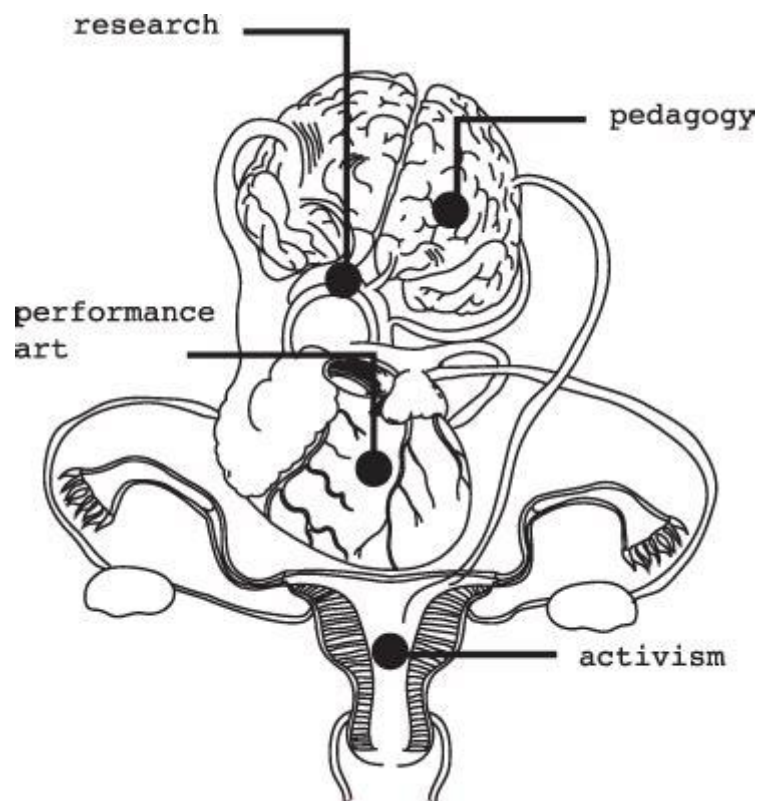


Poetic and sensuous modes of being, in immersive spaces

A field sensing by Mathias O. Jacobsen team 24



Placement organisations

I have done my placement in nested organisations. My original placement-agreement has been with the performance group *Sister's Hope*. The nature of my placement project has meant that I have been located at *Ryslinge Højskole*. My interests and initiatives has led me to involve in the school (from now on Ryslinge) beyond my responsibilities with Sisters, and I consider both organisations essential for my placement.

Sister's Hope

Sisters Hope is a Copenhagen-based performance-group and movement with an associated international troupe of performers from various backgrounds. Sisters Hope is led by Gry Worre Hallberg who co-founded the group with her poetic twin sister Anna Lawaetz in 2007. Sisters Hope operate in the intersection of performance art, research, activism and pedagogy. They draw on immersion and intervention when they manifest on the stages of everyday life and beyond. The group is working from their activist intention of democratizing the aesthetic and moving toward a *Sensuous Society*. The sensuous society is governed by the aesthetic dimension putting the sensuous and the poetic on equal terms with the concepts of rationality, productivity and duty that are held in unproportionably high esteem in the society governed by the economic dimension. Currently, they are working to open and unfold more sensuous modes of learning in the large-scale Nordic project Sisters Academy (2014 – 2020). Sisters Academy is a school in a world and society where the sensuous and poetic modes of being are at the centre of all action and interaction. It defines the primary mode of being and is the values on which all societal institutions are building – including the school.

I have been collaborating closely with Nana Senderovitz, *the link*, project manager and PA to Gry throughout the period. I have selected Nana for the master assessment since we have had weekly sparrings.

