It wouldn’t be making a difference in the world.”*

Some practitioners believed that an important part of the artistic process was sharing art, and having that art recognized and applauded as significant by family and friends; this is the idea of the importance of accomplishment and accolades. Although the participants’ emphasis was never on reaching a fixed, skill-based goal, arts spaces were

perceived, in some cases, to be ideal for the enhancement of the children's self-worth through a sense of accomplishment. Jane described how art creation and performance are able to generate feelings of self-worth in participants with disabilities. It is important to note that she emphasized that the sense of accomplishment was not to prove something to the outside world, but for the artists themselves:

*it creates a sense of accomplishment and helps to build self-worth and self-esteem, and making you feel like you're an active part of society. And for a population that's discarded as being an active part of society, I think it's very, very important to have a space where you can feel good about yourself, and accomplish something, and have something concrete to prove you have accomplished something. Not necessarily for the world, but for yourself, for the reasons of self-worth and self-confidence.*

Margaret and Carl acknowledged that participation in an arts performance was not only good for the participants themselves, but also for their loved ones. It can be rewarding for family and friends from outside of the inclusive arts space to share in the participants' success:

*And her mother said to me, "do you realize that you made one of my dreams come true today?" And I said, "what?", and then I realized, [name of child] reading in front of everybody. And she said, "yes, I'm so happy that everyone can see who she is and what she's capable of" (Margaret).*

*And especially if they're doing something like creating songs and plays, and have, you know, something that they can show their friends, and their peers, and their families at the end of it. That it's something they can get involved with. And I know that's been a really, really good thing for disabled people, and the people that are in their lives too (Carl).*

While many of the practitioners' comments seemed to focus on the accomplishments of people with disabilities, Charlotte commented on the importance of everyone within the inclusive arts program having the opportunity to be in the spotlight.

Participants describe the inclusive arts as a collaborative process with every participant succeeding together:

*Yeah, just really having their moment to shine, and just so that they, everybody felt like they contributed to the production. So it wasn't that a few people, you know, were kind of the shining stars, it was that everybody was equally a shining star within the production, and everybody had their own moment (Charlotte).*

The participants described creative expression as separating the arts from other potential programming options such as sports or outdoor pursuits. Nearly all interviewees described the element of creative expression as being a significant aspect of the arts.

Paula described the arts as involving many types of expression:

*I would think of human expression, like self-expression. And creativity, imagination. And just expressing those things, expressing imagination, expressing ourselves through a medium, whether it be dance, drama, music, or any of those things.*

The intent or outcome of creative expression has the potential to be multi-faceted. Jeff described it as a way to reflect the world, and our hopes for the world, while Jane believed that art has the capacity to create a human connection:

*there's a lot of different ways that we can see art. But mostly, it's a reflection of the world; past, present, but most of all, I think future. You know, what we would like to see (Jeff).*

*And art, in itself, definitely should have no limitations whatsoever on it. It's probably the easiest way to achieve human contact, human connection, and creative expression through that (Jane).*

To most interviewees, the arts were synonymous with the ability to express emotions, ideas, or feelings through a creative outlet. Participants noted that the arts act as an “equalizer” with its emphasis on creative expression rather than competitiveness or

technical skill. Art was seen by many interviewees as having the ability to “level the playing field”. Isabelle described this, further stating:

*I would hope, and that's how I approach it, that it levels the playing field, so to speak. That everybody has, everybody can explore the arts at their own level, and take what they can from it.*

Among some participants there was the sense that abilities and disabilities become less significant in an art space because of the nature of art (i.e., it is personal, non-competitive, creative). Jane described that art is able to transcend disability and simply serve as a means for creative expression and equality:

*I think it gives people with, disabilities a vehicle to express themselves in a way that in other aspects of society that they cannot. So, there's an equality that's created...I think art itself can give a vehicle for equality*

I think that Margaret's comment on the arts best exemplifies all of these ideas together. She explained how the arts level the playing field and enable children to use their varied skills and abilities in ways that other activities may not:

*I think the arts experience levels the playing field. That a child in a wheelchair is not going to be first pick on a soccer team, but a child in a wheelchair can sit in my Sunday School room and do a craft, at whatever level they can do it. A Down Syndrome child is not going to get the highest academic achievement award in their class, but that doesn't mean that they can't sing in the choir. So in the arts, I think we can tap into so many different things that give children, who maybe in the mainstream can't find their place, can find their place.*

#### *Discussion of Exploring Potential through Creative Expression*

Creative expression was seen by practitioners as a key part of the inclusive arts experience. Although there is no agreed upon definition of what creativity is in the literature, Feldhusen and Goh (1995) outline six guiding ideas about the concept:

1. Creativity is expressed through decisions, not products
2. Knowledge of self and of one's world is the medium of creative behaviour

3. Creative behaviour is highly intentional
4. Creativeness and personal identity are emergent
5. The latter two are mutually dependent
6. Creative behaviour engages individuals at the personal level of their identities and abilities. Thus, for each individual there is an optimum fit with the environment.

(p. 233)

In a similar vein, Goff (1992) describes creativity as if it were a lifelong process, a way of thinking and acting that reflects growth and change. Goff emphasizes the aspect of self-expression as being essential to the development of all people:

Self-expression and communication with oneself and others are essential for the growth of human beings regardless of age. Creativity is a lifelong process which can be stimulated and enhanced at any age. Creative thinking skills are key elements of successful personal adjustments as well as in meeting new challenges and dilemmas. As a person grows psychologically and copes with his/her constantly changing environment and self, creativity is called into play (p. 48).

Following Goff's (1992) thinking, developing creativity is not only important in the context of inclusive arts programming. Instead, fostering creative skills can aid participants in managing the challenges and changes associated with daily life. Creative expression can help participants explore artistic experiences, as well as experiences in their school, work, and social lives.

Visual art, music, drama, and dance can be effective mediums through which participants may engage in creative expression. According to Gladding and Newsome (2003), "art serves as both a catalyst and conduit for understanding oneself in a larger world context through stirring up feelings and opening up possibilities" (p. 252). To me,

this quote embodies Jane's assertion that differences, such as disability, can be transcended through arts participation. The arts provide an opportunity for participants to understand themselves in a way that is more meaningful than simply being classified as able or not. Warren (1993) echoes this notion of art motivating the expression of one's humanity:

in each individual's act of creation, the arts engage the emotions and free the spirit. This can encourage individuals to do something because they want to and *not* just because someone else decides it is good for them. The arts can motivate in a way possibly no other force can. It is only through making a mark that no one else could make, that we express the individual spark of our own humanity (p. 4).

Participants expressed a strong belief that creative expression is a key component of inclusive arts participation. It was viewed by participants as an inherently good thing, and described as producing positive social and emotional outcomes for program participants. Smith (2003) describes creative expression as "intrinsically healthy" (p. 15), calling it "integral to good health" (p. 18). Expressing one's self through the arts can have immense benefits such as feeling a sense of purpose and personal growth (Fisher & Specht, 1999), developing coping skills (Goff, 1992), and becoming in tune with one's own humanity (Warren, 1993). Despite the benefits of creative expression, Warren cautions that the arts are not a "cure for all ills" (p. 4), particularly in the absence of other mechanisms to help and support participants. Implementing the arts on their own does not necessarily result in positive outcomes; they are not a cure-all for inclusive programming challenges. It seems that the arts are used to their full potential when they are delivered in a space that is conducive to supportive, process-based arts exploration which emphasizes the gifts and potential of each individual.

Although there are many intrinsic benefits of creative expression, there are several external factors that may impede upon the creative experience. Glück, Ernst, and Unger (2002) identify these constraints as the expectation of external evaluation or reward, creative endeavours that are not freely chosen, competition being imposed upon the creative person, and time pressure being imposed on the creative process. Inclusive arts practitioners must take care to carefully structure the inclusive arts space to promote freely chosen, intrinsically motivated creative expression. Participants described how focusing on process, while de-emphasizing competition, resulted in an environment conducive to free creative expression. Without the pressure of competition, and through the valuing of participants' unique skills, participants avoided the pitfalls of external factors negatively influencing the creative experience. According to Drake (2003), the quality of a place or space can be essential in serving as a source for creative inspiration. The inclusive, enabling space cultivated by participants likely served as an important source of creative stimulation.

#### Flexibility, Adaptations, and Possibilities for Inclusion

Encountering challenges and the need to make adaptations or modifications within the inclusive arts space were two central parts of the inclusive arts experience for many practitioners. According to practitioners, having a disability was closely aligned with facing or having challenges. Nevertheless, these challenges were not perceived as limitations for the person with a disability, but rather, a challenge to practitioners to be open and flexible in their program design. Through a flexible attitude, and adaptations made to their activities and arts space, practitioners demonstrated their recognition of potential in all participants.

The idea of challenges, as described by the participants, referred mainly to the challenges experienced in developing effective programs for people with and without disabilities. To adapt the program or environment to better suit their participants, practitioners felt that they needed to be equipped with a level of flexibility in their program design, implementation, and expectations. Unequivocally, participants agreed that the challenge presented by inclusive arts programs was perceived as an opportunity to learn more about their participants and their own abilities. Significant components of the inclusive arts experience for practitioners included having a flexible approach to program planning and implementation and a willingness to make adaptations.

Practitioners often equated disability with a challenge of some type related specifically to an individual's disability, whether it was a physical or cognitive challenge. For example, when Nancy was asked to think about what came to mind when she thought of disability (question 2: when you think of disability, what do you think of?), she answered, *"I think of certain challenges that individuals might face. And not being able to do things, or doing them in a different way."* Paula explained her personal definition of disability, which centered on barriers related to disability:

*the way I would define disability is that we all have things that maybe, um, are potential barriers that we have to overcome. And for some people those are really physical, like someone in a wheelchair. And other people have a mental health issue that is completely below the surface...And I guess if I was going to define disability really broadly, I would say that it's something that maybe holds someone back from optimum functioning. Something that presents a challenge.*

Practitioners also related disability to the challenge that they experienced in trying to work within parameters that suited their participant, or participants, with disabilities. However, although working with children with disabilities was cited as a challenge, it

was never discussed by practitioners in a strictly negative way. For example, Carl discussed that while working with children with disabilities was a challenge, it was also rewarding work:

*and you know, it, it is challenging working within their limitations. But, you know, the rewards are that when things do happen, and the results are made, that it's even more worthwhile because it's such a big challenge.*

Part of the reward for practitioners came from challenging themselves to develop creative solutions to potential programming problems. In thinking about how arts programs could be made accessible for everyone, practitioners focused on the idea of adapting activities and the arts space. The strong emphasis on adaptations seemed to indicate that practitioners wanted to focus their efforts at change on the space, rather than on the individual. Some practitioners spoke to the idea that it is not the people with disabilities who need to change; rather, it is the environment, and people's attitudes, that need an adjustment. Margaret spoke to the notion that having a disability did not necessarily mean that one must face disabling conditions: *"some things that people think are disabilities are not disabilities, they're just challenges to go a different way."* This quote revealed that a key part of disability discourse for some inclusive arts practitioners was the need to be flexible, both in their definition of what a disability is, and in the way that they deliver programs. Jane reiterates this idea of flexibility in defining disability: *"Instead of thinking of it as a disability, and 'you can't do this', because I don't look at it that way, it's like, 'okay, you have a special need'."* In terms of being flexible in the way that programs are delivered, Charlotte explained that disability itself was not an obstacle, instead it was about finding new ways to deliver programs:

*I just kind of think of disability as just being, finding another way of having, of having to do things, right? It's not anything that has to be an obstacle. It's just, just having to find a different way of doing something, or involving somebody.*

Jane explained the way she approached the idea of what disability means, and gave an example of how she physically adapted a space for a participant with a disability:

*So to somebody who walks into this space, or rolls into this space, things might not be at the right level, or um, we might need to make sure, if we had a visually impaired student, we would have to make sure that we created systems, and kept everything in that spot so they could move around the space.*

Working to adapt inclusive arts programs was also seen by some practitioners to be an exciting opportunity to test their skills at thinking outside of the box. Lana discussed how adapting activities was a rewarding experience for her:

*I tend to think of it in terms of a challenge for myself to find new ways to adapt activities. That's very much where my interest is, so I don't know sort of see it so much as a limitation as an exciting challenge, and making me look at an activity in a different way and finding out how that activity can be modified.*

Although Lana, the sole non-artist of the group, was uneasy with some aspects of the inclusive arts experience, she was very comfortable with the concept of adapting activities. I attribute this to her background in recreation studies, and her current field of choice, occupational therapy, where adaptations play a significant role.

