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Dancing as searching with Deleuze – a study of what students in physical education teacher education express and experience in creative dance lessons

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ABSTRACT

Physical education (PE), and specifically the teaching area of dance, has been identified as an important pedagogical setting within which young people develop creativity. Creativity is thus an important aspect of schooling. Several studies have suggested however, that dance is seldom taught in PE in ways that acknowledge creative aspects of movement learning, and that students in physical education teacher education (PETE) receive insufficient training in the area of dance. Very little research has been conducted specifically on how teachers and PETE students understand the subject tradition of creative dance. The aim of this paper is to create insights into what PETE students express and experience in creative dance lessons where we specifically explore a pedagogy based on imitation. To address this aim, empirical material was generated through observations and logbooks during a pedagogical sequence of creative dance at a Swedish PETE institution. Deleuzian concepts of palpation and experimentation were used to guide our analysis. The results of this study show alternative ways of understanding what can happen when students participate in creative dance lessons. Our findings contribute to researchers' and teacher educators' understandings of students' experiences of working with spaces of creativity in PETE, and how these experiences can be used in teaching of creative dance.

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Introduction

Physical education (PE), and specifically the teaching area of dance within PE, has been identified as an important pedagogical setting within which young people develop creativity (Engdahl, Barker, and Lundvall 2021; Neville and Makopoulou 2020; Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2019; Marquis and Metzler 2017; Carlgren and Nyberg 2015; Torrents et al. 2013). A key factor of creativity encompasses young people's capabilities to operate in unexpected situations, and the development of creativity is an important aspect of schooling (Neville and Makopoulou 2020; Beghetto and Kaufman 2014). Several studies have suggested however, that dance is seldom taught in PE in ways that acknowledge

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creative aspects of movement learning (Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2020; Ekberg 2016; Carlgren and Nyberg 2015; Baker 2015; Rustad 2012). Some scholars have even suggested that dance is taught by PE teachers in ways that thwart the development of creativity (Gard 2006). The aim of this paper is to create insights into what students in physical education teacher education (PETE) express and experience in the subject tradition of creative dance in terms of creativity. To address this aim, we explore PETE students' participation in creative dance and what happens when spaces for exploration of movement processes are at hand in dance teaching in PETE. In this paper we present the results of a study in which the first author worked with PETE students to develop their knowledge of creative dance.

Background

Though marginalized, creative and aesthetic aspects of dance have been part of PE in countries such as England, Sweden and the US since the early 1900s (Vertinsky and Kirk 2016). Creative dance emerged as a subject tradition in the early 1900s as a protest against classical ballet, folk dance and other forms of dance based on established steps and movements (Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2019). Creative dance involved the body's 'natural' and 'everyday' movements as part of what might be considered dancing (Ørbæk 2021). In an educational context, creative dance unfolded in two different ways (Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2019). One central direction developed in USA and was influenced by the work of Margaret N H'Doubler amongst others. In this direction, attention was given to students' embodied movement experiences in the process of exploring dance. The other direction developed in Europe and was underpinned mainly by the work of Rudolf Laban. This direction involved a greater conceptual awareness of movement principles such as body, effort and space as means in the creative processes (Ørbæk 2021). In PETE, elements from both approaches have been combined in various ways, and creative dance tends to be about 'expressing subjective, bodily experience through dance that uses the body to express a dance that is created within different dance forms' (ibid, 2). Similar descriptions of creative dance are also seen in dance education more broadly (Rebello Leandro, Monteiro, and Filipe 2018; Steinberg and Steinberg 2016; Gilbert 2015). Furthermore, creative dance belongs to an aesthetic discourse of teaching in PE (Mattsson and Lundvall 2015). Researchers claim that when students are taught creative dance within PE, they a) develop their creativity by composing dances, and b) learn to express subjective experiences and inner emotions (Çetin and Çevikbaş 2020; Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2019; Mattsson 2016; Steinberg and Steinberg 2016; Keun and Hunt 2006). Literature focusing on dance in schools further suggests that in creative dance, students expand their emotional, physical and cognitive capabilities by means of collaborative creative processes (Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2020), gain new movement experiences (Rustad 2012), and are given 'opportunities to engage in the complexities of problem-solving in our society' (Torrents et al. 2013, 104). The subject tradition of creative dance has involved many pedagogical strategies ranging from teaching based on students' movement experiences (Engdahl, Barker, and Lundvall 2021), improvisation (Rustad 2012), story interpretation through movement (Baker 2015), metaphorical instructions (Torrents et al. 2013) and conceptual-based approaches (Ørbæk 2021). Although research suggests that creative dance pedagogy has moved beyond task-based approaches

