

The formation of interpersonal relationships in dance practice

A mixed-method study of two programmes

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Abstract

Previous studies have described how dance practices encourage the development of interpersonal relationships. However, the possible connections between the development of such relationships and the cooperative characteristics of the dance practices have rarely been focused on. This article sets out to investigate: a) the extent to which cooperative dance practices organised around a performance foster interpersonal relationships among the participants compared with the fostering of interpersonal relationships in different sports activities, and b) which cooperative aspects of such dance practices are of importance for the fostering of interpersonal relationships. We used a mixed-method approach, combining surveys, observations and interviews, to investigate two Danish dance programmes. The descriptive comparison with members of sports clubs presents strong indications that interpersonal relationships arose within a comparatively short time period. Unexpectedly, the activities in the two dance programmes were to a very large extent based on teacher-oriented methods. However, using cooperative learning theory, we could point towards several constitutive elements of cooperative learning that are of importance in facilitating interpersonal relationships. With minor differences between the two programmes, the professional dancers' way of forming part of and facilitating the process of creating a performance seemed to play a crucial role for 'individual accountability' and 'promotive interaction' between participants.

Keywords: dance practice, performance, interpersonal relationships, cooperative learning, cooperative practice

Introduction

Recent survey-based studies of organised sport and physical activity in sports clubs have demonstrated that interpersonal relationships, defined as positive interpersonal interactions and friendship formations (cf. Johnson & Johnson, 2014a, p. 849), were formed between the participants (e.g. Van der Roest, Van Kalmthout & Meijjs, 2016; Østerlund, 2014a, 2014b). The formation of interpersonal relationships was found to depend on both individual level factors (e.g. social background and club affiliation) and the organisational context (e.g. the club structure and type of sports activity). A central finding was that the type of activity was the major influence on the propensity of participants to form interpersonal relationships. Generally, team ballgames (e.g. football and handball) fostered more and stronger interpersonal relationships among the participants than (semi-)individual activities (e.g. tennis, gymnastics and fitness activities) (Van der Roest et al., 2016; Østerlund, 2014a, 2014b; Østerlund & Seippel, 2013). Accordingly, team-based activities, where cooperation between teammates is needed to perform well, seem to increase the extent to which participants form interpersonal relationships. Dance activities were not included as a separate activity category in the sports club studies. However, dance practices are often understood as including creative and cooperative ways of participating, leading us to expect that dance practices, like team ballgames, are well suited to fostering interpersonal relationships among the participants.

For example, researchers with a special interest in descriptions and analyses of creative dance courses in schools have indicated that these activities also contribute positively to the social milieu within the group. A single-case study in Denmark emphasised that the students in the class came to know each other in new ways and that the dance activities initiated and encouraged new friendships (Nielsen, 2008). In another study focusing on the ways physical education is taught in Swedish schools, Larsson and Karlefors (2015) emphasised that in creative dance practices, students negotiated actively how different kinds of movements were to form part of their dance. In a very simple way, this part of Larsson and Karlefors' article illustrates that even with minimal teacher facilitation of cooperation, creating a dance together seems to promote the development of interpersonal relationships.

Moving outside of the school context, a study analysing the developmental benefits for disadvantaged girls engaged in urban dance pro-

grammes in Belgium indicated that through their participation in the dance programmes participants reinforced peer relationships and positive peer interactions (Shaillée, Theeboom, & Skille, 2017). From the outset, the various dance styles evolving from hip-hop culture – also referred to as urban dance activities – were focused on improving participants' skills. However, as Shaillée et al. (2017) emphasise, the inherent characteristics of urban dance styles present a unique context for facilitating a supportive coaching climate, provided that the coaches use participants' ideas and create opportunities for them to make their own choices with respect for differences in the group. In other words, they indicate that the unique context of urban dance practices inevitably involves cooperation between participants and dance coaches.

In accordance with the survey-based studies of organised sport and physical activity, these three dance studies conducted in Denmark, Sweden and Belgium indicate that the formation of interpersonal relationships seems to be positively related to the cooperative characteristics of a particular dance practice. However, to our knowledge, there has been little focus specifically on this positive relation. Our aim in this article is to investigate empirically the possible connection between the development of interpersonal relationships and the cooperative characteristics of the dance practices. The specific kinds of dance practice we focus on are designed from the outset to involve cooperation between participants and a professional dancer in the creation of a dance performance. We investigated two programmes of such cooperative dance practice, which formed part of a national project in Denmark in the period 2015–2017. The two dance programmes were, on the one hand, defined through specific sets of criteria for how the dance activities were to be run and, on the other hand, these criteria set a frame that could also be adjusted according to local circumstances. Thus, the programmes unfolded with local variations. Both programmes were planned as leisure activities unconnected to educational institutions.

Our investigation of the two programmes centres on the following two research questions:

- To what extent are interpersonal relationships among participants fostered in cooperative dance practices organised around a performance, and how does this compare with the fostering of interpersonal relationships in sports activities?

- Which cooperative aspects of such dance practices are of importance for the fostering of interpersonal relationships among the participants?

