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To Offer Dance as Aesthetic Experience and Communication Among Elderly People: An Art-Based Study

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Abstract

As a contribution to the field of community dance, this article explores the teacher role in a setting where elderly people are offered to take part in a dance workshop. The aim of the study is to describe the role of the teacher when offering participation in dance as an artistic form among elderly people. The theoretical starting-point for the study is aesthetic experience and communication, based on a phenomenological philosophy, and the approach is arts-based research. The workshop series was observed and filmed. Written reflections were gathered and six of the participants were interviewed. The research material was analyzed in a phenomenological manner. The result shows that the choreographer influences possibilities for participation regarding: how workshops are *designed* and the *inputs* that are given,

the *atmosphere* that is created, how the participants are to use their *bodies*, and how *dance as an artistic form of expression* is offered.

Keywords: community dance, elderly, arts-based research, phenomenology, aesthetic communication



Introduction

This article concerns how dance as an aesthetic form of expression can be offered to elderly people. Existing research regarding music and dance in relation to elderly people can be divided into three focus areas, namely treatment, therapy, and well-being. The treatment research area focuses on benefits from practicing music or dance, for example using music as a means to improve the quality of sleep or prevent depression (Moon, Zi, Hideaki, & Naidu, 2011; Shum, Taylor, Thayala, & Chan, 2014), or benefits of dance activities in comparison with more functional training such as walking (Merom, 2016). When it comes to therapy, Vaillancourt (2012) demonstrates how music therapy, and more specifically community music therapy (CoMT), can contribute to social justice. Another focus is music therapy for residential elderly people with dementia (Tuckett, Hodkinson, Rouillon, Balil-Lozoya, & Parker, 2015). Symptoms of dementia have been shown to improve with the help of music listening (Chan, 2014) and singing (Skingley & Vella-Burrows, 2010). The third focus area, well-being, is most often investigated within the frame of “community dance or music” or defined as “adult music or dance education.” Elderly people’s participation as audience members, performers, composers, or directors have constituted the research objects in these studies.

In the community context, both participants and facilitators are part of a creative process that involves a give and take relationship (Barr, 2013; Hartogh, 2016). Community music involves creativity—music making as a collaborative process with focus on individual interactions (Higgins, 2007). Within community dance, the belief that dance is for everyone and that everybody can dance is a starting-point (Green, 2000). To a large extent, activities within these areas of community are about expressing oneself—one’s thoughts and values—to connect with life experiences and develop social well-being, and to work on finding identity among relationships to other participants in the music or dance community (Camic, Tischler, & Pearman, 2014; Hallam, Creech, Varvarigou, McQueen & Gaunt, 2013, 2014, 2016; In-Sil, Ji-Young, Soon-Jeong, & Hyun-Jung, 2015; Lee, Chan, and Mok, 2010; Pearce & Lillyman, 2015; Phinney, Moody, & Small, 2014). Hallam et al. (2013, 2014, 2016) conclude that active participation in making music has beneficial effects on well-being among elderly people.

A study about community music within a Finnish association in Sweden (Söderman & Westvall, 2017) shows that positive experiences of dance activities encourage members to start to play and sing music. Music and dance are emphasized as intertwined activities and significant for life-long musical learning (Söderman & Westvall, 2017). The participants in the Söderman and Westvall (2017) study highlight how musical activities that include dancing, singing, and playing music give them higher life quality such as health and social benefits. Musical activities are shown to provide support when life involves hard times. Söderman and Westvall (2017) emphasize a need for aging generations to be active in order to experience benefits from physical, intellectual and emotional activities. A specific activity when it comes to community music is to learn to play together, which Laes (2015) has shown can contribute to empowerment and musical agency among elderly people. Laes (2015) performed a case study where elderly women learned to play rock band instruments in a formal music school context. The study examined individual and shared meanings that the participants assigned to taking part in the rock band, and the findings aligned with John Dewey’s view that the meanings of present learning experiences are constructed along a continuum of the past and the future (Laes, 2015).

