

**Rollerblading:  
Social behavioural  
development and the role of  
peers in an informal sport**



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**Rollerblading: Social behavioural  
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## **Abstract**

Informal sports and their influence on the social behavioural development of children and adolescents is a rather new area of research. This study focused on social development and the role of peers therein, in a specific informal sport: Rollerblading. The perspective of the rollerbladers on social behavioural development and rollerblading was examined by interviewing twenty one of them in three different skateparks. The results indicate that social behavioural development occurs in the process of learning how to rollerblade and frequenting the skatepark. Peers appear to play a significant role in the development of social behaviour in the skatepark. Rollerbladers learn social behaviour, such as how to deal with others, or negotiate space and attention, from rollerblading peers by verbal and non verbal examples. Whether rollerblading does contribute to social behavioural development, or is merely one of the systems where social behavioural development can take place, is not established yet.

### **Dutch abstract**

De invloed van informele sport op de sociale gedragsontwikkeling van kinderen en adolescenten is een relatief nieuw onderzoeksgebied. Deze studie focust op die sociale ontwikkeling en de rol van peers daarin, in een specifieke, informele sport: stuntskaten. Het perspectief van de stuntskaters op sociale gedragsontwikkeling en stuntskaten werd onderzocht door eenentwintig van hen te interviewen op drie verschillende skateparks. De resultaten geven een indicatie dat sociale gedragsontwikkeling plaatsvindt in het proces van het leren stuntskaten en het bezoeken van het skatepark. Peers lijken een significante rol te spelen in de sociale gedragsontwikkeling. Stuntskaters leren sociaal gedrag, zoals hoe je moet omgaan met anderen, of het onderhandelen over de ruimte en aandacht, van andere skaters, peers, door verbale en non verbale voorbeelden. Of stuntskaten bijdraagt aan sociale gedragsontwikkeling, of slechts één van de systemen is waarin sociale gedragsontwikkeling kan plaatsvinden, is nog niet vastgesteld.

**Keywords: Informal sports; rollerblading; social behavioural development; peers; cognitive apprenticeships**

## Introduction

Sports have been a continuous area of interest for social scientists because of the assumed influence on (the development of) social behavior in children and adults (Stuntz & Weiss, 2009; Berger, O'Reilly, Parent, Séguin & Hernandez, 2008; Eppright, Sanfacon, Beck & Bradley, 1997; or see Stegeman, 2007 for a review). Traditionally, most research into sport and social behavioural development is carried out in formally organized sports (Browne & Francis, 1993). Informal sports, which are sports outside the traditional institutions, are gaining in popularity in the Netherlands in contrast to the formal or organized sports (Nederlands Instituut voor Sport en Bewegen, 2001; Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2009). This popularity creates an increasing interest from social scientists, especially concerning social behavioral development in these informal settings (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2011).

The main characteristic of informal sports is the absence of a formal structure: no institutions or organisations and no coaches or trainers (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2011). To study social behavioural development outside this formal structure, the situated learning theory of Lave and Wenger (1991) is used as a theoretical framework. This social learning theory provides an alternative structure, in which social behavioural development can occur. In this study, it is assumed that informal sports are structured socially, in the interaction between the participants. Therefore, next to the main focus on social behavioral development, attention is given to the role that peers play in this development.

The focus in this study is on a particular form of informal sports: Rollerblading. Rollerblading is a special form of inline skating, also known as aggressive skating. With special skates, that have a frame and grindplates, tricks are made that can differ from spins and jumps over objects to grinding. Grinding is jumping on the side of an object (the edge) and sliding over it. Rollerblading can be done in skateparks as well as on the streets. Skateparks are specifically designed places for the *rolling sports*, which are rollerblading and skateboarding, whereas the streets are not.

This study focused on two subjects: exploring if rollerbladers see their sport as contributing to their social behavioural development and what role peers play in this development. This leads to the following research question:

***Do rollerbladers perceive rollerblading as contributing to their social behavioral development and how do peers play a role in this development?***

Twenty one rollerbladers in three different skateparks were interviewed for this study. Rollerbladers were perceived of as any person between the ages of six and twenty one, involved in rollerblading in a skatepark. Fellow rollerbladers and skateboarders (e.g. users) in the skatepark were seen as peers that could play a role in the social behavioral development of the rollerbladers. Social behavioral development itself is perceived of as *“A developmental process in which a young person learns to deal with himself and others within the customs and values of the community to which he belongs”*<sup>1</sup>. A distinction is made between rollerblading, inline skating and skating. Skating is used to cover both rollerblading as well as skateboarding. Inline skating is mentioned separately where necessary.

## Relevance

The societal relevance of this study is that the findings can be used to inform organizations and city councils of the social processes that take place in an informal sport, such as rollerblading. At the moment little relevant information is available for these organizations and city councils to base their leisure policies on.

## Structure

In the literature review, rollerblading, the informal structure and the role of peers are placed in a theoretical framework, as well as the conception of social behavioural development. The results section includes the data and discusses these in the findings. This article finishes with a chapter on conclusions, in which the implications for further research will be discussed as well.

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<sup>1</sup> This is an altered definition, which basis stems from [www.pestweb.nl/socialecompetenties](http://www.pestweb.nl/socialecompetenties) and Kohnstamm (2002)

## Literature review

### Rolling sports

In recent years, a few studies have been published on social behavior and the so called *rolling sports*: Skateboarding and rollerblading (Howell, 2008; Petrone, 2010; Bradley, 2010). Beal's research on social resistance through the subculture of skateboarding (1995) is commonly seen as the first and the most cited work for researchers in this area. In the Netherlands, there appears to be only one research in this direction: In 2006, a study of the identification of skaters with their hobby was published (Anthonissen & Sterkenburg, 2006). Overall, the mere focus in studies of the rolling sports is on spatial development and planning (see, for example: L' Aoustet & Griffet, 2001), or the (risk of) injuries (see, for example: Sherker & Cassell, 1999). Rollerblading and social behavioral development in itself, without including skateboarding, has not been studied yet<sup>2</sup>.

