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Title of Thesis:

An Assessment of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play as Inclusionary Staples for Children with Special Needs: A Study of Selected Private Primary Schools in Trinidad 2018-2020.

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## **Abstract**

(i)

This study assessed Creative Dance and Dramatic Play as Inclusionary Staples for Children with Special Needs, examining Private Primary Schools, in a Trinidad setting. Data collection included questionnaires directed at the Teachers, Specialists and Principals of the schools targeted. For the purposes of understanding the questions posed in the questionnaires, in further detail, a follow up interview was done. The findings revealed that 55% of the schools assessed believes strongly in the inclusion of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play in their school's curriculum. Another 55% of the children tested responded positively to their inclusion into the enrichment programs, resulting in positive changes in their coordination, social skills, communication, expression, mobility and discipline. Most importantly, 95% of the children examined, were able to adjust their challenges as a result of their respective disabilities, to a large extent. Further to the findings of this study, it is suggested that training in the areas of Special Needs/Education ought to be more widespread and accessible.

**Key words:** Creative Dance, Dramatic Play, Inclusion, Staple, Special Needs Children



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## **Introduction**

### **Rationale**

My first hunch to explore this area came as a result of observing my toddler who has been diagnosed with Receptive and Expressive Delay. Since his diagnosis, the search has been on for various methods to correct/cope and reduce his challenges. Examining his daily interactions and play, triggered the need to investigate aspects of inclusion of play and the effects of Creative Dance on the overall development of children who require special needs. Further, in exploring this area of study, it was noted that much research was done on areas of Special Needs and Inclusion into mainstream settings coupled with Special Needs and Movement, mainly through Physical Education. However, Creative Dance and Dramatic play were not given sufficient attention in the development of children with special needs and so this study seeks to enquire on the effects of same in the education of its subjects today. The significance of enrichment studies remains paramount to the overall development of children holistically, what needs to be realized is if and how can these platforms create change in the approach and misconceptions in the education and development of children with special needs.

**Thesis Statement:** An Assessment of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play as Inclusionary Staples for Children with Special Needs: A Study of Selected Private Primary Schools in Trinidad 2018-2020.

### **Research Question/s:**

- ✚ Are children with special needs accepted into mainstream schools?
- ✚ What are the procedures for enrolment of Special needs children at these schools?



- ✚ Is Creative Dance and Dramatic Play elements found in the school's curriculum?
- ✚ Are children with special needs included in the enrichment studies program at respective schools?
- ✚ What is the impact of the exposure of the child with special needs to these enrichment studies?
- ✚ How does the child with special needs respond to their inclusion into the enrichment program?
- ✚ Are trained teachers/specialists in the area of special needs attached to these schools?
- ✚ What coping mechanisms do teachers use during instructional times of the school's programs?
- ✚ Are special aides to support each child with a special need assigned to these schools?

### **Parameters**

This study will use a sample parameter of children in the private primary schools in Trinidad, males and females, ranging from ages three (3) – thirteen (13). A sample size estimation of 40% of the forty-eight (48) private primary schools will be used. The timeframe being examined is 2018-2020. During this period, in the absence of up to date statistics in totality on the number of children who require special needs in Trinidad and Tobago, the years 2018-2020 have seen a steady rise in the areas of training, support and guidance being offered by the various NGO's and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. These areas of critical focus render the subject 'special needs', an area of ongoing and crucial focus. This study seeks to address the social impacts of Creative Movement and Dramatic Play on the development of children who require special needs. Indirectly, economic impact will also be addressed since





the programs and respective sessions provided, allows for the child affected to be able to contribute to society in a meaningful way, be it affordable (private institutions, children meeting adequate contact hours of therapy etc.) or not affordable (Government and NGO's efforts).

## **Objectives**

### **This research is intended to:**

- ✚ Identify which bracket of children require special attention
- ✚ Outline the types of attention that are being administered
- ✚ Examine intake of children with special needs into the mainstream schools
- ✚ Investigate the school's curriculum content for areas of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play
- ✚ Enquire about the school's treatment to children with special needs
- ✚ Interrogate their methods of inclusion
- ✚ Explore adequate training of personnel to:
  - (i) Work with children with special needs
  - (ii) Execute the mandate of inclusion through movement and dramatic play
- ✚ Determine the impact of the exposure to Creative Dance and Dramatic Play on the development of children who require special needs



## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

For this paper, a qualitative and quantitative approach will be taken. The focus will be on the social impacts on children with special needs after an inclusive program and this may indirectly include the economical aspects of inclusion for special needs children in Trinidad. An online questionnaire will be circulated in an effort to collect data and information to guide the findings of the research in terms of yes or no responses. Interviews of the respective personnel will follow this questionnaire and this time the focus will be to gather detailed responses and maybe elaboration on questions previously asked in questionnaire. Collectively, the two will provide the data and information needed in order to extrapolate the findings of the study.

### **Population**

The principal, enrichment studies teachers, specialists and class teachers will be randomly used for each participating school. The idea is to gain an understanding of each participant's knowledge of the study group, the level of interaction, the delivery mode, what is delivered and to whom, as well as how inclusive and coping mechanisms used.

### **Research Procedures**

This study will use both primary and secondary sources as well as primary oral sources. The first bit of samples to go out will be the online questionnaire. These will give the researcher a general idea of each participant's basic knowledge, delivery and approach and will be presented through charts, allowing for a visual representation of the findings. Virtual interviews will then follow specific to the relevant personnel and will speak more to the participants training



mechanisms and methods of inclusion, its implementation and effects during instructional time and impacts on the holistic development of the subjects.

### **Chapter Outline**

This study will carry three (3) chapters. Chapter One (1) will focus on the Statement of the Problem and the Background to the Study. Chapter Two (2) will provide definitions and explanation of key terms used in the study, while Chapter Three (3) will outline the Findings, Discussion and limitations of the study.



## **Literature Review**

Carol Russell's theory on Inclusion/Exclusion as it relates to Creative Dance/ Movement, suggests "Exclusion from creative movement experiences or inappropriate movement opportunities may cause a cycle of failures and further problems for children with disabilities" (Russell 41). Further, Carol Russell believes that, "Participation in inclusive creative movement experiences for young children and those with Special Needs, may provide life-long effects for all children (e.g. impact on: self-concept, self-esteem, body image, creative expression, social competence, physical fitness, orientation toward success, and body image) (Russell 3). Similarly, Karen Kaufmann carried out a study on the inclusion of Creative Movement and Dance at a school for children with special needs. After a series of well-planned activities, Kaufmann reported on one of the students of the program. "An end of term activity was held for parents to attend. For months Michelle's parents have been noticing her speaking with more clarity and moving with more coordination. Michelle learnt how to enjoy herself and was self-confident. She acted in leadership roles and initiated a playful dance circle with her friends. Michelle's parents were pleased she was able to achieve all the objectives set out for her in the Inclusive Creative Movement Dance program" (Kaufmann 10). Additionally, Patricia Capello, at the American Dance Therapy Association's annual conference in 2007 announced that generally, "the Dance/Movement Therapy programs held, presented activities that allowed for significant impact on those children who were non-verbal in their communications and later, fostered the progression of their language" (Capello 2008). Over in Israel, Dance/Movement Therapists provided over one hundred (100) hours of sessions for children at the kindergarten level, aiming at meeting each child's individual needs and this resulted in the consistent development of the spoken language for those children involved (Capello 2008). A Canadian Dr. Hammond-