Although there is an agreed upon need for initiatives that support elderly people’s well-being, researchers state that little attention has been paid to the role of those facilitating such activities (Hallam et al., 2013, 2014, 2016). In addition, despite the value of existing research, more research is needed that takes the experiences of participants as a starting point (Thornberg, Lindquist, & Josephsson, 2012). Beyond these gaps in existing research, UNESCO’s (2019) website declares that one of its stated millennium goals is to further “a set of practices and activities aimed at making young people and adults better equipped to participate actively in democratic life by assuming and exercising their rights and responsibilities in society.” Hence, it can be stated that all citizens, including elderly people,

shall have the right to learn and use artistic forms of expression, and should be guaranteed cultural access. However, societal structures do not commonly honor elderly people's right to express themselves in dance (Ferm Almqvist, 2016). This is also true in Sweden, the context of the study that is the subject of this article. Therefore, it seems important to focus on artistic dimensions of music and dance as forms of expression available for elderly people from point of view of equality, as well as to study further the role of the teacher, facilitator, or choreographer in such settings.

The aim of this study is to describe and analyze the role of the choreographer in offering participation in dance as an artistic art form among elderly people. The study also sheds light on the participants' experiences throughout a dance workshop. Based on theories of aesthetic experience and communication, a professional dancer and choreographer, together with an assistant leader, collaborated to offer a workshop series for people 65 and over. The choreographer¹ involved in the study had long-term experience as a dancer, choreographer, workshop leader, and artistic director for a dance company. Interested people applied to the workshop by email. The workshop took place during one week in Sweden during fall 2016 with 25 elderly non-professional dancers. Over six days the participants and the choreographer worked together for two hours each day. The workshop ended with the participants presenting a studio performance of their dance piece in front of an audience. We, researchers in dance- and music education, followed the workshop through close observation. We will describe our research approach in more detail later in this article.

Dance, Aesthetic Experience, and Communication

Our starting point for this paper is that when human beings have the chance to experience dance as a multidimensional phenomenon, it is possible to define dance as an aesthetic phenomenon. Dance as an aesthetic phenomenon presupposes an aesthetic experiencing subject, and vice versa (Dufrenne, 1954/1978; Merleau-Ponty, 1962, 1968). According to Dufrenne (1953/1973) aesthetic experience includes three perceptive phases in which the experiencing subject responds in a multi-dimensional and engaged way: *presence*, *representation and imagination*, and *emotion and reflection*. Dance as aesthetic experience can, in other words, be defined as a process where all senses are involved in meaning-making, and wherein it becomes possible to engage with the world through perception, expression and reflection (Andersson & Ferm Thorgersen, 2015; Ferm Thorgersen, 2008). Based on the definition of aesthetic experience we have offered, we will shed light on dance as aesthetic communication.

¹ The choreographer functioned as a teacher during the workshop but will be referred to as the choreographer throughout the paper, as that is her profession.

It is crucial to consider the potential for human beings to become actively aware in their learning, particularly if: (a) dance is seen as shared experience and as a form of expression, (b) active participation in dance leads to dance knowledge, and (c) dance is understood as a multidimensional phenomenon. Three dimensions of awareness can be helpful (Ferm, 2007; Ferm Thorgersen, 2008; Ferm & Thorgersen, 2007; Thorgersen & Ferm Thorgersen, 2008): *awareness of own dance knowledge*, *awareness of others' dance expressions*, and *awareness of one's own role in communication*. *Awareness of own dance knowledge* concerns grasping what one's body is able to express, to listen to oneself and try different movements, to control movements, to be able to choose and motivate expressions, and to conceptualize dance knowledge. This dimension of awareness can be seen as a base for active participation in dance as aesthetic communication. The dimension *awareness of others' dance expressions* regards openness towards surrounding expressions in the dance context. It is about seeing, being inspired by and imitating other dancers, taking in and reflecting on what the choreographer means, being open to the multidimensions of dance, and relating to the dance traditions and responses from an audience. Finally, when it comes to *awareness of one own's role in communication*, being visible for others through dance expression comes in focus. It is about being able to take initiatives, knowing how to act to be visible for others, and being aware about how to function together with others. Not least, it concerns how to contribute in the communicative setting to let the dance exist as a multidimensional phenomenon. Such awareness doesn't need to be verbalized but can be bodily or danced. To reconnect to Dufrenne's (1954/1978) view of aesthetic experience, it can be stressed that presence, representation and imagination, together with emotions and reflection, are also what constitute aesthetic communication. Safeness, curiosity, and respect should be important components in such a view of dance and learning of dance.