#### *Discussion of Flexibility, Adaptations, and Possibilities for Inclusion*

Creating inclusive arts programs were associated with some challenges for participants, particularly as they relate to creating an effective program for children both with disabilities and without. Meeting challenges with a flexible attitude and openness to making adaptations resulted in participants viewing those challenges as an opportunity to improve their programs.

Flexibility was identified by participants as a key aspect of developing and implementing inclusive arts programs. Emes, Longmuir, and Downs (2002) discussed the importance of flexibility and a focus on ability when designing and delivering adapted physical activity programs. According to these authors, “inclusion is a philosophy of acceptance and flexibility. Over time, it has become evident that inclusion (physically, socially, and emotionally) is the outcome on valuing people equally regardless of their differences” (Emes, Longmuir, & Downs, p. 407). Similarly, it is a familiar concept discussed extensively in the therapeutic recreation literature (cf. Austin & Crawford, 2001; Dattilo, 1994; Devine & McGovern, 2001; Schelein et al., 1997). Typically, practitioners in my research described that in inclusive arts spaces adapting activities took the form of making a space or activity more physically accessible.

In some respects, the need to be flexible was borne out of practitioners’ sense that disability, and the associated practical implications for programming and space, were viewed as a challenge. This challenge-based view of disability is echoed in the literature. As Brittain (2004) argues, the prominence of medical conceptualizations of disability (which perceive disability to be a deficit inherent to the individual) have greatly influenced society’s understandings about disability. The belief that disability is a challenge or problem has effectively been embedded in public consciousness. Because of this internalization, people with disabilities encounter a challenge in altering this deficit-based disability discourse. As Brittain states:

    this powerful and apparently legitimized discourse is then taken up and used by other organizations and institutions within society to inform policy or exert power over those with disabilities; that is, a particular understanding of disability has been normalized within society. Therefore, those with the most legitimate claim to determine and define the discourse in the area of disability (people who

actually have disabilities) are strongly encouraged to accept a discourse that is not in their best interests (p. 430).

In some ways I was concerned that this challenge-based perception of disability may be problematic for successful inclusive programs. Although I could not find literature pertaining specifically to the inclusive arts, the education literature offers a parallel between inclusive leisure practitioners and teachers in an inclusive classroom. More specifically I learned that the beliefs and approaches of teachers have significant impacts on their students' success in inclusive environments. As expressed by Tait and Purdie (2000), the attitudes of teachers are a "critical variable in the success of managing children with special needs, to the life quality of people with disabilities, and in the success or failure of the integration of disabled students into the regular classroom" (p. 26). Drawing from this literature we may assume that the attitudes and beliefs of inclusion practitioners in the arts will have a great impact on the success of the inclusion process.

Despite these parallels, I think that differences exist between educators and the inclusive leisure practitioners in this study. While the participants recognized challenges to inclusion, and willingly developed problem-solving strategies, there is an ongoing challenge in the field of education in terms of teachers viewing inclusion favourably. Drawing again from the education literature, I found that, "historically, teachers have not been favourably disposed to the policy of increased inclusion of children with special needs within the regular classroom" (Campbell, Gilmore, & Cuskelly, 2003, p. 370). This has been due largely to the perceived challenges related to inclusion, such as the additional time and effort children with disabilities might require, possible detriments to

children without disabilities, and feeling unprepared to work in an inclusive environment. Although they are such a key part of a child's success in an inclusive environment, teachers are more likely to treat children with disabilities with indifference (Barr & Bracchitta, 2008). What is particularly problematic about these views is that "negative attitudes toward groups of individuals are thought to result in discriminatory behavior and stereotypical responses toward these individuals" (Barr & Bracchitta, 225). To me this implies that participants with disabilities are doomed to have an unsuccessful experience in their inclusive classroom or program if practitioners hold negative views of disability. Similar to teachers, if inclusive practitioners view disability as a challenge, then it might follow that they could not develop effective, meaningful programs for their participants. However, it seems that the "challenge-based" definition that some practitioners held was mitigated by the associated belief that flexibility and adaptation are key parts of the inclusive arts programming experience. Although participants with disabilities may present a challenge in terms of program design, practitioners perceived these challenges as an opportunity to look for the possibilities in their participants, program, and space.

#### Valuing Sameness and Difference in Ability and the Arts

When practitioners' spoke about the interactions between program participants, and between program participants and staff the ideas of sameness and difference were two recurring ideas and discussion focused on ideas of respect, acceptance, and opportunity. Respect and acceptance were related to the importance of acknowledging differences, yet treating each other with mutual esteem; this also involved an exploring how disability is conceptualized; that is, what it actually means to participants. The

notion of opportunity described by participants was related to challenging the elitist view of who is granted the status of “artist” in society.

The notion of respecting differences revealed that while similarities between participants are important to share, the differences should also be valued and respected. In terms of sameness, practitioners felt that if children focus on the fundamental idea that they are all people, and pay less attention to the details that separate them (such as disability), it is more likely that they can respect each other, because they appreciate the things they have in common. Jane discussed the importance of participants connecting on an individual, human level:

*If we looked at people for who they are, and how can we interact with that individual, how can we share who we are with that individual, what can they share with us? And those interactions being about our connection with another human being! Because, why do we even need to have a word for it? That’s how the world should work, that’s how we should interact with each other.*

Many of the practitioners in my study believed that if all children start with a foundation of respecting each other as human beings, and appreciating the things that make them the same, they would better be able to appreciate the things that make them different, and accept everyone as a friend. If a precedent is set within the program that mutual respect and appreciation are mandatory, the impetus to create social acceptance would not fall on any group of people in particular – it would be a natural part of the program.

Charlotte described that it is easier for children without disabilities to accept children with disabilities as friends when the emphasis is on participating together, and not focused on disability:

*Just having them come and take part in activities where they’re just, it’s just, yeah, it’s not a known fact that, “oh, this child has a disability”, just more like,*

*“oh, hey, that’s so-and-so, he’s my friend, we play together”. They may have disabilities, but it doesn’t matter.*

In terms of differences, practitioners noted how even when children without disabilities recognize that children with disabilities are different in some way, there is still an atmosphere of understanding and acceptance in the program. Charlotte describes her experience of seeing children without disabilities showing respect towards children with disabilities, despite them being aware of the differences that exist between them:

*the students without disabilities didn’t make a big deal, sometimes they would say, “oh, they can’t really do that”, and they’re like, “oh well!” [laughs], and then they’d move on. But there was no name-calling, there was no singling people out. They did notice that different children had to do things differently, but they didn’t, they didn’t, it didn’t bother them, it didn’t affect them. They still treated them as a human being, and a friend by the end of the week.*

According to Jane, an atmosphere of acceptance emerges from being honest and open with children about what disability is, and some of the different behaviours and needs that may emerge from having a disability. When children are aware, it seems to be much easier for them to be accepting of difference. Below, Jane tells the story of a little girl who, after learning about what autism was from Jane, had a greater understanding of a girl in her program with autism:

*J: It’s okay to ask. And especially with disabilities, it’s, you know, I’ve noticed that students are like, “ooh”, you know? I had this one little girl, Clara, who was autistic. And, um, and she was in classes with these girls, these same girls for a couple of years. And one day, finally, one of the kids says, “what’s wrong with her?” I, you know, explained autism and how it works. And, “why does she repeat things? Why does she mumble? Why does she always say hi, hi, hi to us?”, and when I explained it, they were like, “oooooh, okay!” And after that, Clara would say “Hi, hi, hi, Jacqueline!”, and Jacqueline would be like, “hi, hi, hi, Clara”, you know, like there wasn’t that, “why is she asking me that again?!”*

*Z: There was an understanding.*

*J: An understanding and an acceptance...*

The idea that everyone has special needs connects to the idea of sameness. Some practitioners rallied against the term disability, arguing that it could be limiting or stigmatizing. Jane explained how she disagrees with the idea of “normal” versus “disabled”, and how that influences her definition of disability:

*I hate that word [disability] because that's assuming that there's a whole bunch of people walking around that are perfect and 'normal', versus, and then anyone who doesn't fit into those categories is disabled. And I don't think that's the case at all. I think we all have special needs, and that's how I like to refer to it.*

Instead of seeing disability as something that affects only some participants, practitioners emphasized that the idea that disability exists on a spectrum, and that every person is “disabled” in one way or another. Essentially, participants with disabilities should not be viewed as different because they have disabilities, rather, everyone is perceived as the same because they all have some kind of special need. Below, Paula describes how, to her, the idea of disability exists on a spectrum:

*I don't have one picture in my mind, or one thing that that looks like. I think that, I think that we all have, in some ways we all have disabilities on a varying level of degrees. So, some people those are hidden, and some people those are really obvious maybe, for an onlooker.*

One of the most interesting aspects of sameness and difference was the practitioners' discussion of the “artist”, and how their work in the inclusive arts challenges the stereotypical notions of who can and cannot be an artist. In the inclusive arts space, practitioners work to break down the idea that being an artist is reserved for a select few who have a certain skill-set, and particular level of talent; that is, they challenge the traditional artist persona. Jane discussed the idea that there is a socially defined notion of what it means to be an artist when she said: “*there's a pre-conceived idea about the arts,*

*I think, about who gets to be an artist and who does not. Um, and the privilege of being an artist and what that gives you in society.”*

This pre-conceived idea can be challenging for amateur artists, and for inclusive arts practitioners. For practitioners to be able to deliver an effective program for participants with and without disabilities there is a need for the creation of a wider definition of the arts and who can participate in them. Lana, the lone interviewee who did not define herself as an artist, described art as related to a definite skill set. When I asked Lana what she thought of when she thought of an artist, her response was that *“they're skilled in whatever type of art it is that I'm thinking of. That they know what they're doing, and they have some sort of ability, or some sort of skill.”* In contrast to Lana's statement, Paula's definition of art emphasizes the importance of process over product; when the arts are for everyone, they emphasize the creative process over the final product. Paula described the view that society generally holds about art, and the importance of broadening how we define art:

*I think in our society, a lot of people view the arts as, music is like music performance, and visual art is what's on the wall at galleries, and professional ballet, and all these types of things. And art becomes this really exclusive thing that people who are crazy trained get to do, and other people get to watch and listen, but don't get to participate. So, I think we have to, my perception is that, you know, that we have to broaden the definition of what art is so that it's not just this product that's on the wall at galleries, but that it's something that we're all capable, and something we all need in our lives – to be creative.*

The fact that many people believe that art is restricted to those with a certain measure of talent can make it difficult for practitioners to promote the arts as a recreational program. Similarly, Jeff discussed the challenges he faced when trying to encourage people who do not define themselves as “artists” to participate in the arts:

*I'm constantly telling people that anyone can paint, or anyone can sculpt. And I'll say that to a person directly, and people will say, "oh, I can't." Any person whose not, doesn't consider themselves an artist, automatically believes they can't do art...The subject of talent always seems to come up, "well, I'm not talented." Well, you might not think you're talented, but maybe you just haven't tried. Often it's harder to get someone to try something than to get them to finish something.*

Narrow definitions which restrict the vision of who can be an artist can create a greater barrier when it comes to people with disabilities participating in arts programs. Nancy discussed how people having a particular image of an artist presents a challenge because it can become difficult to picture how a person with a disability might be an artist:

*Because a lot of people sort of, a lot of people shy away from it a little bit because they think, "how can a person with a disability dance?", because they have a perception in their mind of your ballet dancer standing on toe shoes. There's a very specific image.*

However, practitioners discussed how breaking down the stereotype of what an artist is and does can make the field of the arts more accessible and inclusive to all participants.

