

RESEARCH

Exploring Shared Excitement: A Case Study of Participation in Interaction Between Staff and Residents with Intellectual Disabilities

Maria Røgeskov

VIVE The Danish Center for Social Science Research, DK
mrr@vive.dk

This paper explores the participation of residents with intellectual disabilities in their encounters with staff by focusing on the relationship between residents' engagement in activities and the occurrence of shared excitement that is a collective arousal establishing solidarity. The methods used included participant observations and interviews with eight residents and 12 staff at two Danish residential services. The findings illustrate how shared excitement is produced through the establishment of mutual focus on a familiar symbol, shared feelings, and synchronisation of speech, gazes, and bodily movements in resident-staff interactions. The potential of evoking interactional synchrony is related to the residents' familiarity with the symbol used in the activity and to the encounter between resident abilities to engage and staff support. The findings suggest that interactions producing shared excitement can foster residents' participation, a crucial concept in Scandinavian disability policies.

Keywords: Intellectual disability; interaction ritual theory; participation

Introduction

Participation of residents with intellectual disabilities is an established right in international conventions (UN 2007) and a central concept in Danish disability policies (Social-Børne- og Integrationsministeriet 2013; Sundheds- og Ældreministeriet 2015), as in the rest of the Nordic countries. In securing residents' participation, Danish disability policies stress the relationship between social environments and the individual with impairments such as intellectual disabilities (Social-Børne- og Integrationsministeriet 2013). Yet, as Stalker et al. (2011) noted, social isolation still exists among people with intellectual disabilities in general, and they have limited social networks (Maes 2003) despite their enhanced community presence. Hence, participation does not occur merely from being present. Rather than physical presence, scholars have pointed to the importance of "mutual exchanges between individuals which are rewarding for both parties" (Finlay et al. 2008: 532). Following this perspective, participation of residents with intellectual disabilities has been conceptualized as *doing*, involving doing things with others, and *feeling*, such as cohesion in interactions with others, including staff (Kåhlin, Kjellberg & Hagberg 2015). To understand participation, there must be a focus on engagement in activities in interaction and emotional elements that establish cohesion. This understanding of participation was the point of departure for this paper.

Current studies on participation examining enjoyable interactions between residents with intellectual disabilities and staff have shown the occurrence of such situations in encounters involving the residents' preferred interests (Johnson et al. 2010; Johnson et al. 2012). Residents' participation in interactions with staff was related to individual characteristics such as the relationship between age and disabilities and environmental factors such as time in services according to staff (Kåhlin, Kjellberg & Hagberg 2015). Moreover, scholars have attempted to understand interactional synchrony, including how the coordination of gazes, speech (Reuzel et al. 'Conversational Synchronization,' 2013; Reuzel et al. 'Interactional patterns,' 2013), affect attunement (Forster & Iacono 2014), and joint attention (Hostyn & Maes 2009; Hostyn, Heleen & Bea 2011; Hostyn & Maes 2013) can contribute to emotional and high-quality encounters between residents with intellectual disabilities and staff. Synchronisation of interaction patterns, in particular nonverbal elements, relies more on people falling into the same bodily rhythm and less on detecting social clues in interactions. Because of differences in adaptive social skills (Wehmeyer et al. 2008), such detecting may be difficult for some people with intellectual disabilities. Hence, interactional synchronisation may be a catalyst for residents' participation. Such synchronisation appears when persons' verbal and nonverbal behaviour is harmonised in time and form, and it reflects solidarity between persons (Collins 2004: 76). Yet little is known about how changes in situational dynamics, such

as synchronisation, form possibilities for establishing interactions involving shared emotional experiences between residents and staff and how such experiences relate to residents' engagement in activities. Moreover, residents' perceptions of such interactions with staff are mostly unexplored.

This paper explores how shared excitement a collective arousal that produces cohesion between people (Collins 2004: 48), is produced and changes in interactions between residents with intellectual disabilities and staff and how this change relates to residents' involvement in activities. Secondary, this research attends to residents' perceptions of such experiences. As disability policies' focus on participation is put into practice through the support of staff, this paper examines resident-staff interactions. It focuses on how interaction patterns, the residents' emotional associations with symbols (objects, words or gestures that people associate with group membership) and the encounters between resident abilities and environmental factors such as staff support contribute to shared excitement. This paper's contribution is to consider the role of synchronised interaction patterns, in particular nonverbal elements for the occurrence of shared excitement and how this arousal relates to residents' active engagement in resident-staff encounters. Its intention is not to suggest that all interactions should contain shared excitement in residential services. Such experiences fluctuate and resident-staff encounters involve other aspects such as care, where shared excitement may not occur. Yet knowledge about the occurrence of shared excitement is important because these experiences are not only a matter of residents and staff having fun together, but they also relate to residents experiencing cohesion that is crucial to their participation.

