

## Interview #5

Name of Interviewee: Lauren Kato

Occupation: Dance teacher at Mountain View High School

Date: 3/30/23

00;00;02;02 - 00;00;03;28

Speaker 1

Could you please state your name and occupation?

00;00;04;12 - 00;00;10;14

Speaker 2

My name is Lauren Kato and I am the dance teacher and dance director at Mt. View High School.

00;00;11;21 - 00;00;15;24

Speaker 1

How does dance Spectrum aim to incorporate people of all abilities in the program?

00;00;16;08 - 00;00;45;28

Speaker 2

So like the name dance spectrum, we really try to incorporate all abilities and levels and backgrounds by giving any student in the school the opportunity to dance. So we have three beginner classes this year. We have a jazz dance class and a world dance class, or two sections of jazz and one world. But next year there will be three jazz dance classes, and that is open to anyone.

00;00;46;28 - 00;01;10;02

Speaker 2

Meaning that you can have absolutely zero no dance experience. Or maybe some students have taken one tiny torch like ballet class when they were six years old or maybe they just need credit. So it's like there's just anyone who wants to take it. It's free for all. It doesn't matter if you've danced, if you know English or anything.

00;02;09;29 - 00;02;13;23

Speaker 1

When did you start incorporating students with disabilities into the dance spectrum?

00;02;14;10 - 00;02;37;16

Speaker 2

Ever since I can remember, students with disabilities have been a part of the dance spectrum. So one thing that's kind of fun is I went to Mountain View High School, and I was a member of dance Spectrum for all four years of high school. And when I was a freshman through a senior, there were usually one or maybe two students with disabilities in the program.

00;02;37;21 - 00;03;08;25

Speaker 2

So it's always been a part of it. And then when I first started, I typically had 1 to 2, maybe three students with disabilities, but they were kind of scattered throughout the day. Whereas this year I have seven students in the special education program that are in my dance classes. Six of them are in one of my classes, and one who is very independent is on her own in a different class.

00;03;09;03 - 00;03;13;09

Speaker 1

What are the benefits of having students with disabilities and their peers in class?

00;03;13;22 - 00;03;51;29

Speaker 2

There are so many benefits to having students with disabilities just intermingled within just your average classroom. So what I really love is that it just really shows and demonstrates to students that everyone is a human at the end of the day, and we're all able to work together and learn together and grow together and support one another. And it also really shows, I believe, in my classroom specifically that you don't need to be able to understand verbal language as long as you can communicate through your body.

00;03;52;00 - 00;04;20;15

Speaker 2

So I have a lot of students that are nonverbal, but we know exactly how they're thinking and feeling in my classroom, just by the way they're able to express themselves physically. And that goes for students also that are in the special needs program. But they don't speak English. And I also have students that are in special ed and don't speak English, But here they come in my class and are one of many people just learning how to dance and express themselves.

00;04;20;16 - 00;04;23;07

Speaker 2

So it's really special.

00;04;23;20 - 00;04;27;03

Speaker 1

How do you navigate accommodations for students with disabilities?

00;04;29;13 - 00;05;18;22

Speaker 2

I feel very lucky at this school. I get my students with special needs, always have aides accompanying them to my classroom. And that is really, really helpful because the aides work with these students throughout the day. So they have a close relationship with them. The age knows what they need, how to meet their needs and whatnot. But then what I learned last year

was that in order to make the students safe and really included in the routines that are being put on a stage with many teenagers, they needed a 1 to 1 person on stage.

00;05;19;02 - 00;05;41;27

Speaker 2

And our program is for teenagers. And so, in my opinion, I think that's going to be very strange if we put in adult aid on stage with those students, because also what, like a 50 year old woman wants to go on stage and perform with 15 year olds? It's just a little strange. And I myself didn't want to have to do that either.

00;05;42;08 - 00;06;04;19

Speaker 2

So I actually reached out to Spartan Buddies last year and asked that club if there was anyone with the free six period, because that's where I had I think we had three or four students last year in that class. And I said, if anyone has a free sixth, I welcome you to come and join my class and serve as a 1 to 1 buddy.