Methodology

The current study is based on a phenomenological research approach. The basic principle of phenomenology, formulated by Husserl (1976), is to go "back to the things themselves," as it is through experiences that we gain access to the things themselves. The concept of experience was essential to Husserl, and it became a key signature for the whole phenomenological movement. A starting point was how the world is experienced through subjective perception and the aim of the movement was to find a way to describe these subjective experiences. In other words, phenomenology has been described as a way of thinking about how the world is experienced by human beings in the world.

Through existence, human beings experience the concrete world in all its complexity, which is both historically and contextually dependent. Consequently, a person's existence in time and space provides the prerequisites for the experience, which is not to be interpreted as meaning that the human body is in the world in the same way as external things, such as stones or

chairs. Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasizes the fact that the body lives in time and space. From a life-world point of view, it becomes impossible to separate body-soul, and mind-matter. Rather, these are closely interwoven in the lived world. According to Merleau-Ponty (1962), human beings live in a world they share with other human beings, and furthermore he emphasizes the fact that humankind is inter-subjective by nature. The relationship between a human being and the world and between a human being and other human beings is indissoluble, according to Merleau-Ponty (1962). This leads to a view of the human being as participating in the world. The human being is thus not merely observing, but through the body she is “thrown into the world,” to use Heidegger’s (1996) terminology. Luckman (2000) emphasizes that it is within the inter-subjective collaboration that the structures of the life-world are to be found. According to a phenomenological perspective, the challenge is to find a method that makes it possible to understand individuals and social groups from the lived relations they have to their environments, the world in which they live and participate (Bengtsson, 1998). The purpose is not solely to enlighten the things that already exist, but to see new connections between what is already in existence (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

In order to capture the multidimensionality of dance and music education, we have complemented our methodology with an arts-based research approach. In contrast to the traditional use of written and spoken language, arts-based researchers combine these with alternative forms of expression such as images, movies, sculpture, dance, music, poetry, digital technology, metaphors, or drama (Barone & Eisner, 2012). The forms of expression chosen for this study—text, dance, and video—are motivated by a phenomenological, holistic view of humans, dance, learning, and communication. These forms of expression have been used both in production of material and in the analytical and representational phase of the research. The primary motive has been to widen possibilities for communication and meaning making. Another motive is that several human senses can be used in dance, education, and research, as is the case in everyday perception and communication. A third motive is that tools for understanding, including use of video for representation of results, influence what is possible to understand. The choreographer as well as the participants have given full permission to use the movies in publications.

To be able to elaborate upon the role of the choreographer aiming to offer participation in dance activities, we produced written material based on one interview with the choreographer and six interviews including two male and four female participating dancers, complemented by field notes and video recordings. Encouraged notes and emails written by the participants during and after the workshop were also part of the written material.

Both of us, author-researchers, were present in the dance studio during the workshop as observers sitting in one of the corners of the room. Being present in the room made it possible

for us both to grasp the whole picture of the activity (Wragg, 2013), although we were aware that our presence could affect the context in terms of how relaxed and “natural” the participants could behave. We were also aware that, depending on our positions in the room, it could be difficult to see and hear, as well as formulate and represent, certain expressions. Hence, the scenario was video recorded both through one camera positioned in a corner and one portable camera handled by a professional videographer² as we were situated in the periphery of the dance studio.

We analyzed the material in a phenomenological hermeneutic manner (van Manen, 1997). The analysis process comprised naïve “reading,” structured analysis, comprehensive understanding, and the formulation of holistic results. In other words, firstly we “read” the produced texts and movies several times independently, in order to grasp their meaning as a whole. This naïve reading was followed by a phase of structural analysis where we tried to identify and formulate themes, which provided us with opportunities to collaboratively test emergent concepts. A theme is a thread of meaning that penetrates parts of the text and video-recordings in the process of conveying the meaning of lived experience. The process was finished when the themes validated and deepened the naïve reading. Then, we summarized and reflected upon the main themes and constituting aspects in relation to the aim and the context of the study. Finally, in the last step we formulated the results in everyday language and dance expressions used and performed by the participants. We translated the chosen quotations from the interviewees’ spoken Swedish into English and then had them proofread by a native English-speaker.

Results

The phenomenological analysis generated four main themes that picture the role of the choreographer when it comes to offering participation in dance as an artistic art form among elderly people 65 and over. The themes show how the choreographer influences possibilities for participation in terms of: how workshops are *designed* and what *inputs* are given in the process, what *atmosphere* is created, how participants are to use their *bodies*, and how *dance as an artistic form of expression* is offered. The results will be presented with both video clips and text. Some of the quotations are used in more than one theme, as they represent more than one aspect of the phenomenon.