Retaining a focus on the process of creative expression opens up the definition of arts and the artist to a wider spectrum. Charlotte and Paula discussed that changing how practitioners perceive the arts opens up opportunity for people with disabilities to participate:

*they [people with disabilities] can still participate in these programs, such as music and dance. Doesn't have to be the traditional ways that we normally see it. Doesn't have to be, if you're in dance, doesn't have to be everybody leaping in the air to be able to create a dance piece. It could be somebody in a wheelchair who is moving their arms about, or who is being led around by somebody else (Charlotte).*

*But if you're working with someone, an arts program where that is that view of the arts that it's either right or wrong, a person with a disability their, their perception of that space and that place, it would be really clear that they couldn't do it. And maybe they couldn't do it, it would be hard to do a plié from a wheelchair. But to*

*me, that doesn't mean they can't dance. So re-defining arts becomes a challenge (Paula).*

In terms of acknowledging differences, the idea of what it meant to have a disability was a place where differences were very marked. When participants responded to question 2 (“when you think of disability, what do you think of?”), the physical imagery of disability (i.e., visible, physical disabilities) was a recurring theme in the interviewees’ definitions of disability. Although many practitioners acknowledged cognitive and social disabilities later in their discussion of disability, physical disabilities were often mentioned first. This focus on the physicality of disability really surprised me because the interviewees were all fairly knowledgeable in the area of disability, and were certainly aware of social and cognitive disabilities as well. Nevertheless, when asked about what came to mind when disability was mentioned, it was often physical. Jeff offered a simple explanation for this: *“the word disability is culturally-loaded, we automatically think of physical disability.”* Why this is, I am not really sure. I tried to conjure up my first impression what disability is, but now I think I have been influenced by this discussion, and purposefully try to imagine non-physical disabilities.

The example of a wheelchair came up frequently in our discussions of disability, which may indicate that this is an important image of disability. The following quotes illustrate the practitioners’ first impressions of disability:

*I guess the stereotype is to think of someone in a wheelchair or something like that. Maybe that is the first image that comes to my mind (Paula).*

*someone in a wheelchair. Maybe somebody that's sort of, um, not sighted, so they're displaying some obviously physical signs of their disability (Marie).*

*I think the first thing that would pop into my head is something more physical. I don't know, that's just the first thought that comes to mind (Lana).*

*Everything from, you know, people that are wheelchair-bound to, uh, people that have a hard time making sound, you know, verbal sounds (Carl).*

#### *Discussion of Valuing Sameness and Difference in Ability and the Arts*

When practitioners' spoke about inclusion, it was mainly in terms of the interactions between program participants, and between program participants and staff. Practitioners described their emphasis on sameness and difference, and how these concepts connect to respect, acceptance, and opportunity. An emphasis on respect and acceptance was connected to the practitioners' valuing of differences, and treating everyone will equal respect. Acceptance is also related to practitioners' acknowledging differences among their program participants while striving to create a cohesive group dynamic. The idea of opportunity relates to the practitioners' challenging traditional views of who is allowed to be an artist. Through the inclusive arts, practitioners

As with the essence, *Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space*, many aspects of equality connect to the essence of *Valuing Sameness and Difference in Ability and the Arts*. While practitioners believed that equality was important in creating a space conducive to equal access and treatment, equality in the context of sameness and difference describes how many practitioners envisioned equality playing out within the inclusive arts space. The practitioners' notion of equality was strongly related to sameness in the treatment and opportunities provided for participants with disabilities and participants without disabilities. This idea was illustrated by Nancy when she said: "*I think of being able to provide the opportunity for everyone to be able to participate and experience the same things.*" As I re-read the transcripts, I realized that I should have

asked more questions about what the word “equal” meant to practitioners. In retrospect, it raises the question about what the difference between equality and equity is, and if the practitioners meant to use one term over the other. Nevertheless, the word that was used was “equality”, and based on the language that was used to describe “equality”, the concept seems closely aligned with ideas of sameness. For example, Charlotte describes inclusion with the statement below which focuses on treating all participants the same way:

*Treating everyone the same, and not centering them out. Just having it be an environment where the leaders know who has a different need, but again, not making special, complete special allowances for it. Not treating them any differently than they would a child without a disability.*

Connected to opportunity, practitioners emphasized the importance of participants with disabilities being afforded the same type of inclusive arts experience as their counterparts without disabilities. This sentiment is echoed in a statement about the purpose of inclusive leisure by Devine and Lashua (2002):

The purpose of inclusive leisure contexts is to create awareness of similarities (e.g., leisure interests) rather than focus on differences (e.g., walking vs. using a wheelchair to ambulate)...social capital assumes that providing opportunities for interaction among individuals with and without disabilities may promote awareness of potential shared resources (e.g., a common interest and skill in knitting) and what individuals have to offer to each other (e.g., teaching each other new knitting techniques) (p. 396).

According to Braveman and Gruskin (2003), “equity means social justice or fairness; it is an ethical concept, grounded in principles of distributive justice” (p. 254), which is what I would assume practitioners were trying to get at. I believe that practitioners want participants with disabilities to have the same opportunities, but with the recognition that they may need additional resources or assistance to make the

experience equally fulfilling. The notion of equality, on the other hand, is a slightly different concept which implies equal access to resources and opportunities, but no offer of increased support or resources to facilitate successful experiences (Grogan, 1999).

It seemed that a key part of the participants' programs was the theoretical orientation that they adopted as practitioners. In addition to valuing equality, practitioners seemed to adopt a model of disability that focused on potential and ability rather than deficits. Although participants initially characterized disability by its physical manifestations, I had a strong sense throughout my interviews that the participants believed the idea of "disability" was rooted in society's negative perceptions of difference, rather than in an inadequacy inherent to the person. This point is emphasized by Harris (2000) who quotes Alison Davis as saying:

If I lived in a society where being in a wheelchair was no more remarkable than wearing glasses and if the community was completely accepting and accessible, my disability would be an inconvenience and not much more than that. It is society which handicaps me, far more seriously and completely than the fact that I have spina bifida (p. 95).

I wondered how it was that if the practitioners in my study were proponents of inclusion who believed in the strengths and abilities of people with disabilities, why did they ascribe to a predominantly medicalized view of disability? My best guess is that the symbols of disability are largely ingrained in society, and outwardly physical signs are the most easily recognizable. Several of my participants also come from professions which clinical in nature and guided by medical definitions of disability (e.g., occupational therapy, in-patient art therapy).

According to Li and Moore (1998), the extent to which people with disabilities accept their own disabilities strongly dictates how society will perceive people with

disabilities. Self-esteem level and social support have been found to be two major influences in terms of how well people with disabilities adjust to their disability. In some ways I find this idea to be somewhat problematic, as it was illustrated by participants that social inclusion assisted in the development of self-esteem and social support systems for their program participants. If people with disabilities do not live in a society that accepts and embraces people with disabilities, it may preclude the development of self-esteem and social support. The authors sum up their findings with a recommendation for practitioners in the field of disability rehabilitation: “rehabilitation counselors should take into consideration that improved self-esteem, reliable emotional support from family and friends, and reduction of the stigmatizing effects of disability could positively impact the processes of adjustment and rehabilitation” (Li and Moore, p. 23). This quote reinforces the key role that inclusive arts practitioners can play in connecting their participants to social support groups within the program, as well as the wider community.

Devine and Parr (2008) raised a similar idea, explaining that people with disabilities may use inclusive recreation and leisure settings to “proactively construct elements of social acceptance by taking deliberate and subtle actions to gain acceptance by peers” (p. 392). According to them, recreation and leisure experiences create the potential for people with disabilities to “embrace their disabilities and successfully cope with social stigma” (p. 392). Participants with disabilities work hard in inclusive settings to create positive images of disability (Devine and Parr). This echoes Devine and Lashua’s (2002) assertion of the importance of inclusive program staff modeling positive attitudes and behaviours toward all children.

It has been found that addressing stereotypes and biases about disability directly is the most effective way to promote the acceptance of differences (Grenier, 2006).

In an inclusive camp study by Devine and Lashua (2002), it was found that inclusive contexts may act as more of a “band-aid” than an actual solution to problems with social exclusion. According to the authors:

Inclusive leisure contexts may camouflage society’s typical response to individuals with disabilities. For instance, campers without disabilities expressed frustration with the amount of effort it took to include their peer with a disability. They also expressed that the notion of inclusion was not a natural consequence, but instead a forced situation. Thus, while the concepts and spirit of inclusion were an inherent part of this camp, relationships that reflected the sense of community and social capital were not always apparent (p. 402).

Inclusion and exclusion are not binary opposites for interviewees; one cannot exist without the other. In fact, Lana, when asked to define inclusion, said that it was simply “the opposite of exclusion”. The concept of exclusion, therefore, is an important notion when considering what inclusion is, and how it relates to ideas of sameness and difference. An area where the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy was especially noted by practitioners was within the school system. Several participants in my study had experiences within schools, and two noted how even within so-called “inclusive” schools, exclusive practices are still very much at play:

*the kids with special needs are still grouped into a separate class, and it’s called a life skills class now. And everyone, from people with physical disabilities to behavioural and emotional needs, are all lumped together in the same group. So, the general population, let’s say, still don’t have an opportunity to interact with people with special needs on a daily basis in a way that isn’t scary (Jane).*

*I’ve worked in school rooms, and I’ve had some difficulty with that. You know, just the way that schools nowadays are set up. Maybe certain children are identified as having social difficulties, so that they’re assigned a teacher’s aide*

*which kind of separates them from the rest of the class, and separates them from the group activities* (Jeff).

The ineffectiveness of school-based inclusive programs has been largely attributed to classroom teachers' lack of experience and training in terms of disability and inclusive practices (Avramidis, Bayliss, & Burden, 2000; Campbell et al., 2003; Horne and Timmons, 2009). Horne and Timmons suggest that "inclusion does not work, especially when students with disabilities in the general education setting do not receive necessary support services" (p. 274). This notion was

#### Practitioners' Experiences of Receiving Gifts and Feeling Strained

This essence examines what the process of delivering an inclusive arts program entails for practitioners personally, both the challenges and the rewards that they experience. In many ways, being part of an inclusive arts program seemed to broaden practitioners' worldview, through an increased acceptance of people's differences and a greater tolerance of others' ideas. This essence also involves the demands of inclusive arts programs which practitioners have to deal with throughout the course of a program, demands such as time and financial commitments.