and imitation (Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2019; Steinberg and Steinberg 2016), such approaches still permeate parts of creative dance teaching in PE and PETE. For instance, movement imitation is part of establishing and upholding habits in PE practice (Quennerstedt 2013), employed to develop students' movement qualities (Gibbs, 2013), and used as starting points in exploratory dance assignments (Mattsson 2016) connected to students' social affiliation (Ørbæk 2021).

Although dance teaching in PE has been identified as an important pedagogical setting for developing students' creativity, researchers have also claimed that dance as it takes place within school PE seldom explicitly addresses creative aspects. Gard (2006) even asserts that teaching in PE has constituted 'the tyranny of the anti-aesthetic' (p. 237), and that this has hindered creative movement learning. Moreover, the aesthetic discourse of dance teaching in which creative aspects are valued has long been marginalized (Mattson and Larsson, 2020; Quennerstedt 2013). In this paper, we explore creative aspects of pedagogies based on imitation. We explore further creative dance teaching in PE and PETE in which students operate in unexpected situations while dancing (Engdahl, Barker, and Lundvall 2021; Mattsson and Larsson, 2020).

In light of the potential benefits offered by dance teaching in PE to develop students' creativity, the roles of teacher education and teachers emerge as important. It is after all the teacher who can significantly impact the nature of the dance education that students receive. Very little research has been conducted specifically on teachers and students in PETE. As a result, little is known about the ways teachers and students in PETE understand the subject tradition of creative dance (Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2020). Engdahl, Barker, and Lundvall (2021) note that creativity is explicitly referred to in Swedish PETE curricula however they also note that it is difficult to know what creativity and exploration come to mean for PETE students (see also Baker 2015).

Research design

To address the question of what PETE students express and experience when operating in spaces of exploration during creative dance lessons, a pedagogical sequence was designed and implemented in an optional dance course in a Swedish PETE program. The PETE students are in their fifth and final year of teaching degrees that will enable them to teach pupils aged 6–18 years. The overall learning outcome of the dance course was to develop knowledge in dance didactics with a focus on the subject tradition of creative dance. The pedagogical sequence took place during the COVID-19 pandemic and contained seven lessons á 90 minutes, which involved collaborative planning, performing and evaluating the implemented sequence. The general structure of the unit along with the content of the first lesson were initially planned by the teacher/researcher, while the content of the remaining six lessons was collaboratively determined by the teacher/researcher and the students attending the course. The first lesson contained an introduction to the unit, exploration of one movement assignment, along with time for reflection and discussion. To focus the participants' exploration of creative dance, the students were invited to read relevant course material before the first lesson. The course material consisted of texts on creative dance teaching (for instance Mattsson and Larsson, 2020). After the students' reading they asked the teacher questions of how to work with pedagogies which led to the teacher introducing new tasks by which the

students were given opportunities to explore new and unpredictable movements (Mattsson and Larsson, 2020). Partly due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and with an aim to keep physical distance between the students while dancing, one question that was discussed was whether it was possible to include exploratory assignments based on movement imitation and mirroring. It was also important allowing pedagogy to serve as a counterweight to a teaching that consists of instructions of specific and pre-determined movements (ibid). During the dance unit the teacher/researcher and students worked together iteratively to explore and revise assignments. While planning, performing and evaluating the sequence the philosophical conceptualization provided by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Todd May was considered to continuously pose new questions. In the result section of this paper, three examples from the dance unit are presented.

Below, we describe our theoretical and methodological approach by presenting the theoretical framework of the study, sample, data production and finally how data from the study were generated and analyzed.