To pursue these research questions, we applied a mixed-method approach, combining surveys with observations and interviews. An inductive approach led to the adoption of cooperative learning theory. In what follows, therefore, we start by introducing central theoretical concepts related to cooperative learning and its relation to the development of interpersonal relationships. Drawing on selected dance studies, we go on to present some preliminary theoretical considerations about the way in which this theoretical approach is relevant in the analysis of dance studies. This is followed by a description of the two dance programmes and the methods applied in our study. Finally, we present the results of our study and draw our conclusions.

Theory

Cooperative learning theory presents an applied version of social interdependence theory. As Johnson and Johnson have shown (e.g. 2005, 2009 and 2014a), cooperative learning theory is based on a social psychological understanding of group dynamics, so that “a change in the state of any member or subgroup changes the state of any other member or subgroup” (Johnson & Johnson, 2014a, p. 844). Accordingly, the outcomes of individuals’ learning processes are understood as fundamentally affected by their own and others’ actions within the group. Cooperative learning is commonly used as an instructional practice for teachers and as a tool for researchers when analysing the interpersonal dynamics of different kinds of learning situations (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, 2014a, 2014b). It can be divided into four types: a) *formal cooperative learning* (cooperation formally set by the institution and/or the teacher), b) *informal cooperative learning* (temporary and ad hoc groups of participants working together for a few minutes or longer), c) *cooperative base groups* (long-term heterogeneous groups of participants who offer each other mutual support), and d) *constructive controversy* (when participants’ ideas are incompatible yet everyone seeks to reach an agreement) (Johnson & Johnson, 2014a).

Across the four categories of cooperative learning listed above, one should also pay close attention to five conditions of interpersonal dynamics which make cooperation work. First of all, *positive interdependence* is at the heart of cooperative efforts and emphasised as the most important condition for it. This, in turn, is further divided into three sub-categories: ‘*outcome interdependence*’, which refers to the mutual goals and/or rewards that are to frame and set the whole situation of cooperative learning; ‘*means interdependence*’, which refers to the resources, roles and specific tasks that are divided among group members; and ‘*boundary interdependence*’, which specifically targets how groups (as cooperative units) are separated and segregated (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, 2014a). The remaining four constitutive elements that are important to making cooperation work are: ‘*individual accountability*’, which refers to each member having and accepting a personal responsibility for completing their share; ‘*promotive interaction*’, which refers to each member actively helping, supporting and encouraging the others’ success; ‘*the appropriate use of social skills*’, which encompasses skills like decision-making, communicating and conflict-managing; and ‘*group processing*’, which refers to the students’ ability to improve the process of cooperation (Johnson & Johnson, 2014a, 845).

In a review of their work on social interdependence theory, Johnson and Johnson (2005) emphasise that numerous studies consistently show that working cooperatively creates positive interpersonal relationships among participants. When forming part of a cooperative effort and pursuing a shared goal, participants tend a) to feel that they are accepted and liked by the other practitioners in their group, b) to realise that they have contributed to the group’s success, and c) to perceive themselves and others in a way that allows for multidimensional comparison (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). However, they also emphasise that the relation between positive interpersonal relationship and cooperation unfold as a “bidirectional relation” – on the one hand caring and committing friendship is the outcome of the mutual accomplishment of learning goals, and, on the other hand, the more the students care about each other, the harder they will work to achieve these mutual goals (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, 2014).

It is important to notice that the two dance programmes investigated in this study are leisure-based activities that do not form part of an educational curriculum. Learning outcomes and goals are not formally set by an institution as is the case in schools, educational programmes and

so on. Despite learning not being measured or evaluated according to a curriculum, as seems to be the case in Johnson and Johnson's discussions of cooperative learning theory, we know that from the outset the two programmes encouraged participants to strive to create the best possible performance together. The performance presents a mutual goal, which can be understood as setting a condition of 'outcome independence' for the cooperation of the participants. More importantly, however, is the fact that our investigation focuses on how interpersonal relationships are fostered through participation rather than through measuring and discussing learning outcomes in relation to a mutual goal. That is, we are interested in investigating an aspect forming part of the learning outcome of cooperative learning. Accordingly, by using cooperative learning theory, we examine how cooperative ideas unfold in the contextual setting and in the realisation of the dance programmes and expect such examination to bring useful information about how different forms of cooperation in dance practices contribute to the formation of interpersonal relationships among the participants.

Cooperative learning and the embodied perspective of dance practices

In its embodied nature, the dance practice is based on face-to-face interactions, which, from the perspective of cooperative learning, predictably enhance cooperative endeavours and the development of positive interpersonal relationships (Johnson & Johnson, 2014b). The embodied premise means that, like sports activities, dance practice encourages interactions to unfold directly and simultaneously. Furthermore, as dance scholars have emphasised for decades, compared to other physical activities, the embodied involvement in dance practices is of a specific kind. In most sports activities, movement and skills present the means to achieve a goal, such as winning the game with one's teammates. By comparison, in dance activities movement is, to a certain extent, both the means and the goal of the activity (Legrand & Ravn, 2009; Ravn, 2017), and embodied experiences, as these are bodily felt and expressed, form a foundation for learning outcomes in most dance practices. These outcomes are often specified in relation to aesthetic criteria and cultural understanding – especially in the field of dance research (e.g. Ehrenberg, 2015; Engelsrud, 2010; Mattsson & Lundvall, 2015; Rustad, 2012; Standal & Engelsrud, 2013). In other words, in dance activities, the practitioners' sense

of their moving body is central to the ways in which cooperation takes place. Dance practices not only include the direct and simultaneous characteristics of face-to-face interaction but can be thought of as involving a body-to-body interaction. The following brief presentation of selected dance studies exemplifies this general point – especially how positive interpersonal relationships are facilitated by the specific kind of embodied cooperation found in dance practices.