Summarized, little is known about the influence of participating in rolling sports, and rollerblading in particular, on the social behavioral development of young people. As Karsten and Pel state: "*From a social scientist's point of view, skating in the Netherlands is a blank page*" (Karsten & Pel, 2000, p. 328). Therefore, a great portion of this literature review is used to sketch a theoretical framework for rollerblading, drawing upon available sources of research on informal sports, and the rolling sports in particular.

Rollerblading, skateboarding and inline-skating grow in popularity in the Netherlands. Research from the Centraal Bureau Statistiek (1999, as cited in Nederlands Instituut voor Sport en Beweging, 2001) shows, for example, that *inline skating*<sup>3</sup> takes second place in most practiced sports by children aged six to twenty-four, whereas field soccer takes third place. There are, however, no definite numbers on *rollerblading*, although research and policy documents point to an increasing number of participants in these sports (Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, Welzijn en Sport, 2005; Anthonissen & Sterkenburg, 2006; Nederlands Instituut voor Sport en Beweging, 2001; Karsten & Pel, 2000; Gemeente Den Haag, 2004).

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<sup>2</sup> Although several studies touch upon the subject, no study to date is found specifically on the subject

<sup>3</sup> This research did not specify whether rollerblading was included in the term inline skating

## Rollerblading

Rollerblading is an informal sport. Informal sports have features that separate it from the more formally organized sports, such as the absence of sport organizations or clubs, no coaches, no strict training or playing time and no structural provisions (Anthonissen & Sterkenburg, 2006). Informal sports are called *unorganized* sports as well, due to these features (Sociaal Cultureel Planbureau, 2009; Ministerie van Volksgezondheid, welzijn en sport, 2005; Bradley, 2010). However, in this study, only rollerblading in *skateparks* is researched, and therefore lacks two of these features. A skatepark *could* be perceived of as a structural provision and city rules *can* prohibit use of the park outside regular hours. Rollerblading in a skatepark does have two clear features of an informal sport. These are the (almost<sup>4</sup>) total lack of sport organizations and clubs and the absence of (guidance by) trainers and coaches (Anthonissen & Sterkenburg, 2006; Seiffert & Hedderson, 2009; Beal, 1995; Bradley, 2010). The absence of a formal organization and formal instruction imply that rollerblading is formed and practiced differently than formal sports. This has an impact on how rollerblading, and thereby the social behavior within, is formed.

It is assumed in this study that the informal structure of rollerblading stimulates the presence of learning relations between the participants. Therefore, assumptions are made on how formal structure and instruction are replaced in rollerblading by different mechanisms. Perceiving learning of social behaviour as happening through social interaction is in line with social learning theories, which claim social behaviour is being learned by observing and imitating or modelling others (see, for a discussion: Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989). In this study, the situated learning theory developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) is used. This theory sees learning as occurring collectively in communities of practice, in the interaction with others. It emphasises a social structure, instead of a formal structure, as well as the learning from other participants, instead of learning through formal instruction. Although it is not certain yet whether social

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<sup>4</sup> There is one foundation in the Netherlands, Stichting Skateland Rotterdam, that promotes the rolling sports, including rollerblading

behavioural development takes place in rollerblading, this theory is used as a framework for the structure of rollerblading in this study.

### Social setting

The assumption in this study is that rollerblading is structured socially, in the interaction between the participants. Beal (1995) suggests that the lack of formal organization and institutions leads to the formation of skateboarding by skaters themselves: they make the social (unwritten) rules together. This could also apply to rollerblading, because of the perceived similarities between the two rolling sports. These are the absence of formal organizations and coaches and the shared environment in which both take place, namely the skatepark (Anthonissen & Sterkenburg, 2006; Dumas & Laforest, 2009; Beal, 1995). The absence of formal organization does not mean there are no rules rollerbladers adhere to. Rather, it seems that rollerblading has rules that are socially constructed. Researchers in the area of rolling sports have suggested there are participant- or socially constructed rules (Anthonissen & Sterkenburg, 2006; Bradley, 2010; Beal, 1995). For example, Petrone (2010) describes several social unwritten rules in the use of the skatepark. He mentions that kids are implicitly instructed in the skatepark on how to act "*psychologically, emotionally and physically*" (Petrone, 2010, p. 123). An internal form of control in the group is created by the participants themselves; the rules are structured socially (Bradley, 2010). This implies that rollerblading in a skatepark could be perceived of as a *social* setting structured by the participants, instead of a formal structured setting created by institutions.

A concept within the situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that is applicable to a social setting structured by the participants is *communities of practice* (see, for example, Petrone, 2010). These are groups of people that share a practice, in which they learn and share activities, and learn how to become better at it by regular interaction. This somewhat reflects the two features mentioned earlier. Firstly, being a member of a group of people that only share a practice, instead of for example, being a member of a sport club. Secondly, learning happens not through formal learning by coaches and trainers, instead it occurs from interaction in sharing activities. A socially formed structure can be

seen as an alternative to the structures in formal sports. Therefore, the concept of a community of practice could fill in the specific social structure in which rollerblading takes place.

### Instruction

In this study, the group of rollerbladers in a skatepark create the social setting of rollerblading, the community of practice. This group of people, peers<sup>5</sup>, thereby play an important role in learning and instruction in rollerblading (Bradley, 2010; Anthonissen & Sterkenburg, 2006). This role has two different aspects to it: the first aspect is learning rollerblading in interaction; the second is learning social behaviour through this interaction (Dumas & Laforest, 2009). These aspects are also reflected in two types of imitation. Deliberately imitating, for example copying exact movements in a sport like rollerblading, is one type. The second type is unconscious social behavior, such as mimicking the person you speak with (Blakemore & Frith, 2008). By participating in a community of practice, rollerbladers do not only acquire technical skills in rollerblading, but also social knowledge (Dumas & Laforest, 2009; Bradley, 2010). There are several examples in the literature on rolling sports; advice on rollerblading and advice on life issues is given to beginners by more advanced skaters (Dumas & Laforest, 2009), learning skating helps to build self confidence and status within peer groups (Bradley, 2010), and kids are implicitly instructed in the skatepark on how to act (Petrone, 2010).