Theoretical framework

When studying what PETE students express and experience in creative dance in PETE, we are guided by a philosophical conceptualization provided by Deleuze and May. To further conceptualize creative movement learning, we borrow May's reading of Deleuze's writing and specifically the concepts of *palpation* and *experimentation* (May 2005). Although neither Deleuze nor May considered education in any detail – Deleuze (1994) wrote a few notes on learning and teaching – their ideas offer multiple ways to discuss what students express and experience when operating in spaces of exploration as they participate in creative dance in PETE.

Following on from the French philosophical traditions of existentialism and post structuralism, Deleuze developed an ontological thinking that concerned questions of creativity and newness. His writing is permeated by his own insistent attempt to move beyond pre-given positions and already defined possibilities (Olsson 2009). Deleuze develops a philosophical thinking 'that creates opportunities for change and variety' (Stagoll 2013, 83). One concept that is central to Deleuze's philosophy is *difference* (Deleuze 1994). To illustrate the process of understanding difference, May (2005) borrows the term *palpation* from clinical medicine. To palpate entails a physical examination of a lesion where the doctor senses the lesion without experiencing it directly. In the area of philosophy, Deleuze suggests that thinking is that which 'palpates something that cannot be directly comprehended. It palpates something that . . . eludes our knowledge. Concepts palpate difference, and by doing so they give voice to it. It is a strange voice, eerie and perturbing' (ibid, 21). May goes on to discuss these concerns in relation to music, and specifically the work of John Coltrane. May suggests that Coltrane,

did not so much compose or arrange or express; he searched . . . [He] puts music in the center of the account, rather than seeing it as a means . . . We need to recognize that Coltrane was as much a vehicle for the music as he was its master. This is why his relation to the music was one of searching rather than expression. The music played itself through him as much as he played it (ibid, 157).

May suggests that to palpate involves a process of searching that which is unknowable (difference), not in order to discover what there is to be known, but as a continual process of exploration. In such a process, one explores the strange voice of that which cannot be known directly. Following May's reading of Deleuze, we can understand creative processes in music or dance as processes of palpating difference and not processes primarily concerned with mastering or expressing something which is already identified. This suggests that explorative processes where the lesion – or in our case, the dance – is that which guides the movements of the hands or the bodies. The dancing bodies seem to serve as vehicles for searching that which cannot fully be known and that might only manifest as a strange voice. May's concept of palpation seems to signal Beckman's (2017) illustrations of Deleuze's philosophy in terms of dance, suggesting a way of 'dancing "beyond yourself"' (101). This suggests that creative dance in education is not primarily a means for learners to express themselves through movement, but a movement practice through which learners' bodies and actions serve as vehicles for the almost known, a strange voice that can't be identified.

A second central concept borrowed from the Deleuzian theoretical framework for this study is *experimentation* (May 2005). In this study teaching becomes a project of experimentation acknowledging the 'not-yet seen' in educational practices. Olsson (2009) notes that the Deleuzian notion of experimentation differs from the positivist idea of experimentation as controlling parameters and working towards an expected outcome. Olsson argues that the Deleuzian notion of experimentation suggests a way for teachers to work whereby the children's subjectivity and learning are seen as never really possible to predict, control, supervise or evaluate against predefined goals. May (2005) concurs with Olsson, adding that creativity is central to experimentation and that to experiment is to act without any assurance about the results of one's experimenting. When thinking with Deleuze, teaching becomes an experimental project with spaces of exploration, 'that offers us no guarantees, because it is always other and more than we can imagine' (ibid, 152).

To our knowledge, May's and Deleuze's conceptual frameworks have not yet been used in dance education in PE and PETE. Using May's concepts palpation and experimentation is to suggest a way to think about what PETE students can express and experience in a context of creative dance in PETE. Thinking with these concepts in relation to pedagogical practices, the latter can be said to reflect ways in which PETE students operate in spaces of exploration. The concepts palpation and experimentation are utilized to guide our analysis of how the students describe their experiences and what they express during lessons of creative dance in PETE.