Cooperative learning and positive interpersonal relationships in various dance practices

Having the embodied perspective in mind, we can expectably better spell out the value of using cooperative learning ideas in dance practices. In this section we will, accordingly, present preliminary considerations on how cooperative learning presents relevant theoretical considerations of value for the interpretation of selected dance studies – especially in relation to if and how these studies indicate the fostering of interpersonal relationships.

First of all, it is worth noticing that among dance scholars we find teaching and learning considerations which closely resemble ideas of cooperative learning theory, without specifically addressing the theory (e.g. Schupp, 2015; Nielsen, Wehner, & Herskind, 2015). For example, dance scholar Karen Schupp (2015) argues that dance practices should (also) be used to teach students collaborative skills. Her descriptions of how to plan and structure cooperative learning by suggesting that the dance instructor should establish shared goals and create space for participants to listen to each other and take turns, mirror Johnson and Johnson's (2009) descriptions of essential aspects of the four categories of cooperative learning – especially: 'formal cooperative learning', 'informal cooperative learning' and 'constructive controversy', and not least how these elements can be implemented by the teacher.

Activities labelled as community dance projects are typically based on an artistic cooperation between a professional dancer and several participants with very different backgrounds and movement experiences. The cooperation is often expected to be grounded in the premises of participants' life situations and, possibly, to improve social skills and agency (e.g. Barr, 2013; Houston, 2005; Rowe, Buck, & Martin, 2015). Seen through the lens of cooperative learning theory, community dance projects can be understood as framed to specifically nurture cooperative

ways of engaging in embodied practices. Without engaging in discussions for or against community dance projects as a means of changing participants' life situations, as for example discussed by Houston (2005), it seems reasonable to expect that this kind of dance activity promote cooperative learning and thereby constructively contribute to formations of interpersonal relationships.

Turning to studies of dance practices characterised by participants' individual efforts to learn a specific kind of dance, we also find, partly to our surprise, that several studies emphasise the development of participants' interpersonal relationships. If we look into analyses of dance practices taught according to a specific technique, such as flamenco and ballet, dance scholars have stressed that these practices also facilitate new kinds of relationships and a positive understanding of diversity (e.g. Gardner, Komesaroff, & Fensham, 2008; Siljamäki, Anttila, & Sääkslahti, 2010). The teaching of such recreational dance activities generally relies on teacher-oriented methods. The teacher decides what to do and presents movements to be learned – often by imitation – by participants. We should bear in mind that the mutual endeavour to learn a particular dance might frame the learning situation as a shared event, and, as is highlighted in the studies of urban dance programmes (Schaillée et al., 2017), this shared endeavour might facilitate a supportive and cooperative climate among the participants. With reference to our presentation of the five elements that are of importance to making cooperation work, we suggest that 'promotive interaction' and possibly 'individual accountability' could be considered as supporting the successful learning of the specific dance techniques. The results of these studies on individual learning which unfold in what we can consider (partly) shared events, remind us that 'individualistic effort' can supplement cooperative efforts, a point also emphasised in Johnson and Johnson's (2009) work. Furthermore, in these practices, participants' sense of their moving body plays a central role in the incorporation of the specific dance movements. Thus, the embodied characteristics of individual efforts might be hypothesised as playing a central role for the fostering of interpersonal relationship.

Data and methods

In the following, we will first describe the two dance programmes and the participants. Then we describe our data material in separate sections, one describing the survey data and one describing the observations and interviews. Finally, we present our mixed-methods study design.

The two dance programmes and the participants

From 2015-2017, the dance institution Dansehallerne in Copenhagen, Denmark (<http://www.dansehallerne.dk>) was responsible for a national dance project involving several programmes, which aimed to create fresh opportunities for people of all ages to dance. The programmes were locally based and organised, and the actual form and content of the dance activities were influenced by the professional dancers in charge of running the local versions of the programme. In this article, empirical data from two of these dance programmes – ‘Dance with your Neighbour’ (DN) and ‘Dance for Youth’ (DY) – have been included.

In both dance programmes, the participants collaborated to create and present a performance as the end product of the dance sessions. Some performances were presented in smaller settings, outside in a school yard, for example, while other performances were presented on bigger stages – the biggest being the foyer of the Opera House in Copenhagen. In accordance with community dance ideas (e.g. Rowe et al., 2015), DN was aimed at offering people across age groups and dance experiences the opportunity to be active in part of local cultural life with artistic qualities. DY was more specifically intended to present an opportunity for talented young people interested in improving their dance competence to pursue this interest.