Meiers, mixed Dance/Movement and Art therapy in her examination of adolescent children and was quoted by Capello reporting that, “Young clients focus on boundaries, express feelings connected to their bodies, and developed their sense of essence through dance and in the art, in a safe place” (Capello 2008). Specialist in Germany applied the Kestenberg Movement Profile (KMP), Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and the Creative Dance and Chace Approach, in their delivery to those children with learning disabilities, sensory disorders, autism, eating disorders, behavioural disorders and children requiring special needs in general. These methods used, proved to be “invaluable techniques in the treatment of these children” (Capello 2008). Inclusion for special needs children in Japan through dance and play for the children, parents, teachers, family members, guardians and the community was extensive. This approach is believed to have encouraged all involved to recognize how children with special needs respond to “touch, imagination and rhythm, further to the development of speech, language and communication skills” (Capello 2008). The inclusion of mothers, teachers, guardians etc. in their dance/movement and play programs, built strong relationships for mothers and reduced the feelings of “isolation and anxiety in mothers of the subjects under scrutiny” (Capello 2008). Capello goes on to quote Maralia Reca, of Argentina and her findings on including a series of movement activities in a program aimed to correct a five-year-old enuresis. Reca claimed, “with practice and repetition, this child was able to work through stressful early life events which triggered her enuresis and eventually achieved successful self-control (Capello 2008). Not only did Reca discover that the Dance/Movement Therapy sessions improve children’s various inabilities, vocabulary and language, she also exposed the Teachers of these children to the program material and Reca found this, “using the body-based learning approach, teachers recognize how their own bodies communicate through movement and therefore, are now



equipped to better understand their student's needs, self-esteem responses, body image and social identity" (Capello 2008). Dance/Movement's inclusion into programs for children with special needs, continued to be explored through various delivery methods. In France Dr. Jocelyne Vaysse used a Dance-Psychotherapy practice with children from kindergarten right up to adolescent, mainly those affected by Autism. Psychotherapy is made up of gestures and movements accompanied by percussion or rhythmic music, folk dances, circle dance, improvisation and art which helps promote student's imagination, imitation skills, emotions, play and symbolism (Capello 2008). Furthermore, Jennifer Dabalsa in her research on 'Dance for Special Needs Children: Building Confidence and Motor Skills', referred to Munsell and Davis as saying, "being Dance active can result in improved physical fitness, socioemotional gains and academic gains (Dabalsa 7). Dabalsa continued along with Munsell and Davis, "Dance experiences increases student's cooperative skills, help them resolve conflicts and enhance their self-esteem" (Dabalsa 8). According to Dabalsa, (Anderson 231) speaks to the "integration of Dance enhancing student learning and engagement. While Reinders et al is quoted Creative Dance is "instrumental in developing young people's creative and artistic, personal and social skills" (Dabalsa 9). Matzner believes that "Dance is ideal in promoting not only motor learning, but also cognitive and social development (Dabalsa 11). Additionally, (Karper and Martinique 1985) found that a group of children with disabilities ages eight (8)-thirteen (13), were integrated into a movement program and entered with a lower self-esteem than their normal peers. By programs end, the groups were matching each other's self-esteem level (Russell 23). (Russell 36) believes that "in the absence of special needs children's participation in a movement program, the potential to benefit positively from same will be risky".



Moreover, Jean Piaget (1962), believes that “play is vital. to a child’s early identity.” An investigation on ‘Inclusive Education and Play’ for children with and without special needs, by Justine Howard et al, found that, “children benefitted from play through cognitive development; imagination, problem solving, language acquisition, and learning skills, while physical benefits meant, fine and gross motor developments, mobility and good health. Emotional benefits ranged from expression to trust to self-discipline and confidence and social benefits included, communication skills, team work, acceptance, making friends and accepting defeat (Howard et al 140). Play in Korea has somehow been an absent element for children since their programs are designed strictly for academic fulfilment and so children of Korea often times developed behavioural problems like, ‘Attention Deficit Disorder’ and poor social skills (Capello 2008). Once these children were exposed to Dance/Movement Therapy sessions, they “grew, were able to express their feeling and thoughts without fear, explored emotional needs, related to others and fostered their overall physical and mental development, resulting in an integrated sense of self” (Capello 2008). Adapting Play for special learners is key and can prove essential in their development. (Sage Journals 278), pointed out that “children with learning difficulties, communication, Language, developmental delays etc. can benefit from exposure to play by way of improved communication skills, fluency in speech, problem solvers, critical thinkers, comprehension skills and kinaesthetic development.” Similarly, (Mendoza and Katz 2008), found that, “children’s language skills were supported though multiple play acts of conversations, negotiations and role playing.” “Children effectively expressed their ideas, needs and wants during their dramatic play activities (Mendoza & Katz 2008). Junita Batubara and Sumathi Maniam quoted Montgomery (2003) and Mazur (2004), “children with emotional and intellectual disorders should be exposed to



structured learning types, for example; the use of motion and symbols (Batubara & Maniam2019). “Children who were initially cancelled out of being able to perform musical dramas, were exposed to the sessions and were able to perform the musical dramas successfully (Batubara & Maniam 2019). Olivia Rhoades reported on a study by Brownell (2002) on the effects of using Social Stories coupled with Music on children with autism ages 6-9, and found that “each child improved their social skills” after this exposure (Rhoades 5). Mantle-of-the-Expert was also introduced and used in the teaching of social skills to children on the Autism Spectrum in two different studies. Kemp and Tissot 2015, used mantle-of-the-expert activities to teach social skills of children on the Autism Spectrum and found that after the exposure to both activities, the children were using the very social skills they were teaching to their new classmate in the activity and developed their own imagination (Rhoades 6). A Drama Camp was set up in an effort to work with children on the Autism Spectrum, to achieve improved social skills. During the camp, teacher-in-role, role-play, dance and storytelling were some of the activities explored after which parents of the participants reported their observations of their children as a result of the camp activities. One parent found that “the social setting of the drama camp was good for him, the more children he is around, the better he interacts with them” (Rhoades 26). This Drama Camp also posed an interesting twist to the notion of inclusion where some parents of the camp reported that “effective change in their child’s social skills might have been hindered due to the fact that their child may find it easy to imitate unwanted behaviours displayed by the other children involved in the camp” (Rhoades 26). While another parent noticed that “he saw some of the other kids were not participating at his level, so he thought he could drop to their level (Rhoades 26). And yet another parent found that “once exposed to other children with certain behaviour patterns, the child will take those





learnt behaviours home” (Rhoades 26). Despite the occasional flip side, social skills continued to improve in children with special needs that were exposed to Dramatic Play. Teachers were able to distribute his/her time evenly to all the students, since spending most of his/her time trying to calm down or remove the child who may be differently abled, from disrupting the class, was becoming less and less of a challenge (Herman 6).