² Anders B. Larsson, *Anders och Mia*

Design and Inputs: Approach, Stories, Music and Progression



The *approach* of the choreographer can be defined in terms of professionalism, explicitness, naturalism, presence, risk taking, energy, warmth, curiosity, encouragement, caring, and adaptation. Even if the choreographer expressed that she was nervous about going into the workshop series, she went in and tried to be herself and open for the people she met.

I know that I myself am very much in the movement, and I know that people are scared. So, I try to be like a child. You know, hey, sing and shout...then people get a bit crazy inside. All people, I think, have this playfulness. The participants are just unused to use it. (choreographer)

The participants reported experiences on how the choreographer created a positive, unpretentious atmosphere by being open, energetic, and enthusiastic. At the same time as she showed awareness about not letting anyone get hurt, physically or mentally, she treated them as dancers, in a professional way, viewing dance as an artistic form of expression. For example, she used formal dance terms in her communication. In the words of one participant, "It was very fascinating to meet a real dancer and choreographer. She was incredibly inspiring, happy and encouraging." Further, the participants appreciated the choreographer's explicitness and were a bit surprised by the high demands, at the same time as they acknowledged the adaptations she made towards their various bodies and experiences. The choreographer treated the participants as dancers and had high expectations and trust in their possibilities to express themselves in and through dance as an aesthetic expression.

The choreographer asked the participants in advance to write *life stories* that could concern simple everyday topics, or deep experiences. The participants used these stories as grounds for individual and as well as collective improvisations, which turned out to be very touching. One participant expressed:

The improvisations were connected to ourselves, as we were to improvise to what someone in the group had written – that is fascinating, and exciting.”

The part of the group who acted as audience to these improvisations seemed really touched. They cried several times and expressed that they shared similar experiences.

The choreographer’s choice of *music* also influenced what happened in the improvisations. Participants expressed explicitly that they appreciated the chosen musical pieces in connection to different activities. Aspects of music mentioned as crucial were tempo, rhythm, instrumentation, and character. It was also mentioned that the music gave inspiration and ideas, without steering the movements too much. For example, different kinds of music might be offered within an activity.

When it comes to *tasks and progression*, the participants got to train, use, and develop technical, personal, and communicative skills throughout the workshop. Warm-up activities, choreography, and improvisation were combined in each class. Participants appreciated the mix of steered and free activities. The ambition of the choreographer was that the workshop would be received as a creative place where the participants could dwell together in dance as an artistic form of expression. Some participants were aware of improvement over the week:

That first day, and that choreography, it felt a bit tough and hard. I felt that she was tough from the beginning, but it worked out well in the end. We practiced for several days.

Even the improvisation parts were practiced and developed in a conscious way. First, the choreographer suggested the participants use circle movements as a development of the warm-up activity. Then the participants were encouraged to walk around with their eyes directed towards the floor. Gradually they were asked to make eye contact, and thereafter bodily contact.

Different inputs were used to encourage improvisation, such as movements on small papers, metaphors, the music, and not least the prepared stories of the participants.

And then the involvement of our stories, of our histories that came in, which we also were to perform through improvisations, which made it very fun all the time and meaningful, I have to say.

Participants appreciated that they were given specific tasks, at the same time as they were encouraged and expected to improvise. The different activities and the mix in between them, where the participants' earlier experiences were used and developed in relation to new movements and forms of communication, led to something new.

Atmosphere: Freedom, Sharing, Common Age, and Playful Seriousness



The workshop showed an atmosphere of *freedom*. The participants described that ordinary limits were taken away and that they could be themselves in the different dance activities.

Yes, in the workshop with [the choreographer], it felt almost strange. It felt so very natural. It felt like dance was completely my element. It felt like I had done it all my life, and so liberating and nice not to have any limitations.

Limitations mentioned by the participants as absent were, for example, the different roles, societal positions, and norms for how to behave. Their absence might have afforded the relaxed atmosphere observed between the participants, even when someone fell into a common hierarchical position--for example, when one of the male participants thought he

could decide how a group should work by verbally giving the other participants instructions and feedback.

Another aspect of atmosphere, which was mentioned by several of the participants and the choreographer, was the openness for, and willingness to, *share old and new experiences* in co-operation. Some were surprised that the expected co-operation with unknown people went so smoothly.