The DY project periods typically lasted between four and six months, while the DN project periods were a bit shorter at three to four months. During these periods, most of the participants in both dance programmes met once or twice a week. At least nine out of ten participants in both dance programmes were women. Not surprisingly, the DY participants were the youngest with an average age of 19 years, ages ranging from 13 to 33 years. The DN participants were on average 53 years old and ranged from 10 to 79 years of age (Elmose-Østerlund & Christiansen, 2017).

Data material: Survey data

The survey data was collected through an online survey in which the participants received an email with a link to the survey. Some links were distributed to the participants directly by the researchers, whereas others were distributed by the local unit responsible for the dance activities. A total of 129 participants completed the survey, of which 77 were DN participants and 52 were DY participants. Based on information sent from the local units responsible for the dance activities, it was possible to calculate the response rates, which were 42% among DN participants and 29% among DY participants. It was not possible to compare the respondents with invited non-respondents, and so we cannot know whether the sample is representative for the DN and DY participants. Nevertheless, the material provides an insight into the experiences of a substantial sample of the participants from the two dance programmes.

The questionnaire sent to the dance participants was designed to facilitate a broad evaluation. It included several topics such as the frequency and intensity of participation, recruitment, evaluation of different elements in the dance sessions, experienced benefits from participation (social and personal), and social background. In this article, we report results that reflect the participants' evaluation of the dance programme and opportunities to be co-creative in discussing the practices of cooperation in the dance activities. The questions regarding the social benefits of participation in the dance activities are used to make empirically based claims about the formation of interpersonal relationships among the participants in the two dance programmes. The questions used to examine the formation of interpersonal relationships were copied from a study conducted in Danish sports clubs (Elmose-Østerlund & Van der Roest, 2017; Østerlund, 2014a, 2014b; Østerlund & Seippel, 2013). The questions were not devised to explore the concept of interpersonal relationships but to examine whether the participants viewed the activities as social and whether they developed new social relationships. Since the data collected from the participants in the two dance programmes and the data collected from members of sports clubs were not part of the same data collection, we were not able to include statistical tests to indicate whether differences between the dance participants and sports club members were statistically significant. This is clearly a limitation, but we believe that by including comparisons in this article, we can provide indications as to whether cooperative dance practices are well-suited to fostering interpersonal relationships when compared to sports activities..

Data material: Observations and interviews

For the observations and interview studies, local groups within both the DN and DY dance programmes were chosen. The choice was based on a combination of practical constraints and information-oriented criteria (Flyvbjerg, 2011). We deliberately sought to involve programme activities from different local areas in which the programmes were implemented with some variation. Three local groups within the DY programme were selected. These local groups each presented local versions of the programme which were adjusted to suit the way in which development of participants' talent and their ambitions were nurtured in the training sessions, taking account of whether participants had to audition and to which extent the programmes were connected to a community cultural centre. Two local groups within the DN programmes were selected. One was related to a cultural centre, while the other was organised around a professional dancer not connected to a cultural centre.

In the DY programmes and one of the DN programmes, observations took the form of two to six visits at each setting. At each setting, the participants often worked with part of the performance in progress – and this included trying out and rehearsing choreographed parts. Accordingly, it made most sense for the observer to take on the relatively passive role of watching the practice from the side. However, a few episodes arose in which it became natural for the observer to participate in the practice. Fieldnotes were jotted down in a notebook and written out in full shortly after the observations, when the events were still fresh in memory (Hammersley & Atkinson, ch. 7). The observer was asked to be aware of different ways participants interacted right before, during and after the dance sessions. Furthermore, she was instructed to focus her observations on the organisation of sessions and the professional dancers' way of teaching, including how time and space were given to allow creative cooperation to unfold between participants and as invitations to experiment and contribute individually. She was also specifically asked to be aware of the relative amount of time scheduled for participants to cooperate on creative tasks and to register the particular ways the dance sessions were organised by the professional dancer.

The formal interviews were organised as semi-structured focus group interviews (Smith & Sparkes, 2016). The interview guides were centred on questions that encouraged descriptions of a good training session, of outcome related to dance and personal interests and of creative and co-operative aspects of participating in the project. In accordance with de-

scriptions of the non-directive version of the semi-structured interview (Thorpe, 2012; Ravn & Hansen, 2013), the questions and themes were presented in a relatively open form and the interviewer aimed at adopting a listening position. Participation in the interviews was presented as optional. Following ethical guidelines, participants gave their consent for the observational notes and interviews to be used for the study in anonymised versions.

All in all, 17 observational ‘visits’ of typically two to seven hours’ duration and six focus group interviews were conducted. This amounted to 63 hours of observation and interviews with 27 participants. The interviews were transcribed and, together with observational notes, further analysed in an inductive way, letting the data guide the coding (Gibbs, 2007, p. 45). In accordance with analyses of ethnographical fieldwork, observations and interview transcriptions thereby complemented each other during the process of both generating and analysing the data (Thorpe, 2012; Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Having organised the coded data into relevant themes on inductive terms, we actively used Johnson and Johnson’s (2005) categories of cooperative learning and the elements characterising the conditions needed to make cooperation work within the group to differentiate among the inductively generated themes.