Learning rollerblading and learning social behavior can be seen as distinct, yet interrelated processes. In support of this argument, there is a body of research available. For example, Lave and Wenger (1991) see learning processes divided in the development of the membership in the community and the shaping of identity. Marchand (2008) notes that skills people acquire become tied to their social and professional identities. Social behavior is developed in a process of social interaction in rollerblading. Rollerblading is a community of practice, in which learning of rollerblading as well as to behave socially, occurs through the entanglement of the practice and the shared social participation.

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<sup>5</sup> Note that rollerbladers old enough to be considered adults, are here perceived of as peers as well

Therefore, the other users of the skatepark, peers, play an important role educating each other in this community.

### Cognitive apprenticeships

The literature on rolling sports points to the role of peers in the social behavioural development of rollerbladers. It is important to establish through what mechanisms peers can influence the social behavioural development. It is already mentioned that the role of peers in rollerblading is twofold: learning rollerblading and learning social behaviour from each other. This learning through social interaction with peers could be filled in by using the concept of cognitive apprenticeships. This theory is used by several authors (Brown, Collins & Duguid, 1989; Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991) to specify the relations of the interaction with others in the situated learning theory. The theory of *cognitive* apprenticeships is also a learning theory, derived from the theory of *traditional* apprenticeships (Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991). Traditional apprenticeships describe the relationship between a master and a student. A student learns to develop his skills in two different ways: one is observing and imitating others, such as the master or other students, and the other is by instruction, again by the master or others (Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991). Rollerblading *could* be seen as an activity taking place in traditional apprenticeships (Bradley, 2010). Several researchers claim that rollerblading is learned through educating each other (Anthonissen & Sterkenburg, 2006; Beal, 1995). The social behavioral development that is assumed in this study, however, is more than the technical learning of rollerblading. Collins et al. (1991) provide three specific differences between traditional and cognitive apprenticeship theory, which are here summed up as reasons why cognitive instead of traditional apprenticeship theory is used in this study for the assumed role of peers.

In traditional apprenticeships students learn to copy specific skills for a specific goal and end product, without the transfer of skills to other situations (Collins et al., 1991). Children, however, usually learn social behaviors without being aware of it, let alone make it a goal to achieve. Often, the attitudes and beliefs of people are imitated, even without the intention to do so, by others (Blakemore & Frith, 2008). Transferring of

acquired social skills to other situations is present in the development of social behavior. Cognitive apprenticeship theory does reflect learning in general, not specific goals or end products, and transferring of skills. Also, an emphasis is made on that the thinking process in learning has to be “made visible” (Dennen, 2004), for the students to gain the knowledge. Developing social skills through learning experiences with or by peers, therefore, is best described by the use of cognitive apprenticeships theory.

The cognitive apprenticeships in this study are between rollerblading peers (Petroni, 2010; Bradley, 2010), and the roles of master and student are not rigid, which is somewhat different view on apprenticeships relations. Most apprenticeship relations are (naturally, i.e. because of the experience of an older person) between an adult and a younger person, and the roles of master and student are unchanging. In this study, these are not necessary conditions. For example, a twelve year old rollerblader with five years of experience could well master the twenty year old rollerblader with five months of experience. Being a master depends on experience, rather than on age. This is in concordance with the available literature; cognitive apprenticeships do not appear to be fixed relations between master and student in rollerblading (Petroni, 2010; Bradley, 2010). This is in concordance with Lave and Wenger’s view of learning (1991). They see master-student relations as depending on situations, time, need for specific expertise and accumulated knowledge. They see the way knowledge is build in a certain community as a *fluent* process. A distinction can be made between the learning *with* each other and the learning *from* each other. The latter emphasizes the more classical cognitive apprenticeships roles, while the former puts and emphasis on the more fluent form of cognitive apprenticeships as mentioned above (Grindstaff & Richmond, 2008). Therefore, the proposition is to rephrase using the term *fluent*, which indicates that the relationships are not fixed by age or by person.

Lave and Wenger (1991) coined two other important concepts in regard to cognitive apprenticeships, which are briefly described here: *situatedness* and *legitimate peripheral participation*. Situatedness points to a setting or a context in which human action is situated (Dennen, 2004). Legitimate peripheral participation points to a natural, gradual

process of participation. New people start on the periphery and move in a gradual way towards full participation (Dennen, 2004). Situatedness in this study is filled in by the location, the skatepark. Legitimate peripheral participation is seen as the process of beginning to participate in a skatepark, to becoming a regular participant at the skatepark.

### Apprenticeship methods

There are some *dominant* methods in cognitive apprenticeships in which the master is assisting the student to obtain the necessary skills (Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991), although the parts and detail differ from author to author (Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991; Dennen, 2004). These methods are outlined here because the aim to fill in the role of peers in rollerblading gives a need to be able to recognize whether cognitive apprenticeships are present. Although it is possible to do so, no detailed and defined descriptions are given here, so to make sure there is the best possible opportunity created to be able to recognize apprenticeships methods in the field. The dominant methods discussed here<sup>6</sup> are coaching, scaffolding-fading and modelling. The master coaches the student within cognitive apprenticeships. Coaching is seen as the monitoring of students' activities and assisting and supporting them where necessary. Imbedded in coaching is scaffolding-fading, which is offering support to the student to cope with a task, gradually withdrawing (fading) the support as the student gets better at the task (Dennen, 2004). Scaffolding or *supportive* scaffolding (Lenski & Nierstheimer, 2002, as cited in Dennen, 2004) is focused on the student and his needs at a certain moment, specified to his abilities and interests. For rollerblading this means that, as in legitimate peripheral participation, a beginning rollerblader will at first learn some specific (social) behaviour. Thereby, he is supported by more experienced rollerbladers in all the behaviours that he has not mastered yet (Beal, 1995; Bradley, 2010). Gradually, the beginner learns all the appropriate social behaviour, with simultaneously decreasing scaffolding by more experienced skaters, which is called *fading*. This is also reflected in Vygotski's zone of proximal development, in which learning activities are made fit for the student, assessed