## **Chapter One**

### **Statement of Problem**

This study seeks to understand the inclusion of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play as a principal staple in the Education of Children with Special needs in Trinidad. The focus is to examine Creative Dance and Dramatic Play's inclusion in the school's curriculum. To analyze who are the beneficiaries of these activities and its overall impact. This study is essential in understanding the school's position on its enrolment of special needs children, then once enrolled, determine the school's distribution of its curriculum to this category of the school's population, while identifying, the impact of inclusion or exclusion on the general development of the special need population in their charge.

### **Background to Study**

As early as 1940, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago embarked upon an intervention into the education of children with Special Need/Disability. Institutional schools were established and was subsidized by the Government, alongside the input of reputable groups, institutions, and the corporate populace of Trinidad and Tobago. By 1980, The Government took up the mantle to solely manage the Institutional Schools and Cabinet passed a bill on the implementation of a Special Education Unit. The main aim of this unit was to coordinate, develop and supervise curricula for these special needs schools as well as mainstream schools where children requiring special needs maybe enrolled. These initial special education institutions were namely;

- ✚ The School for the Blind, Santa Cruz



- ✚ The Schools for the Deaf at Cascade and Marabella
- ✚ The Princess Elizabeth School for Physically Handicapped Children, Woodbrook
- ✚ The School for the mentally handicapped at St. Ann's Hospital and
- ✚ The Training Centre at the Lady Hochoy Home, Cocorite and its branches at Gasparillo and Penal (Williams 2007).

Later in 1984, a survey carried out by the Trinidad and Tobago Government in collaboration with the Organization of American States identified that 16.1% of Trinidad's population were children between the ages of three (3) – sixteen (16) who require special needs. This finding was of grave concern for the Government and spiked the call for education and training of the relevant personnel in the Special Education field, including parents (Williams 2007). At the beginning of the early 1900's, the education system started to have a different view of children with disability and their needs. A further study of the Education Policy of 1993-2003 established one very critical area of focus amongst others, that "children vary in natural ability and schools therefore should provide for all students, programmes which are adapted to varying abilities and which provide opportunities to develop differing and socially useful talents" (EPP 1993-2003). This led to the Inclusive Education Drive that was spearheaded by the Student Support Services Division in 2004 to present. This unit focused on special education, student counselling and social work, to the benefit of all students (disability, behavioural issues, under-achievers etc.) in the education system. Since the establishment of Inclusive Education, the Ministry of Education has embarked on further plans to ensure the effectiveness of Inclusion. These dynamisms ranged from the physical re-arranging of schools to accommodate inclusive



learning, training and producing qualified specialist to support in the area of early diagnosis of children with special needs (Williams 2007).

Private Schools and denominational Schools in Trinidad and Tobago are subjected to the Ministry of Education's policies and Guidelines and therefore are expected to have implemented all of the procedures outlined for inclusive education of special needs children in their charge. The extent to which this done and how inclusive their programs are as it relates to both Creative Dance, Dramatic Play and children with special needs, this study will seek to ascertain. Additionally, the Disability Affairs Unit, within the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, has seen its way into the system since 1999 and offers financial aid in the form of grants to persons who require special needs attention (DAU). The Government of Trinidad and Tobago, despite their deep rooted interest in providing to the best of their abilities for persons who require special needs, does not provide full financial coverage for these subjects to access the medicinal and therapeutic care they need in order to function sufficiently in inclusive environments. According to the Autism Association of Trinidad and Tobago, children diagnosed on the Autism Spectrum may develop multiple learning difficulties or developmental delays and would require up to forty (40) hours per week of therapy and corrective sessions (AATT), all of which come at a very high cost since the Specialists in these areas operate privately. And so the Disability Affairs Unit was set up in this regard. Offering a small grant to help offset some aspect of this cost. Apart from the Ministry of Education's fight for diagnosing and inclusion of children with special needs, various individual institutions and/or organizations have since come on board and offer similar services to the affected population of Trinidad and Tobago. The Autism Society of Trinidad and Tobago is one such Non-Governmental Organization registered in 1990 with the Ministry of Social Development,



Community Development and Health, in an effort to help parents and children with special needs requirement, with training, therapy sessions, social play, music, drama and art inclusive sessions (ASTT). The Autism Society of Trinidad and Tobago recorded as of 2018, over 700 families registered with the institution, averaging five (5) new families per month and sixty (60) families per week requesting services from the institution (ASTT). The Dyslexia Association is another charitable organization founded in 1990 by concerned parents and teachers. This association offer several means of support to parents, teachers and the diagnosed, train teachers in the area of dyslexia and is in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, providing at least one trained teacher in every school across Trinidad and Tobago. By 2005, the Dyslexia Association recognized the growing need for additional training given the increasing reports of learning difficulties in children each year and have since expanded training in areas of Phonology, Comprehension and Expressive Language (DATT). Although up to date statistics are not available in totality on the number of children who require special needs in Trinidad and Tobago, the years 2018-2020 have seen a steady rise in the areas of training, support and guidance being offered by the NGO's and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, rendering special needs an area of ongoing and crucial focus at present.



## Chapter Two

For the purposes of this study, children who require Special Needs, Inclusion, Creative Dance, Dramatic Play and Staple are going to be examined. According to Mary Gavin of the Kidshealth.org, “any kid who might need extra help because of a medical, emotional, or learning problem, have special needs because they might need medicine, therapy, or extra help in school, stuff other kids don't typically need or only need once in a while” (Gavin 2016). The, Individual with Disability Educational Improvement Act, defines Special Needs in children as, “a child having mental retardation, a hearing impairment, a speech or language impairment, a visual impairment, a serious emotional disturbance an orthopaedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, any other health impairment, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities, and who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services (IDEA 2004). In essence the term Special needs in children covers a wide range of diagnoses that can be life long, short lived, can also be moderate or profound. A child requiring Special Needs may suffer developmental delays, medical conditions, psychiatric conditions, cognitive challenges, as well as physical changes. These children are not able to meet milestones and co-exist like the normal child can and therefore require Special Attention in order to reach their potential.

Inclusion as used in this study seeks to understand the levels to which children with Special Needs are being included in a general learning environment and how effective this inclusion might or might not be. Mariana Francisco et al in their study on ‘Inclusion and Special Education’, quotes the National Centre in Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) in their National Study of Inclusive Education, defining inclusion as “providing to all students,



including those with severe disabilities, equitable opportunities to receive effective educational services, with supplementary aids and support services as needed, in age-appropriate general education classes in their neighbourhood schools, toward the outcome of preparing all students for productive lives as full members of the society”(Francisco et al 2020). Similarly, the United Nation’s Children’s Emergency Fund declares that, “Inclusion is the most effective way to give all children a fair chance to go to school, learn and develop the skills they need to thrive. It means all children in the same classrooms, in the same schools, with learning opportunities for groups who have traditionally been excluded. Inclusive systems allow students of all backgrounds to learn and grow side by side, to the benefit of all” (UNICEF).