Participants described that there was a huge personal benefit in terms of seeing their participants experience personal feelings of success and achievement. Seeing participants have a positive encounter with the arts was as gratifying for practitioners as it was for participants. Nancy describes the reciprocal relationship that exists with participants, and how she receives as much – or more – gratification from her program delivery experience: *"I mean, I think, like I keep talking about how rewarding it is to*

*work with these children. I feel like you just get so much. As much as you give them, you get that much back, and more.”*

Jane and Jeff described how they gained a great personal satisfaction in watching their participants experience growth. However, when practitioners described watching their participants grow, they seemed to be speaking more so of their participants with disabilities. Although I acknowledge that children without disabilities experience struggles and challenges in their lives, in looking at the language that participants used I believe they focused specifically on the triumphs of their participants with disabilities:

*the biggest, biggest part is when I see a child who comes into this space who, in the rest of their lives, feels like they're a piece of crap. And watching them unfold to this self-reliant, self-confident, filled with joy and celebration by the end of the week. That's the biggest gratification. That's why I do this. That's the reason I get up in the morning (Jane).*

*Children accomplished things they had no idea they could. They never conceived of being able to accomplish something, anything, little or big. And sometimes they made quite large and impressive things, and had no idea they could. And they would smile, they would be thrilled. And that makes you feel incredible (Jeff).*

While the practitioners described their experiences as personally rewarding, they also described inclusion as a gift. When practitioners discussed their experiences with inclusive arts programs, some practitioners spoke of the “honour” (Paula) in being a part of the program, how the program was “incredibly moving” (Paula), and how the experience was “empowering” for the practitioner (Charlotte). These words connected to the idea that inclusion is a very special process, a gift for practitioners to witness. The idea that inclusion can be a “gift” came from Jane, who discussed a boy with a disability in her inclusive arts program, and how he created a sense of magic in her program, simply by being himself:

*And it was really amazing to see the effect that this little boy, who doesn't speak, who, you know, isn't the life of the party, doesn't have all of those charismatic things that we equate with, you know, popularity. Yet, there's something so magical about him...having Joseph in the studio, as part of this space, is a huge gift.*

There was a sense that in an inclusive arts space, events that were miracle-like in nature could occur. Participants could transcend their regular lives, and become, or achieve, something they could have never imaged before. Jeff described such an event, where children bonded and reached out to people that they likely would not have in another situation:

*I've seen people create some really amazing things together, and bond, and become friends, and find new people to talk to that they wouldn't normally talk to – if they would talk at all. You know, some children start interacting with other people, and I've never seen them interact with anyone.*

Several practitioners spoke of their involvement in the inclusive process as being a lesson in tolerance for themselves. They explained that through their work with children with disabilities the practitioners found that they had developed a greater acceptance towards all people. They described becoming less judgmental and more open to differing ideas and opinions. Nancy described how participating in the inclusive process made her better able to be accepting of others:

*I'll speak for myself, but I think it makes us more accepting of differences. And, you know, not, like, everybody does things in different ways. Yeah, that's what I think. Just, more accepting and aware of different people, and what different people are dealing with.*

Jane explained how asking people to ascribe to her beliefs within her inclusive arts space made her more aware of the need to respect other people's belief systems, even if they differ from her own. Jane describes this experience below:

*And then by creating [program name], and creating all this stuff, and you know, asking people to come into this space and be respectful of what the rules are, I've also had to learn about tolerance and patience. And if I'm asking people to respect my belief system, then I don't have to agree with people's belief systems, but I have to respect them.*

Gaining an increased sense of tolerance is not limited to people with disabilities, rather, this new insight applied to all people, in all situations. Isabelle described the attitude shift that she experienced through participating in an inclusive arts program:

*that's really made me see the other point of view. Whether it's passing people on the street asking for money, or...yeah, I think I'm not so hard-edged about people in society and judging them.*

I felt that an increased sense of tolerance was also related to practitioners being better able to apply their inclusive principles to situations outside of an inclusive arts environment. Jeff explained how his experience in the inclusive arts program at a youth shelter made him realize that taking time to gain a more in-depth understanding of a person's experience can open the door to a more meaningful interaction:

*My own awareness of other people has been greatly influenced by my experience with the shelter. I think I used to be more cavalier, quick-judging about people. The ability to not judge someone quickly is something that I've taken away. I've learned that there's more usually happening under the surface that, if not explains, at least gives some sort of a reason to why people act the way they act. You might not be able to change that, but it gives you a basis for starting to interact with people.*

Many participants also spoke of the financial struggles linked to delivering an inclusive arts program, particularly those who owned small businesses. Jane discussed her personal struggle related to the financial strain of owning a private inclusive arts business:

*I was like, “I’m tired of not making any money. I’m tired of the struggle, the struggle, the struggle.” And I thought, “maybe it’s time for me to get a real job.” You know, give up [program name], and get a real job, nine-to-five.*

Despite her intention to leave the inclusive arts field, Jane was convinced to stay after her students protested, and appealed to her with the argument that there was no other inclusive arts space where they could go:

*But there was this huge outcry from students and clients who I had been working with for years. And they said, “you can’t go, because there’s nowhere else for us to go. No one else is going to take us. Where are we going to do pottery? Where are we going to do drumming? No one else is allowing us to do it”. – Jane*

Participants described the challenges associated with the demand for inclusive arts opportunities. One program, which was the sole not-for-profit inclusive arts program offered in one city, was plagued by a lack of finances and a long waiting list. Charlotte describes how parents were unable to send both of their children to an inclusive program because of the long waiting list:

*they wished there could be more funding so that more children could attend the camp. That was a big issue. And then there was a huge waiting list for the camp, as I mentioned, but they couldn’t get in because there wasn’t money for the program, and there wasn’t a large enough space.*

As the participants described, the inclusive arts are not a lucrative field, and cannot be sustained without support from donors and the community. In the non-profit sector and education sectors, there is a heavy reliance on grants. Finances are the bottom line between a program operating or closing down. Paula described the importance of community or donor organizations supporting programs, and when they are unable or unwilling to contribute any longer, programs are in jeopardy:

*community support, like support of parents, for example. Parents who bring their kids back year after year after year. And the support of somewhere like [name of*

*not-for-profit disability-focused organization] who allow us to use their space. All of those types of things are necessary for the success of the program. And I really think that parents are a huge part of this program, and support from them and the community is really what keeps this kind of thing going. I guess in terms of the negatives, it would just be the opposite of those things, when community organizations or funders decide not to support us anymore. And, actually, with [program name], that's the situation we have found ourselves in right now. So money is definitely a huge issue.*

Another potential challenge described by Jane was the fact that inclusive programs require practitioners to “give” a lot of themselves, both physically and emotionally. She described how she has to take extra care of herself, otherwise her own health (and consequently her program) would deteriorate:

*creating a balance within myself, that's the other challenge. Making sure that I'm emotionally, psychologically, and physically taking care of me. Because that's what I'm teaching people, so, not being hypocritical. Which is a challenge, right? Because not all of my clients understand that, and society doesn't necessarily support you doing that, so I have to consciously make sure I'm doing it. And I slip up now and again, and I get burnt out...And the truth is, I've learned, over the ten years I've been doing this that, if I do not take the time I need to feed myself emotionally, physically, all those things, then I have absolutely nothing to give to all my students. And I'm angry, I'm frustrated, and everything they do irritates me, and you know, I'm no good.*

According to Jane, spending just a few hours within an inclusive arts program takes the same toll as a full eight hour day at a regular day job:

*when I was just doing, um, for lack of a better way of saying it, just normal classes. I might have one person with special needs in my class, but not very often, and that was the focus. Yes, when you're teaching and doing art, and because of the way I teach, everybody's emotional needs, as soon as they walk through, I pick up. And I'm there. Which is a lot of emotional energy. So for me to teach two hours of class is probably equivalent to working eight hours for someone in an office.*

Although this idea of inclusive arts programs requiring a lot of effort and energy was a common sentiment, it was most strongly expressed by Jane. Jane, who has recurring medical problems due to an accident years earlier, described her struggle to find a healthy balance.

*Discussion of Practitioners' Experiences of Receiving Gifts and Feeling Strained*

Inclusive arts practitioners' encounters in their own programs were marked by two very different experiences: feeling a sense of gratitude and joy about the rewards they experience, and feeling financial and emotional strain. Despite financial and emotional challenges, inclusive arts practitioners stated that personal rewards and satisfaction associated with their work outweighed any downsides. I could not find a dialogue pertaining to inclusion as a gift from the perspective of art or recreation practitioners; however, I found parallels in practitioners providing recreation in specialized programs. In a report by Dupuis, Smale, and Wiersma (2003), it was found that recreation practitioners cited a variety of rewards associated with their work in long-term care facilities; some rewards included: satisfaction at seeing enhanced well-being in clients, support and encouragement received from families and the community, making a difference in someone's life, and having a sense of accomplishment and fulfillment. I also found similar connections to the caregiving literature. Although there is a difference between being an inclusive leisure practitioner and being a full-time caregiver, I think they share a commonality of being dedicated to a person with a disability. Grant, Ramcharan, McGrath, Nolan, and Keady (1998) introduced the notion that, contrary to what previous literature had suggested, caregivers of family members with disabilities experienced a great sense of reward "in terms of the achievements of the person with

intellectual disability” (p. 59). The idea that practitioners develop a greater tolerance for others following their experiences in an inclusive arts program parallels the assertion by Grant et al. (1998) that being a caregiver for family members with disabilities can yield many intrapersonal benefits such as “strengthened faith, tolerance, personal growth” (p. 59).

The notion of inclusion being a gift also connects to the field of nursing. In the context of nursing, Lindsey (1995) put forth the notion that nurses should embrace their role of healers, and shift away from their medicalized role of providing technical care for people (i.e., become person-centered caregivers). Lindsey described the process that people with chronic illness or disabilities undergo on their journey toward healing. The final step “The Gift” mirrors some of the ideas put forward by the practitioners in my study. People with disabilities felt their “disease” moving to a state of “ease”, and this transition was perceived as gift-like. Table 1 describes some of the characteristics of the healing journey which undergo a shift in The Gift phase (see Table 1).

To create an inclusive arts space, practitioners experienced a measure of personal rewards and challenges. Although the personal gratification and growth developed through participation in an inclusive arts program are very positive aspects for practitioners, program demand, finances, and personal health were also significant challenges to program delivery. Practitioners described how financial struggles can easily cause burnout in a practitioner, or even threaten the existence of their programs. Although I could not find a discussion of this issue in the inclusion literature, these ideas are echoed in the caregiver literature. The caregiver literature describes that, although fulfilling for many, caregiving may have negative outcomes for caregivers, including

financial burden (Aranda & Knight, 1997; Dupuis & Smale, 2000), stress (Dupuis & Norris, 1997; Dupuis & Smale, 2000), and physical and emotional fatigue (Dupuis & Smale, 2000; Teel & Press, 1999).