Participants

Eleven students in their fifth and final year of their PETE education from a Swedish PETE program participated in the optional dance course and in the pedagogical unit that lasted two weeks during a fall semester. The first author of this paper was the teacher of the unit. The teacher/researcher had worked with dance artistically for 10 years prior to the study and had taught creative dance for five years. The course aimed to help course participants to deepen and broaden their knowledge of movement and dance. The syllabus contained, for example the statement, 'the main theme of *Movement and Dance* includes movement

communication where creation and exploration as didactical perspectives is the focal point' (Swedish School of Sports and Health Sciences 2020, authors' translation). The students had encountered creative dance in other courses in their program. Thus, they were relatively experienced with creative dance and had worked with dance didactics. Some of the students knew each other well while others knew each other only slightly. The teacher/researcher had taught half the group in four web-based lessons focusing on creative dance during an earlier semester. In this study, we present examples from three of the students as they reflected on movement exploration in both of the two forms of data.

Data production

To provide insights into what PETE students can express and experience in creative dance, two forms of data were produced. First, video observation data were created. Two cameras were placed in opposite corners of the sports hall to capture a general impression of the activity taking place (see Aarskog, Barker, and Spord Borgen 2019). The preservice teachers were informed in advance that they would be filmed. As Mattsson notes: 'video observations give the researcher a possibility to notice both verbal communication and non-verbal bodily actions' (Mattsson 2016, 89). Öhman and Quennerstedt (2012) state that this method can provide insights into *what* is happening in the practice that is studied, as well as *how* it happens. Video observations allowed for repeated viewing of the dance lessons. The video-data comprised approximately 18 hours of film from the two cameras.

Second, during the first lesson the students received analogue logbooks (see Barker, Larsson, and Nyberg 2020, for digital equivalent). The students were given approximately 15 minutes each lesson to write in their books. They were asked to reflect on questions relating to creative movement in PETE, for example, 'reflect on what you have explored during this assignment' and 'write down one thing that you experienced during your creative movement exploration'. The amount of text produced in the logbooks by each PETE student varied from seven pages to 18 pages, with 133 pages of text being produced in total.

Analysis

Analysis was abductive (Graneheim, Lindgren, and Lundman 2017) and iterative. The analytic process was characterized by a systematic and repetitive process where data and theory were continuously re-visited and discussed by the involved researchers in terms of differences and similarities (ibid). Through this iterative process, the researchers developed a shared understanding that formed the basis of the interpretation of the empirical material.

The first step of analysis involved the authors getting familiar with the data. The video data were viewed in their entirety once while taking notes. Focus was given to the PETE students' verbal comments and body movements (see Mattsson 2016). The logbooks of the students were read twice, and notes were made primarily in a deductive manner, as they were interpreted through the lens of the theoretical framework. The authors observed for example, that the students' expressions and descriptions included an

ambiguity in relation to issues of ownership of movement expression (an idea related to palpation – see above). Note taking was not solely deductive since it also involved a search for patterns (for instance ways of reflecting on experiences of responding to unpredictability).

In the second step, the first author focused on two analytical questions (AQs) while examining the data: AQ 1) How do processes of palpating difference unfold in regards to the PETE students' participation in the subject tradition of creative dance? and AQ 2) How do the PETE students speak, act and write in terms of what they express and experience when dancing by experimentation? The video data were again viewed in their entirety and the logbooks of the students were read again by the first author while considering the two AQs and taking notes. The notes were read and commented on by all authors. As a last step, students' quotes were sorted into ways of experiencing spaces of exploration such as 'PETE students describe creative dance characterized by processes of palpating difference' (following from AQ 1) and 'PETE students explore creative dance without knowing what will come out of the exploration' (following from AQ 2). Finally, the findings were discussed amongst the authors in light of the two analytical questions and were sorted into sub-categories such as 'Serving as a vehicle of the dance'.

Ethical considerations

The researchers followed the Swedish Research Council's principles for social science research (Swedish Research Council 2017). Wright and O'Flynn (2012), among others, stress the relevance of protecting participants. The participants were given detailed information about the study prior to data collection. All participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could cancel their participation at any time. Consent was given using a form signed by the first author and the participants. Concerning confidentiality, two points are worth noting. The first concerns the video recordings. As a government body, the higher education institution where the research takes place owns the films. This makes the recordings official. The files are saved on an external hard-drive in a locked space at the teacher/researcher's institution, and all files will be deleted after the study is finished. Second, the students' real names were not used when transcribing and/or discussing the data. Students were informed that in all texts they would be anonymized and that the films would not be used in any other project. They were also informed that the films after the study were to be deleted.