Theoretical perspectives: The production of shared excitement

The American sociologist Randall Collins (2004) offers theoretical insights into which types of situations produce shared excitement at the micro-level of interactions. Shared excitement, which is equivalent to Emile Durkheim's term 'collective effervescence' (1995[1912]: 220–2), is according to Collins (2004: 35, 48–9) a collective emotional arousal that pervades individual consciousness and forms solidarity between people. It is produced by successful interaction rituals (IR) that contain four interactional ingredients: (1) a high level of 'bodily co-presence' whereby people affect one another, (2) 'barriers to outsiders' displaying those who are included and excluded from the interaction, and (3) the emergence of a 'mutual focus of attention' that contributes to (4) a 'shared mood' between the interacting people. These ingredients enhance one another, especially mutual focus of attention and shared mood. When people become entrained by the situational emotions and rhythms, they start to synchronise verbal and nonverbal behaviours such as gazes, speech, and bodily movements (Collins 2004: 48, 75–7). The intensity of the four ingredients influences the level of shared excitement in encounters.

This excitement results in group solidarity, symbols of the social relationship, standards of morality, and emotional energy (EE) in the individual. EE describes peoples' long-lasting feelings of, for example, initiative and enthusiasm that enable them to act in present and future encounters (Collins 2004: 49, 105–7; Poder 2009: 347). As people seek to experience shared excitement and gain EE, they attempt to repeat prior encounters where they have experienced shared excitement and where the symbols being used, for instance, in this paper a tablet game, represent such experiences. It can also be the case that a symbol can be negatively charged when people are not familiar with it or associate it with emotions of, for example, passivity (Collins 2004: 107–11). Collins' framework can help illuminate how shared excitement increases and decreases in interactions and how this relates to residents' active engagement in encounters that involve familiar symbols.

In residential services, residents are to some extent dependent on staff facilitating their participation. Such dependency implies an imbalance of power, where staff support can enable or hinder the residents' experiences of shared excitement, particularly when they cannot meet the situational demands. These experiences require that service policies allow staff the time to interact with the residents, and that staff cooperate with the residents to establish a shared focus and interactional synchronisation. To do so, staff must step out of their usual role as providers of help to interact with the residents on an equal footing. A relational approach to disability (Gustavson, Tøssebro & Traustadóttir 2005) focuses on the encounter between individual functioning and environmental factors in its understanding of disability. From this perspective, the production of shared excitement depends on the interplay of residents' abilities and the environmental factors allowing for such experiences. Taking a relational approach, this paper considers how these experiences relate to the encounter between individual functioning, the situational demands and environmental factors such as staff support and resident-staff power relations.

Methods

Research methodology

This paper draws on a case study methodology (Flyvbjerg 2011) to gain in-depth insight into the process of generating shared excitement in staff-resident encounters. The case study approach was applied as an inductive research process to identify the empirical focus as insights emerged from the data gathering (Harper 1992; Ragin 1992). This paper is part of a larger study with an overall goal to examine how staff provide opportunities for residents' participation (focusing on 'doing' and 'feeling'). As a pattern appeared in which participation occurred in encounters with shared excitement, these situations of mutual enjoyment became this paper's empirical focus. Thus, this paper draws on a case study of the production of shared excitement in staff-resident interaction, whereas other parts of the larger study mainly focus on participation as 'doing'.

Data collection

The data consist of field notes taken during five months of participant observations in two Danish residential services¹ for people with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities (three months in service A, two months in B) and interviews with eight residents (five in service A, three in B) and 12 staff (five in service A, seven in B). This paper is primarily based on participant observations and secondarily on the interviews. Data were collected in 2013/14. Residents and staff were told that the aim of the study was to explore resident participation. As the paper's focus on shared excitement appeared during the data collection, this focus was not verbalised to them.