**Table 1: The Healing Process**

<i>Dis-Ease</i>	<i>Ease</i>
Incongruence	Congruence
Constrictions	Creativity, expansion
Wall	Membrane
Imbalance	Balance
Franticness	Relaxation
Rigidity	Flexibility
Heavy, bounded	Buoyancy, energy, vitality
Self-judgment	Self-acceptance
Disconnectedness	Connectedness
Disharmony	Harmony
Spiritually bereft	Spiritual well-being
“Doing”	“Being”
Unconscious	Expanded consciousness

(from Lindsey, 1995, p. 301)

### Embodying Inclusive Arts Values

The final essence of *Embodying Inclusive Arts Values* was the final essence to emerge from the data. While some practitioners spoke about how they had changed their actions and learned from inclusive arts programs, *Embodying Inclusive Arts Values* illustrates how others felt that they had always held the values of inclusion and creative expression, and perhaps that is why they gravitate to the arts and inclusion as recreation or a profession. As Paula explained, “*I don’t know if it’s that [program name] has created this, or I’m just this kind of person and so, you know, it’s a good fit for me, and it just kind of rubs off everywhere.*” The embodiment of the inclusive arts can be divided

into two main ideas, embodying the values of inclusion and embodying the values of expression/creativity.

As participants spoke about their programs and their own values it became apparent that inclusive values were ingrained in some practitioners. This was illustrated in the way that Jane structured her program based on these principles before she even had participants with disabilities. Jane explained, “*that was one of the founding principles of [program name], that it was an “ism” free zone, and everyone is welcome.*” Similarly, Isabelle discussed that while her early training in professional dance did not quite align with her ideals at the time, she later realized how it could connect to her desire to share her art with the world:

*You know, it's always been that way, but, your dad has probably said this, or older people have probably said this to you...you start, I don't know...all your experience in life, all those things that you've done kind of start together and make sense. It's like, I was trained with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, which didn't make any sense for me - well, it did and it didn't - but now I can draw on that and use that experience. Or my piano, and bring that into what I'm doing. So it, it's, but it's always been kind of going to the direction of, “how can I share the gift of music, dance, and movement, visual arts, with as many people as possible?” And yeah, I have a great job.*

Margaret brought an interesting perspective to the essence, as her inclusive arts program existed within the church. To her, inclusivity is intertwined with her faith because God created all of us equal, and we are all a part of God’s family. To Margaret, inclusion was a natural extension of her faith:

*Everything we do, we do together. And I think the advantage that we have, in everything having to do with the church, is that we constantly reinforce to the children the concept of equality in the eyes of God. So, we are all created in God’s image, no matter what we look like. We`re all created in God’s image, we*

*are the way we`re supposed to be. And acceptance of one another is part of what we do, it`s part of who we are.*

Margaret`s strong beliefs in inclusion and equality, which are derived from the values of her faith, transcend all areas of her life, including her work and leisure. It is embodied clearly in how she speaks about her work, and Margaret also cited an example from her leisure lifestyle that reinforces the idea further. Once a week, Margaret and her husband participate in a volleyball league. Margaret coordinates the league, and has set the precedent that no score is kept, everyone can play, and the emphasis is on respecting one another in the spirit of teamwork. Not only does she embody the tenets of the inclusive arts in her faith and work, she embodies them in all aspects of her life.

On the creative side, Paula expressed a belief in being transparent, noting that if she asked her participants to take artistic risks, and express themselves creatively, that she must be embodying the same values:

*I definitely believe in being transparent, so if I`m talking about this, and wanting it for my students, then I need to follow that in my own life, and I want to be living those things. But again, I don`t know if [program name] created that, because that`s something that I value. But [program name] is a really good fit for that, and a really good reminder (Paula).*

In contrast, Lana seemed to have a very distinct, and somewhat rigid, schema of what it meant to be an art instructor. I think that, in her mind, a practitioner in the arts field should have a pre-determined set of competencies, among them artistic talent at the forefront.

#### *Discussion of Embodying Inclusive Arts Values*

According to Wilde (1999), a consistent understanding of the notion of embodiment does not exist in the human services literature. However, she posits that

embodiment can be understood according to Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological philosophy as "how we live in and experience the world through our bodies, especially through perception, emotion, language, movement in space, time, and sexuality" (Wilde, p. 27). Embodiment describes participants' valuation of inclusive and creative ideals as an almost taken-for-granted part of their identity; they cannot explain where these values came from, but they are intertwined with their inclusive arts philosophy. According to Wilde, "embodiment is a form of experiencing and understanding the world through the body in lived experiences. Lived experiences are experiences of the everyday world that are taken for granted, making them less available to our awareness" (p. 28).

When trying to decide where in the literature the idea of embodiment fits, it also occurred to me that connections could be drawn between the notion of embodiment and a calling. According to Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, and Schwartz (1997), while a "job" is done strictly for money, and a "career" is done for money and advancement, people with callings "find that their work is inseparable from their life. A person with a Calling works not for financial gain or career advancement, but instead for the fulfillment that doing the work brings to the individual" (p. 22). Participants expressed that, although working in the inclusive arts caused some financial and emotional hardship, they could not imagine that another career holding the same amount of meaning for them. Despite the fact that none of the participants described the field as a "calling", I have the sense that many of them would describe their work in this way because of the personal fulfillment and satisfaction that the work brings them.

A quote by Hamachek (1999) seems to me to be representative of the previous three examples from these practitioners, he says, "consciously, we teach what we know;

unconsciously, we teach who we are” (p. 209). Because the practitioners I interviewed believe that they embody the characteristics and ideals of the inclusive arts, they naturally reveal these values through their teaching. Avramidis, Bayliss, and Burden (2000) have done similar work in the area of inclusive classrooms and found that teachers who embody a philosophy of inclusion tend to find inclusion relatively easy and natural.

Margaret’s comment about inclusion being a natural extension of her faith made me curious about my own predisposition towards inclusive arts ideals – where did it come from? Margaret reminded me that, although I do not ascribe to any particular faith, I was raised in the Catholic school system, and many of her ideas resonated with my past. Whereas practitioners tended to say that they had “always” been like this, I’m not sure if I have, and I cannot pinpoint the moments or events that began to reform my thinking. A new definition of “calling” as proposed by Dik and Duffy (2009) may provide some explanation for the connection between a religious calling and how that translates into other arenas:

A calling is a transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation (p. 427).

According to Korthagen (2004), teachers are generally judged on how well they meet the standards of a set of teaching competencies. However, it has been argued that personal characteristics, such as enthusiasm, should be emphasized as well. Korthagen believes that being a good teacher involves the interplay of several factors, moving from the characteristics most internal to a person, to the external environment (i.e., mission → identity → beliefs → competencies → behavior → environment). Korthagen says:

with more balance between the various levels, the teacher will experience less inner and outer frictions. Ideally, there is a complete “alignment” of the levels, which means that the teacher’s behavior, competencies, beliefs, identity and mission together form one coherent whole matching the environment (p. 87).

It seems that nine of the ten practitioners reflected the cohesion of Korthagen’s levels, while Lana placed a greater importance on artistic competencies in the inclusive arts field. In the context of Korthagen’s model, all ten practitioners may have the same internal mission (i.e., to provide engaging, fulfilling inclusive programming), but there was a difference between Lana and the other practitioners in terms of their identities.

While other practitioners embodied the qualities of inclusion and creativity in the arts in their identities, Lana was likely more attuned to other aspects, such as the qualities of being a good clinical therapist. Although there is nothing wrong with having different identities, both are important in different contexts, this may partially explain why Lana did not feel she embodied the inclusive arts. Lana did not feel confident in the realm of the arts, and as such could not be open to the range of ways that one can be an “artist.” She was unable to see her own potential as an artist because she defined the arts with the singular vision that art participation requires technical artistic skill.

## CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTIONS

Initially, the essences that emerged from my interviews were difficult for me to manage. Because many of the essences contained overlapping ideas, it was a challenge for me to separate these ideas and uncover the key aspects of the inclusive arts experience for practitioners. Once I had separated each of the six essences, the unique aspects of each essence were clearer. As well, I was better able to explore the similarities that ran through many of the essences.

The first essence reflects the space that is created by practitioners in the inclusive arts field. The essence *Inclusive Arts as an Enabling Space* refers to several characteristics identified by practitioners as key in inclusive arts spaces. The creation of a safe space was a central aspect of inclusive arts program development. A space that is physically and emotionally safe enables participants to engage in the arts without the fear of being wrong or being judged. Participants of all ability levels are treated with equal respect and dignity, and afforded the same opportunity to explore the arts. Everyone can succeed in an inclusive arts space in an individualized way. Because competition is de-emphasized and success for all is emphasized, practitioners facilitate a space that challenges the traditional valuation of art products in favour of the artistic process.

*Exploring Potential through Creative Expression* refers to the unique experience of utilizing the arts as a programming medium. The arts have several qualities that set them apart from popular leisure pursuits, such as competitive sports. In the field of inclusion the arts serve as an equalizer; that is, they level the playing field for participants. There is no standard way to express yourself creatively, and this emphasis on personal expression empowers students to transcend traditional limitations through the

arts. Each practitioner has opportunities for success through creative expression, and as such, are able to share their success with their families and communities. For some participants, being recognized for their accomplishments is a new experience, thus receiving accolades may be a key part of the inclusive arts experience. With creative expression the focus is on what participants *can* do.

*Flexibility, Adaptations, and Possibilities for Inclusion* describes practitioners' belief that inclusive programming presents a set of unique challenges when including participants with a wide range of abilities. However, when these challenges are met with an open mind and flexible approach, practitioners found that there was great potential for successful inclusive experiences.

*Valuing Sameness and Difference in Ability and the Arts* recognizes that all people exist on a spectrum of special needs. While each person shares commonalities with the larger group, we also have a set of individual differences and challenges that must be acknowledged. In inclusive arts settings these aspects of sameness and difference are recognized and valued. In addition, within an inclusive arts space, the traditional role of the artist is challenged in favour of a view of the arts as a unique and personal creative experience.

*Practitioners' Experiences of Receiving Gifts and Feeling Strained* relates to the duality of practitioners' experiences developing and implementing inclusive arts programs. Practitioners experienced many meaningful, enlightening moments within their programs, but at times these successes were tempered by financial and emotional strain. Nevertheless, the consensus among practitioners was that the benefits of being involved

in an inclusive arts program far outweighed the potential challenges that sometimes arose.

Finally, *Embodying Inclusive Arts Values* encompasses all five of the previous essences. This essence refers to the idea that practitioners did not learn to value aspects of the inclusive arts (such as inclusion and creative expression) through their participation in the programs, rather, they have held these ideals through their lives. This is why they gravitated to the arts and inclusion as recreation or a profession. Not only do practitioners embody the tenets of the inclusive arts their work, many practitioners embody them in all aspects of their life.

Examining each of the essences separately, and then again as a whole, revealed that there are three main ideas which seem to cut across several of the six essences; these ideas are the notion of embodiment, the two models of disability (i.e., medical and social), and the use of art as a medium.

#### Inclusion and the Arts as Embodiment

As discussed in Chapter 4, the notion of embodiment in the context of the inclusive arts refers to embodying both the values of inclusion and the values of expression/creativity. Participants who embody both of these aspects personify the values of inclusion and the arts through their work and in their daily lives.