It was exciting and it was fun. And, we were also to work together and touch each other, but it went rather easy. It wasn't as scary as I thought it should be in the beginning. All of us were open, and we all dared to do things. I experienced that we were open when we got instructions for what to do. Everyone accepted and started to do their best.

Such material reveals that participants were positive and not intimidated, giving themselves in the dance activities even if they were a bit scared initially. They wanted to get to know each other.

It also became clear that the “*common*” age of the participants influenced the atmosphere. On the one hand they underlined that age didn't make a difference, but on the other hand the advanced life experience and relaxedness among the participants contributed to the atmosphere as a whole. The interviewees expressed that they appreciate mixed-age groups, but also understand that dance for elderly people is neglected—that the specific workshop is important as an occasion for anyone to dare to dance.

The aspect of *playful seriousness* consists of unpretentious playfulness. The material reveals that as the participants knew who they were and didn't have to pretend something else, an atmosphere of safety was strengthened. In turn, the safeness allowed the group to be curious, to let go, use their humor, and play. The choreographer described how this approach differed from professional dance contexts, where pretentiousness and technical mastery are often much more prominent. She stressed that it in playful seriousness, new things are discovered continually. The workshops were full of surprises, for both participants and choreographer.

Body: Experience, Awareness, Health and Impetus

The participants' earlier bodily *experiences* of dance as aesthetic communication were limited. As one of them said, "Yes, it was a very strong experience to take part in this workshop, first of all because I am not used to dance. I took a new step in my life and tried it out." Both the choreographer and the participants themselves emphasized that the participants were not professional dancers. "But they are not professionals, they are not experienced dancers, they do not know how to perform an arabesque³" (choreographer). The choreographer simplified the technical movements in the choreography to accommodate participants' bodily limitations.

Participants showed growing *awareness* during the workshop week. This aspect included memorizing movements and movement patterns, and gaining presence in the body in various ways. The ability to memorize movements was emphasized by the choreographer as one of the hardest challenges for participants, while presence was something that participants could achieve more easily while dancing: "When I dance I become present in myself, in my body." This quotation shows the connection between dance activity and awareness in the body. Awareness also includes acceptance of one's own body's possibilities and limitations.

³ An arabesque is a position where the dancer stands on one leg and the other leg extends back behind the body.

Enjoyment and energy are born from the dance. But it is mostly enjoyment and flow in some kind of way. But it is not always so easy either. You can get a feeling of being stuck, that you don't get...that you want to do something, but you can't find that movement. So, it is not always easy that it flows and that you find what you want.

This participant could experience an idea of how a movement should be executed in theory, but their body's limitations made it challenging to embody the specific movements, and modifications had to be made.

Bodily flexibility and mobility were highlighted as important in terms of *health*. Among activities that train flexibility, mobility, and balance, a participant noted dance as one effective activity that prevents becoming stumbling and is good for older people.

When you become older it is about stopping, not allowing degradation, your stiffening both mentally and physically—to act controlled. I think that is where I am standing, that I feel that I need to work out. But the dance...you actually become more inflexible by the years. You can be that way your whole life, but you become even more inflexible. And the dance... it is the same thing with aerobics, also dancing...I believe that the soft movements are really good for older people.

The quotation above emphasizes the ability to stay flexible; for this participant dance is an activity that benefits older people.

The aspect of dance as *impetus* appears in relation to both bodily movement and well-being. Participants' desires to dance were expressed as an impetus to moving. Impetus for bodily movement also focused on a desire to let emotions out through the body.

Dancing gives me access to my emotions. To release and express sorrow...that has been embedded in a frozen chest. To arrive to dance class with a headache, to discover and in my dancing express anger that has not been released...

Participants also expressed dance as impetus for well-being through emotional self-awareness and expression.

Dance as an Artistic Form of Expression: Variety, Emotions, Communication and Exploration



During the workshop participants were invited to try out a *variety* of expressions in dance, both through improvisation and given choreography, as mentioned. The exercises involved communication through dance performance, speaking, and singing, and participants emphasized that they were offered possibilities to express themselves.

Yes, when I hear music. Then I feel like moving my body. And music is the one thing that affects me the most. Enjoyment and energy are born from the dance. But it is mostly enjoyment. And flow in some kind of way.

During various exercises the participants were offered to express their *emotions* in dance as aesthetic experience and communication. One participant said,

Dance is my enjoyment, my game—to be able to experience and express feelings and be able to arrive tired and you feel leached, and to dance that. Or, if you arrive full of energy and to be able to dance that—be able to express emotions and to discover emotions inside of me that I might have hold inside of me. That will be expressed in the dance.