Study design: mixed-method

As indicated in our introduction, a mixed-method approach was applied, involving the collection of data from surveys, observations and interviews. The approach can best be described as what Creswell and Clark (2011) have termed a “convergent parallel design” (pp. 70-71). In effect, the data collection was designed and implemented during the period of fourteen months from the spring of 2015 until the summer of 2016. The analysis of the collected data was carried out by the researchers that designed the studies, but the analyses of the survey data and the observations and interviews took place separately and were originally disseminated in two different reports (Elmose-Østerlund & Christiansen, 2017; Johnsen & Ravn, 2017). Throughout the article, we combine data from all empirical sources to allow for an overall interpretation.

Findings: The practice of cooperation

Both the DY and the DN participants described the dance sessions and their participation in the programmes as a haven from everyday life. Forming part of the actual dance group in one of the programmes clearly provided an opportunity to experience an embodied involvement that was different to the embodied characteristics of their everyday life. The DY and DN participants highlighted positive aspects of this ‘haven’ in different ways. For example, one of the DN participants said:

I feel as if I am travelling. It’s like buying a ticket for somewhere far away – and in this place far out I just pretend I am somebody else. So, all the stuff at home that I can’t figure out – I just throw it away and travel around as if there are no problems in my life.

The DY participants emphasised that the programmes offered a context in which it was okay to smell of sweat, not to wear makeup, and so on. As one of the girls expressed it: “When everybody is gross, no one is gross, right?” Despite differences in their descriptions of this haven, the time and space of the programme activities clearly allowed for an opportunity to meet people on premises different from those of everyday life. In terms of cooperative learning, for both DN and DY participants these unfamiliar circumstances for embodied involvement contributed to the group being positively segregated in relation to everyday life and to other recreational activities. Furthermore, the professional dancers across programmes and in most settings emphasised that they needed participants to show up every time. As one of the DN participants explained:

Ooh, am I really so important that it is a problem if I am not there? ... So, hey – we have a shared goal! ‘We need you, we can’t be without you, you are important!’ That was something that really made me grow.

In a positive way, the participants framed their participation in the dance activities as something cohesive. The dance sessions were both an opportunity to meet people in unfamiliar circumstances and to form part of a project in which everyone had to be relied upon. Drawing on the theoretical framework of cooperative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2009, 2014), we can see that participants’ descriptions thereby indicate that the constitutive elements ‘boundary interdependence’ and ‘individual accountability’ are central characteristics of their cooperative practices.

Furthermore, within this framing of dance practice, the performance provided, as partly expected, the participants with a common goal to work towards. In accordance with ‘outcome interdependence’ (Johnson and Johnson, 2009, 2014) it served as a structure within which interdependence could unfold in the group of participants. Interpreting the performance as central for the ‘outcome interdependence’ of each group’s learning situation was also confirmed by the survey data. In both dance programmes, nine out of ten participants partly or wholly agreed that they found it motivating that the dance activities ended with a performance. Although the two dance programmes can hardly be characterised by set objectives, concepts and principles, participants are undoubtedly involved in completing “jointly specific tasks and assignments” (Johnson & Johnson 2014, 842) and this can be categorized as a formal cooperative learning situation (Johnson & Johnson, 2014).

TABLE 1. *Level of agreement among the ‘Dance with your Neighbor’, DN, and ‘Dance for Youth’, DY, participants with the statements regarding the dance performance listed in the table.*

	DN (N=64/65)	DY (N=43/44)
<i>It was motivating that the dance activities ended with a dance performance</i>		
Partly or wholly agree	89%	90%
Neutral	5%	5%
Partly or wholly disagree	6%	6%
<i>I would like to have been without having to perform in front of other people</i>		
Partly or wholly agree	10%	11%
Neutral	15%	10%
Partly or wholly disagree	75%	80%

TABLE 2. *Level of agreement among the ‘Dance with your Neighbor’, DN, and ‘Dance for Youth’, DY, participants with the statement: ‘I had the opportunity to influence the dance/choreography?’*

	DN (N=63)	DY (N=44)
Partly or wholly agree	71%	90%
Neutral	10%	5%
Partly or wholly disagree	19%	6%