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<sup>6</sup> For details on methods in cognitive apprenticeships, see Dennen (2004) or Collins et al. (1991)

by more experienced people (Rowlands, 2000). Whereas at first, the beginner might need clues in how to behave socially, this need will decline as he becomes more experienced. Fading can also be seen as happening in concord with legitimate peripheral participation. The more a person participates fully in rollerblading, and therefore gain experience in how to behave socially, the more fading occurs. Modelling can be divided in two different forms: Behavioural and cognitive (Jonassen, 1999, as cited in Dennen, 2004). The behavioural form is imitation, while the cognitive form entails the use of learned strategies in a situation, other than the one in which the strategy is learned. As mentioned before, social behaviour is perceived of as being able to transfer skills in different situations.

### Social behavioural development

Having established a hypothesis that there is a social structure in rollerblading and the role of peers is filled in by cognitive apprenticeships, it is important to establish how social behavioural development is seen in this study. Rollerblading, organized as a community of practice, provides a different environment for the development of social behaviour than formal sports (Bradley, 2010). Social behavioural development is seen in this study as: "*A developmental process in which a young person learns to deal with himself and others within the customs and values of the community to which he belongs*". This definition encompasses three important elements. The first is that social behaviour is seen as a developmental process in time, instead of a fixed trait in a person. The second is the ability to develop one's self to deal with the social environment, whereas the third element is the interaction with others (Ten Dam et al., 2003).

Social behaviour can be measured by assessing *social competencies* (Ten Dam, 2003; Calderra & Merell, 1997). These social competencies are divided in intrapersonal and interpersonal<sup>7</sup> competencies. Intrapersonal competencies are skills in relation to the self. *Knowing* one's self, being aware of one's feelings, abilities, strengths and virtues, is important to be able to behave socially (Ten Dam et al., 2003). This can be described as self confidence and self knowledge (Ten Dam et al., 2003) or as self awareness

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<sup>7</sup> Intrapersonal is within an individual; interpersonal is between persons

(Overveld, 2010). Managing this knowledge of the self constructively, such as dealing with emotions, feelings and controlling impulses, is a second competency: Self management (Overveld, 2010; Calderra & Merell, 1997) or regulatory skills (Ten Dam, 2003). Based upon the knowledge and dealing with one's self, a person makes decisions to behave a certain way. Being able to make, and take responsibility for, reasoned decisions, in the interest of yourself and others, is a competency as well; responsible decision making (Overveld, 2010; Illinois State Board of education, n.d.)

Interpersonal competencies are skills in relation to others. *Knowing* others, just as knowing yourself, is also important to be able to behave socially (Ten Dam et al., 2003). Knowing others can be described as: To be able to empathise and/or take the perspective of others, recognise the differences within individuals and groups and appreciate them, and taking social clues. This is called social awareness (Overveld, 2010), or interpersonal skills (Ten Dam et al., 2003). Managing these relationships with others constructively, such as dealing with conflict and resist social pressure, are skills needed to establish and maintain positive relationships. These skills are referred to in research as relationship skills (Overveld, 2010), peer relations (Calderra & Merell, 1997) or interpersonal attitude (Ten Dam et al., 2003). Reviews on measuring of social competencies show that these aforementioned competencies are, although in some cases named or categorised differently, the main components generally perceived of as constituting social competencies by researchers (Ten Dam et al, 2003; Caldarella & Merell, 1997).

Overveld (2010) gives a clear arrangement of these competencies, using the layout of the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (n.d): Self awareness, Self management, Responsible decision making, Social awareness and Relationship skills<sup>8</sup>. This arrangement is also found in the Illinois Learning Standards (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d). In these learning standards these five social competencies are worked out in goals and the standard to which a young person in a certain phase of her life must adhere. Furthermore, researchers have shown that it is possible to use these components to measure social behaviour in skateparks (Bradley, 2010; Palen & Coatsworth, 2007). A combination of Overveld's competencies (2010) and the descriptions given by the Illinois