00;06;05;20 - 00;06;29;01

Speaker 2

And so that kind of got going and that helped the students feel more comfortable, like they had their friends in class. And what was really important to me was the safety part of it, because some of the students just there's a lot of directional changes and moving in dance and these classes are big with about 36 kids sometimes.

00;06;29;01 - 00;06;54;13

Speaker 2

So it gets chaotic. And when my students with disabilities have that person going, All right, let's go, that helps them not get run over and stay with it. And that has really, really helped with a lot of the accommodations. But then the aides really do help with the other things that they need and things like that.

00;06;54;13 - 00;07;08;29

Speaker 2

And I've also learned a really fun little tool this year is using these little dots that we put on the ground so they know where they stand. And I have a student this year that likes to wander away from his dog, but we just know that's where he got to go because he likes to stay in the back of the room.

00;07;08;29 - 00;07;21;10

Speaker 2

But it's really not that difficult. The most difficult thing is the size of my class in general, and that poses the most issues.

00;07;21;10 - 00;07;29;10

Speaker 1

And what are the challenges of having an integration of students with disabilities and disabilities in dance specifically?

00;07;30;17 - 00;07;31;19

Speaker 2

Can you answer that question?

00;07;32;14 - 00;07;39;07

Speaker 1

So now what are the challenges of having an integrated class like specifically a dance class?

00;07;39;20 - 00;08;07;21

Speaker 2

Okay, So I think what's most challenging is the fact that it's a physical class with a lot of movement, but it's also a creative art form. So it's interesting because again, my jazz dance class or my world dance class, but I have students with disabilities and they are all usually starting at a lower level, all learning together.

00;08;08;14 - 00;08;37;03

Speaker 2

But again, the process is different and what I find really hard as well is where to place the students in class because I want them to feel as engaged and incorporated as possible. But also if they're always in the middle of the room or in the front, sometimes they get hit or they don't realize when we're moving from one direction or the other, or they just want to run somewhere else.

00;08;38;00 - 00;09;20;22

Speaker 2

And so one thing I feel very guilty about is that because I have such a big class, I tend to make the back line, my buddy line. But it's also repetition and routine. So they know that's where they go, that's where they stand. And then when we transition to a stage, they also know where they go. But it's also really difficult because my program, not my program, but dance spectrum, is very student centered, where the students choreograph the dance routines and when that happens, I'm not in control full control of the choreography at first, and I have to give way to these student choreographers to come up with transitions and formations.

00;09;21;04 - 00;09;52;01

Speaker 2

And they're young people and don't always know what to do with the students in the special needs program. And sometimes what happens is they just keep the bodies there or they don't include them because they're afraid or they don't know what they're capable of. And that gets really challenging and it hurts my heart. And then I have to have conversations with them and then they feel guilty, but they don't know what to do.

00;09;52;01 - 00;10;17;24

Speaker 2

And it kind of creates a mess when in reality all students are capable of so much and they just need the push and to be treated like everyone else. Yes, it is easier when they're in the back line, but the back line doesn't have to be at the back of the room per se. There's a way of including things and coming up with option A and option B, because some students have a hard time going up and down, but so do my six foot five students.

00;10;18;04 - 00;10;20;25

Speaker 2

So it's just difficult.

00;10;21;29 - 00;10;22;17

Speaker 1

But yeah.

00;10;24;19 - 00;10;29;14

Speaker 1

Um, how do you feel when you're teaching dance to these students?

00;10;29;14 - 00;11;03;01

Speaker 2

I love teaching. Dance to students in special education. I honestly wish that I was able to have a class with just them because I feel like I'm not able to devote all my attention and focus to their needs. There's so much that I could be doing to help them grow as movers, and because I am having to cater to all these different abilities, they're just kind of learning along with us, which is great, but it's kind of at a quicker pace.

00;11;03;14 - 00;11;30;14

Speaker 2

But oh, they're just incredible, incredible students who for the most part want to be here and enjoy music and enjoy movement. And that's what I love and that's what a lot of teenagers sometimes don't want to be here. And that's really challenging because with my elective, you don't really have to take this class, but people come and take it anyways.