Results

In this study we have explored ways in which PETE students operate in spaces of exploration to create insights into what they express and experience when participating in creative dance lessons. Our analysis is guided by the Deleuzian concepts palpation and experimentation. We identified three ways of operating in spaces of exploration relating to what the PETE students express and experience in creative dance, labeled as: a) moving in spaces of unpredictability; b) almost dancing, and; c) serving as a vehicle of the dance.

Moving in spaces of unpredictability

Moving in spaces of unpredictability is generated as part of an exploration of PETE students practicing a common dance assignment in creative dance teaching in PE and PETE, called a mirror-assignment. This assignment was taught to the students during the first lesson of the unit. Addressing movement exploration through mirroring was one of the aims of the unit. The task also allowed students to get to know one another, and thus helped to develop a safe space for further exploration. Before the students began to dance, the class discussed previous experiences of exploring new and unpredictable movements in class. Anna suggested for example, that:

What is characteristic of creative dance, and what distinguishes it from other ways of learning, is that it is grounded in exploration. Movement exploration can be done in millions of ways, which also is part of the fascination of it. It can feel unfamiliar and uncomfortable to be thrown out without tactics, but the feeling of freedom ... results in ... that one manages to be thrown out.

The mirror-assignment was initially carried out with students dancing in pairs, facing one another and mirroring each others' movements. The assignment began by one of the students leading the movements while the other mirrored the movements. The two then changed roles. Based on the class discussion about exploring new and unpredictable movements, the teacher/researcher revised the mirror-assignment so that also the roles of the one leading and the one mirroring were not predetermined and thus also to be explored in the assignment. The students were asked not to choose who was leading or mirroring but simply to focus on each other and mirror what they see. They were asked to make it impossible for an observer to determine who is initiating the movements and who is mirroring. The students described their dancing following the final instruction as unpredictable. Anna expressed her experience of dancing in this assignment in the following way: '[I danced] by not knowing or thinking about what movements I would perform. It happened spontaneously ... the movements emerged in the moment. Because it was something new.'

For Deleuze, human activity, whether one is thinking or moving, 'is at least as unconscious as it is conscious. That is one of the things meant by the suggestion that Deleuze *palpates* his subject matter' (May 2005, 112). The students who were dancing stated that they were unable to predict each other's movements. This thought was also affirmed by the students observing the assignment while sitting at the side of the gym. And, because it was an assignment of mirroring each other's movements, the students were unable to predict their own movements. Further, it was unclear who in the pair was leading and mirroring the movements. This uncertainty pervaded the dance assignment. The Deleuzian notion of experimentation (May 2005) suggests that actions are never possible to be fully predicted. The practices of the students can be characterized as movement experimentations, where they are unable to predict what their partner or they themselves will do. This sentiment was picked up on several occasions by all students. Elliot for example commented: '[There is] high unpredictability in who leads/ mirrors. Exciting to see what happens'. For Jim, the emergence of the movements came from somewhere indefinable: 'I sometimes felt that no one was leading the movement'. The students' movements seemed often fully simultaneous. Anna described her

experience of the assignment as seeing her own movements through someone else's movements. She stated that what she does is 'follow and see one's own mirror-image but in someone else'.

We identified three factors that brought about the emergence of such movement exploration: a) the speed of the movements, where performance of slow movements gave the students opportunities to experience unpredictability in movement exploration, b) the level of movement complexity, where less complexity of movements seemed to give students opportunities to experience an unpredictability while dancing. The level of complexity of movement seemed to correspond to the instruction by the teacher to facilitate the act of mirroring. As Jim stated, he 'didn't use whole body movements that are more difficult to mirror . . . [and] it was safer to do less complex movements to be able to focus on not revealing who was the leader and the one mirroring'. And c) the students' familiarity with each other, where those who danced together with friends, and whose personal movement patterns were familiar, seemed to gain increased opportunities to experience dancing beyond the sense of predictability in movement exploration. As Elliot described after having observed a few of his classmates pair dancing during this assignment:

There is a really big difference between the ones who have studied in the same class before and the ones who have not . . . It is really obvious that they [who have studied in the same class before] do the movements more simultaneous and are more in sync and it is really difficult to see who is leading [the movements] . . . they are like stuck together.