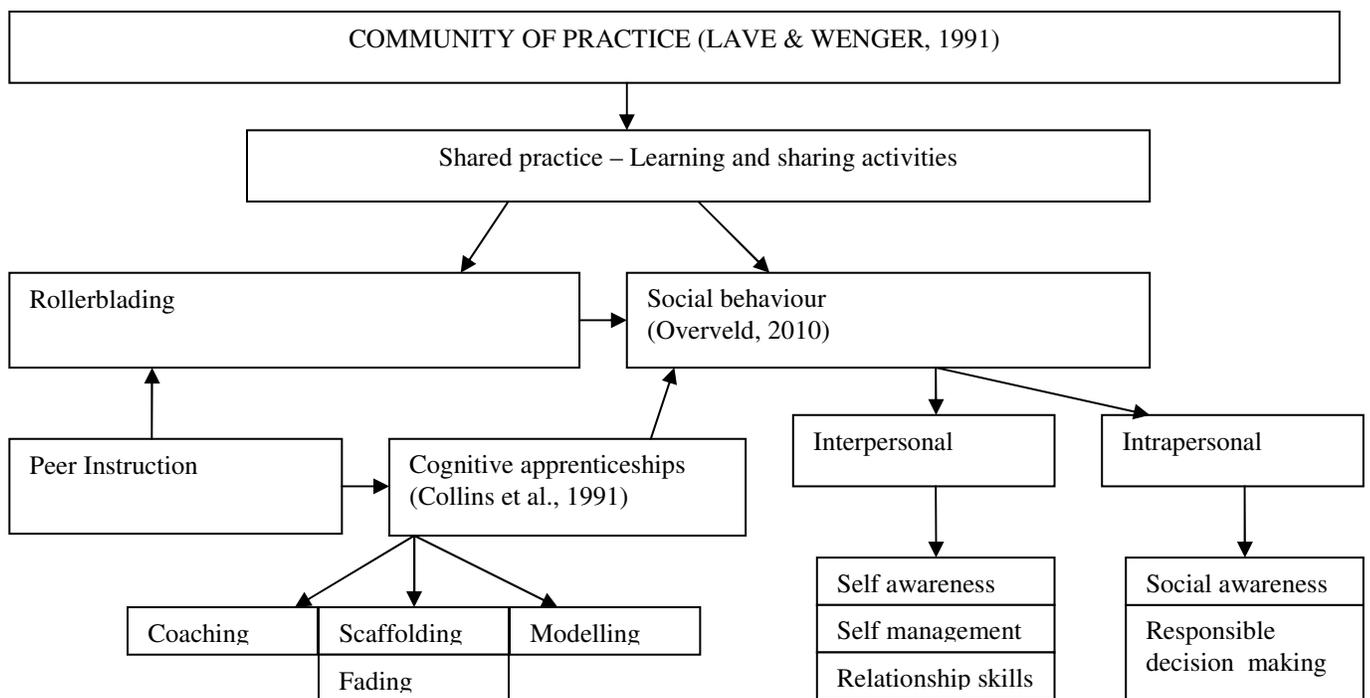
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<sup>8</sup> See appendix 1 for detailed information

State Board of Education (n.d), are used in this study to establish social behavioural development.

## Conclusions

Rollerblading has a informal structure, because of the lack of organisations and coaches/trainers. This structure can be perceived of as a social structure, or, following situated learning theory, a community of practice. Social behavioural development is seen as a process of learning to deal with yourself and others, in five core elements: self awareness, responsible decision making, self management, social awareness and relationship skills (Overveld, 2010). These competencies and the descriptions given by the Illinois State Board of education (n.d) will be used to see if social behavioral development is present in rollerblading. The expectation is coined that learning social behavior happens trough interaction with peers, in the form of *fluid* cognitive apprenticeships. Four dominant methods of cognitive apprenticeships will be used to establish whether these apprenticeships are used in rollerblading: coaching, scaffolding-fading and modelling. Figure 1 shows the outline of the theoretical framework.



***Figure 1: Theoretical framework***

# Methodology

## Design

In this qualitative research, semi structured interviews were conducted on a convenience sample of twenty one rollerbladers in three different skateparks. A topic list comprised of five social competencies (Overveld, 2010), whose descriptions were drawn from the Illinois State Board of Education (n.d.) was used to inquire about social behavioural development in rollerblading. Dominant methods of cognitive apprenticeships were used to phrase questions on the role peers played in this development.

## Participants

Rollerbladers were, at first, defined as any person between the ages of six and twenty one, involved in rollerblading in a skatepark. The age of six was chosen because it is difficult to establish information about social behavioral development in younger children as they have problems judging themselves (Ten Dam et al., 2003). Ultimately, no person younger than twelve was interviewed in this study. Twenty-one participants were interviewed, all male. The youngest was aged twelve, the oldest was aged twenty. Seventy-five percent was between twelve and fifteen years of age ( $M= 14$ ), twenty five percent were older than fifteen ( $M= 17$ ). Four started out as skateboarder, sixteen as inline skater, before transferring to rollerblading, and one started out as rollerblader. Five of the participants could be labelled beginner, twelve could be labelled medium experienced and four as expert. This indication was made on the assumption that beginners were not able yet to perform all possible segments, such as riding all the obstacles in the skatepark, or basic moves, such as grinding. Medium experienced rollerbladers could ride all the obstacles and were able to do the basic moves, whereas experts performed more complicated moves, such as multiple grinds on the obstacles in the skateparks. Although there are no definite numbers of rollerbladers in the Netherlands, it is assumed that the twenty one participants are only a small sample. This means that only a small portion of the research population is interviewed. Therefore, it has to be taken into account that it could be difficult to generalize the results into the broader rollerblading community in the Netherlands.

## Locations

For this study, there has been a restriction for the outlines: only rollerbladers in a skatepark were selected to participate. Therefore, a random selection of three skateparks was made. One of the parks was brought to the attention by a former contact and chosen because of the unfamiliarity of the researcher with that park. The other two parks were selected to globally match in surroundings, size and population<sup>9</sup>. All were located in a park, or park-like setting. Two had other sport- and play facilities surrounding the skatepark, whereas the other was merely next to benches and a walking path. They were all medium sized skateparks; more than three and less than ten obstacles. All parks were frequented by skateboarders and rollerbladers. Observed ages on the locations were approximately between six and twenty years of age. The estimates of numbers of rollerbladers vary between seven and fifteen per park. The presence of kids on bikes, wave boarders and inline skaters varied per park, although no definite numbers of those participants were established. The parks were situated in three large cities with a population of approximately 100.000 to 500.000 citizens. For the purpose of anonymity of the participating skaters, these cities are not mentioned and the names of the participants in the text are fictive.

## Procedure

Skateparks were visited and after initial acquaintance, rollerbladers were asked if they wanted to participate by being interviewed. Only one rollerblader refused to participate in the study, and one prospective participant left before being invited to participate. The participants were selected through a convenience sample; a selection on basis of features interesting for this study, such as age (Boeije, 2005). Social behavioral development was measured by the use of social competencies: self awareness, responsible decision making, self management, social awareness and relationship skills, because these seem to

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<sup>9</sup> These estimates are based on the conversations in the parks and observations in a certain period of time. Failing definite numbers, this is merely an assumption

accurately reflect social competencies<sup>10</sup>. The Illinois Learning Standards (Illinois State Board of Education, n.d) were used to shape the social competencies into questions for the topic list. Dominant methods of cognitive apprenticeships were used to phrase questions on the role peers played in this development. This list was tested on experimental subjects. The topic list was used to conduct semi structured interviews<sup>11</sup>, held in the presence of a recording device, to get consistent data. The data derived from the interviews was processed by hand. At first, the data was divided in the five aforementioned components of social behavior. Secondly, a more specific division was made between what the participants said that applied to these components, what they have learned as rollerblader concerning this component, and how they learned it from whom.