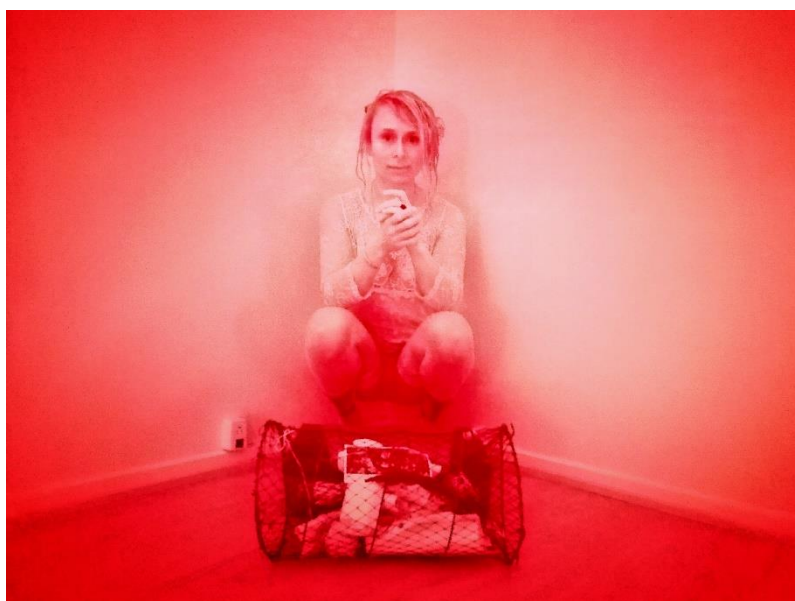


Figure △: *The (w)Hole* - a guest teacher with the course

Ryslinge Højskole

A Danish folk highschool focused on theatre and acting. The students live on the school and a lot of emphasis is put on building a strong sense of community and belonging between the students. Three main courses are offered for the students to dive into, *Film og nysgerrig på scenen*, *Klassisk teater og devising* and *Sister's Performance Method – Sensuous Learning*. Other than that, the students have some communal elements in their stay both on a weekly basis and in more extended courses spread throughout the semester. The school is a part of a larger organisation together with the sibling *Ryslinge Efterskole*, both schools are run separately, but under the same principal and backed by communal units of administration, kitchen and technical personnel.

Based on interviews and numerous informal conversations with the three leaders of the school it is evident to me that some of the central virtues the school revolve around:

- Building a strong culture of caring, emotional safety and community amongst the students
 - And equipping the individuals with the social competencies to seek out and engage in relation based communities after they leave Ryslinge.
- That every single student grows and develops.
 - Meeting the students with demands of agency and responsibility for own learning and personal development.
- Theatre as a method for learning a craft, but also for learning about being and being together in the world.

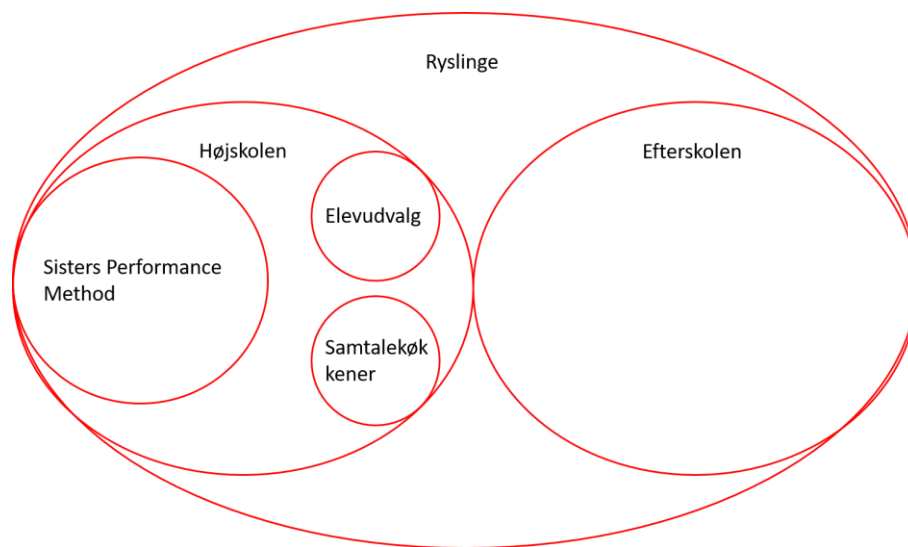


Figure ∞: A simple schematic of the structures of organisation I have encountered

Compared to other folk highschools, Ryslinge has an unusual setup as they have no resident and even no permanent teachers. The classes are conducted by active practitioners from the various fields of the subjects. The leadership at the school is permanent and has been my everyday colleagues, rather than the other teachers.

Placement agreement

Made with Sister's Hope.

For the first time, the group is offering a long-term course in their performance method.

Their platform is Ryslinge højskole. The teaching is carried out by changing performers, conducting their own sensuous classes as living sources of inspiration for the students.

Sisters saw the need for a consistent figure throughout the course. As everything is a pilot and a test of the format, a central part of our agreement was flexibility and to work with and from the needs as they arise. This means that I did not have a set of concrete tasks and responsibilities when entering the agreement. The predicted needs to be met by a consistent figure:

- Acting as the representative towards Ryslinge, coordinating and collaborating
- Being the consistent figure to provide coherence and stability to the course
- Providing emotional support for the students
- Hosting the visiting performers

What I have actually been doing

I have been the everyday coordinator of the course, arranging practicalities with the guest teachers and been their host.

I have followed the process of the students closely. By both participating in the classes with them and being facilitated in their own classes every week. This close knowledge of their process means I have been in a unique position to offer guidance and sparring as well as emotional support when the students have been confronted with past experiences. As well as, providing assistance in cases of individual needs during the classes.

I have attended the teachers meeting every Monday morning as the representative from Sisters Hope and have been the representative on site in the everyday. I have covered for unforeseen cancellations and facilitated a week and one of our Friday anchoring sessions. I have been keeping Sisters Hope updated and supported them in keeping up to speed on the process and development, every Friday the Link would arrive at Ryslinge to host the anchoring Fridays and do a status meeting with me.

From my position on the floor I naturally collected insights on adjustments to next years iteration of the course.