Both simultaneous movement exploration involving non-predetermined and unpredictable movements and the ambiguity of movement origin appeared of primary concern to the participants. The PETE students described ways of getting access to an experience of a strange and not completely familiar voice (Deleuze 1994; May 2005).

Almost dancing

Almost dancing relates to two dance assignments that were developments from the mirror-assignment common in creative dance teaching presented above. Again, the teacher/researcher created a dance assignment based on movement imitation and that acknowledged the seemingly unconscious movement experiences suggested by the students in the previous assignment. In the two dance assignments, the students and the teacher-researcher participated together in the same dance. During two lessons, the participants were presented with two different music videos projected on a big screen in front of them in the gym. Didactic considerations were made by the teacher/researcher with an aim to acknowledge the unconscious character of the students' dancing in the previous assignment. The movements on the screen consisted largely of movements improvised in the moment, and contained, to a great extent, complex and sudden movements and had not been created to be reproduced. The teacher/researcher told the students that he knew that the assignment was impossible to succeed with and he encouraged the students to enjoy the assignment: 'Please, let yourself go totally. I will put the lights out. All will dance, including me. Nobody will watch. You will not get examined. I want you to have fun! . . . and it might be messy, but that is the point'. The two dances on the screen had not been shown to the students in any previous class in

their educational program, yet may have been seen by them outside the school context. The participants were invited to mirror the movements on the screen as immediately and as closely as possible. Each dance assignment ended with a moment for student reflection. The students were given 5–7 minutes to reflect individually in their logbooks, followed by a class-discussion led by the teacher/researcher. Jim commented for example, after having danced the first assignment: ‘With this dance assignment, everything is unpredictable in the beginning’.

The assignments produced a movement exploration characterized by continuous immediate adjustments and re-adjustments of movements. The majority of the students’ movements were sudden, abrupt, and hesitant. For instance, the students quickly adjusted directions of arm movements in relation to what appeared on the screen, they abruptly modified whole body movements forward and backward, and sometimes they suddenly paused movement sequences to move to new kinds of movement sequences. As Jim commented for example, ‘I often ended up slightly behind because I did not know what would happen’. Elliot described the experience of a halting dance: ‘It can almost look like dance . . . I danced, sort of, in relation to the quick movements I had time to perceive’. The ‘almost’ and ‘sort of’ references to dancing possibly indicate that the student was dancing in terms of continuously operating in unexpected situations. The assignment to mirror improvised, sudden and complex movements that had not been created to be reproduced consists of a seemingly hopeless but at the same time enjoyable, lively and messy search for that which cannot be mastered. The students seem to enjoy the explorative processes as they at times burst out in laughter. Similar to May’s (2005) discussion about the music of Coltrane, the students do not work with creative aspects by composing sequences of movements or by learning to express inner emotions (Çetin and Çevikbaş 2020; Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2019), but by engaging wholeheartedly in a playful, and seemingly partly unconscious, activity of searching.

Anna further described the ‘almostness’ of dancing: ‘It [the dance] does not become an exact replication . . . for the person who sees the screen . . . A gap emerges between the movements on the screen and the person’s movements’. While dancing, the students at times felt like they replicated exactly what was presented to them, but were unsure. Anna stated that sometimes ‘it felt like I did exactly as in the video, but if I had seen myself from outside I probably didn’t’. Even if the student felt as if she immediately mastered the dance presented to her, she indicated that this is not the case. Observing the videorecording, the dance is one of searching and continuously operating in realms of unpredictability. The student’s dancing suggested a continuous search for movements that are intended to be neither mastered nor fully identified by the students. Further, Elliot described how his dance was imbued by a sense of uncertainty:

Because they are movements that you don’t know in advance, many unpredictable movements emerge that give a lot of space for just that, I mean contingency . . . The movements were quick and spontaneous.