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<sup>10</sup> See the literature review for a discussion

<sup>11</sup> The interview is written out in appendix 2

## Results

The results are being reviewed by using the five social competencies, as described in the literature review, in combination with what the participants learned from rollerblading and from whom.

### Self awareness

*Knowing yourself, being aware of your feelings, abilities, strengths and virtues*

The participants described rollerblading in different ways, apart from being a hobby or sport. Mostly, they referred to experiencing freedom and/or kicks, pushing boundaries and rollerblading as an addiction. For example, Fabio describes rollerblading as giving him a sense of freedom: "*I can do what I want and am not being held accountable for anything by anybody else*". Next to that, the participants describe that progression in rollerblading, such as learning a new trick, gives them a sense of euphoria that they really 'enjoy': "*It's a super feeling, a kick, almost indescribable*" (interview Evert).

The participants described in the interviews what they thought they learned from rollerblading and what the effect of rollerblading on them as a person was. The participants say they have learned from rollerblading to be determined, to persevere, and not give up easily. The most heard response<sup>12</sup> was that rollerblading teaches you to be persistent, which is, for example, necessary in learning a trick. Because eventually they master a trick after failing, sometimes after falling, they learn you can do "*whatever I choose to master, as long as I am persistent and confident*" (interview Carlos).

Congruent with Carlos, learning to overcome obstacles is seen by the other rollerbladers as benefiting their self confidence as well. They stated they gained (more) self confidence, as well as confidence in being able to overcome obstacles in rollerblading and in other parts of their lives.

The rollerbladers mention certain social behaviours they learned from other rollerbladers, which they see as important in their skatepark. For example, some of the participants

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<sup>12</sup> Apart from any practical examples, which are mentioned later on

mentioned they learned that they had to greet everybody on arrival and when leaving the park. Other examples were learning to wait for their turn, and give others that are in a special position, such as beginners, time for their turn. They state the importance of maintaining the skatepark by keeping it clean and cleaning up afterwards, to be able to skate safely. What is also mentioned is learning how to address people that are in the way or that litter. As Bernard says: "*I learned that it helps if you ask them nicely if they want to go away, instead of yelling: Go away! That will only trigger them*" (interview Bernard).

### Self management

*Managing yourself, dealing with emotions and feelings, impulse control*

Rollerblading does not only give positive emotions. At first, the participants do not acknowledge any negative emotions as part of rollerblading in the interviews. They rather speak of negative *situations*, such as a skatepark that doesn't adhere to their standards, or other youth hanging around the skate park. If specifically asked about falling, most rollerbladers just shrug. For example, Harry's answer to the question was: "[Defying look on his face, shrugs] *Falling hurts every time, you just get up and get going*". The participants admit that they sometimes tire of falling and failing in tricks, which can cause some radical emotions. Controlling your impulses and emotions in front of others is specifically present in these situations, as Arnold explains: "*You are aware of the people around you, you take them into consideration; you do not want them to see you freak out when something goes wrong*".

As for how the participants learned these behaviours, being corrected when stepping over the line and learn to accept comments and remarks from other (more experienced) rollerbladers were the most cited answers. The responses were not all negatively phrased; in line with the comments and remarks, the participants said they learned to give and receive compliments about skating or good behaviour as well.

## Social awareness

*Knowing others, empathise, take perspective, recognise differences and take social clues*

The participants explain that approval or disapproval of certain behaviour can be verbal as well as nonverbal. This became clear by the examples of using a specific sign for respect: the so called *Box*. As a skater arrives at the skate park, as a sort of ritual, he is expected to greet the other rollerbladers/skaters. This happens verbally (e.g. Hi), but mostly by using a specific sign: the *box*. The most regular form of the box is that both people make a fist, and slam them into each other<sup>13</sup>. The participants explain that the box is not only used to greet other people: if someone wants to acknowledge or appreciate a trick from somebody else, they also box the other person. The rollerbladers name this ritual by saying they use it to 'give respect'. Giving someone a box is therefore a way to express your respect towards another. Respect is a very important issue for the rollerbladers. In the words of Zeb: "*Satisfaction, appreciation and respect, that's what I do it for*" (interview Zeb).

Verbally showing someone respect or appreciation happens too: for example, with specific words, such as *props* (a substitute word for 'well done'). Dave and Caro explain that sometimes a person believes he 'deserves' respect for a trick, but doesn't get it because nobody either saw the trick, or didn't see it as special enough to show respect for. Caro tells that if that happens, you can go up to the other rollerbladers and get your respect. He explains that he himself will go up to the other skaters, explain what he did asking for respect, which than is usually given. Another way to get respect is to focus people's attention on you, according to Dave: "*I scream out my happiness when I land a trick, and than I get respect*".

## Responsible decision making

*Make, and take responsibility for, reasoned decisions, in the interest of yourself and others*

Ivo explains that he learned from the other rollerbladers to accept other people's mistakes and react calmly on them. He said that at first he reacted very angry when beginners were in his way while rollerblading. More experienced rollerbladers made him see that he

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<sup>13</sup> The box seems to have several variations, depending on what it is used for, by whom and where

himself used to be in *their* way when he was starting out, and that the appropriate response is not to be mad, but to educate the beginners calmly. Now, he says, he approaches the beginners, explains what the problem is, and asks them politely if they would pay attention not to be in his way while rollerblading. He adjusted his behaviour after being told to by the more experienced rollerbladers. The same goes for other spatial social rules: the interviewed rollerbladers state that waiting for your turn, giving extra attention to beginners that are in the way or to deliberate with the other users before using wax<sup>14</sup> are learned on the skatepark through the guidance of (more experienced) other rollerbladers.

