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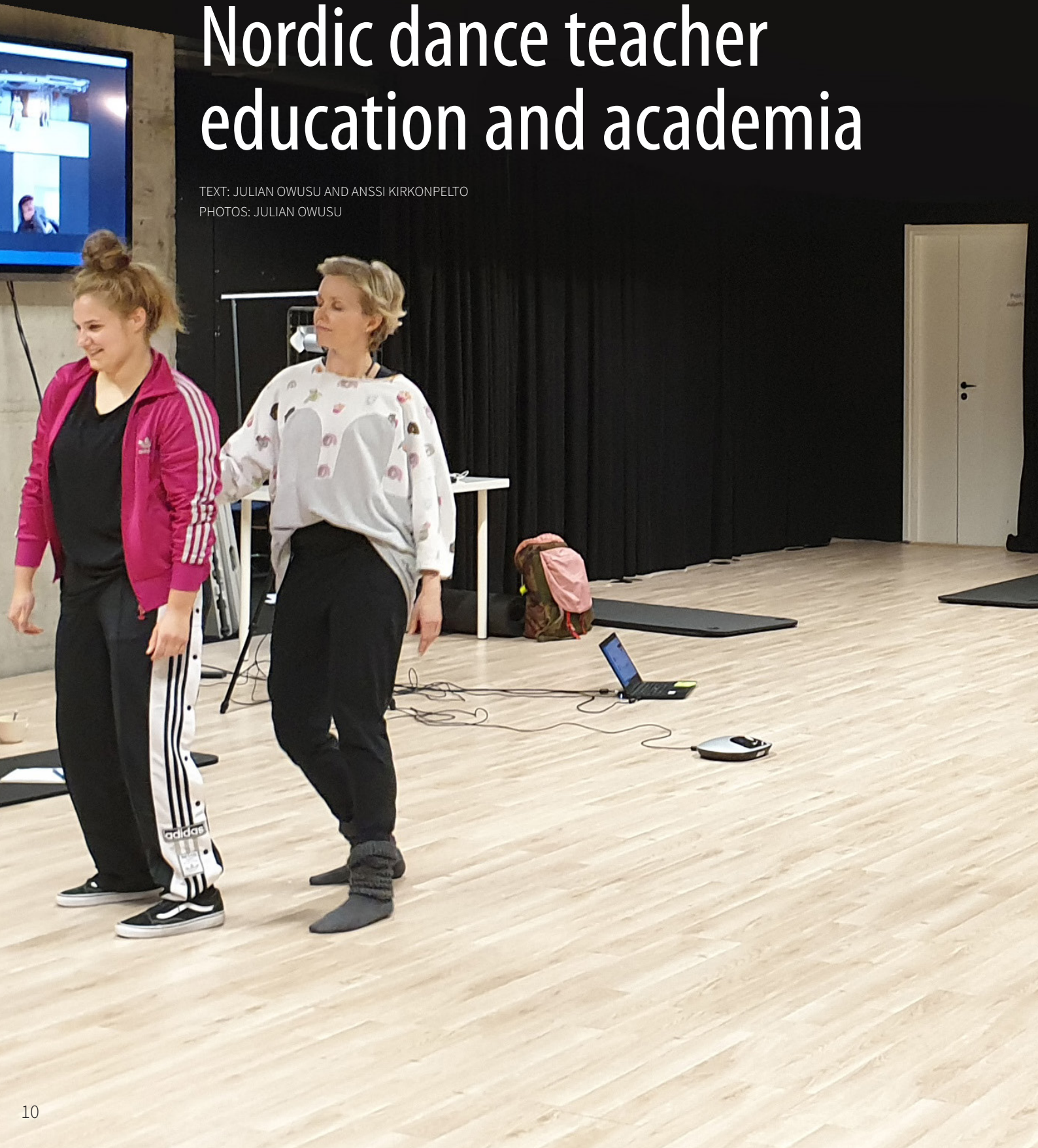
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Hiphop pedagogy and theory looks for a stable position in Nordic dance teacher education and academia

TEXT: JULIAN OWUSU AND ANSSI KIRKONPELTO
PHOTOS: JULIAN OWUSU



The Nordic Youth Streetdance Training and Education Program (NYSTEP) is a dance pedagogic project which aims to utilize dance to promote youth co-creation in cultural productions and education. The NYSTEP project concept introduces Hiphop pedagogy to Nordic universities through the collaboration of experienced Hiphop dance educators, aspiring dance teachers and youth with themes of Hiphop dance like jams and workshops.