A large majority of the participants partly or wholly agreed that they had the opportunity to influence the process of creating the choreography of the dance performance: In DY, 90% of the participants partly or wholly agreed that they had the opportunity to influence the dance/choreography, while the corresponding percentage in DN was 71%. At first sight, these survey responses seemed to be partly contradicted by our analysis of the practice as observed. Across the two programmes, activities were, to our surprise, to a very large extent instructed using teacher-oriented methods. Often the professional dancer in charge of the project would place herself in front of the group and clearly instruct and/or perform the movements which were then to be practised and – in various degrees – imitated by the participants. In both programmes – and all settings – teacher-oriented methods were used when warming up, in the technical training, and in introductions to the movement patterns that were to be used in the final performance. In the subsequent parts of the sessions, teacher-oriented methods also characterised, for example, the way part of a choreography was learned or rehearsed anew. Accordingly, observations of the programmes did not indicate that participants were given instructions or much space to cooperate creatively with the choreography; nor were they given much space for ‘informal cooperative learning.’ In fact, observational notes on the organisation of the practices indicate that it was relatively rare for participants to be invited to create minor sections of the choreography, to experiment with movement possibilities or to create movement patterns to be used in the choreography – as is otherwise often the case in the cooperative practices of, for example, community dance (Barr, 2013; Houston, 2005; Rowe et al., 2015). For a large part of the observed activities, the practice could at best be described as inviting participants to follow and copy the professional dancer’s movement. It thereby invited participants to focus on individual efforts when taking on personal responsibility in relation to preparing the performance. Despite advertising the programmes as involving creative cooperation, much of the actual practice seemed to resemble the teaching practices described in the urban dance programmes (e.g. Schailleé et al., 2017) and in the recreational activities focused on learning a specific technique (e.g. Gardner et al., 2008; Siljamäki et al., 2010). However, a closer look at ways in which creativity and embodied involvement were addressed in the dance sessions of the two programmes reveals three interlinked aspects that may play a central role in the participants’ sense that they were part of a cooperative practice of creating a performance.

Firstly, despite not constituting a major part of the activities, experimenting and creative practices among participants did take place now and then, and we know from the interviews that these minor sessions of informal cooperative practices were of high value to the participants. An older (60+) male DN participant described his experience with improvisation, which formed part of these experimental and creative practices:

To just do what comes up. I think this is so wonderful. Then you don't think – and actually this is what I really would like to get out of dancing.

By comparison, many of the DY participants especially emphasised during interviews that they found it exciting and fascinating to be included in, and to contribute to, the process of creating a performance. They specifically emphasised that they felt they had become better at being able 'to see' new kinds of movement possibilities. In their own ways, participants in both DN and DY indicated that they were offered unique and possibly new ways of relating to their moving bodies when dancing. The learning situations that unfolded were closely connected with a revision of participants' understanding of their own movement repertoire and of the kinds of movement that can form part of a dance performance. Finding a way to see and perform the movement presented by the professional dancer in itself becomes an experimentation with possibilities of movement and indirectly points to the specific kind of embodiment characterising dance practices.

The second aspect relates to the ways in which participants cooperated with the professional dancer. For example, at the very beginning of the programme, one of the DY groups was asked to write words and sentences indicating what they were engaged with in their life. The professional dancer then used these notes to set the overall theme of the performance. She thereby invited the DY participants to cooperate with her in setting the theme of the performance and to take on a co-ownership of the choreographical outlines. Another example is when participants were invited to suggest choreographic solutions during the teacher-oriented rehearsals. Suggestions could, for example, be a solution for how to create a transition between sequences.

Besides characterising the teacher's role in formal cooperative learning as that of setting the objective for the lesson, Johnson and Johnson (2009) also indicate that the teacher can operationalise a formal role by explaining the task, by encouraging positive interdependence in the

working process, and by intervening in the group and providing task assistance to increase the students' interpersonal and group skills. We find that contributing 'to setting the theme of the performance' and 'to finding choreographic solutions' suggests that we should pay close awareness to that different kinds of informal cooperation between the professional dancer and each practitioner characterise the process of creating the performance. We realise that these examples could also be interpreted as an indication of intervention and task assistance. However, as we can see from the data, if so, the intervention and task assistance is highly based on the professional dancers' way of cooperating informally with the participants. In contrast to Johnson and Johnson's description of 'informal cooperative learning', informal learning took place between the practitioner and the teacher – not (only) between participants. Furthermore, across cases and settings, the analysis of both observational notes and interviews indicated that the professional dancers led practice in an engaged and enthusiastic way. Their involvement appeared to reach beyond a professional approach in the sense that engaging in the dance sessions and in creating the performance with exactly 'this' group of people seemed to matter for them on a personal level. The professional dancers' engagement supports the interpretation that informal cooperation between the professional dancer and the participants in the programmes is an important characteristic of each of the practices we observed.

The third aspect that possibly form a central role for the participants' experience of being part of a cooperative practice of creating a performance concerns the different ways that they 'felt seen' as the person they are. In both programmes and across all settings, the dancer in charge created the performance using the resources of a particular group of participants and what their bodies could do. As a DN participant explained during interviews:

Their way of teaching is really fantastic. On the one hand, you meet the obligation – and you are necessary – and on the other side okay, that's what you can do, but, you know, this is also exactly what we need!"

As emphasised in the quote, the professional dancers visibly appreciated the participants' different bodily repertoires and movements – and demonstrated that they 'see' each participant's movement skills. This approach allowed participants to feel accepted for who they were from the very beginning. In Johnson and Johnson's work, the sense of acceptance is a positive outcome, emphasised in their description of the bidirection-

al relation between cooperative learning processes and the development of positive interpersonal relationships (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). In the DN programmes especially, the appreciation of each participant's embodied competences was a starting point for how the dancers cooperated with the participants. Accepting difference seemed to characterise the way dance practices grew from an appreciation of each practitioner contributing in their own special way to the process of creating a performance. As metaphorically expressed by one of the DN participants

A wise man once said that: the road does not exist. It is created by walking. This fits so well to this project ... the dancer creates a road by letting us walk! I mean, ... I think that that picture – works very well.