Participant observations were used to explore everyday resident-staff interactions, in particular to gain insight into what was going on in these encounters in relation to the context in which they occurred (Goffman 1989). Participant observations were conducted in the services' shared living rooms three to four days a week at different hours and lasted between three to five hours per day. As the purpose was to gain insight into shared excitement between residents and staff, the researcher engaged as observer-as-participant (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 82), communicating with them only when addressed directly. The observations concerned the development and lack of mutual verbal and nonverbal exchanges, concrete actions, the content of the activities, and bodily positioning. The writing of field notes followed guidelines of noting what happened, when, between whom, in which contexts, and in particular focused on interactional processes of everyday activities (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw 1995: 15–8). To enhance the interactional details in the field notes, notes were taken on a tablet as the interaction played out and further details were added immediately after. In the field notes, each resident-staff interaction consisted of one to one and a half pages of descriptions. In sum, all the field notes contained 55 situations.

To gain insight into resident and staff perception of their interactions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both parties. Resident and staff interviews focused on resident participation, including what characterised such encounters in terms of activities and mutual enjoyment between residents and staff. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. To facilitate the residents' engagement, examples from participant observations were used to have the residents reflect on interactions with staff.

Participants provided informed consent and were informed that they had the right to decline participation at any time. In all four residents did so prior to the data collection. Legal guardians provided consent on behalf of two residents. All names and identifying characteristics have been changed and ethical guidelines on research among people with intellectual disabilities (Dalton & McVilly 2004) have been followed. The study was reported to the Danish Data Protection Agency and the collection and processing of data was conducted according the agency's guidelines. In Denmark, no further ethical approval is needed to conduct a study such as this.

Data analysis

The field notes and interview transcriptions were coded line by line in NVivo 10 focusing on mutual exchanges and a lack thereof in resident-staff interactions. Extracts from interviews presented in this paper were used to illustrate residents' broad perceptions of their participation in encounters with staff. This paper presents in detail one interaction from field notes in service A. Similar patterns appeared regarding the production of shared excitement across the two services. Therefore, the data analysis focused on interactional rather than organisational differences and similarities.

Guided by a relational approach to disability, the analytical strategy attended to the encounters between environments and disabilities. Further, as informed by Collins' (2004) theoretical framework, the analytical focus was on the symbol that situations evolved around and interaction patterns. According to Collins, in interactions involving a high level of shared excitement, the interactants share identical interaction patterns including their bodies are turned towards one another, their movements are synchronised, and there is a rhythmic pattern of eye contact and a shared rhythm of speech with a minimum of gaps (Collins 2004: 134, 139). Guided by these interactional elements, I systematically grouped the data into two categories, interactions with high and low levels of shared excitement. When grouping the data, I focused on whether the interactions involved mutual exchanges of speech, eye contact, shared bodily movements, and signs of mutual enjoyment between residents and staff.

The resident-staff interaction presented is an extreme case (Flyvbjerg 2011: 307) because it contains both an increase and decrease of shared excitement. It was chosen through a thorough reading of the field notes focusing on the appearance and absence of shared excitement. The other examined interactions either include or lack this excitement. However, the chosen interaction is typical of the other encounters concerning the 'successful' ones predominantly being initiated by staff, the resident-staff interaction pattern and the activity being or not being emotionally loaded for the resident. Because the selected interaction contains two opposite levels of excitement, this situation provides rich information on how such experiences are produced and can be changed.

¹ The two services were selected among participants in a survey conducted among managers of residential services for residents with intellectual disabilities in Denmark.

Results

The results section encompasses two parts. First, I present extracts from resident interviews to illustrate their perceptions of participation regarding experiences of cohesion and engagement in encounters with staff. Second, I present a detailed analysis of this participation focusing on the production and decrease of shared excitement in one resident-staff interaction.

Residents' perspective: cohesion and engagement in activities

In interviews, residents described the enjoyment of experiencing cohesion during activities with staff, including the importance of having a shared symbol in such encounters. The following three quotations illustrate how residents take pleasure in being with staff during preferred activities:

I like talking about a lot of things and experiencing many things together with them [staff], for example, going to the theatre or to Copenhagen (Resident 1, service B).

Another expressed his enjoyment of being with staff doing practical work:

I am happy when I go for a walk with them [staff], or am outside drilling [using a drilling machine] together with them, and I can be outside and ... together with them, and I can help them with some things. Some packing boxes or something else. If they [staff] want some help, they get it (Resident 5, service A).