Lana, the sole interviewee who did not identify as an artist in some way, offered an interesting counter to practitioners' accounts of embodying the arts. While she embodied many aspects of the inclusive space, she did not embody the values of the arts. Contrary to how other interviewees viewed the arts as a safe space, something everyone can do, and focused on free creative expression, Lana viewed the arts as something she is

not capable of, and is in fact intimidated by. Her discussion of art, and artists, seemed to indicate that she is very much influenced by the typical vision of what an artist is (i.e., someone with a defined skill set and level of ability). When asked what an arts space feels like, Lana responded:

*I don't tend to feel like I involve myself in the arts too much, per se. Like, I enjoy listening to music, and I enjoy watching other people perform arts, but I don't enjoy being the one who is doing the arts. So if I was put in the situation to have to do the arts, I would probably feel nervous, and uncomfortable, and unskilled.*

Later in my conversation with Lana, I asked her if she believed that a discomfort with the arts might cause practitioners to hesitate in utilizing that format for a program. Lana believed that not feeling confident within an arts environment would certainly discourage practitioners from delivering such a program. She describes her own experience with this discomfort below, highlighting the idea that she would feel pressured to possess an artistic skill-set:

*Yeah! [laughs]. I would still be nervous to lead a visual arts program, or, I mean, that's why I work with kids, 'cause I can do whatever with kids. But I feel if I had to run a program with adults, I would feel more nervous because I would feel like I had to be an expert, in a sense, or even more so than I am.*

I wondered if Lana's discomfort with lacking a skill-set could potentially impact her ability to perceive the arts as something that all participants can do, despite her previous (and successful) experience in a prior inclusive arts program. Below, Lana explains how she can identify with the frustrations that people with disabilities may feel when trying to participate in an arts activity that they are incapable of doing:

*so maybe how I was explaining before that I find arts activities to be frustrating and kind of nerve-wracking because I don't feel like I am really good at it. So it might be experienced in that way because you might feel like you can't*

*participate, or you always thought you couldn't participate, or you can't do it the same way other people can, so why do it?*

In what seems to be a contradiction, Lana expressed how interested she is in adapting activities, and how she approaches each activity as an opportunity to challenge herself. However, perhaps Lana's concept of adapting activities is connected more to the idea of integration and place versus inclusion in space. She explained how she views adapting activities as a challenge:

*I tend to think of it in terms of, um, a challenge for myself to find new ways to adapt activities. That's very much where my interest is, so I don't know sort of see it so much as a limitation as an exciting challenge, and making me look at an activity in a different way and finding out how that activity can be modified...*

As well, she described her experience with her inclusive arts program in words that many practitioners used. When I asked her about the rewards that arose from her experiences, Lana described the personal rewards she received, the importance of a final product for participants and their families, and how meaningful an inclusive experience can be:

*I think just being able to be a part of something that I think had an influence on these kids' summers, if not, you know, something more. And being able to see that there's a final product, almost. We had the show at the end of the week, and the parents being able to watch their kids be a part of something, which I think was really neat. Just whenever it looked like, you could tell when the other kids in the program were having fun, or having a good time. Just that they were able to be completely free and independent in this camp, and that seeing how it was completely normal for someone to be participating in activity, with or without a disability, just like everyone. And no one thought it was weird or anything, that's why I like [program name], it's at atmosphere of acceptance, or a sense of it being normal.*

Inclusive arts programs have the potential to inspire almost all practitioners in some way, whether they define themselves as artists or not. However, when a practitioner embodied the characteristics of an inclusive arts program, it seemed that the inclusive arts

become a lifelong passion rather than a single great experience. The embodiment of inclusive arts values and beliefs ran through every essence and through each participant's experience of their inclusive arts programs.

### Inclusion and Models of Disability

Initially I found it difficult to reconcile practitioners' consistently physicalized views of disability with their beliefs about inclusion and the potential of all participants. I was unsure how it could be explained, but it seemed that the interplay of these two models of disability (i.e., medical and social) was a significant part of the inclusive arts programming discourse. Practitioners' knowledge about the physiological, challenge-based aspects of disability is rooted in a more medicalized view of disability, while their belief in the importance of equal treatment and in the gifts of all participants reflects leanings toward a more social model.

The medical model of disability views disabilities as physiological problems that require medical intervention; the focus is on overcoming the disabling condition (Areheart, 2003). On the other hand, the social model deems disability to be "the result of social discrimination against individuals who are different than the norm" (Devine & Sylvester, 2005, p. 87). Rather than focusing on the person with a disability as the problem, the social model views society to be the challenge (Devine & Sylvester). Both the medical and social model of disability came into play in the context of inclusive arts. The two conceptualizations of disability arose in the context of the essences defining disability, exploring flexibility and adaptations in practice, and when considering the equal treatment of participants with and without disabilities.

The medical model of disability was most prominent in participants' definitions and conceptualizations of disability. Disability was consistently defined by many participants' as relating to physical and developmental challenges. However, in a seemingly contradictory reversal, participants' repeatedly stated that they did not view disability as a problem, although it could present challenges. Instead, disability was viewed as an opportunity to think in a new way about programming; a chance to be flexible and use creative problem solving skills to create an inclusive environment. Although working with children with disabilities was viewed as a challenge by some practitioners, this challenge was viewed in a positive way. Practitioners felt that working within a set of limitations could be rewarding, particularly when the participants with disabilities made progress. Perhaps the inclusive arts, in some ways, provide an alternative way for program participants with disabilities to express themselves physically (i.e., through dance, movement, music-making, and creating visual art).

Disability was also viewed by some practitioners as something that existed on a spectrum; we all have disabilities, some are just more prominent than others. To that end, practitioners believed that people with disabilities were not the ones that needed to change; instead they wanted to focus their efforts on changing the inclusive arts space to ensure that everyone was able to participate. This view largely reflects the social model of disability, and the belief that disabling conditions are created by an inflexible social structure, not by the qualities inherent to a person (Devine and Sylvester, 2005). Practitioners emphasized the importance of treating all participants the same way, disability or not.

I speculate that practitioners' use of primarily biomedical definitions of disability could be products of participants' previous experience in medical-based fields or their need to demonstrate the presence of participants with disabilities for grant/funding purposes. Meanwhile, their emphasis on treating participants according to a social model of disability connects to the idea of practitioners embodying artistic and inclusive values.

It seems that both of the dominant discourses of disability (i.e., the social and medical models) inform practice and influence the inclusive environment. Because these two models guide much of what society recognizes and accepts as true in terms of disability, it would follow that both of these notions would interact in an inclusive setting. Although I initially believed that an inclusive arts setting would reflect the social model, it seems that the medical model has a role to play in how we come to understand and develop inclusive programs. For example, if practitioners do not acknowledge the physical, developmental, and social challenges and limitations associated with disability, how can they create a program to address these issues?

#### Inclusion with Art as a Medium

According to participants, art itself is a key piece in the creation of inclusive arts spaces. Participants worked to create a program space that reflected the ideals of their art; that is, the arts are accessible, everyone can participate in their own unique way, and they are conducive to facilitating a successful leisure experience for all. Within this context, issues of both sameness and difference are highlighted. Art allows for participants of different styles and skill levels to participate, but the ultimate goal of creative expression remains the same for all. In the literature review, I found evidence of the arts being used as therapy (Gussak, 2009; Koch, Morlinghaus, & Fuchs, 2007; Yotis, 2006; Young,

2009), a tool for advocacy (Barnes & Mercer, 2001; Swain et al., 2003), and as recreation (Kelly and Freysinger, 2000; Warren, 2008). The arts have also emerged in this study as having other uses in the context of the inclusive arts, namely: the arts as a means of creating a sense of space, the arts as a means of expression, and the arts as an equalizer. The arts intersect with issues of space, sameness and difference, and arts as a means of equality.

Art as an equalizer is an idea which also connects to space in that art allows for equal opportunities for success, and emphasizes a focus on process over product. As an equalizer, the medium of arts is unique in its ability to create a level playing field for all participants. This is an important part of what it takes to create an inclusive arts space – a medium which is conducive to such an environment. I borrowed the language of art as an equalizer from Marie, who described this special characteristic of the arts as follows:

*The arts become sort of an equalizer, whether you are, you know, an average student, or somebody who does need assistance, you can still participate in that process. It's everybody together, doing the same activity.*

I suggest that taken together, these uses of the arts create a new category: the arts as inclusion.

The arts as inclusion is strongly connected to the notion of an inclusive arts space. When the arts exist only as a place, this refers strictly to the physical location of a program, with no consideration of the potential for social and inclusive dynamics. When integration is introduced, the arts place becomes integrated; people with disabilities are able to be present. However, when the arts exist as a space that emphasizes inclusion, the signifiers that tell all participants they are in the right space for arts and inclusion. The idea of embodiment exists beyond this; it is here that the practitioners' intrinsic qualities

come into play to govern the arts space. By intrinsic qualities I mean the intangible values and beliefs about disability, the arts, and inclusion which are reflected, perhaps unconsciously, in practitioners' actions.

As illustrated in the example of Lana, not all practitioners are comfortable developing and implementing programs based on art and creative expression. I suggest that the notions of creativity and expression must be reframed to make them more accessible to all practitioners and participants. In order to do this, we must emphasize each person's innate ability to explore creative expression freely. While we are all capable express ourselves, our ability has often been stifled by social expectations of what it means to be an artist. By starting with the basic recognition of each person's inborn ability to explore the arts as an expression of their humanity, doors open up in terms of who is able to be artistic. However, expanding the definition of creative expression also involves the acknowledgement that some individuals express themselves through mediums other than the arts. In order to achieve this level of human expression, each person must explore a personal creative outlet that works for them.

#### Disability, Art and Lived Human Relationships

As practitioners described their experiences, and essences relates to disability and the arts, van Manen's (1997) notion of lived human relation emerged. Lived relationality is a lifeworld existential which refers to the relationships that develop in shared interpersonal space. According to van Manen, it is these relationships which give us a sense of purpose and meaning. In this study practitioners described how understandings of, and conversations about, disability often shaped relationships between children within the inclusive arts space. The emphasis placed on of treating people the same way, and

children's questions about their peers, described how understandings and values about disability shape human relationships. In addition, art as a medium also shaped the nature of human relationship that occurred in the inclusive space. As suggested in the title, everyone can dance to colour pink, art provided the medium for individuals to express themselves, in relation to each other and the audience. In this inclusive arts space process was emphasized over product and cooperation over competition. Further, it was these relationships that continued to engage the practitioners despite experiences of frustration and burnout; allowing for the continued creation of spaces for inclusion through the arts.

### Implications of the Study

This study has illuminated some important aspects of the inclusive arts experience from the perspective of practitioners. It is my hope that a better understanding of the practitioner experience will prepare other recreation practitioners for a journey into inclusive arts programming. A greater insight into the associated rewards and challenges, as well as theoretical and programming considerations, could potentially help make this modality more accessible to practitioners who have not previously considered utilizing the arts as a programming tool. Surely not all practitioners will embody the values of the inclusive arts, as many of my study participants did, but I believe that the inclusive arts as a program modality can work for a variety of practitioners. In order to utilize the inclusive arts in an effective way, practitioners must first examine their beliefs about the arts, disability, and inclusion. Developing a greater understanding of one's personal beliefs and feelings about these issues will make it easier to uncover areas of strength and areas of improvement as they relate to inclusive arts program development. As well, practitioners must be prepared to keep an open mind to both the joyful surprises and

struggles that involvement in an inclusive arts program may present. Engaging in reflective practice will be an important way for practitioners to explore their strengths and challenges in this context.

Miller and Pedlar (2006) explored the notion of reflective practice in the context of TR. According to Miller and Pedlar, reflective practice “allows us to more fully and deeply understand our practice and to identify ways that it may be improved” (p. 34). Being a reflective practitioner involves recognizing that TR practice is dynamic; each day brings a unique challenge or situation. As such, practitioners are often required to “respond to these unknowns in the moment of the event happening, at the moment of the emotion, in the doing of the activity” (Miller & Pedlar, p. 35). Consequently, reflective practitioners must explore their thought processes in connection with their actions. Through reflective practice, practitioners critically evaluate themselves in “thoughtful consideration and retrospective analysis of their performance in order to gain knowledge from experience” (Leitch & Day, 2000, p. 180).