Most of the participants say that they get along pretty well with the other users of the park. The main reason given was, as Fabio says: "*they are in it for the same* [reason, namely to skate]" (interview Fabio). Contrary to the attitude towards other users, most of the participants declared they did not like the people who were not skating or rollerblading. Youth hanging around the park was mentioned as example by almost all the participants. Several reasons for this were mentioned, such as that they endanger the rollerbladers by running around, littering, and by the negative comments they give. Some of the participants, such as Bernard, approached them, as cited, '*nicely*', because he thinks that works best. Other participants<sup>15</sup> were not that patient, and yelled at them or called them names. However, the way the participants react to the other people did not seem to be identical, not even in the same skatepark. These differences in response show that the participants will not imitate all behaviour that is displayed by the other rollerbladers. Repeated answers were that the participants only imitate behaviour that they see as beneficial. Temper tantrums and cursing are examples of behaviour that are mentioned by the participants as not beneficial, and are therefore not imitated.

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<sup>14</sup> Wax is a substance used to glide easier on obstacles, mainly used by rollerbladers and contested by skateboarders

<sup>15</sup> This could be due to the fact that they had more problems with littering, cursing and even fighting the 'others'

## Relationship skills

*Establish and maintain relationships with others, deal with conflict and resist social pressure*

The participants describe their mutual relationships with their fellow rollerbladers as being friends, who learn rollerblading together. They give examples such as learning new tricks together and copying tricks from each other. In particular, a game called 'SKATE'<sup>16</sup> is mentioned as a beneficial part of skating in a group. In this game, each person gets a turn doing a trick, while the others have to copy that trick. If (one of) the others fail, they get a letter. After failing five times the letters form the word SKATE, which means that person is defeated. Harry explains they use pressure *and* support in the game to become better at rollerblading: "*Even when you are scared of the trick, you try it, because you do not want to fail in front of your friends. Even so, my friends also stimulate me to try by cheering and motivating me!*"

The participants differ between the others with whom they learn to skate, and people they see as masters. They stated, with exception of the four that were expert level, they had one or more rollerbladers they saw as *masters*. Statements were: "[name] *represents all of our city, you know, he is the best*" and "[name] *is my teacher; we look up to him and he teaches us*". The first relation is a more equal relation in which rollerbladers teach each other. The second relation is described differently, because the master is perceived of as a person with authority on rollerblading. Carlos and Bernard put it like this: "*If he says: do it, do it! Well, than you just do it...*" (Carlos), "*If he pushes you, and looks at you, you just have to try*" (Bernard).

## Findings

The results point to rollerblading as a community of practice in which cognitive apprenticeships play a role. Rollerblading is the shared interest and members build relationships that take the form of cognitive apprenticeships, in which they can learn from each other. In the literature section it was proposed that in rollerblading there are fluent apprenticeships. The results do point towards the existence of fluent *and* rigid

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<sup>16</sup> This game is sometimes called 'HORSE' as well.

apprenticeships. Fluent apprenticeships, in which the master-student relations are not fixed, were found for most of the relations in the skatepark. However, the participants (with the exception of the four experts) pointed to the existence of a rigid apprenticeship, in the form of one or more people, who were expert status in rollerblading and were perceived of as masters. This indicates that there might be several forms of apprenticeship relations present in rollerblading.

A good example of the cognitive apprenticeships is from Ivo, who is being corrected by the other rollerbladers. They not only tell him to stop certain behaviour, they also make him think back to how he was as a beginner, giving him the chance to comprehend why his behaviour was wrong. The dominant methods in cognitive apprenticeships, coaching, scaffolding- fading and modelling all occur in the skatepark. Coaching and scaffolding-fading is done by other skaters concerning rollerblading as well as concerning displaying behaviour, by instruction. For example, learning to give comments and compliments and express respect by using a box (a sign which is putting fists together between two people). The box can be seen as a shared sign of a community of practice. The box and giving respect can also be about expressing appreciation. In organized sports, appreciation will be received not only from other sportsmen, but usually by the coach, trainer, volunteer, or parent, who are absent in rollerblading. Rollerbladers learn from each other that they will have to give respect to (the accomplishments of) others, thereby replacing the absent trainer and such.

The presence and examples of the other rollerbladers play an important role as example how to behave in a certain situation, e.g. modelling. However, participants said they would not imitate behaviour they judged to be not beneficial to them in any way. This was confirmed in the behaviour towards other people on the skatepark. Whereas behaviour towards other rollerbladers was corrected if not appropriate, behaviour towards other users was not. Therefore, participants differed in their responses towards the other users, where person and history seem to play a more important role than imitating other rollerbladers behaviour.

## Conclusion and implications

This study explored an upcoming informal sport, rollerblading, and social behavioural development. The research question was focused on whether rollerblading does contribute to social behavioral development and which role peers play in this development. The assumption was that development of social behaviour is situated in a process of social interaction in the group of rollerbladers. This group was perceived of as a community of practice, following situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991), whereas the learning processes were seen as happening through *fluent* cognitive apprenticeships (Collins, Brown & Holum, 1991). The data for this study was collected through semi structured interviews on three skateparks.

The results show that social behavioural development is present in rollerblading. Rollerblading contributed to self confidence and a sense of freedom, as well as to being able to overcome obstacles, in rollerblading and other parts of the lives of the participants. The assumption that cognitive apprenticeships are the form in which peers play a role, was found true. Rollerblading *together* with peers influenced social behavioural development. This was apparent in rituals, such as greeting everybody upon arrival and when leaving the skatepark, and the ways in which social behaviour was approved of or rejected, verbal or non verbal. The apprenticeships appeared fluent in nearly all relationships, with the exception of the relationships towards one or more expert rollerbladers. The experts seem to have a rigid apprenticeship relation based on his/their authority as expert, with the rest of the rollerbladers.