Moreover, Creative Dance combines movement and artistic expression, without the requirement of extensive training (Gilbert, 1992). Additionally, Creative dance allows for variation amongst the skill level of its participants, affording opportunities for those of any age and ability (Wang, 2004) and most interestingly, Creative dance has also been shown as an effective holistic approach to promote movement development and improve social and cognitive functioning amongst populations with delayed or arrested social, cognitive, and physical abilities (Scharoun, 2014). Just like Creative Dance, Dramatic Play finds its way in this study with the aim of exploring its inclusion for the child with special needs. Karen Petty and Beth Hatcher believes that Dramatic Play is a mixture of Imaginary Play, explicit roles and implicit rules (Petty and Hather79). Through a different lens, Susan Jennings speaks to Dramatic Play as, “a problem solving mechanism, to manage pressing concerns and to decipher what is to come. Through Dramatic Play the child can distinguish what ‘is me’ from what ‘is not me’ and to separate the world from self” (Jennings et al 134). And so in an effort to determine whether these elements should be a staple for the Special needs child, the Colin’s



dictionary defined ‘staple’ as “ a food, product, or activity that is basic and important in people's everyday lives”, also the United Kingdom definition states, staple is “of prime importance; principal” (Collins). Further, the Merriam-Webster Dictionary provided three meaning for ‘staple’ when used as an adjective; “(a) a commodity for which the demand is constant, (b) something having widespread and constant use or appeal and (c)the sustaining or principal element” (Merriam-Webster).

Collectively, programs for Special Needs children incorporating Dance and Drama were structured and coordinated by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago, through the Ministry of Education, by way of a program in an effort to boost the education of children with special needs in the 1940’s. Specific institutions or schools were set up and funded by religious bodies, concerned citizens, the business fraction and community gatherings. By 2004, the Ministry of Education assessed their plan and took steps further in adjusting the education of children with special needs. This move strengthened the Ministry’s view on what Inclusion for children with special needs should mean. And so Mr. Steve Williams, Manager, Student Support Service Division and Coordinator of the Inclusive Education Team, Ministry of Education, reported that “a child is considered to have special educational needs when that child has:

- (1) a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of the same age or
  - (2) a disability that prevents or hinders the child from making use of the educational facilities of the kind normally available in school for children of the same age
- (Williams, Trinidad and Tobago Country Report 2007).





Williams continued that “Children with special educational needs are, therefore, those who have characteristics that affect their ability to learn to the extent that specially adapted conditions are necessary if they are to be appropriately and effectively educated” (Williams, Trinidad and Tobago Country Report 2007). This triggered the first steps into Inclusive Education for children with special needs in Trinidad and Tobago. The Ministry then moved to a strategic plan with these objectives;

- ✚ Physically upgrading public schools to adapt to the new inclusive policy
- ✚ Teacher training and Specialist training
- ✚ Parent education and empowerment
- ✚ Streamlining curriculum and adaptation of testing instruments
- ✚ Providing teacher aide for children with special needs
- ✚ Support for early diagnosis of children with special needs, amongst others (2000-2006 MOE).

In 2013, the then Minister of Education, Mr. Tim Goopesingh promoted a drive to re-visit the Primary School’s Curriculum, in an effort of presenting a more inclusive unit. This amended curriculum allowed these basic principles;

- ✚ The belief that curriculum reform must address the needs of 21st century development and the labour market needs of the society, as well as build the foundation for responsible citizenship and ensure the optimisation of multiple talents, including the arts and sports.
- ✚ The creation of a learning system that accommodates all types of learners, not limited to the academically gifted.



- ✚ The strengthening and enhancement of the cognitive, social and psycho-motor skills learnt at the primary level for a seamless transition to the secondary level (MOE 2013).

This project commenced the introduction of the Visual and Performing Arts Primary School's Curriculum and included, Dance and Drama for all children of the Primary School System across Trinidad and Tobago.

Similarly, in the United States of America, Marina Francisco et al, in their assessment of special education and inclusion is meeting the needs of all individuals involved, outlined the Ministry's approach to Special Education as a three tiered project that starts at institutionalization then moves to separate integration, normalization and mainstreaming and finally to the focus of this study, Inclusion (Francisco et al 2). In the year 1990, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, Public Law 101-476, was amended to include, changes in multi-disciplinary works for children with disabilities included regular reporting between schools and districts, and to incorporate parents in the decision making of the process at school (Francisco et al 5). Parent understanding and involvement, served as a vital tool in the work to include children with special needs. Additionally, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), Public Law No.107-110, 115, Stat. 1425 (2001), stated that all children including those with disabilities, be provided support and supplementary education in areas of Literacy Development and Intervention (Francisco et al 4). Likewise, United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund's views of Inclusion for special needs children as, "children with disabilities should be in the same classroom with other children, at the same schools, without exclusion" (UNICEF). All these observances remain crucial, and proven as a series of case studies done by Hayam ELZein,



found that: inclusion is the right for children with special needs to be place in the general classroom environment that has been modified to suit the needs of each learner” (ELZein 164).



## Chapter Three

### Findings and Discussions

#### Summary Findings

The first question coming out of the questionnaire dealt with the acceptance of special needs children into the specific schools. Figure 1 demonstrates the percentages of children accepted to be 80% while those not accepted stood at 20%, indicating that children who require special needs are generally accepted into mainstream schools.

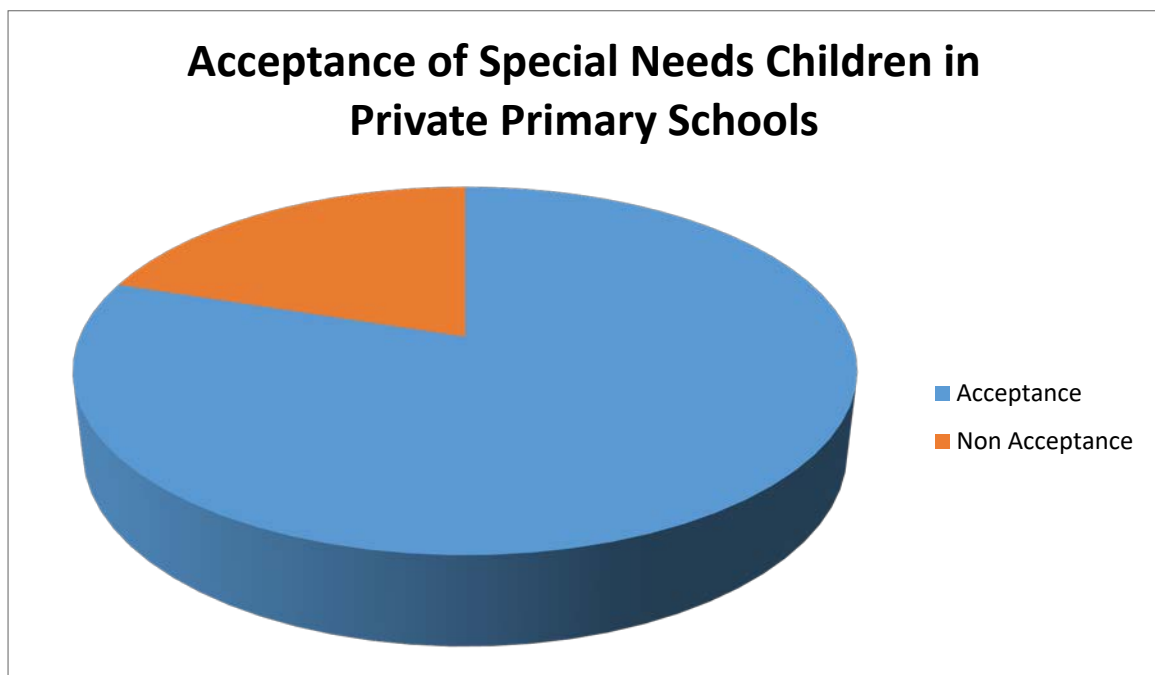


Figure 1. Acceptance of Special Needs Children in Private Primary Schools

When asked about the average population of children with special needs presently enrolled at these schools, the overwhelming response of 0-25% of the population requires special needs while just two (2) schools indicated that their population ranged between 76-100%, as seen in



“Figure 2”. This was particularly the case since these two (2) schools are predominantly special education institutions, established primarily to care for those children that require special needs.

