



podcast transcript:

1. Hello my name is Clare Adam. I am a part of Shaper/Caper's Youth Advisory, The Body and I will be talking with my co-host Lesley Howard about disabilities within dance.

Lesley, so a question for you. What is one thing you would like people to know about being a disabled dancer within the professional training environment?

2. Hi I'm Lesley and I am a dancer with Autism. Autism is a neurological condition that effects the brain, but it basically means, I just think and work a little different than you. Within a dance studio the main challenges I phase are knowing where to put my energy throughout the day. So I work on the term masking which means if you picture a swan you see the swan above the water and that's it but you aren't able to see their feet underwater working hard to stay afloat and that's how my brain works, constantly working hard just to stand in a room and observe. This makes it really exhausting as I have to figure out when I should look, listen, stand and I really read the room to help follow social queues and try to keep up. So, this is difficult if I have a long day of classes as I need to work out if I can give 100% in all my classes, not just with my dancing but with masking skills also. If I want to mask in the morning can I afford to last all day without burning out. Which makes it really tiring and difficult sometimes to follow.

I think another challenge would be different types of music. Some noise levels can stimulate my brain and get stuck and amplify. If you have music that is really high pitched imagine that in my head amplified and constantly playing. It overtakes anything else you are asking from me as I am focused on getting the noise out of me head which means it's hard to focus on a task. This is also when there are other people in the room talking as background noise prevents me from following instructions.

Another challenge would be contact. I don't like unpredictable contact. In a dance setting it is helpful if a contact task is pre-plan and explained to give me time to prepare and understand but when contact is a free for all it causes me to feel overwhelmed and anxious.

My main advice if you have a person with a disability would be to just ask questions. Both myself and Clare and fortunate that we can speak for ourselves but not everyone can. It takes a few seconds to research or ask questions which makes things better for all. Education is the key!

3. What is it like being a deaf professional dancer? For me I am deaf that's part of me. I wear two hearing aids and they work very well for me personally. Within professional dance, that career is already hard enough without having an added layer on top. Being deaf comes with it challenges in everyday life, but when in the professional dance I feel like there's a grey area with disabilities within dance.

I would like to say I doesn't affect me, but it does in reality. In class I'm always trying to listen to music, get on the right beat whereas it comes second nature to some. Also trying to be in a place where I can hear/lip read the teacher, this can become challenging when there's a lot of bodies within the space. In general, a lot of studio the sound goes up rather than out which is also a challenge. Comes to a point as a dancer, for example being in college I would have class in the mornings and then have a three-hour class in the afternoon. I would have to think about where can I put my energy in so I didn't tire myself out. But at the end of the day I was going home and would just sleep with exhaustion.

This is something I want to do, and this is something I love doing. Being tired is nothing because I get to wake up and do it all again. I'm really excited to expand my knowledge, pass on my knowledge and help people learn.

4. What is the effect of everything moving on to online resources?

I thought I would enjoy online classes as I am rather antisocial, however that is not the case. People with Autism really like routine and things to be on time, and I have learnt that the online world doesn't follow this. Classes always start late which is nerve-wracking and you spend the first 15 minutes of the class with everyone fixing their WIFI which can cause feelings of anxiety and stress. It is also difficult as people

keep their mics on which makes it difficult to follow the leader/talker due to the background noise.

I think the main challenge is that I mask, relying on looking and following physical queues from others which is something I can't do over a video class. This makes it difficult to know when I can speak, or process the instructions given. I think if you have someone with Autism in your class, limiting it to only one speak and allow time for a response. It would be helpful if you invite them to speak and also minimize background noise.

5. What is the effect of everything moving on to online resources?

Like previous saying I lip read people and I'm not able to do that video call on either zoom, teams, skype, FaceTime. That's a challenge itself, I'm having to rely on my two hearing aids which can backfire. Captions - there's none as its live. To get a BSL interpreter is it worth it as no one working due to current issues. Background noise - having a background noise won't allow me to be able to hear you clearly. Lighting - having the light source in-front fine but then when it behind the difficulties of seeing your lips

WIFI freezing- everyone WIFI different. When freezing creates a problem for me as I then lost track of the conversation and the struggle to catch up is a big challenge. Lack of seeing body language - this is one I've just discovered. When on video call you don't get to see someone body language and this is something I rely on heavily. For example, missing what was said I can look around the room and understand. Video call affective for some not for others, for me it's not affective. I struggle with it, I gotten so use to compensating in class that I'm not able to do so via video calling. I always been the one that had to work harder to ensure I know what I'm doing. What the effect of everything moving to online - it's difficult that would be my answer to sum it all up. It difficult, it's not easy.

Can people help? Thing is we can't caption videos but if do have someone struggling even having the video call happening but an open chat so communication still happening.

Thank you for listening, if you have any questions please feel free to message us both, we are more than happy to help.