00;11;30;29 - 00;11;53;02

Speaker 2

But when my special education students come in, they come in with a smile. They know the routines that they need to do and they're just kind. They're always really, really kind. And if they're having a bad day, they just let you know. And it's very easy to understand. And also they love hugs. Some of them don't, but many of them do.

00;11;53;02 - 00;12;01;29

Speaker 2

And I'm a hugger and that always makes me happy. And I just love them.

00;12;01;29 - 00;12;07;25

Speaker 1

Um, what has the parent and family reaction been to having students with disabilities in dance?

00;12;08;25 - 00;12;41;20

Speaker 2

The parent reaction about having students with disabilities in dance has been really positive. So positive that I said earlier, I have seven students with special needs this year, whereas my first year here I had one. So I think that speaks volumes because parents talk. But I think the greatest thing for the parents is being able to see their child up on stage amongst every other teenager doing the same dance in costume and feeling confident.

00;12;41;20 - 00;13;03;15

Speaker 2

And that's not something you always get to see. And that really goes for any parent. But I know sometimes with parents with disabilities, their children are pushed to the side and that's not fair. That's not how it should be. And that's what I do think is really special about our program, because they're just part of it. They're part of this huge thing that is so supported by the community at large.

00;13;04;17 - 00;13;11;29

Speaker 1

Is there anything you think we could do in more academic classes to have that same sort of integration?

00;13;11;29 - 00;13;53;09

Speaker 2

I don't know what academic classes could do to have more integration. I know when I was learning about being a teacher, they were really talking about how students with developmental disabilities and physical disabilities and all of those should be incorporated into just your typical classroom, which I agree with. But also, like everything else, equity is a really big thing and we need to support kids as much as possible and sometimes students need the aides and just more support and different modes of learning that you don't always get in the average classroom.

00;13;53;09 - 00;14;20;21

Speaker 2

So I don't I don't know. I don't know how to make it happen. And is it challenging? Absolutely. But is it rewarding? Yes. And if we could get every class more integrated, I think it'd be great. But then you also have to step back and think, you know, not everyone's ready for an AP class

and there's people that go, don't take those that shouldn't be there either, that have no disability of any kind.

00;14;20;21 - 00;14;28;04

Speaker 2

So again, I think classes are where you should take classes you are ready for and every student is ready for.

00;14;28;04 - 00;14;39;08

Speaker 1

That was great. Okay. Um, for our last question, do you have any stories that you would want to share, especially with students?

00;14;39;14 - 00;15;02;15

Speaker 2

Um, yeah. Okay. Well, can I, like, just talk about Yasmeen? Is that okay? Can I use her name? Okay, so I have a student. She is a sophomore this year. Her name is Yasmeen, and I met her last school year and when she came in, she said a tiny little thing. And I think it's funny for me to say that because I'm not even five feet tall.

00;15;02;23 - 00;15;25;18

Speaker 2

So we get each other on a short level. But she does have Down syndrome. And she started with me and was so shy, painfully shy would come in every day and not make eye contact, would stand up against the wall. Literally just looking at the wall, the entire class shoulders sunken in, nothing like I was like this girl.

00;15;26;14 - 00;15;52;01

Speaker 2

She's going to be out of here in no time. But then the music would start to come on. And when there is a song that she enjoys or has some sort of beat, that girl turns on. Of course she has to be comfortable so it took a while, but she started to get more comfortable. Then we brought in her buddy Avery, and that connection helped her feel more comfortable into just loosening up.

00;15;52;17 - 00;16;25;13

Speaker 2

And let me tell you, we end up at Foothill College for these shows, and I have never seen Yasmeen light up and just be so herself. It was the most beautiful thing to watch and just think back on this girl that wouldn't even look at me or in my classroom or anything or move. And she was up on that stage, just light shining and living and posing and smiling and honestly knew the dances better sometimes than other students because she loved it.