Participants expressed that they discovered, developed, and dealt with their own emotions during this dance experience, performed individually and as a group. One person expressed

that dancing is about expressing oneself in dance— “To get the chance to dance myself.” This participant's own discovery of their emotions through their dancing was also highlighted: “to be able to express emotions and to explore...emotions within me that I might have compressed. These will be expressed in the dance.” Another participant relates dancing to feelings of bodily contact and sensuality, as well as emotional connection.

I am now a 73-year-old that lives alone and without body contact, without closeness, and dance for me is a kind of experience of my own body and some kind of body contact of myself. A feeling of dancing close to someone occurs— even if I am not physically dancing together with anyone, a feeling of closeness that you are together with the bodies that are moving. My entire body has been active and been moving. I do believe that dance has the possibility to remove a whole lot of the feeling of being alone and lack of body contact, lack of sensuality. When you are older you might not have such an active sex-life anymore, but your sensuality is still there. I do believe that you can get a lot out of dance, or at least I do.

The participants expressed themselves in dance both through individual and collective *communication*. This gave the dancers a chance to explore their own and also others' dance expressions. The choreography was described as a connecting force, “This choreography connected and accumulated us in some kind of way—as a group. Then we got united, and then we'd go towards our own path and do what we were supposed to do.” Participants also communicated their dance expressions to an audience, both when they acted as audience and watched each other and during a public studio performance on the last day of the workshop.

The aspect of *exploration* includes participants' exploration of themselves and each other while dancing. Exploration became visible through the participant's own dance expression and in meetings between participants' dance expressions: “Maybe both develop my own movement language, and I learn something from someone who has more knowledge.” The choreographer created possibilities for meetings between bodies where participants met each other with and through their bodies. Exploration also includes new experiences through dance expression with others: “If there is something I take with me, it is the opportunity to explore and get to know other people.” It is clear that the participants who were eager to continue this type of activity appreciated this opportunity. One participant wrote, “My strong wish is to get the opportunity to continue dancing in this kind of way or similar, together with all of you or in another way, preferably regularly.” Another stated, “The past week became like a drug for the body, i.e. a need to continue dancing...!! Maybe it is possible for us to continue to dance together?” Others also emphasized the desire to continue to explore themselves with dance together with this specific group.

Discussion

The study presented in this article aimed to contribute to a discussion of possibilities and limitations when it comes to encouraging opportunities for dance as an artistic art form among elderly people. We have shed light on some crucial aspects concerning design of such an environment. One important aspect of the design includes creating an environment for safeness and letting go in playful seriousness, where limitations are taken away and elderly people can take part on equal grounds. Music is another aspect of the design that seems to have an extraordinary function here, while not taking away from any other aspects. Music was used during the whole workshop to create the atmosphere, as part of the dance performance, and to inspire participants to various expressions. Lastly, the choreographer created a foundation for participants to experience their possibilities and limitations in dance, offering a context where elderly people could explore dance as aesthetic experience and communication. It is obvious that the three dimensions of awareness that constitute aesthetic communication, *awareness of own dance knowledge*, *awareness of others' dance expressions*, and *awareness of one own's role in communication*, were present and facilitated in the activity.

Awareness of own dance knowledge became visible as the participants began to grasp what their bodies were able to express. For example, they were encouraged to view themselves in the mirror and relate their ideas of what to express to how their bodies actually were moving. They were also encouraged to try and choose among different movements in ways that were in harmony with their mature and varied bodies. Further, participants developed more control in terms of embodying and conceptualizing dance knowledge. In other words, they could actively participate in dance as a multidimensional phenomenon, understood as aesthetic communication.

Participants also showed *awareness of others' dance expressions* as they were encouraged to be open for and attentive to surrounding expressions in the dance context. They learned to see, to be inspired by, and to imitate other dancers. The material showed that the participants perceived and reflected upon what the choreographer meant, were open to the multidimensions of dance, and related to dance traditions as well as responses from an audience. They also became more clear in *awareness of their own role in dance as communication*. They participated in activities that built upon being visible for others in dance expressions, took initiatives, and showed awareness of how to function together with others. Equally significant was that all of the participants contributed in the communicative setting and let the dance exist as a multidimensional phenomenon.