In the same vein, another resident talked about appreciating playing video games with staff (S):

Resident: Sometimes S1, S2, and I play video games together, I really enjoy that. It is a shared activity we have to play video games (...).

Interviewer: Why do you enjoy playing video games with some of the staff?

Resident: Because it is something where you get challenged and something where you have an activity to share, and then you are physically active because many of the staff do not have a healthy lifestyle. They are very average. Many of them do not do any sports (Resident 9, service A).

In the excerpts, the residents describe experiences of momentary cohesion during activities where they engage in mutual exchanges with staff and they perceive their input as being valuable to staff. This is seen by that they present themselves as helping staff by moving boxes or by adhering to a healthy lifestyle. This indicates that both being involved in a common activity and experiencing cohesion with staff were important in the residents' perception of enjoyable encounters with staff. Similarly, Kåhlin, Kjellberg, and Hagberg (2015) described how doing things with others and feelings of cohesion were essential to the residents' participation according to staff. The current findings illustrate how such actions and feelings also appear important in the residents' perception. This finding underlines the importance of approaching participation as engagement in shared activities and experiences of solidarity. The remainder of the findings section explores how participation from that perspective plays out in resident-staff interactions.

Production of shared excitement

The field notes illustrate that interactions that generated shared excitement between residents and staff occurred in both residential services. The interactions involved activities such as music quizzes, word games, and conversations about sports, make-up, or music. All these situations contained activities or discussions about activities, which the residents enjoyed, had the skills to engage in, and were included in by staff. These interactions were characterised by both residents and staff as contributing to the development of the activity and by shared interaction patterns. In situations without shared excitement, either residents or staff mainly engaged and interactional synchrony was lacking. For example, one party held monologues while the other stared out the window or focused on other activities. As the presented case illustrates, the production and decrease of shared excitement within the same resident-staff encounter it provides an example of how situational dynamics and the encounter between residents' abilities and staff support rather than merely personal characteristics can change the occurrence of such excitement.

The selected interaction involves Karen, a staff member, and Jane, a resident labelled with moderate intellectual disability. The observations of Jane illustrate that she rarely engaged in mutual exchanges with others and that she generally showed little interest in interacting with staff or residents. Jane always brought her tablet, which she had had for some time, to the shared living room and spent a lot of time playing games or using it in other ways on her own. Therefore, Jane was familiar with playing tablet games. The interaction, which lasted approximately five minutes, took place on a quiet afternoon in the shared living room and showed two activities. In the first one, referred to as "the tablet game," Karen and Jane played a game together on each of their tablets. In the second activity, which immediately followed the game, Karen helped Jane to fix her tablet. The subsequent activity is referred to as 'fixing the tablet'. The following presents the field notes from the observation of Karen and Jane:

Karen comes down from the office upstairs with one of the new tablets and says hello to everyone in the shared living room. Karen sits down at the dining table. Jane is sitting in the couch with her own tablet and magazines and I am sitting next to Jane. Karen starts playing a game on the tablet. She laughs at the game and gets up from the chair and starts moving her body in accordance with the game. In order to play the game, one has to move the tablet from side to side and in that way drive a car in the game. Karen says “oh no,” “yes,” and “uh” out loud while she is playing. Right after Karen starts playing, Jane gets up from the couch and walks across to Karen and watches her playing. Immediately, Jane gets her own tablet and places herself close to Karen and starts playing the same game. Jane and Karen stand closely together and they are moving their bodies simultaneously from side to side according to the game.

Both Karen and Jane look at their tablets and they both have their shoulders lifted as they are playing. Karen and Jane say “yes” and “oh no” by turns and laugh out loud together, and the noise level increases in the shared living room. The other staff member, who is in the shared living room, laughs at Karen and Jane. “Oh no,” Karen says as she quickly moves the tablet and her body from side to side. Jane looks at Karen and they both laugh. Then Jane looks at the tablet and says “uh” and again they both focus on each of their games. Several times Karen and Jane look at one another during the game and when there is eye contact, they laugh together. A couple of times Karen and Jane play the game this way where the pattern continues. They play the game while they are standing close to each other, and they move their bodies almost simultaneously in accordance with the game, crying “oh no,” “yes,” and “uh” out loud, and laugh together.