Anna commented that ‘it was unpredictable when it went too fast or when I did not see all movements clearly . . . There were no pre-decided movements, that gave more space for movement exploration’. Jim added that the ‘movements emerged in the moment because nothing was determined beforehand’. He also stated that he experienced a freedom of moving in relation to the ambiguous nature of the assignment: ‘It was

free, when given the possibility to explore because the movements were unpredictable'. Developing capabilities of operating in unexpected situations seem to be of significance in determining what PETE students express and experience in creative dance in PETE.

Serving as a vehicle of the dance

Serving as a vehicle of the dance also relates to the two dance assignments presented in the section above. The majority of the movements the students were presented with are unexpected and the students immediately respond to the movements by attempting to mirror the dancer(s) on the screen. Both Elliot and Jim commented that when they danced, they sometimes experienced how they were not in control of their movements. Observing the dance in the video, it occasionally seems as if the students' body parts are pulled in directions that they have neither planned nor initiated. Sometimes it appears as though the hands and arms of the students are lifted pre-reflexively. At other moments, their heads seem to be dragged in different directions rather than the students themselves actively are moving their heads in these directions. Jim stated, for example, that 'I experienced that I did not express *myself* ... I felt that the dance owned me'. This idea is further expressed by Elliot, who commented that, 'The dance used me as a vehicle to create unexpected movements'. Sometimes the students seem to experience themselves as channels for that which is not pre-determined. The students navigate in an unfamiliar space where they do not intend to discern specific movement qualities or to get familiar with certain movements. Anna states that: '[w]ith this assignment, everything is unpredictable'. The students' focus seems not to be on mastering compositions of movements or attempting to express subjective experiences or inner emotions (see e.g. Çetin and Çevikbaş 2020; Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2019). Instead the workings of the students seem to involve making themselves available to encounter unexpected situations. What a Deleuzian reading of the students' experiences and expressions suggests is that there are no particular movements defined in advance (Deleuze 1994; May 2005). While students dance, certain movements actualize, such as immediate adjustments and re-adjustments of body parts and lifting movements of hands and arms. They offer an understanding of exploratory processes entailing responses to the precariousness of the dance. At a first glimpse of the above described movement tasks, one might read the students' actions as quite passive reproduction and mirroring of visual stimuli. Yet, by giving account to Rothfield's reading of Deleuze in the field of dance, one might suggest that the students' '[d]ancing represents one sphere of master activity, expressed within a kinaesthetic ... [and pedagogical] milieu' (Rothfield 2017, 134). The students' sudden and seemingly pre-reflexive reactions to the stimuli seem to be actions governed by unconscious reflexes. Rothfield writes: 'If the master reacts by way of some momentary thought or experience, such reaction is expressed forthwith, in an immediate reaction' (ibid). The dance assignment is set up in such a way; lights in the ceiling are put out, the students are told that nobody will watch, that no one will be examined, and that they ought to enjoy the moment, with the aim to encourage the students to explore movement experiences that were unknown to them. Anna says that: '... it [the dance] was to a high degree without my control ... because it gets ... unpredictable what will come and what I will do'. Following May's (2005) reading of Deleuze, creative aspects of dance appear to entail

an endless, and in some sense, eerie, search and exploration of movements. As the students attempt to mirror movements that did not lend themselves to mirroring, they can be said to explore the strange voice of that which cannot be known directly.

We identified two factors when operating in spaces of movement exploration that facilitated serving as a vehicle. When the students: a) were very focused on the complexity of the dance on the screen, and b) aimed to reproduce the movements that appeared on the screen as immediate and as detailed as possible. It seems that because of the vast complexity of the dances on the screen, the overall quick movements of the dances, and their unfamiliarity with them, the students do not control the movements they perform and do not achieve a sense of ownership of the dance. The students described this in terms of serving as vehicles of the dance, or the dance expressing itself through them (their bodies), rather than regarding the dance as a means to express themselves.