Findings: Fostering interpersonal relationships

The results presented in Table 3 suggest that the formation of interpersonal relationships was an integral part of the dance activities for a clear majority of the participants in both DN and DY. When asked to evaluate whether the dance activities were social, 87% of the participants in DN and 98% of the participants in DY found that this to a high or very high extent was the case. These results tell us that the participants surveyed in both DN and DY found that the dance activities provided a good basis for the formation of such interpersonal relationships.

One way to examine the quality of the interpersonal relationships formed is to examine the depth of the social relations, and whether these relations are understood by the participants as 'friendships'. The participants were, therefore, asked to indicate whether they had made new friends by participating in the dance activities. A clear majority of participants in both dance programmes found this to be the case. In DY, 87% had made new friends, while this was the case for 71% of the participants in DN. Both figures seem high for dance programmes lasting three to six months, and they are, indeed, high in comparison with data from the Danish sports club study described in the introduction to this article and elaborated in the 'Data and methods' section. For members of sports clubs, the corresponding figure is also high – 79%. However, when compared with the group of members in sports clubs who had been a member for less than a year – a duration that corresponds with the duration of the participation in the dance projects – the percentage that

had made new friends in sports clubs was only 48% (Østerlund, 2014a). This indicates that dance activities build up friendships between the surveyed participants in a comparatively short time period.

TABLE 3. *The interpersonal relationships and their quality as they are experienced by the 'Dance with your Neighbor', DN, and 'Dance for Youth', DY, participants..*

	DN (N=60/65)	DY (N=39/41)
<i>The dance activities were social</i>		
To a very high degree	52%	44%
To a high degree	35%	54%
To some degree	12%	0%
To a low degree/not at all	0%	2%
<i>I have made new friends by participating in the dance activities</i>		
Yes	71%	87%
No	29%	13%
<i>I meet up with new acquaintances from the dance activities outside of them</i>		
Yes	37%	26%
No	63%	74%

Besides comparing the results for the dance participants with the results for members in sports clubs in general, it seems relevant also to compare with specific sports activities, as this can tell us whether the ability of dance activities to foster interpersonal relationships could be associated with the element of cooperation characterising the sports activities. In the sports club study, results are differentiated according to type of sports activity. Football and handball (team ballgames) are differentiated from fitness activities, and these can be compared to the results obtained from the survey study of the two dance programmes. Although team ballgames and cooperative dance activities are different activities, the fact that both require cooperation towards a common goal makes for a relevant comparison. In the case of the team ballgames, the common goal is to perform well in and to win matches, and, in order to do this, the players must act as a team. It is within these activities that we find the highest proportion of players that have made new friends – 95% in football and 92% in handball (Østerlund, 2014a). Conversely, in fitness activities – even when they take place in teams or in groups doing aero-

bics, CrossFit, Zumba and the like – the percentage that have made new friends through participation in the activity is significantly lower (52%) (Østerlund, 2014b). A likely explanation for this finding is that most fitness activities, although the participants take part in a team or a group, unfold as individualistic practices. For the dance activities in DN and DY, the part of the practices (warming up, technical training and learning the choreography) form part of the common goal: to create and perform a dance performance. Such a goal becomes more evidently a shared project when the DY participants are invited to take on co-ownership, involve in informal cooperation with the professional dancer, and when the embodied competencies of the DN participants become central to the professional dancer's choreography of the performance. Accordingly, the overall cooperative effort gives meaning to individualistic parts and makes manifest the positive and possibly reinforcing relation that can exist between 'individualistic efforts' and the common goal of the group in cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, p. 324). This seems to distinguish dance practice from team-based fitness activities.

The percentages of the dance participants surveyed that met up outside these activities with new friends formed during dance practice (37% for DN and 26% for DY) are quite similar to that of members of sports clubs, for whom the corresponding figure is 37% (Østerlund, 2014a). On the one hand, these figures show that for most of the dance participants, the friendships formed in the dance activities were restricted to the dance setting. On the other hand, the figures also show that for a significant minority of the participants, the relationships made through the dance practices spilled over into their wider social life. Again, the members of sports clubs engaged in football (59%) or handball (56%) score significantly higher than other members in sports clubs in terms of the extent to which friendships spill over into the private life. However, while we assume that many of the participants on the football and handball teams had played together over several years and are likely to have formed a kind of cooperative base group (Johnson & Johnson, 2014a, p. 842), the DN and DY participants had only been part of their groups for three to six months. Some participated in the programmes for the second time – and therefore knew some participants from the year before. Still, the dance programmes were not based on the kind of long-term cooperation that often characterise the activities of a local football or handball team.

To summarise, the vast majority of the participants in the two dance programmes report that they have built up interpersonal relationships

through their participation. It is worth mentioning that, across the different measures presented in Table 3, the DY participants generally score higher than the DN participants. This finding could reflect the fact that that the participants in the DY activities are younger and in a life phase where they are more open to the formation of new interpersonal relationships than participants in DN. However, the finding might also indicate that slightly different cooperative aspects were important for the development of interpersonal relationships of the DN and DY participants. From the outset, the DY participants had a more pronounced interest in pursuing individual achievements for the sake of the common goal of creating a performance.