Karen sits down on the chair and takes a rest and stops playing. She says “phew” and laughs. Jane, who is still standing holding her tablet, goes across to Karen. Jane needs help to write something on the tablet. She hands Karen her tablet. Karen takes it and starts writing. While Karen is writing, Jane places herself behind Karen's chair and watches. Jane does not do anything; she is only watching and waiting. To fix the tablet requires that one is able to read and spell, which Jane cannot. Karen returns the tablet to Jane and says “now it is done.” Afterwards Jane returns to the couch and starts telling me about the game (Field notes, Service A).

The field notes show that as staff member Karen started playing the tablet game, her verbal and nonverbal appearances changed. She gets up from the chair, sways her body from side to side in accordance with the game, laughs out loud, and says ‘oh no’, ‘yes’, ‘uh’. As resident Jane enters the activity, she adopts Karen's bodily and verbal appearances, which become their shared pattern. Additionally, when Jane engages in the game, eye contact and shared laughter are added to this interaction pattern. Karen and Jane's interaction pattern consists of four elements: synchronised bodily movements, eye contact, repetition of identical vocal expressions such as ‘uh’, ‘oh no’, ‘yes’, and shared laughter.

Synchronised bodily movements include lifted shoulders and simultaneous bodily movements from side to side. Although the game itself required that the players move the tablet from side to side in order to drive a car, one does not need to stand and move the entire body from side to side. The lifted shoulders are not necessary to play the game; Karen and Jane do not verbally agree to lift their shoulders. Rather, their continuous synchronised bodily movements illustrate that Karen and Jane are attuned to each other's bodily rhythms and so the synchronised bodily movements produce social cohesion between them.

The repeated eye contact between Karen and Jane shows that they are aware of one another all the time. When Karen's utterance of ‘oh no’ attracts Jane's attention, they look at one another and laugh together; afterwards, they refocus on their individual game playing. By looking at Karen when she said ‘oh no’, Jane shows that she is attentive to Karen playing the game and aware of her experience in the game. As Karen and Jane repeat this pattern of exchanging mutual gazes, they reaffirm their awareness of the other's engagement and their shared involvement in the game. Thus, the game becomes the object of their mutual focus of attention (Collins 2004: 48).

Repetition of identical vocal expressions contains ‘uh’, ‘oh no’, and ‘yes’. Although these utterances portray Karen and Jane's individual experiences during the game, for example, ‘yes’ expressing success, the fact that Karen and Jane repeat the same words shows that they affect one another verbally. As the repetition of identical words applies only to their interaction during the game, Karen and Jane demonstrate to one another their participation in the shared activity by continuously repeating the same expressions. This verbal repetition can illustrate that they become verbally entrained by their shared activity of playing the tablet game.

The shared laughter illustrates that Karen and Jane have fun and enjoy playing together. The shared laughter only occurred when they make eye contact. Therefore, the shared laughter, displaying enjoyment, is collectively produced and is not a response to their individual game playing but a collective response to participating in an activity together. Karen and Jane reaffirm their enjoyment to participate in the shared activity by continuously responding to the other with shared laughter. In the game, Karen and Jane's shared laughter becomes louder, showing that they collectively get more excited about their activity and their shared feeling of excitement increases as they are playing. This feeling replaces their individual experience prior to the game; for example, Jane's passivity is transformed to excited engagement during the activity. In addition, Karen and Jane repeatedly respond to their individual failures in the game, illustrated by the utterance “oh no” and by laughing together. Hence, the shared feelings of excitement become the dominating emotion showing that Karen and Jane are absorbed in their common activity and shared emotional experience. This absorption can illustrate the development of shared excitement (Collins 2004: 48) between them in the game.

Similar to these findings, other examples from the data illustrate how interactional patterns including the rhythmic synchronisation of gazes, bodily rhythms, and speech build up and intensify shared excitement, which produces momentary cohesion between residents and staff. In service B, two residents and a staff member express such excitement during a game of greeting one another. This activity involves verbal synchronisation by repetition of the words 'tikki likki takki' and the nonverbal synchronisation of bowing the bodies towards one another, eye contact and folding their hands simultaneously, followed by shared laughter. An example from service A shows the occurrence of this excitement when a resident initiates a music quiz with a staff member. This quiz becomes their mutual focus of attention and produces shared laughter and the synchronised clapping of hands, representing shared excitement between them.