A progression in bodily awareness became visible through observations and participants' own expressions. An important finding is that participants used the offered dance as an artistic form of expression in aesthetic experience and communication, where they found more

control over their body and were able to get to know themselves and each other physically, emotionally and existentially. One implication of this study is that the emotional, existential, and aesthetic aspects of aesthetic communication could be illuminated to a higher degree in the above previously described theory of aesthetic communication.

What participants were offered to use, experience, and learn in the week-long workshop can be discussed in relation to the holistic view of dance knowledge seen in Andersson and Ferm Thorgersen (2015), which is presented in figure 1. The figure below shows a life-world phenomenological way of viewing dance knowledge. The dancer is placed in the middle of the figure. She interacts with the parameters of dance (inner circle) and dimensions of dance as an aesthetic object (middle circle). Dance knowledge is situated in various contexts seen in the outer circle. It can be stated that (aesthetic) meaning in dance knowledge is constituted in the gaps (Merleau-Ponty, 1968), where the parameters become intertwined with the dimensions and contexts.

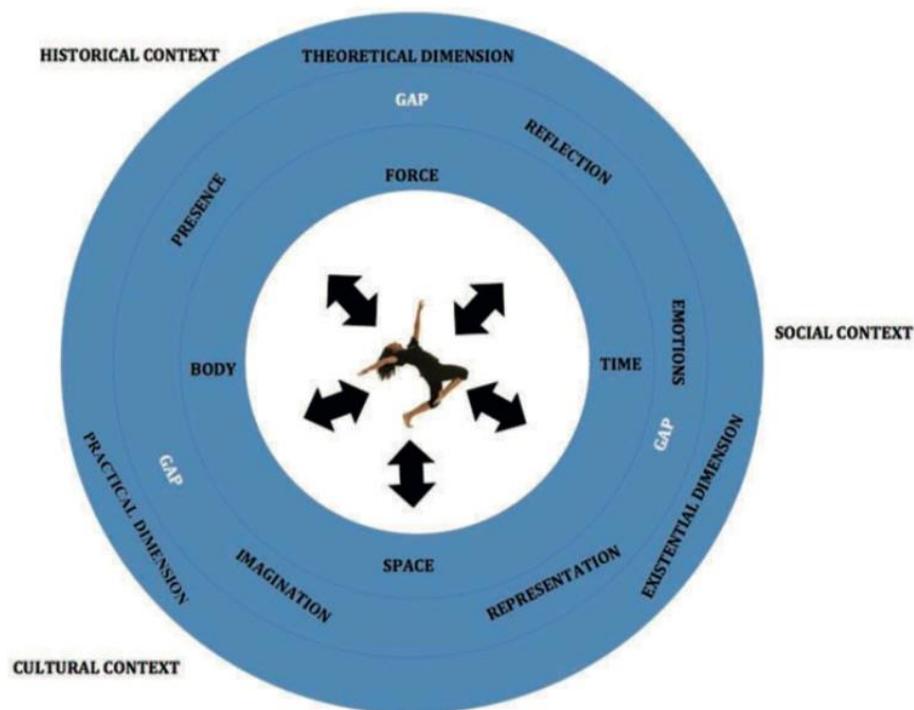


Figure 1. Schematic illustration of a life-world phenomenological way to explore dance knowledge (Andersson & Ferm Thorgersen, 2015).

When viewed from a learning perspective, the organization of the workshops offered a group of elderly participants the opportunity to develop holistic dance knowledge, as all parts of the above figure were included. Participants were provided possibilities to develop their ability to

use their bodies in relation to the different parameters of space, time and force. These parameters can be combined in various ways. During the variety of exercises, participants intertwined, expressing and representing various emotions and presence. The choreographer created assignments where the dancers reflected upon their dancing and used their imagination. Dance became meaningful for participants in the gaps seen in figure 1, where these parameters were intertwined.

This study contributes to an increasingly relevant discussion in the growing field of dance and music education, and challenges common assumptions of what we call “later adulthood arts education.” The choreographer created a foundation for this possibility by offering a context where elderly people explored dance as aesthetic experience. This exploration appeared through a combination of inputs, atmosphere, and bodily awareness, where people had the opportunity to dwell in dance as an artistic form of expression.

“The dimensions of dance have been changed forever after Age on Stage⁴.” (participant)



⁴ Age on Stage was the name of the project, of which the workshop series constituted one part. The project was led by Charlotta Övferholm.

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