### Limitations

The researcher herself is a rollerblader which had several advantages, such as an understanding of the technical aspects and slang used in rollerblading. It also affected the atmosphere in the interviews, in that it created the idea of a mere conversation between rollerbladers, instead of a formal interview. This helped in defying social desirable answers, which is always a threat of the validity of a study. A good example hereof was

the hesitation of the participants to speak out about negative features of rollerblading. The conversational atmosphere made it possible to consequently repeat the questions on this topic and to keep asking for clarification, until answers were received. Whereas in a different, more formal interview this might have caused friction, it did not in the case of conversing with a fellow rollerblader.

This study was focused on measuring the *perception* of the rollerbladers on their social behavioural development. This focus on perception bids the question whether there is social behavioural development in the skatepark present, or is only present in the eyes of the interviewed rollerbladers. There is no additional information derived from, for example, parents or classmates to verify the given information. This study can only answer whether social behavioral development is present in rollerblading, as *conceived of* by the rollerbladers themselves. The question if rollerblading does contribute to social behavioural development, or is merely one of the systems where social behavioural development can take place, has to be answered in further research.

#### Implications for further research

In this study, there was a focus on peers and their role in social behavioural development. The found cognitive apprenticeships within rollerblading were fluent as well as rigid, indicating that there are several forms of apprenticeship relations present. In current literature on apprenticeships there is not yet a focus on these several forms within an informal setting. Therefore, little is known about whether the found relations are an intrinsic aspect of informal settings, or are imitations of a formal structure. It could be that the rigid relations are reflections of coaches or formal leadership, and the fluent relations reflections of member relations, such as in formally organized sports. However, it is possible because of the nature of rollerblading, in which no formal organisation and coaching occurs, these do not reflect formal relations at all. Instead, they could be perceived of as a characteristic aspect of informal sports, a cooperative structure necessary for the realization of these sports. Therefore, a focus point for further research could be the forms of cognitive apprenticeships in informal sports.

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## Appendix 1:

### Social competencies (Overveld, 2010).

#### Self awareness

Self awareness is about being able to accurately assess one's feelings, interests, values, and strengths, and maintaining a well-grounded sense of self confidence.

#### Social awareness

Social awareness is about being able to take the perspective of and empathize with others; recognizing and appreciating individual and group similarities and differences; recognizing and using family, school, and community resources.

#### Responsible decision making:

Responsible decision is making decisions based on consideration of ethical standards, safety concerns, appropriate social norms, respect for others, and likely consequences of various actions; applying decision-making skills to academic and social situations; contributing to the well-being of one's school and community

#### Self management

Self management is regulating one's emotions to handle stress, control impulses, and persevere in overcoming obstacles; setting and monitoring progress toward personal and academic goals; expressing emotions appropriately.

#### Relationship skills

Relationship skills is establishing and maintaining healthy and rewarding relationships based on cooperation; resisting inappropriate social pressure; preventing, managing, and resolving interpersonal conflict; seeking help when needed

Appendix 2:  
Interview topic list

*Thank you for giving me permission for this interview. I want to start by asking you if I can use my sonic device to record this conversation, so when I am back at home I can listen to it again. It will only be used to refresh my memory, and will be deleted after that. I will start by introducing myself, and than can you introduce yourself?*

*I am Jolanda, student on the University of Utrecht, and currently working on a research on rollerblading. Therefore, I would like to ask you a couple of questions, of which there are no good or wrong answers, I am interested in your opinion. Everything you say will be anonymised. If there is anything you do not understand or if you want to ask something, please let me know. Can you tell me something about yourself?*

Name and age

How long have you been rollerblading for?

How did you start rollerblading (who introduced you to this skatepark?)

Do you skate alone or in a group? Why?

Can you explain to me why you rollerblade?

Can you tell me what you like and what you dislike in rollerblading?

Can you explain to me what feeling rollerblading gives you?

Can you explain how you learn new tricks?

Is there a certain way to learn how to rollerblade?

Do other people assist you in learning?

Do you always succeed in learning a trick?

If not, how do you cope with that?

You have told me what *positive feelings* [insert answer!] rollerblading gives you.

Are there also negative feelings to rollerblading?

*For example:* falling: what do you do? How do you behave? How do others react to that?

Do you learn from others examples how to deal with it?

Can you tell me if there are any skills you have learned by rollerblading?

Do you apply those skills outside rollerblading?

Did rollerblading help you to learn how to deal with certain situations or react in a certain situation?

Can you give me an example?

Did rollerblading help in dealing with your emotions?

Did rollerblading play a role in your behaviour?  
Can you give me an example?

Can you tell me if you have learned certain responses or behaviour from other rollerbladers?

Did others help you to deal with certain situations (in rollerblading or outside rollerblading).

Can you give me an example?

Did you learn from others how to behave in different situations?

Can you give me an example?

Do others in this skatepark learn from you? What do they learn from you? (Behaviour)

(You have mentioned you skate alone/in a group)

What do you do when you rollerblade in a group/alone? Can you tell me what the difference is between rollerblading alone/ in a group?

*For example:* do you help each other? In what way? (rollerblading, personal trouble et cetera)

How do you perceive the people in that group/ on the skatepark? As friends, teachers, other rollerbladers?

How do you perceive the other users of the skatepark?

How do you perceive the other people on the skatepark (bystanders)

Can you tell me something about the interaction between your group/you and the other users/other people? How is this?

Can you tell me what, if at all, you have learned from being a rollerblader.

Positive/ negative?

What effect did rollerblading have on you as a person?

Do you think rollerblading had an effect on how you deal with your emotions?

Do you think there are social rules on the skatepark? Can you give me an example?

Thank you for this interview. We are now finished with the questions. Is there anything you would like to add or ask?