However, synchronisation of interaction patterns such as gazes did not seem significant in the staff's perception. In interviews with staff, some emphasised that eye contact was difficult for residents and highlighted the importance of avoiding this in encounters with residents. Similarly, Reuzel et al. ('Conversational Synchronization,' 2013) demonstrated that the staff did not value the coordination of gazes, which these authors suggested may influence the opportunity for positive encounters with residents. Hence, the staff's avoidance of eye contact to enable the residents' participation in interactions can unintentionally contribute to a lack of experiences involving shared excitement between residents and staff.

Decrease of shared excitement and changing resident participation

After the tablet game, Jane initiates another activity with Karen when she needs help to get her tablet fixed. In this activity, the tablet remains the central object of their interaction. However, during this part of their encounter, Karen and Jane remain two individuals gazing at the same object without engaging with one another. Consequently, the fixing of the tablet does not become a collective activity producing shared excitement between Karen and Jane.

For Jane, the change in the content of the activity results in the tablet developing from being an object of play in the game, in which she could participate, into an object that needs to be repaired, which she cannot do herself. Hence, the tablet turns into a symbol of her lacking the skills to participate and needing the staff's support. As the symbolic meaning of the tablet changes for Jane, she approaches the interaction in a passive manner. The field notes illustrate how Jane hands Karen the tablet, while she places herself physically behind Karen. This passive approach can indicate that Jane has low expectations of participating and can illustrate a low level of EE (Collins 2004: 118–21) for Jane during the fixing of the tablet, where she remains a spectator. The observations of Jane indicate that she often is passive when receiving help from staff, including Karen. Hence, Jane's lack of initiative to be involved in the fixing of the tablet can relate to her prior experiences as a rather passive recipient of staff support.

The last part of the field notes illustrates another change in Jane's initiative in encounters when she approaches the observer (the author) by talking about the game. Jane's behaviour can indicate her attempt to initiate playing a game with the observer, who also has a tablet. However, the observer does not have the game on her tablet and they are unable to play together. By applying Collins' (2004: 119) perception that persons are motivated to engage in situations where they have previously experienced shared excitement and can enhance their EE, Jane's attempt to engage in another game can be viewed as a way to find a new occasion to become emotionally energised. As the observations of Jane illustrate that she rarely initiated interaction with others, the fact that she did so is noteworthy. Based on Collins' (2004: 134) perspective that emotional energy enables people to act in interactions such as by taking initiative, the excitement produced during the tablet game may facilitate Jane's act of approaching the observer. Similarly, the field notes of other resident-staff encounters indicate that the residents seek to repeat activities where they previously have experienced shared excitement. For example, one resident, Tom, initiates the same encounter with a staff member several times, which involves putting his glasses on upside-down and asking the staff to do the same. This situation always results in expressions of shared excitement, which can facilitate Tom's repetition of the same activity. This finding suggests that experiencing shared excitement can foster residents' participation in other encounters.

Encountering residents' abilities and staff support

The decrease in Jane's participation during the fixing of the tablet relates to her abilities to engage in the activity. The fixing of the tablet required the skills of reading and writing, which Jane did not possess. Similarly, the observations of other resident-staff interactions illustrated that the residents' opportunity to obtain positive association of participation with specific activities was related to the requirements for participation and their abilities to engage.

Moreover, the character of the staff's support contributed to resident participation. Karen did not attempt to involve Jane in the fixing of the tablet, instead sorting out the matter herself. Although this action may relate to the fact that Jane lacked the skills to engage, the observations indicate that in other situations, Jane and other residents were included by the staff in similar activities. For example, the staff would support resident participation by spelling words out loud while Jane or other residents would write them down. The interplay of the residents' abilities, the requirements for engagement, and the staff's support can reflect a relational approach to disability (Gustavson, Tøssebro & Traustadóttir 2005). By drawing on this approach, the findings illustrate how the residents' participation, which allowed for interactional synchrony, relates the encounter between their abilities, situational demands, and the character of staff support to include them in activities.

Conclusions

Participation of residents with intellectual disabilities is a central goal in Danish disability policies; it implies that services are obligated to make participation a priority in a staff's daily work. This paper focused on residents' participation by exploring how the production of shared excitement between residents and staff relates to the residents' involvement in encounters. By applying Collins' (2004) interaction ritual theory, the findings illustrate how the interplay between synchronisation of gazes, speech, bodily movements, mutual focus, shared feelings, and the resident's emotional associations with the symbol used in the activity contribute to how residents and staff experience momentary cohesion. Taking a relational approach to disability (Gustavson, Tøssebro & Traustadóttir 2005), the findings also demonstrate how the encounter between a resident's abilities to participate and staff support were important factors in enabling interactional synchrony in resident-staff encounters. Second, it illustrated how experiencing cohesion with staff seemed to be valued by residents and these experiences relate to residents engaging in shared activities with staff.

