

## **Young identities and dance as an aesthetic and participatory activity**

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In a Danish dance educational landscape consisting mostly of dance academies that focus on teaching specific dance styles and steps, Dansehallerne has identified a lack of opportunities for children and young people to work with dance and movement in a more artistic and creative way. Thus Dansehallerne strives to develop dance activities that focus more on the aesthetic process than on the ability to perform in a specific technical way. One of Dansehallerne's goals is to develop a dance field for children and young people where *participation* and *co-creation* are keywords.

Speaking of dance, young people, and identity, our assumption is that young people are working in a highly productive and positive way with the constant dynamics of identity-making when they take part in a creative process, such as producing a dance performance. The identity-making process happens especially because they discover aspects of themselves *in relation* to others and because they discover that they *develop new skills and forms of expression*. Thereby they expand the field in which they can navigate as individuals.

In order to give young people opportunities to develop themselves through contemporary dance, Dansehallerne develops dance projects that focus on an artistic approach and on co-creation by the participants. For young people taking part in our projects, this means that they are deeply involved in the creative processes. In this context, the status of the dance teacher changes into a *facilitator of dance creation*. The typical facilitators in our projects are choreographers and dancers with artistic backgrounds and a strong experience of how to facilitate aesthetic processes.

### **“Take hold of the dance” and the Student Company in Odense**

In 2014, Dansehallerne initiated the nationwide project “Take Hold of The Dance.” The project has received 20.3 million Danish kroner during a period of three years. The project involves six partners from six different regions of Denmark. Dansehallerne has the financial responsibility and formulates the overall guidelines and dance programs. The regional partners put in content, implement, and carry out the different dance programs in their local context.

One of our six partners, the Department of Sports Science and Biomechanics at the University of Southern Denmark, has engaged in developing the Youth Program — one of four programs — by starting a student company at the university. Dance is already part of the degree of physical education at the university and thus in this local interpretation of the Youth Program the funding realized by Dansehallerne has been used to facilitate further initiatives in relation to the curriculum in dance. The Student Company is led by associate professor Susanne Ravn and is organized as a Community Dance project in which the students experiment with movement, the body, and interaction. During an intensive period of three months, the students explore and investigate: what can the body be like? What can be expressed through movement? And they develop movement and dance material in cooperation with choreographers (Susanne Ravn in an email-interview, June 2015). The case of the University of Southern Denmark is an example of a local partner who has succeeded in implementing a program in a local context. In Dansehallerne, we can identify three main reasons for their success. The local partner has:

- a strong interest in developing and making their mark on the content of the program
- a wide local network and easy access to potential young participants
- been able to select artists and choreographers who match the overall intentions and methods of the project

Questions that have arisen when presenting the project to others are: how does a program like this youth program manage to attract and recruit young people who have the world at their feet? (Recruiting young people has been a great challenge for some of our other regional partners.) Regarding the role of the dance facilitator: what competencies must the choreographers and dancers have in order to develop the young people's skills in being co-creative?

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