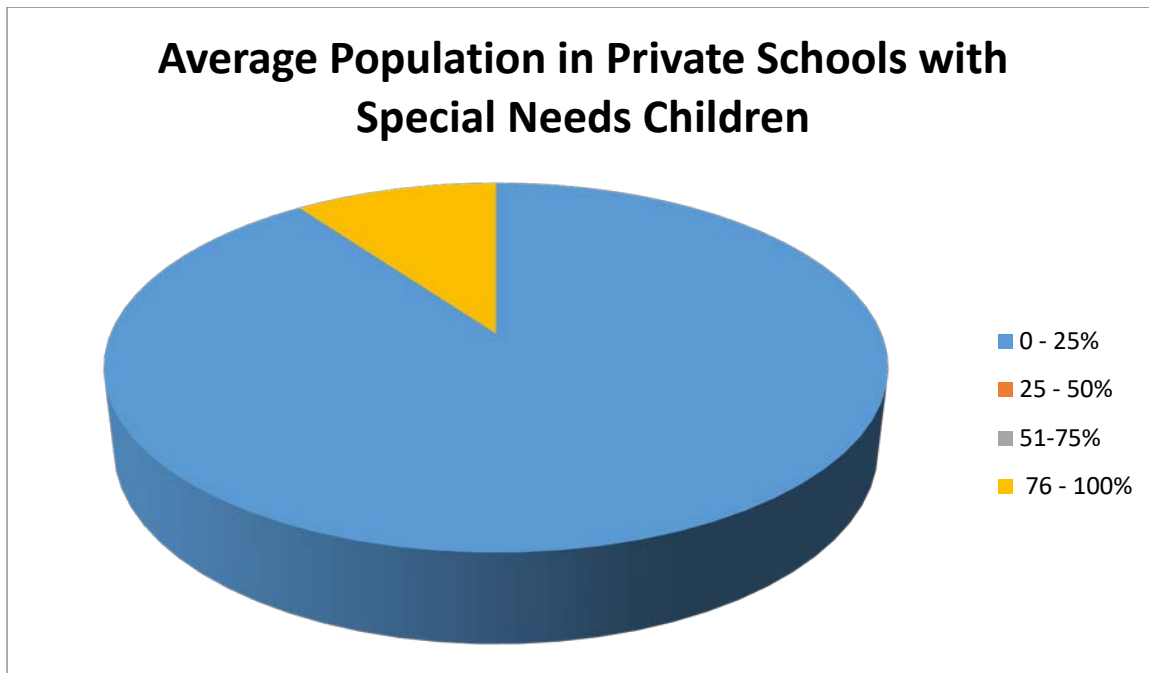


Figure 2. Average Population of Children Presently Enrolled in Private Primary Schools

Additionally, the question on student diagnosis at entry into the school system, yielded further discussions in the interview section of this research. Probing further into the process of diagnosis, revealed that some schools do student interviews which is a detailed program where the children attend and spend the day going through a series of activities with the aim of discerning the child’s ability and developmental challenges if there be any. At the end of this, the administration decides on which students with special challenges observed they will accept. Another few schools reported that they do student interviews as well but their aim is really focused on the child’s ability for purposes of streaming, if the child is accepted. Streaming in this case does not necessarily mean separated by ability and special attention be given



thereafter. Streaming in this case simply mean, the teacher that is assigned this child or children, is aware of the child's ability and can apply sufficient coping mechanisms in an effort to assist the child/children in their academic achievement. What the staff at this school also shared was that their system at student interviews allowed for quite a number of children who require special needs, to slip into their school unnoticed. In both instances mentioned above, the schools would usually request a diagnosis be done upon discovery of the child's challenges, if the results of same were not provided beforehand. Of the twenty (20) schools tested, 72% of the special needs population were already diagnosed while 28% remains in the system, with identified challenges but no diagnosis. The reasons for non-diagnosis was also questioned in the interview and was reported that the parents cannot afford the assessment needed to determine the specific challenges of the child.