According to the findings, a mutual focus and synchronisation of gazes, speech and bodily movements contribute to shared excitement between residents and staff, which is in line with previous studies (Hostyn & Maes 2009; Hostyn, Heleen & Bea 2011; Hostyn & Maes 2013; Reuzel et al. 'Conversational Synchronization' 2013; Reuzel et al. 'Interactional patterns' 2013). However, nonverbal synchronisation can be difficult to establish, as the findings show that staff did not find it important to establish eye contact in encounters with the residents. This finding concerning the importance of nonverbal synchronisation has implications for practice, where guidelines could underline that the content of an encounter such as a game, residents' emotional associations with the activity and verbal and nonverbal synchronisation are essential for residents to experience shared excitement. Therefore, staff could strive to apply such synchronisation in their encounters with the residents to allow for these experiences.

This paper demonstrates that residents initiate situations where they previously had experienced shared excitement. For example, the resident Jane, who rarely approached others, initiated interaction with the observer (author) after her experience of shared excitement in the tablet game. Another resident, Tom, repeated an interaction with a staff member where they previously had experienced shared excitement. In line with prior research (Kåhlin, Kjellberg & Hagberg 2015), this paper underlines the importance of understanding participation as both 'doing' and 'feeling'. Such a multidimensional understanding is also central to Danish disability policies, which explicate that encounters between people are important in establishing a foundation for feelings of fellowship (Social-Borne-og Integrationsministeriet 2013). This paper's illustration of how experiences of shared excitement can buttress the residents' engagement in future situations, and Collins' (2004: 49, 105–7) perception of emotions being the foundation for the human capacity to act, suggest that such experiences can facilitate the residents' acts of doing in other situations. Such a perspective can make experiences of shared excitement even more important in staff's work to enhance resident participation. Therefore, practice guidelines could emphasise that these experiences are not only an outcome of doing activities with others, but are also facilitators for the residents' capacity to act in future interactions.

Informed by a relational approach to disabilities (Gustavson, Tøssebro & Traustadóttir 2005), the findings show how the occurrence of shared excitement related to the encounter between residents' abilities to engage in activities and environmental factors such as staff support. For example, in the 'fixing of the tablet', Jane remained a spectator when Karen did not involve her, which illustrates how the occurrence of shared excitement related to unequal resident-staff power relationships. This relationship was also evident when the shared excitement decreased as Karen ended the activity when Jane appeared to want to continue playing. Hence, staff held the power to enable residents' experiences of shared excitement. The inequality in power relations also related to environmental factors such as work obligations and time. The participant observations showed that work obligations such as cooking and paperwork could hinder staff in interacting with the residents when the latter tried to initiate activities with them. Therefore, services can create barriers to residents experiencing shared excitement when other work obligations are prioritised. The existence of an inequality in power and resident dependency points to a need for continuing to work on implementing the concept of normalisation in current Danish disability policies in residential services. Therefore, service policies and the prioritising of work obligations must allow for staff having time to establish experiences of shared excitement, which are a crucial aspect of resident participation.

Future studies could use videotaped recordings to gain even more detailed insights into how shared excitement builds up and declines. Videotaped recordings might enable further knowledge of how the synchronisation of voices, gazes, and bodily movements can change the rhythm of resident-staff interactions and the occurrence of shared excitement. In this paper, videotaped recordings of resident-staff interactions were not used due to ethical reasons of interfering as little as possible in the everyday lives of residents who declined to participate in the study (Dalton & McVilly 2004).

The paper's findings on the production of shared excitement deemphasise individuals in relation to interactional characteristics, which might be similar to those in other resident-staff encounters in services for people with milder levels of intellectual disability. When discussing the findings of the relationship between the production of shared excitement and resident participation in future encounters, it is important to take into account that this paper did not involve longer interaction chains. Therefore, more studies need to examine such chains involving the same resident to gain further insight into how shared excitement can buttress residents' engagement in future interactions. Future research could view participation as being continuously produced in an interplay of emotional, interactional (verbal and nonverbal) and environmental processes to enhance our understanding of the multidimensionality of participation. This paper took a step in that direction.

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Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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