Table 2 illustrates five principles that connect to each of the first five essences in an effort to guide inclusive arts program development. Each essence has several guiding questions intend to direct practitioners’ reflective thinking in considering creating a space that embodies inclusive arts values. According to Leitch and Day, what defines a truly reflective practitioner is “a set of attitudes towards practice based upon broader understandings of self, society and moral purposes than those which seek simply to increase efficiency in relation to ‘delivery’ and narrowly conceived achievement targets” (p. 181).

**Table 2: Reflecting on the guiding principles of inclusive arts programs**

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Guiding Questions</b>			
<b>Explore personal values</b>	What do I value?	How are my personal values reflected in my work?	What does inclusion mean to me?	What do the arts mean to me?
<b>Create a space that is physically and emotionally safe for participants to explore the creative process</b>	What would I personally need to feel safe, comfortable, and welcome in a new space?	How can I make this space conducive to focusing on free, creative expression?	How can I facilitate feelings of success for all participants?	How can I foster mutual respect and appreciation among children with varying abilities and life experiences?
<b>Emphasize the potential for personal success and social rewards through creative expression</b>	How can I provide opportunities for creative expression?	What aspects of the arts do I value (e.g., technical skill, creative expression)? Can everyone succeed in these areas? How do I define “art”?	How can participants share their success with family, friends, and community?	How can I create a sense of community and social connectedness within a diverse group of participants?
<b>Meet challenges to inclusion with an open, flexible approach</b>	What is my vision for this program? How can I modify these plans and expectations to be more inclusive?	What community resources are available to help me develop and adapt this program?	How can I demonstrate flexibility and openness to change?	How will I learn more about all of my participants’ unique needs?
<b>Acknowledge and value the shared and unique qualities and experiences of every participant</b>	What do the notions of disability and able-bodiedness mean to me?	How can I create a culture that is respectful of difference?	How can I facilitate a fulfilling arts experience for participants with a wide range of abilities?	How will I foster meaningful and lasting connections between participants?
<b>Balance the challenges you may face with an acknowledgement of the gifts you</b>	What makes work meaningful for me?	What makes work challenging for me?	How do I find joyful moments in difficult days?	What is my problem-solving strategy?

will receive				
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Utilizing each of the six essences as guiding principles, I have developed a chart of reflective questions guided by the work of Dupuis et al. (in press). The intent of these reflective questions is to help practitioners explore both their understandings of themselves, and the societal processes around them as they pertain to inclusive arts programs (see Table 2). The process of reflection-in-action takes place when a spontaneous action or event is interrupted by a surprise (Schön, 1995). This surprise causes practitioners to immediately reflect upon what is happening and what knowledge or strategies they possess to deal with the surprise. Reflection-on-action refers to examining how one responded in a situation after-the-fact (Miller & Pedlar, 2006).

#### Future Research

Throughout my research process I struggled to find literature that connected to the topic of inclusive arts programming in a relevant way. Although there is some research pertaining to the utilization of the arts in leisure programming, there was virtually no discussion of inclusive arts programs in the context of leisure. This is an area of research that remains relatively unexplored, likely because the field itself is continuing to develop.

I think that the connection between inclusion and the arts warrants further exploration. I have long held the belief that the arts are a natural fit for inclusive programming, and speaking with practitioners in the field has reinforced this idea for me. Practitioners in this study introduced the importance of creating a space that enables participants of all ability-levels to experience the arts in a safe, supportive environment. Creative expression has been identified as a vehicle through which the potential of

participants can be explored in a meaningful way. In addition, a focus on creative expression and process (versus a product-oriented program) allowed for authentic experiences of success. I think it is important to examine these claims in more detail. For example, can arts programming work for everyone? Do participants perceive the arts as being particularly effective inclusion tools? When the program is over, do the skills and experiences developed throughout the program translate into other areas?

I think that the social aspect of inclusive programs is particularly important here. Although practitioners believe that the program has the ability to alter stigmas and perceptions, and to cross (dis)ability lines, I wonder if these effects would last, for example, after the program ends, do the program participants' new social attitudes translate to school and friendships? I am curious to know if participants would be more likely to create a friendship group that is inclusive of people with and without disabilities, or if they would pursue further non-competitive, creative experiences.

I was introduced to the notion that practitioners who are inclined to develop and implement inclusive arts programs seem to embody the values and belief systems that underpin the inclusive arts. I think this is important to explore, not only in the context of the inclusive arts, but in other fields such as therapeutic recreation, teaching, and nursing.

According to Stoiber, Gettinger, and Goetz (1998):

beliefs are conceptualized as powerful influences on the way we think and act – they permeate one's perceptions and, in turn, influence teaching processes and learning outcomes. Examining beliefs about inclusion is essential because previous studies have linked beliefs to parental and educational practices (p. 109).

I think that this connection is worth exploring to provide the best possible inclusion services and opportunities to participants. I believe that participants have a better chance

of having a successful inclusive experience if they are working with practitioners who not only ascribe to, but embody, the values of inclusion.

Throughout this study I could not help but feel that I wanted to see these inclusive arts programs in action, and initially I thought that a program evaluation would be a good method to explore the inclusive arts. I still believe that there is something to be gained from this type of examination, and wonder if it might be useful to help create a set of guiding principles which can be used to guide the development of inclusive arts programs. Because I believe in some ways that inclusive arts programs develop organically from the practitioners who implement them, I do not think there is a program formula that will work for everyone. However, I think that something can be gained by exploring what does and does not work in a variety of inclusive arts programs. A better understanding of technical details (e.g., room arrangement, adapted materials, and programming planning) as well as socio-emotional considerations (e.g., fostering a sense of respect, creating a safe space, and encouraging expression), can only benefit inclusive arts practitioners.

In terms of how these potential research studies can be undertaken, there are some items which need to be considered. Personally, I did not anticipate the initial difficulty I would have breaking into the inclusive arts world. Programs and practitioners are out there, but they exist in very specific pockets and niches, and are not necessarily easy to locate. Once they were found, I had more practitioners than I needed who were willing to be interviewed and share their experiences. In my experience they were a wonderfully open and supportive community of practitioners. Snowball sampling was an effective way to locate all of my participants. However, many inclusive arts programs were linked

to a therapeutic function, which made my mission slightly more difficult given that I was looking for programs that were not linked to any clinical outcomes. Despite these initial challenges, I found the data collection process to be the smoothest part of this project! I also found phenomenology to be a good fit for my study, although I certainly needed a lot more guidance in my data analysis process than I expected. I think that it is important to examine the experience of participants (those with disabilities and without) to hear their perspective on being part of an inclusive program, and their thoughts on the arts as a programming tool.

I think that the inclusive arts field needs to develop more connections to other programming areas to increase its visibility (e.g., therapeutic recreation, school-based programs). Additional visibility could garner more support and increase the amount of inclusive arts programming that is available. Finally, by identifying and promoting a concrete set of inclusive arts practices, the programs could become more accessible to practitioners who previously may not have considered implementing arts-based programs. The development of effective guides to practice would require further research in the area of the inclusive arts from the perspective of a variety of stakeholders (e.g., participants, parents, practitioners, funders).

## AFTERWORD

As I reflect upon this study as it transitions toward completion, I find myself concurrently experiencing an academic transition as I move from my Master's program into teacher's college. I began my studies in education three weeks ago, and am already finding that the experience is shifting my worldview in terms of program design and the diverse needs of practitioners and participants (or now, teachers and learners). I have found my new colleagues to be a mixture of those who are well-versed in the issues related to disability, and those whose awareness is still developing. As well, I'm beginning to realize that the conceptualization and delivery of inclusive education programs is a complex issue which everyone seems to have a different understanding. Early in the program a visiting principal told our class that, by law, inclusion does not mean learning in the same room together, it simply means learning the same curriculum. In my mind, that has nothing to do with what inclusion is (inclusion is more than taking the same standardized tests!), and so the societal perceptions of inclusion and disability continue to take new shapes. In the past three weeks I have heard inclusion called a right, an option, difficult, and essential. It made me realize that although much of the inclusion literature comes from the education field, the topic is certainly still evolving here too. I think inclusive practices need to be guided by a strong, clear framework, although I do not know who should be responsible for developing this framework – the government? Municipalities? Individual organizations? In my opinion, a strong framework for inclusive practices that works in terms of its practical application has yet to emerge. In some ways, I see my own biases emerging here. I am very much of the mind that inclusivity is the natural answer to how our programs and classrooms should be

organized, but am also aware that some children and parents much prefer a segregated environment for the extra care and attention that it offers. I suppose it is not important which system (segregated or inclusive) families choose to utilize, but more so that the choice is available to them.

I am happy to say that the arts are a force here in teacher's college. We are constantly encouraged to engage our students' various styles of learning through consistent use of the arts in planning and teaching. Many websites are devoted to teaching teachers effective ways to incorporate the arts into core subject lessons, thus making them more accessible for a variety of learners. The arts remain, in my mind, a form of inclusive programming that is yet unmatched in terms of its ability to level the playing field and produce opportunities for success for all participants. Not only is it a programming tool, it is a means of creating a higher quality of connection between participants as they engage in the artistic and creative process.

This research has been quite an adventure for me. I have taken three of my passions (i.e., the arts, inclusion, disability studies) and explored how some of the most inspiring practitioners combine all three concepts into an exciting, effective program design. The inclusive arts practitioners are certainly the unsung heroes of inclusive programming. As I transition into teaching, I will take these lessons with me and strive to make connections between my diverse students and the potential of the arts to inspire and unite them. I believe that the arts have so much potential to fill a program gap, namely, inclusive recreation that is not strictly sports-related. Participants who are looking for a non-competitive, highly stimulating, challenging, rewarding, and welcoming leisure

environment will find that within the inclusive arts. As for practitioners, if they ascribe to the values and ideals of the inclusive arts, they just might find their calling.

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**Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
University of Waterloo**

**PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR  
RESEARCH IN INCLUSIVE ARTS PRACTICE**

I am looking for volunteers to take part in a study of how practitioners' images and understandings of inclusion, disability, and the arts shape their experience of inclusive arts programs.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to participate in a face-to-face interview.

Your participation would involve one interview session which will last approximately one hour.

For more detailed information about this study, please refer to the Information Letter included with this email.

**If you are interested in participating in this study,  
please contact me to set up an interview time:**

Zara Rafferty  
Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies  
at

Email: [zeraffer@ahsmail.uwaterloo.ca](mailto:zeraffer@ahsmail.uwaterloo.ca), or  
(519) 954-1524

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo (file#15631).

## APPENDIX B: INFORMATION LETTER

Date

Dear (insert name),

This letter is an invitation to participate in a study that is examining accessibility in Municipal Recreation. The title of my project is “*A Phenomenological Exploration of the Meanings and Experiences of Inclusive Arts Programs for Practitioners.*” This study is being completed as part of my Master’s degree in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo under the supervision of Dr. Susan Arai. I would like to provide you with more information about this research project and details about your involvement if you decide to take part in the study.