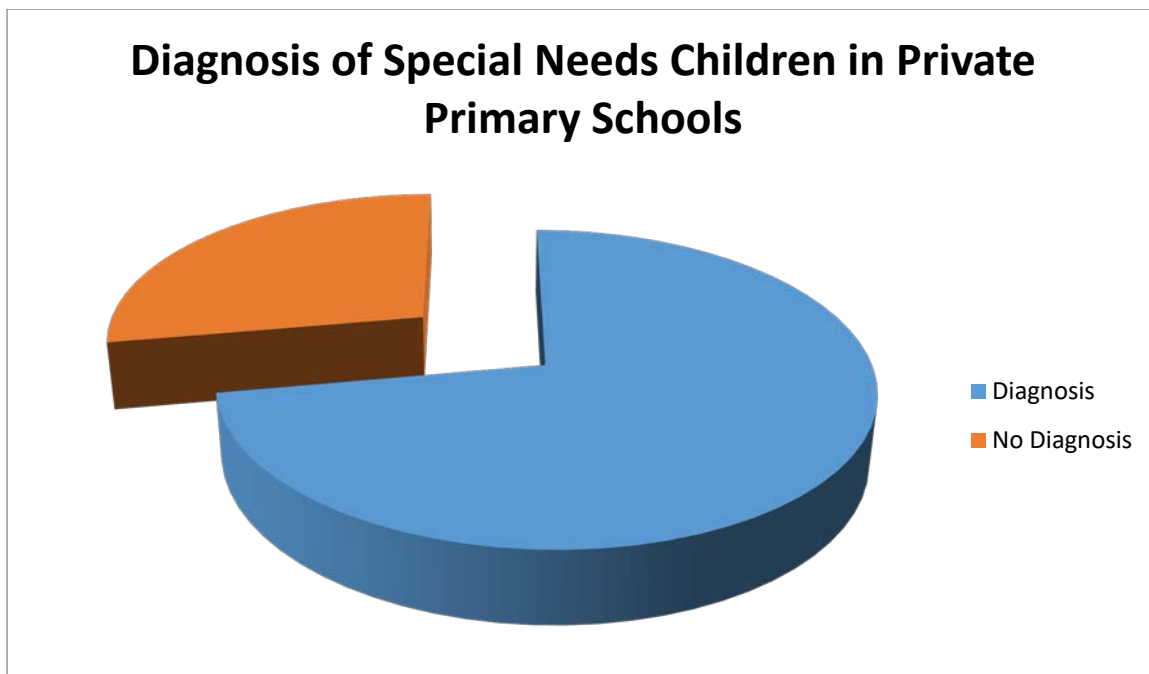


Figure 3. Percentage of children diagnosed and un-diagnosed in schools



Following up on the inclusion of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play in the school's curriculum through the interview, a little more insight was provided. The questionnaire asked for a Yes or No response which sort of limited the response of the participants. The interview then filled that gap and opened up discussions on the fact that nine (9) of the schools do all of the enrichment studies including Creative Dance and Dramatic Play, while three (3) schools indicated that they do Drama and Music only. Four (4) schools indicated that they have an active Dance Program and Physical Education and a fourth group of four (4) schools reported that they do not offer Dance or Drama but they offer Music, Art and Physical Education. Figure 4 is a representation of the yes or no response to the inclusion of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play, with 55% confirming Yes and 45% No.

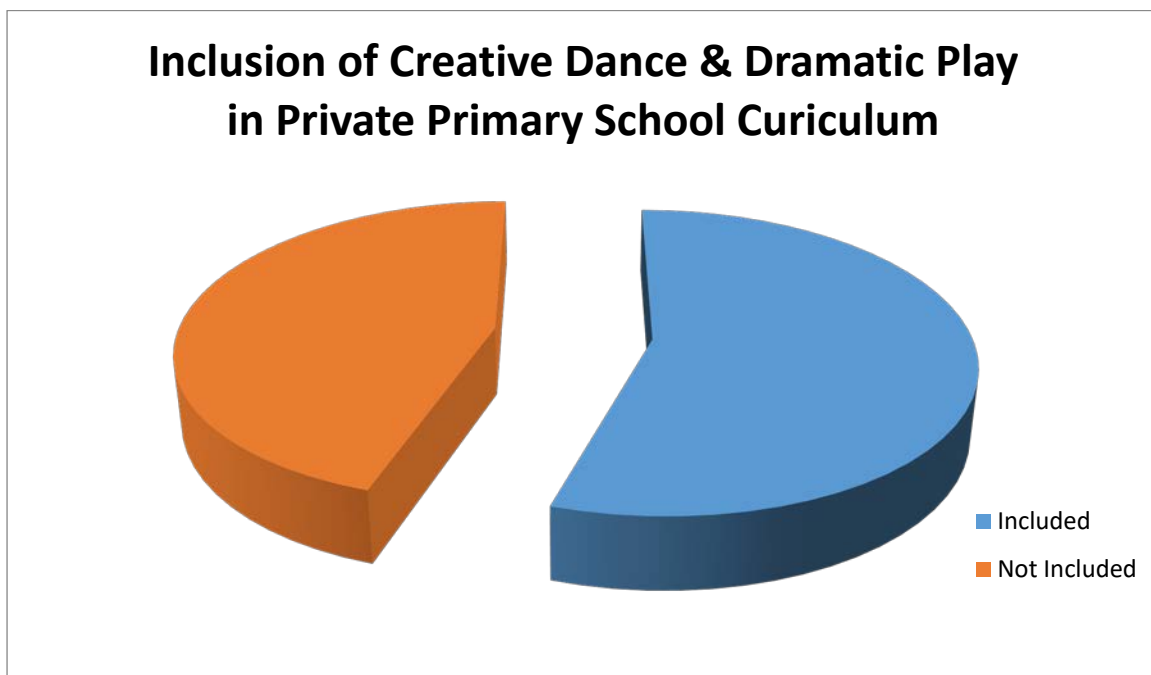


Figure 4. Inclusion of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play in the School's Curriculum

Generally, all children benefitted from the inclusion of the enrichment studies in the schools investigated. Figure 5 seeks to indicate 90% of the of the participating schools allowed all of



the schools' population to be a part of the enrichment studies program. The remaining 10% claimed they only allowed children with special needs to be a part of this program. Important to note here is these schools are but two (2) Special Needs Institutions who cater specifically to the needs of these children and so the school's population are only children with special needs.

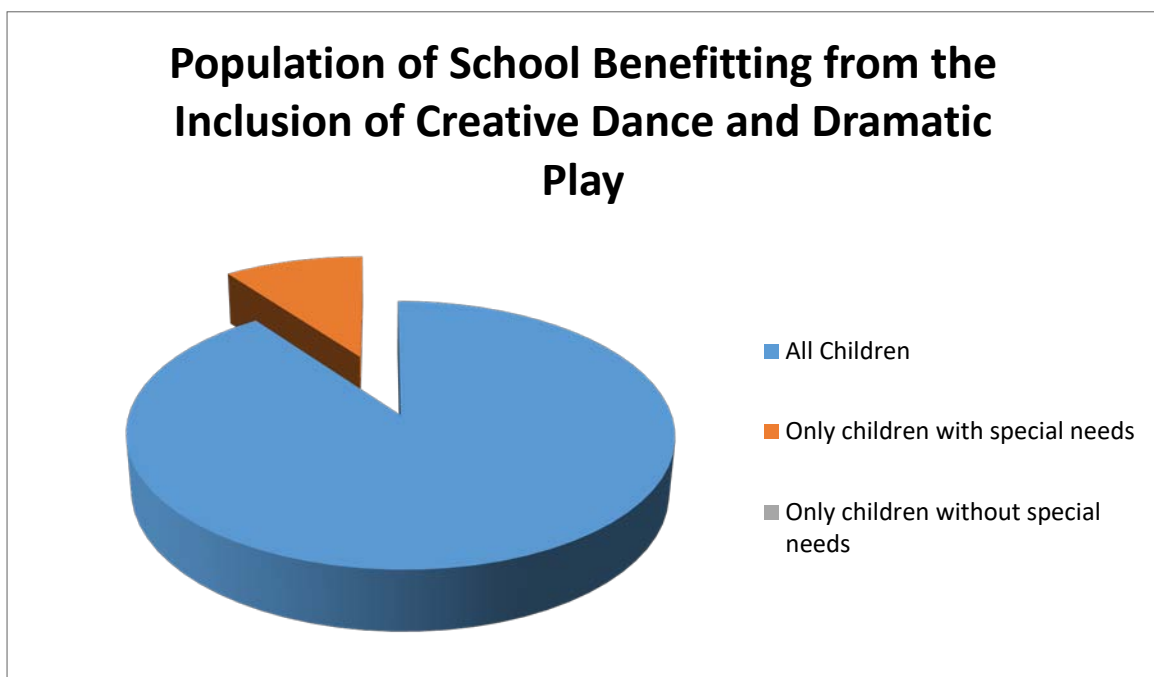


Figure 5. Population of Schools Benefitting from the Inclusion of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play

In trying to understand the thought processes and mental state of children who require special needs, this question of the S.P.C willingness to participate was posed in the questionnaire. An overwhelming 70% of the participating schools said yes they are usually willing, while 30% said No. In the interview this question was again raised and this time brought about some clarity to the general yes or no responses in questionnaires. Various issues were raised from interviewees. Some felt that the children participated willingly based on their mood at the time





of activity. One teacher reported that she had one child who would only participate if the activity was not noisy and chaotic.