Discussion and concluding thoughts

The aim of this paper was to create insights into what PETE students express and experience in creative dance in terms of creativity. To address this aim, we explored PETE students' participation in lessons of creative dance and what happens when spaces for exploration of movement processes are at hand in dance teaching in PETE. Our analysis guided by the concepts palpation and experimentation (May 2005) suggests three significant aspects of what students express and experience in creative dance in PETE teaching: moving in spaces of unpredictability, almost dancing, and serving as a vehicle of the dance.

The few investigations that have examined notions of creative aspects of dance in PE and PETE, suggest that creative capabilities are mainly considered either in terms of learning to express subjective experiences or developing creativity by composing dances (see e.g. Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2020, 2019; Steinberg and Steinberg 2016). This study shows alternative ways of understanding what can happen when PETE students operate in spaces of exploration during creative dance lessons. In order to offer the students opportunities to operate in unexpected situations while dancing, a central pedagogical consideration during the creative dance lessons was that the movements that the students were expected to respond to were, a) based on improvisation, and, b) presented to them in the moment while dancing (and not before). This study shows that when students are exploring creative dance, they can be confronted with that which they only can get a sense of. During the lessons, the students do not learn to *adopt* predetermined forms of dance and build up a mastery of movements (Mattson and Larsson, 2020; Quennerstedt 2013), but they can, by encountering spaces of exploration, learn to operate with unanticipated movement experiences. For instance, they can learn to operate with ambiguities of from where or who movements emerge, they can learn to acclimate to experiences, sometimes eerie and perturbing, of constant re-adjustments of movements, and, respond to experiences of serving as vehicles for the emergence of unexpected movements. This can, according to May (2005) be described as a palpation of difference (the unknowable), as a continual process of experimentation. And, following Rothfield (2017), such a process does not seem to be a conscious one, but governed by unconscious reflexes.

In line with the dominating discourse of dance teaching in PE and PETE, teaching pre-arranged dances have overshadowed creative movement learning (Backman, Nyberg, and Larsson 2020; Mattson and Larsson 2020; Ørbæk and Engelsrud 2020). In such teaching, steps and movement qualities are predetermined and evaluated against pre-planned goals.

In line with Olsson's reading of Deleuze (2009), creative dance suggests that the movement experiences PETE students gain when operating in spaces of exploration are never fully possible to predict, though it is to operate with the unknown. For teacher educators and teachers, this involves organizing pedagogical spaces for experimentation of movement (Engdahl, Barker, and Lundvall 2021). Creative aspects of dance in PETE can involve experimentation (May 2005) without any assurance about the results of one's experimenting. The results of this study suggest, in a didactic sense, that creative dance has less to do with skill acquisition (Keun and Hunt 2006) as with operating in unpredictable and ambiguous movement environments (Engdahl, Barker, and Lundvall 2021). When movement experiences and expressions of the students occur, they do not seem to be considered a means for subjective expression but signaling what Beckman (2017) states as 'dancing "beyond yourself"' (p. 101). Creative dance can be regarded a means for the emergence of new and unexpected movements through the actions of the dancing student.

We have suggested ways of understanding what can happen when PETE students operate in spaces of exploration as they participate in creative dance lessons based on our Deleuzian approach. Creativity could be understood in other ways and if we worked from other starting assumptions, we might end up with different conclusions. This study is small scaled and the findings are based on pedagogical sequence consisting of a unit of seven lessons of creative dance in PETE. We have not studied whether these students developed creativity, but have illustrated some ways in which they have operated and reflected over their experiences in creative dance lessons.

We want to conclude by suggesting that creative dance in education offers spaces for experimentation (Gilbert 2015; Marquis and Metzler 2017). The study shows that creative dance can involve movement exploration of non-predetermined and unpredictable movements which might result in PETE students' development of their capabilities to operate in unexpected situations. A strength of the study is its use of a theoretical framework – specifically the notions of experimentation and palpation – that contribute with an alternative perspective on what students express and experience within PETE. Furthermore, our findings can offer researchers and teacher educators new insights and understandings of PETE students' experiences of working with spaces of exploration and creativity in PETE, and how this can be used in creative dance teaching. Further research is needed to understand and build knowledge around how to develop spaces for teaching and learning in PE and PETE with a focus on the fostering of and supporting young people's creativity.

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