The NYSTEP project was coordinated by the Oulu university of Applied Science (OAMK) and was funded by the Nordic Culture Point and the Arts Promotion Centre Finland. Partnering in this project were the dance teacher education programs of the Luleå Technical University and the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, whose prior collaborations with OAMK serve as a fruitful base for Nordic collaboration. The NYSTEP project approached dance pedagogy from a socio-cultural viewpoint and encourages communal sharing of knowledge in accordance with the pedagogic philosophy adopted by Hip Hop called “Each One Teach One”.

It is worth noting that the application of cultural elements of Hip hop in academia is not entirely unproblematic. There is a general misconception that associates Hip hop with negative stereotypes and refuses to recognize its products as art. Hip hop dance is often reduced to children’s hobbies, low quality art and a dance style to practice for fun alongside classical dance styles considered to be professional. Hip hop dance stems from community and social dance practices which western academia finds difficulty in theoreticizing from its limited perspective. Considering this, teaching dance teachers with classical dance backgrounds how to teach Hip hop dance in possibly a single course and project is not entirely unproblematic either. For this reason, the precise articulation of Hip hop theory in the context of Nordic dance teacher education was central to the process.

The NYSTEP project adopts its pedagogic concepts directly from the Hip hop culture. In order to be sensitive and true to the culture being introduced to a new setting, it was important to have representation from within the culture in the project. Thus, each university had their own mentor(s) who are Hip hop dancers themselves and understand the local contexts of each country. These mentors were Michael Aspli (NOR), Niki Tsappos (SWE), Julian Owusu (FIN) and Teemu Tuohimaa (FIN). The mentors would also be the link between the academic setting and local perspective.

The project’s pedagogic process took place on multiple levels: the co-creation of a platform and common curriculum by the mentors, sharing Hip hop-specific pedagogic methods with young dance teacher students and applying these methods in the work with youth.

The mentors’ meetings were held online. This altered the approach from a more dance centered approach to a slightly more dance theoretic approach. The mentors met through video conferences and built their syllabus.

THE PROCESS WAS DIVIDED INTO FOUR PARTS:

- 1) Identifying our students and their needs considering their education, local context and connection to Hip hop as a culture and an art form.
- 2) Identifying cultural characteristics of Hip hop that translate into content of the dance form.
- 3) Translating terminology and precise definition of Hip hop-specific terminology used in pedagogic settings.
- 4) Creating tools for teaching dance teacher students with limited Hip hop knowledge that would give them an understanding of the broader context they are stepping into as well as prepare them for teaching Hip hop accurately and culturally sensitively.

IN THEIR WORK TOGETHER, THE MENTORS WORKED THEIR WAY TO FIVE CORE OBJECTIVES IN TEACHING DANCE TEACHER STUDENTS:

- 1) Defining and applying “Each One Teach One” in a dance class setting
- 2) Enforcing social dance practices as normative dance class forms
 - *Cyphers*
 - *Party dancing*
 - *Sharing concepts*
 - *Positive reinforcement through social dancing*
- 3) Understanding Hip hop dance as a part of a wider culture with its own history
 - *Ritualistic dancing*
 - *Battling*
 - *Links between the movement and the music*
- 4) Understanding Hip Hop Culture
 - *History and heritage*
 - *Embodiment of the culture in the dance*
 - *Culture vs dance practice*
 - *What is Hip Hop locally? “Glocal” culture*
- 5) Tools for personal development of Hip hop dance technique



The NYSTEP education program planned to be held as a camp week at the Luleå University was turned into an online Zoom seminar hosted simultaneously in three countries due to travel restrictions in the Nordic countries. The students of the Oulu University of Applied Science participated with their mentors, Julian and Teemu, from Oulu. The students of Luleå Technical University participated with their mentor, Niki Tsappos, from Piteå. Unfortunately, the students of the Norwegian University of Science and Technology were not able to participate due to local restrictions closing universities in Trondheim during the project's time. The Norwegian mentor, Michael Aspli, was able to participate and took part in lecturing during the joint sessions over Zoom.

The dance teacher students had a dual role of students of Hiphop pedagogy as well as being teachers to youth, implementing methods they had learned during the camp week. Local youth of Oulu, Piteå and Trondheim were the main focus group for testing the "Each one teach one" teaching methods in jam-like workshop sessions. Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, public workshop, jam sessions and subsequently video documentation of the camp week and events were cancelled. However, the positive outcome of the situation was

that there was more time devoted to the work with mentors and dance teacher students. The online camp week turned into an intensive deep dive into Hiphop history, theory and practice.