Utilizing the inclusive arts as a programming tool is an area which is still emerging within the recreation field. This exploration will examine how practitioners’ images and understandings of inclusion, disability, and the arts shape their experience of inclusive arts programs. Examining the practitioner experience is important, as both researchers and practitioners lack a thorough understanding of the factors which contribute to a practitioner’s experience of an inclusive arts encounter. How practitioners understand the concepts of disability, inclusion, and art will ultimately impact how they experience these concepts through inclusive arts programs. The practitioner experience is significant in that they are responsible for the conceptualization, development, and (in some cases) direct implementation of inclusive arts programs, an area which is currently under-developed. Gaining insight into the practitioner experience may provide practitioners with strategies to enhance inclusive arts programs.

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview that will last for approximately one hour. The interview will take place in a mutually agreed upon location. You may decline to answer any of the interview questions if you wish. You may withdraw from the study at any time by notifying me or my advisor, and there will be no negative consequences if you decide to do so. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded to facilitate collection of information, and the interview will later be transcribed verbatim for analysis. Upon completion of this study, an executive summary will be made available to you if you are interested. All information you provide is considered completely confidential. Your name will not appear in the thesis or any reports resulting from this study. To support the findings of this study I may use direct quotes from your interview. However, a pseudonym will be assigned for you to protect your identity. Data collected during this study will be retained for one year. Only I and my supervisor, Dr. Susan Arai, will have access to the data. There are no known or anticipated risks to you as a participant in this study.

If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information, feel free to contact me by phone at 519-954-1524 or by email at [zeraffer@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:zeraffer@uwaterloo.ca). You

can also reach my supervisor, Dr. Susan Arai, by phone at 519-888-4567 ext. 33758 or by email at sarai@uwaterloo.ca. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo. However, the final decision about participation is yours. If you have any comments or concerns resulting from your participation in this study, please contact Dr. Susan Sykes, Director, Office of Research Ethics at (519) 888-4567 Ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

I hope that the results of this study will be of benefit to both inclusive arts practitioners as they work to develop and deliver new programs. I look forward to speaking with you and I would like to thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Yours sincerely,

Zara Rafferty

MA candidate,

Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies

(519) 954-1524

zeraffer@uwaterloo.ca

Susan Arai, Ph. D.

Associate Professor

Dept. of Recreation & Leisure Studies

(519) 888-4567 ext. 33758

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APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

- I have read the information presented in the information letter about the study “*A Phenomenological Exploration of the Meanings and Experiences of Inclusive Arts Programs for Practitioners*” being conducted by Zara Rafferty of the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies at the University of Waterloo.
- I have had the opportunity to ask any questions related to this study, to receive satisfactory answers to my questions, and any additional details I wanted.
- I am aware that I have the option of allowing my interview to be audio recorded to ensure an accurate recording of my responses.
- I am also aware that excerpts from the interview may be included in the thesis and/or publications to come from this research, with the understanding that the quotations will be anonymous.
- I was informed that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty by advising the researcher.
- I am aware that this project has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo (file #15631).
- I was informed that if I have any comments or concerns resulting from my participation in this study, I may contact the researcher, Zara Rafferty, at (519) 954-1524 or by email at zeraffer@uwaterloo.ca or her Advisor Dr. Susan Arai at (519) 888-4567 ext. 33758 or by email at sarai@uwaterloo.ca. I am also aware that my concerns may also be directed to the Director of the Office of Research Ethics, Dr. Susan Sykes at (519) 888-4567 ext. 36005 or ssykes@uwaterloo.ca.

**With full knowledge of all foregoing, I agree, of my own free will, to participate in this study.**

YES  NO

Participant Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

When the study is completed, would you like to receive a copy of the executive summary?

YES  NO

If yes, please provide me with an email address so that I may send the Executive Summary to you.

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Preamble: *Hello, my name is Zara Rafferty, I am a graduate student at the University of Waterloo in the Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. I would like to ask you some questions about your experience with an inclusive arts program. I am interested in learning about your experiences with inclusion in the arts, and the meaning and understanding of those experiences.*

*If you are uncomfortable with any of the questions, you do not have to answer them, and you may stop the interview at anytime. I am going to turn on the digital recorder now so that I can have an accurate account of our conversation today. Is this okay with you?*

### **Part One: Disability, Inclusion and the Arts**

Preamble: *This interview is meant to be conversational in style. I have a number of questions that I would like to ask but we can explore new ideas and topics as they arise. With this first set of questions I would like to ask about your thoughts about disability, inclusion and the arts. In the second set of questions I will be asking you about your experiences with [insert name of program or group]. Do you have any questions before I begin?*

1. When you think of the arts, what do you think of?
  - How do the arts influence an individual's experience of a physical body?
  - How does engagement in the arts influence relationships and interactions?
  - Lived space refers to felt space and how space makes us feel. How does engagement in the arts influence the experience of space?
  - How does participation in the arts differ from other recreation pursuits such as sports?
  - How does participation in the arts differ from cultural events?
  - How does participation in the arts differ from art therapy? How does participation in the arts create social change?
  
2. When you think of disability, what do you think of?
  - What are your images of persons with disabilities?
  - How does disability influence an individual's experience of a physical body?
  - Lived space refers to felt space and how space makes us feel. How does disability influence experiences of lived space?
  - How does disability influence experiences of time?
  - How does disability influence experiences of relationships?
  
3. Thinking then about both the arts and disability, how does involvement in the arts influence an individual's experience of disability?
  - How might involvement in the arts influence experiences of the physical body for people with disabilities?

- Lived space refers to felt space and how space makes us feel. How do the arts influence the way people with disabilities experience lived space?
  - How does involvement in the arts influence experiences of time for a person with a disability?
  - How does involvement in the arts influence experiences of relationships for a person with a disability?
4. When you think of inclusion, what do you think of?
    - What does inclusion mean to you?
    - How does it feel to experience inclusion?
    - In the context of inclusion, what do relationships look like?
    - How does inclusion unfold? (note: here I am trying to get at the time and space dimensions)
  5. How does involvement in the arts influence participant's experiences of inclusion?
    - How does art influence experiences of inclusion in relation to the physical body?
    - How does the arts influence experiences of inclusion in relation to lived space?
    - How does the arts influence experiences of inclusion in relation to time?
    - How does the arts influence experiences of inclusive relationships?
  6. For you, what would the ideal inclusive arts program look like?
    - What would it look like?
    - What would it sound like?
    - What would be happening?

## **Part Two: Focusing on a specific inclusive arts program.**

**Preamble:** *Okay, we have covered all of the questions in the first part of the interview. Before we continue on, is there anything else you would like to add? This next set of questions focuses on your experiences with [insert name of program or group].*

7. I would like to know more about [insert name of program/group here], can you tell me about the who, what, where, when and how of [insert name of program/group here]?
  - Can you describe a typical program?
  - What was your role in this program?
  - Where do the programs typically take place?
  - How did it feel to be a part of this inclusive arts program? Note: this question is about lived space.
  - What were relationships like in [insert name of program/group here]?
  - How did you experience time when participating in [insert name of program/group here]?

(Example, if needed for clarification: “does time ‘fly’?”).

- How was inclusion experienced in [insert name of program/group here]?
8. What sorts of rewards arose from [insert name of program/group here]?
  9. What sorts of challenges have you experienced with [insert name of program/group here]?
  10. What sorts of external factors have influenced the delivery of [insert name of program/group here]? (Example, if needed for clarification: “Has funding been an issue that has influenced your program?” “What has your experience been with parents of participants?”).
  11. In thinking about all of the children in [insert name of program/group here] with different abilities, how did you go about creating inclusive opportunities for all?
  12. Can you tell me about a time you felt unable to achieve inclusion in [insert name of program/group here]?
  13. If you were working in a different context (i.e., non-inclusive, non-arts), how might your experiences have been different?
  14. After working with [insert name of program/group here], how have your actions changed?
  15. Is there anything else you would like to share about your inclusive arts experiences?

## APPENDIX E: DESCRIPTION OF ORIGINAL ESSENCES

1. **Equality:** the idea that everyone, regardless of ability level, should be treated equally, and be given equal opportunity to participate.
2. **Respecting Differences:** the promotion of mutual respect among all participants and practitioners. There was an emphasis here on accepting people for who they are.
3. **Inclusion is a Gift:** the belief that special, and almost magical, things can happen in an inclusive setting. For example, children who have been known to be mean or bullies become accepting and tolerant of others.
4. **Exclusion:** the notion that inclusion cannot exist without an acknowledgement of exclusionary practices. Recognizing exclusion helps to situate the importance of inclusion for practitioners.
5. **Physical Imagery:** when asked to describe what disability was, an overwhelming number of practitioners described disability in a physical sense. Although there was clear recognition that disability exists cognitively and socially as well, the dominant image of disability was a physical one.
6. **Involves a Set of Challenges:** for practitioners, the idea of having a disability was strongly associated with encountering, and coping with, a set of challenges.
7. **Adaptations:** one of the key ways that practitioners believed they could make a space more accessible was through adaptations to the space and activities.
8. **Everyone has Special Needs:** in describing what disability meant, some practitioners felt that “disability”, in the traditional sense, was not real. Rather, they believed that having special needs exists on a spectrum, and that we are all challenged in some measure along this continuum.

9. **Creative Expression:** for practitioners, the key part of an arts experience was that it provided an opportunity for creative expression, an aspect of the experience that is unique to artistic pursuits.
10. **Everyone can Succeed:** this is the belief that there is no right or wrong way to participate in the arts. Within this programming modality, there is an opportunity for everyone to experience success, regardless of ability level.
11. **Accomplishment and Accolades:** this essence explored the importance of participants with disabilities having the opportunity to share their work, feel a sense of accomplishment, and be celebrated for it by their family, friends, and peers.
12. **Personally Rewarding:** this refers to the practitioners' personal experience. It was indicated that participating in an inclusive arts program as front-line staff garnered many personal rewards and a sense of satisfaction for practitioners.
13. **Financial Struggle:** practitioners discussed that choosing to deliver inclusive arts programs often resulted in personal financial hardship, and working in an unsteady field in terms of program funding and cuts. Inclusive arts programs were not valued as essential leisure services in the perspective of many practitioners.
14. **Learning Experience for All:** this is the idea that in being a part of an inclusive arts experience, everyone (from practitioner to participant) takes away some kind of learning experience, for example, that they can achieve more than they thought possible.
15. **Increased Tolerance:** this refers mostly to practitioners. After participating in an inclusive arts experience, some practitioners spoke about how their actions had changed; they became more tolerant of others and their differences.

16. **Safe Space:** the notion that in order to participate successfully in an inclusive arts space, a feeling of physical and emotional safety must first be carefully cultivated and promoted by practitioners.
17. **Challenging the Traditional Artist Persona:** in order to support and encourage their participants, inclusive arts practitioners have redefined what it means to be an artist. Rather than focusing on technical efficacy or gallery presentations, being an artist becomes about the creative process.
18. **Focus on Process:** connected to “Challenging the Traditional Artist Persona”, this essence illustrates how practitioners emphasized the process of engaging in creative expression rather than the final output. The importance part of the arts experience is not creating a high quality product, but being a part of the creative process.
19. **Perceiving Arts as an Equalizer:** this is the idea that the arts can “level the playing field” for participants. Because there is no right or wrong way to do the arts, everyone can be successful, and everyone’s artistic contribution is important. There are no losers in the creative arts process.
20. **Embodiment of Inclusive Arts Ideals:** the final essence ties in all of the previous essences. This focuses on the notion that practitioners are drawn to the inclusive arts because they embody the characteristics which make the experience unique. Rather than seeing the inclusive arts as a major influence on them, some practitioners believe the inclusive arts are a natural fit for their own values and beliefs.