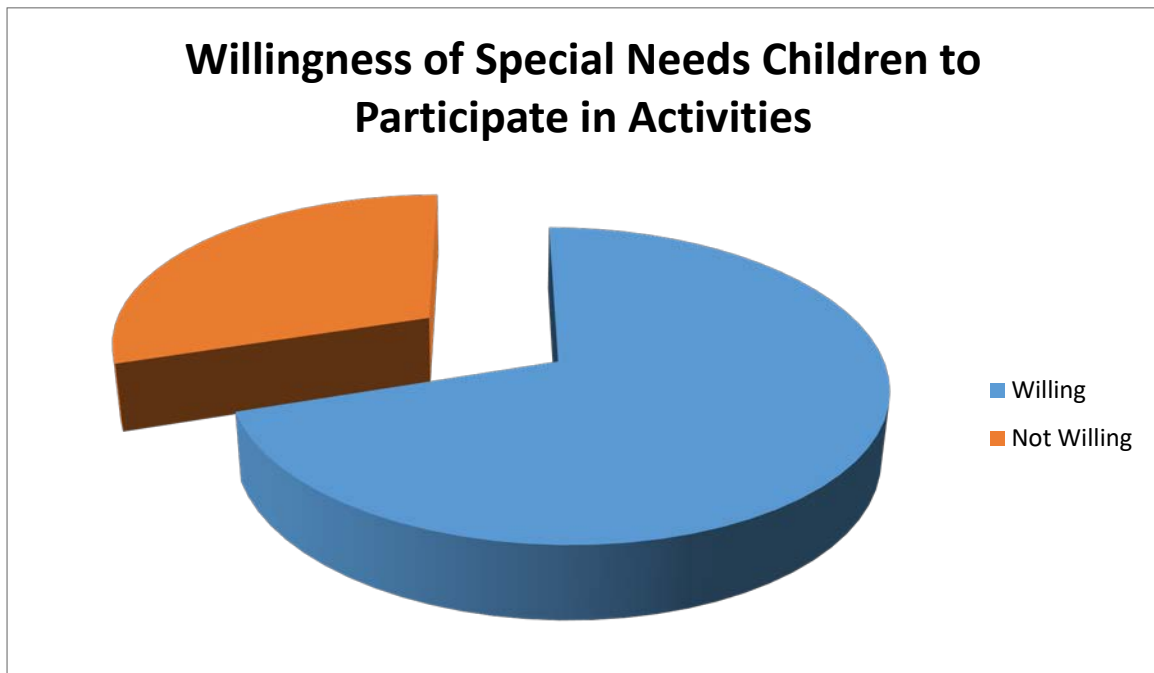


Figure 6. Willingness of Special Needs Children to Participate in Activities

Investigating the subjects' response to their inclusion in the enrichment studies programs at their respective schools, lead to further conversations through interviews, resulting in most of the participating schools concluding that the children in question seemed to be enjoying the activities. They might have started off not understanding fair play, taking turns respect for others, control of body and how to incorporate in general. But as time went by, these negative attributes grew more and more distant and signs of improvement in those areas became visible. There was a general consensus that the participation sometimes leads to fall outs with those who may want to dominate activities. There was also a report of that one child whose emotions



or interest seemed not to waver at all. There were usually very little signs of interest shown and a continued state of withdrawal in this one child.

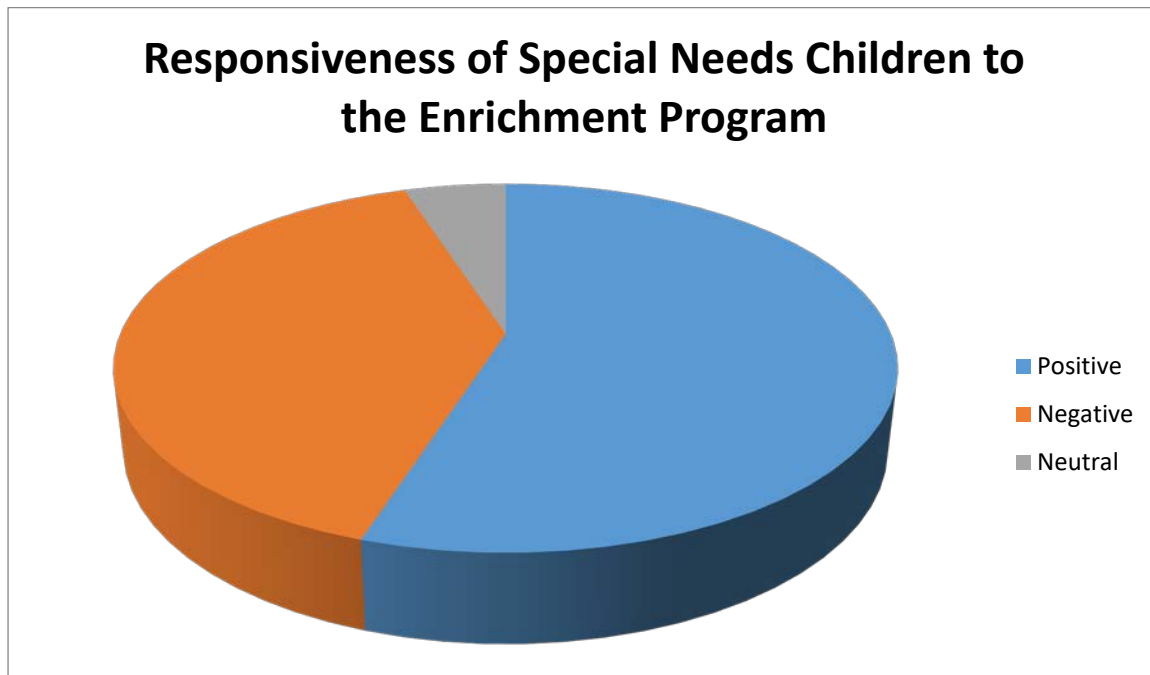


Figure 7. Responsiveness to Special Needs Children to the Enrichment Studies Program

None of the participating schools felt there was a total adjustment of challenges for any one child being investigated. However, almost all of them expressed seeing improvements in children's social skills, coordination, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, communication, expression, discipline, mobility, cognitive development and speech. Some reiterated that even though the general response to the inclusion saw improvements, there are still times when meltdowns and behavioural challenges, maybe even some emotional outbursts may occur, but these were still manageable behavioural patterns. There was still the concern of that one child that no method introduced seemed to be reaching him.