There seems to be two central elements comprising the cooperative environment of DY participants. These are meeting and training with other young people with the same interest and enthusiasm and being taught by a professional dancer (a role model) who encouraged informal cooperative learning in the process of creating the performance. The DY participants' individual efforts and the professional dancer's ambitions converge in the dance practice and, not least, in the creation of a performance. Drawing on Johnson and Johnson's (2014) descriptions of what makes cooperation work, the following three (out of five) essential elements seem to be of central importance for the DY learning situation: 'outcome interdependence', when it comes to the participants' eagerness to aim for the best performance results; 'individual accountability', when it comes to their engagement in taking on the responsibility for completing their part in the performance; and, predictably, 'promotive interaction', when it comes to the enthusiasm deriving from meeting and training with other youth pursuing the same dance interest. In accordance with Johnson & Johnson's (2005) work, the analysis of the practice of the DY participants confirms and exemplifies the idea that the creation of a motivational climate, the participants' eagerness to improve their skills and their experience of skill improvement can contribute to the development of interpersonal relationships.

The experience of being 'seen' by the other participants and, not least, by the professional dancer was emphasised by the DN participants. At the same time, DN participants emphasised that personal encounters arose out of unfamiliar circumstances and had a greater importance to the activity than they were used to. As one of the DN participants in the survey commented:

The community relations played a very big role in the performance and exercises leading up to the performance. [...]. An unusual, but very strong community, which you rarely see, was built up.

In other words, feeling as part of the group – and appreciated for who they are – was central to the experience of the DN participants. From the very beginning, participants felt obliged to participate and needed for the performance. To feel accepted and liked in an embodied sense manifested a starting point for the cooperative efforts. In terms of cooperative learning theory, practitioners' experience of feeling 'seen' is not primarily a positive outcome related to being part of a cooperative group. Rather, it presents a much more fundamental characteristic of the dance practices – possibly deeply connected to the informal characteristics of the cooperative learning unfolding between the professional dancer and participants and possibly connected to the embodied premise of dancing. The DN participants' formation of interpersonal relationships highlights the potential of actively using the bidirectional relation between cooperative learning and positive personal relationship (Johnson & Johnson, 2005) by exercising a positive and creative approach to participants' embodied capabilities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we find it important to begin by re-emphasising that our investigation draws on a theory that presents important constitutive elements for the interpersonal relationship that develops in conjunction with cooperative learning situations. Drawing on cooperative learning theory (Johnson & Johnson, 2005, 2009, 2014a, 2014b), we can interpret the practices related to the two dance programmes as resembling formal cooperative learning situations, in which the performance is the common goal structuring how interdependence unfolds between participants. More specifically, the performance frames an 'outcome' interdependence among participants.

On this basis the dance programmes for both DN and DY participants seem to offer a special space for participants to 'feel' and 'see' their moving body in a way that is different from everyday life. As has been highlighted in several dance studies (e.g. Ehrenberg, 2015; Engelsrud, 2010; Mattsson & Lundvall, 2015; Rustad, 2012; Standal & Engelsrud, 2013), the dance practices are characterised by an embodied involvement, which

may facilitate a 'boundary interdependence' of the different groups of participants dancing together. That is, when joining the programmes, the participants also come to share a special embodied involvement. As constitutive elements, 'individual accountability' and 'promotive interaction' seem to become actualised in both programmes, though in slightly different ways. The young participants' eagerness to pursue their dance interests in the DY programmes converge with the professional dancer's enthusiastic involvement in developing and expanding their dance and performance skills. These strong commitments to learning and developing indicate 'individual accountability'. Furthermore, the DY participants are highly engaged in constructing a co-ownership of the performance as well as in supporting and listening to each other throughout the practices and performances, all of which illustrate 'promotive interaction'.

For the DN practices, the professional dancer's enthusiasm and ability to see movement potentialities for any of the participants shaped DN participants' perceptions of the process of creating a performance and their role in this process in pronounced ways. Despite taking charge of the process of creating a performance with participants in the group, the professional dancer was at the same time capable of making the DN participant feel important for the process and the performance. We suggest that 'individual accountability' and 'promotive interaction' are strongly connected to participant's experiences of being 'seen' and to their experiences of being part of a process in which the performance is created especially for them – for their particular group with these particular bodies.

In continuation of our concluding remarks, we would like to emphasise that the results of the survey should be interpreted with some reservations, especially in the comparison of DN and DY participants to sports club members. The material did not allow us to test the statistical significance of the differences identified between the participants in the dance programmes and members of sports clubs in general or within different sports activities. We cannot, therefore, conclude that the dance activities are superior to sports club activities in fostering interpersonal relationships. Nevertheless, the high percentages of both DN and DY participants developing new friendships serve as a strong indication that the dance programmes have the potential to build up interpersonal relationships among participants within a relatively short time frame. Furthermore, forming part of a convergent parallel design, these indications from the survey study support the overall message from our analysis of the qualitative data using cooperative learning theory. They tell us that

dance practices organised along the lines of the DN and DY programmes convincingly foster interpersonal relationships among participants.

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