00;16;25;13 - 00;17;01;28

Speaker 2

And she's such a visual learner just standing and just taking things in. It was just such a special moment for me just to see that and for her to have that opportunity to shine and be recognized for it. So that was really, really special for me. And I'm so excited for her to go on stage again because she, although we have our gym show, a little show in the gym, but that's not her favorite, She can't wait to be in costume under the lights with her, with her makeup done and her hair done because she's our glamor girl.

00;17;01;28 - 00;17;33;02

Speaker 2

So I'm just so excited for her. And I'm really glad that she's only a sophomore because I know she's going to stay for a while and I can't wait to just keep watching her grow. So that's my Yasmeen story. I have another one. I have a lot of stories. Okay, I have another student. So sometimes with my classes it's hard to know if dance will be the right fit because students can take dance or they can take P.E. or they can take Intro to Music.

00;17;33;13 - 00;17;55;09

Speaker 2

And so we start off the year with one student in my class just trying to figure out if it was the right move, just wasn't the right scene for him. So Mr. Kyu and I were talking and we're like, okay, so we don't think this student is a good fit. What can we do? Let's see if this other student can try.

00;17;55;09 - 00;18;37;13

Speaker 2

So in walks, I'll just call him Fred. And Fred is very tall and is nonverbal and just a big dude who has a hard time getting up and getting down and processing and all of that. So he started off the year just very like slow moving, not really doing anything giggling sometimes, but not engaged. Now, the other day he's like picking up his feet and moving and he knows now when the rest of class is going down towards the floor, he can bend down and touch his toes to blend.

00;18;37;13 - 00;19;04;18

Speaker 2

And that growth too, has just been so incredible because Mr.. Q and I were also like, we don't know if this is going to be good because sometimes even music is really triggering for some of these students. So just watching him now come into class and he likes to sway his hips and he's just there enjoying it and moving and the activity is just so great for everyone in general.

00;19;05;09 - 00;19;14;26

Speaker 2

So that's been really fun and exciting for me to watch. And I feel like you probably have a lot of stories.

00;19;15;04 - 00;19;15;19

Speaker 1

You can share.



00;19;18;13 - 00;19;44;14

Speaker 2

To the story. I don't know. He's such a ham. I don't know if I have any good gifts right there. Just David's funny. Gabe is just a funny, funny boy, but he is kind of a leader in a way. He is not afraid to just be himself and be out there and support other students that I know.

00;19;44;14 - 00;20;08;20

Speaker 2

He really encourages others around him in this classroom. I'm sure he does in other classes. But like this is a big class, but he's very good at accounting, so he really gives us a five, six, seven, eight a lot. And he always says, Let's go, guys. And what else did he say? I don't remember. But he says a lot of encouraging words and, oh, I have a good game story.

00;20;08;27 - 00;20;44;29

Speaker 2

So over Zoom, Gabe was my student and I was terrified. I just have to teach over. Zoom was going to be really difficult. Teaching dance over Zoom was going to be awful and scary and just really, really hard. And then I'd never thought this was my second year of teaching. And so I now had to teach a student with Down's syndrome over Zoom and it was the most incredible, incredible experience.

00;20;45;07 - 00;21;13;17

Speaker 2

And I learned that with the support of his parents, Gabe was able to just thrive because he is such a visual learner. He would just watch and rewatch videos that I would post in class. His mom and dad would help him more than I think any parent would in general, and that was incredible. And when we came back and when we started to have students come back to school, Gabe would show me what he learned over Zoom.

00;21;13;29 - 00;21;40;00

Speaker 2

And there were just technical skills like Shani's, which is a turning movement, which over Zoom, right and left and forwards and backs are all mixed up. But he learned how to shenae over Zoom and could come back to school and without me having to say, Let's break it down and do it. He showed me what it was and he still can do his dance routines from then on from last year.

00;21;40;00 - 00;21;55;10

Speaker 2

His memory is incredible and it just goes to show that everyone does thrive in different learning situations. And he was a superstar in the Zoom setting, which was really awesome. And he's proven to be a superstar just in class, too.

00;21;56;14 - 00;22;12;27

Speaker 1

Yeah. Oh, I love them so much. I'm glad that you have so many good stories. I don't think you could compare it back to what the parents you have. Thank you.