### Effect of Exposure to Enrichment Studies

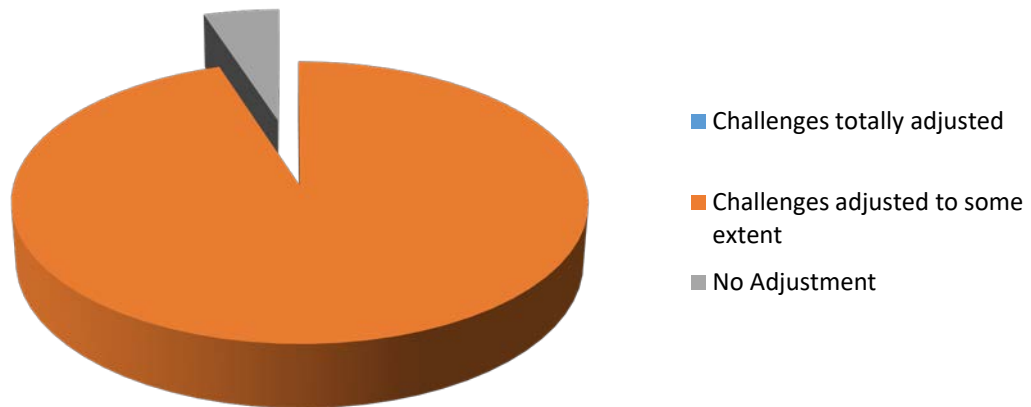


Figure 8. Effects of Exposure to Enrichment Studies

Examining the availability of Trained Teachers or Specialists, revealed that only 30% of the teaching population were trained or specialized in the area of treating with special needs.

### Availability of Trained Teachers and Specialists for Special Needs Children in Private Primary Schools

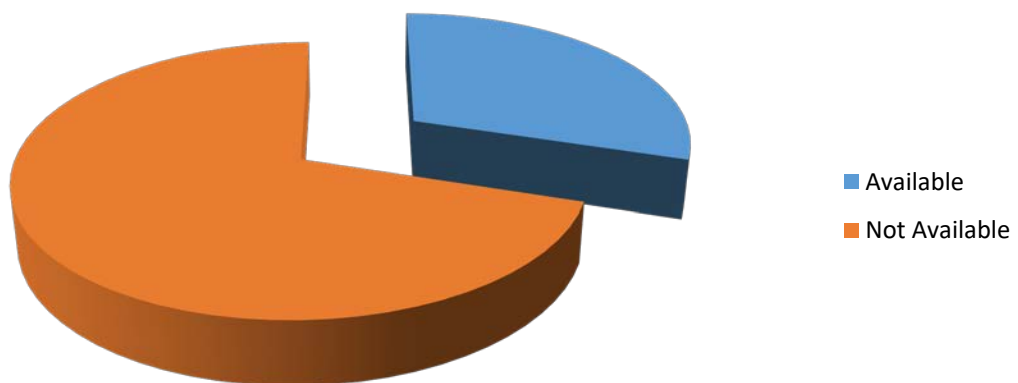




Figure 9. Availability of Trained Teachers and Specialists

The question of how teachers coped with the varying challenges that may appear was discussed and shared were a few ways teachers used strategies to be able to reduce the situation at hand. Some reported of having children go for walks outside of the classroom then return, sent to wash faces, take fresh air and return. Or breathing activities were administered, some children were allowed to walk with things like fidgets that helped to calm and sooth their hyper activity and kept them focused for a bit. Some teachers praised movement breaks, announcing that this was their number one activity that almost immediately got the subjects back in line and ready to actively participate once again.

Additionally, supporting Aides for each child was one of the areas that school personnel expressed grave concern. An alarming 15% of Aides are present at few of the schools interviewed and these numbers are still insufficient providing one Aide to each child who require special needs. Some shared that this may be the case since not all parents/guardians can afford to pay for the Aide and most times the schools do not take on that responsibility. The 15% that had Aides were split between parents affording same and two (2) schools that provided one Aide, while other schools, one (1) Aide to cover the entire special needs population at their respective schools.



## Special Aide Allocation for Each Child

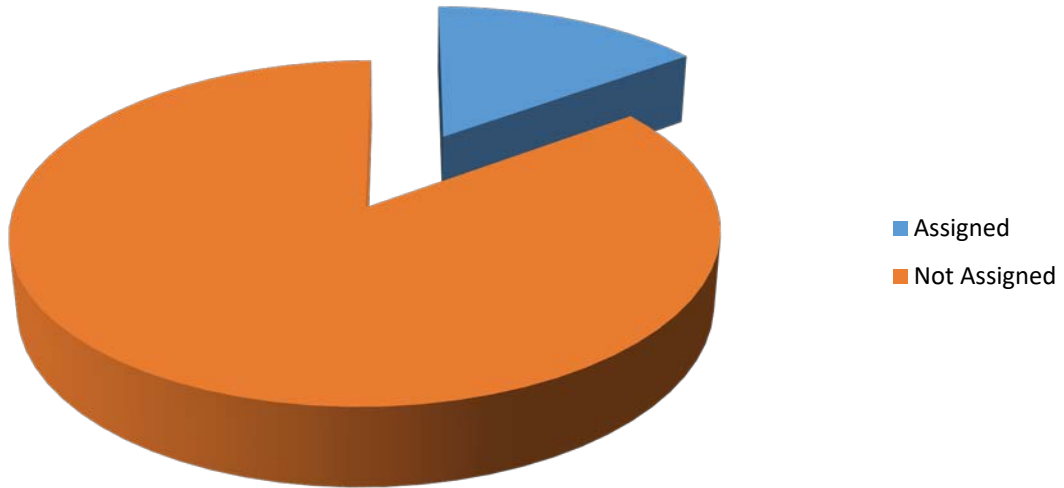


Figure 10. Special Aide Allocation



## **Limitation to the Study**

### **Sample Selection**

This research was done with an assessment of Private Primary Schools in Trinidad. No Government schools were tested, only Private Schools and only Private Primary, Secondary Schools were not a part of the sample selection. This study did not examine the schools in Tobago, it was limited to Trinidad only.

### **Sample Population**

Out of the forty-eight (48) Private Primary Schools identified in Trinidad, only 40% of these schools were assessed.

### **Limited access to data**

The presence of the COVID-19 Pandemic, brought on limitations in terms of reaching a wider sample population in the first instance, hence the study's assessment of only Private Primary School, and limited to Trinidad. Further, even the Private Primary Schools had to be narrowed down since the challenge of being able to reach all forty-eight (48) schools, was prevalent given the COVID-19 Pandemic and its restrictions.



## **Conclusion**

This research proved that 55% of the schools assessed believes strongly in the inclusion of Creative Dance and Dramatic Play in their school's curriculum. Another 55% of the children tested responded positively to their inclusion into the enrichment programs, resulting in positive changes in their coordination, social skills, communication, expression, mobility and discipline. Most importantly, 95% of the children examined, were able to adjust their challenges as a result of their respective disabilities, to a large extent. There were reports of visible adjustments in the children's overall deportment, gross motor skills, cognitive, emotional and physical development. Recommendations by Teachers and Specialists suggests that Training in the areas of Special Needs/Education ought to be more widespread and accessible. One school proposed that the Specialists already available, form a group to host continuous workshops and seminars on the various strategies to use when working with children who require special needs. Furtherance to these findings, it is therefore safe to conclude in essence that, Creative Dance and Dramatic Play, should be Inclusionary Staples in the Education of Children with Special Needs. The notable Martha Graham once said, "there is vitality, a life force, an energy, a quickening, that's translated through you into action, and because there is only one of you, in all time, this expression is unique" (Graham).



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