The pilot project is now being rounded up and even though the original aim of co-creating jam sessions as pedagogic environments for youth did not happen due to COVID-19 restrictions, the project exceeded expectations of how the mentors and students could work together. Even on an online platform. The depth of knowledge achieved during the week was commended by both mentors and students alike. It highlighted the necessity of in-depth Hiphop pedagogy as part of the dance teacher education curriculum. Many students will be faced with the challenge of teaching Hiphop or other social dances once they graduate. Insufficient Hiphop education leads to professional dance teachers perpetuating stereotypes and possibly limiting their students' possibilities to move forward with aspirations of professional careers in Hiphop just because their knowledge is limited. Moving on, the NYSTEP project continues to introduce ways of approaching dance pedagogy diversely in tertiary education. One of the long-term goals is that this

content would no longer be project-based but a part of the official curriculum of dance teacher education in all participating universities. The Oulu University of Applied Science has already taken steps in that direction but there is recognition of a need to ensure consistency between year classes as HipHop lecturers are usually visiting lecturers. Nordic university collaboration is a fertile ground to build the change needed.

MENTORS OF NYSTEP PROJECT ARE EXPERTS

Michael Aspli is a Norwegian dancer, choreographer and teaching artist. Michael also explores other mediums of expression like film, visual arts and music. Michael's background is in Streetdance but has worked in multidisciplinary contexts with companies like Frikar, JSR Company, Kronos Dance Company, EWC and his own company / Collective: The Creative Art Force.

Julian Owusu is a dancer, who has worked prominently in the Finnish streetdance scene as a dancer, teacher and choreographer since 2004. Julian's focus in the large scheme of things has always been community and finds home in the Hip Hop ciphers and jam sessions. In addition to his work in the streetdance field, Julian has worked in productions for, among others, Jojo – Oulu Dance Centre, the Oulu City Theatre and Zodiak – Centre for New Dance as a choreographer, dancer and actor. Julian Owusu acted as chairperson of the Northern Finland's Streetdance Association from 2011 to 2015. At the moment, he works for the Arts Promotion Centre Finland as Regional Artist for youth Culture and as part of that position co-ordinated the NYSTEP project alongside Anssi Kirkonpelto from OAMK. Julian also sits on the board of the Nordic House of Reykjavík in Iceland.

Niki is a well-known figure in the battle scene and is constantly representing Sweden at international dance events. She frequently travels to share her vision and movement through workshops, performances, lectures, battles. She is the winner of, among many others, the Juste Debout 2010 (Paris), WDC 2010 (Japan) SDK HipHop 09-10-11 (Czech Republic), Fresh Battle 2014 (Japan) and Just Play 2015 (China) events. Niki is also the organizer of many events in Sweden such as Scandinavian Superjam, Pump up the Battle Tour and We're Jamming. Her history as a teacher stretches far back and she is the head teacher of the dance program at the Åsa Folkhögskola. Recently she extended her artistry from the dance floor towards the microphone. On the mic she goes by the name Niki Awandee.

Teemu Tuohimaa is a pioneer of the Finnish streetdance scene. His career as a professional dancer and dance teacher in Oulu spans over 20 years. He has taught streetdance at the Citydance Dance Centre throughout that time and has been a frequent visiting streetdance lecturer at the Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OAMK) over the years. Teemu has worked as a performer in many productions by Jojo – Oulu Dance Centre and Flow productions. Despite his long professional career, he still identifies himself to be a club dancer at his core as dance to him is primarily a means to relaxing and having fun. Teemu is one of the founders of Finland's oldest breaking crew, Sonic Skool as well as the Northern Finnish Street Dance Association (PSKT ry). Teemu is one of the few Finnish dancers that have competed in the Juste Debout final in Paris. ♦

MOTIVATION FOR NYSTEP

- The inconsistent/low level of HipHop education in Nordic Universities.
- Lack of two-directional pedagogic methods especially for engaging youth.
- Lack of social engagement as a cross-sectional educational viewpoint.
- Need for diverse university co-operation models.
- General lack of understanding of HipHop theory in Nordic academia.

KUVA: JP MANINEN



KUVA: HARRI TARVAINEN



Teemu Tuohimaa (left) and Julian Owusu, street dance gurus from Oulu, could share views and practices with their Nordic colleagues in the NYSTEP project. Sweden includes Niki Tsappos (down left) and Norway's Michael Aspli.

KUVA: MEI-VISIONS



KUVA: ANTERO HEIN