Toward Ryslinge I have hosted two of their sit-down Fridays, joined the team of guidance during the project week *Leading Artistic Processes*, covered for cancellations on the morning assemblies, arranged trips and events and involved myself a lot with the students, covering the "boarding school duties" that is a part of the job of a teacher.



Figure 5: Messages to the students from a teacher



Figure 6: Gifts from the students to the (w)Hole after a week's teaching

Reasoning behind choice of field, org & research question

My intention for the placement was to involve myself in an inspiring organisation made up of skilled practitioners that I could learn from. Perhaps the most important aspect was with the nature of the actual work I would be doing. Wanting to work with an organisation whose vision is aligned with my own values and do work I find meaningful, valuable and motivating. As my criteria for choosing was so broad and not really depended on a specific field or discipline, I wanted to challenge myself to look for opportunities in my current surroundings, and not spend a ton of time researching “cool organisations of the world.” From a guidance with Pete on not knowing my field and a little bit of anxiety of having the possibility to do ANYTHING, and thus having to do something cool, came a decision of staying open for as long as possible. To curiously and actively explore my different possibilities, not closing down early at the sign of an agreement, neither cold calling every interesting lead google could provide. This strategy proved immensely helpful. I contacted Sisters Hope based on my own experience of being a student in their boarding school format. This was indeed an inspiring organisation, working from values and a vision strongly aligned with my own, but within a field and with methods very alien to me. The practitioners involved all have a very strong practice.

The specific project where we saw the greatest potential in me getting involved was the world premiere of their long-term course being executed at Ryslinge. The Danish folk highschool is an institution very dear to me and of great professional interest – I worked with folk highschools in my PBA and on a few occasions in my outside-KP practice. To have this field unintentionally added to my placement period was a great gift.

In short I chose to work with Sisters Hope to learn from how they work with the sensuous, the poetic and total immersive spaces to evoke personal transformation and new modes of being and being together. In a larger context, I wanted to investigate alternative modes of learning and radical alternatives to the way education is approached in our society.

My choice of organisation came first, within that I have chosen performance art, aesthetics and education as field. The reasoning behind this has been to expand my own practice. Before I have been using the sensuous and dialogue as my primary tools, I hope to add poetry after this experience. Encapsulating all three aspects are the use of space, something we use very actively in the KP methodology. Studying how Sisters use total immersive spaces and a very carefully designed scenography is also something I hope to learn from. My usual “total immersive space” is nature, getting new perspectives and new language will enable me to work even more actively and deliberately with my choices regarding space.

These considerations let me to naturally formulate my initial research question:

How can I use poetic and sensorial methods in immersive spaces to catalyse the formation of meaningful relations and growth of personal leadership?

By relations I mean both interpersonal and in regards to our surrounding world i.e. nature.

In regards to my research design I have chosen to dive deeply into the physical context rather than going wide.

The nature of the course is evoking presence and immersion. To be able to learn from an organisation so strongly advocating these virtues I have naturally embodied the experience, and chosen to immerse and focus – to practice *sensing*.

The nature of my work spans two different organisations and brings me in intimate contact with a variety of different practitioners from both fields.

Due to the time range and level of complexity I it sufficient to go deep into one framework and learn from that in detail.



Figure 1: The alter of the Ekko, co-created with the students to end a week's teachings

Research and findings

Under the research question stated above I have been working with the following sub questions.

The third line of work

How does a matured and tested alternative to business-as-usual education look?

How to make a living facilitating capacity building workshops/courses?

Second line of work

How to organise around a strong value-based methodology within an established value-based organisation

How to include performers as sources of inspiration without them becoming mere products of a method?

First line of work

How do I balance facilitating, hosting, mediating, curating and teaching when practicing?

How do I define my role as “the person on-site” in between participating, teaching and hosting?

How do I balance my role as not a student, not a teacher, representative of Sisters, Kaospilot on investigation and somehow finding my place socially within such a strong community?

How am I as a teacher at a højskole?

Can I thrive in the country-side far from my network and friends?

I have conducted my research by fully immersing in the context of my placement. The duality of the setup means I have found myself in a bubble within a bubble. A ‘højskole’ is itself a place where many “lose themselves to a passion, to being together and to life” and the Sisters performance method is heavily based on the performative method of immersion. I have tried to immerse fully in these two worlds to conduct my investigation as an act of sensing. To experience on my own body and emotion and live my research questions rather than think, google and guess my answers. Both contexts have a very strong frame for reflection and introspection, and I have set up a reflection practice for myself weekly. This means I have a lot of reflections, thoughts and reactions that are collected during the experience and some that are captured when stepping out of the content and looking from a meta perspective.

On the first dimension – my practice and craft

Being able to observe a wide variety of experienced practitioners in action has given me much thought on the practices of facilitation, mediation, teaching, hosting and curating. How and when to discern between them and to what effect? Going back to the definitions in the Cambridge and Oxford dictionaries I have identified the different practices in action and mapped out my encounters. Some sessions have had a clear nature of one of the practices and many have had elements from two or more. Identifying the nature of the session before starting is defining for the role to take on and how to approach the interaction with students or participants. Being intentional supports the desired outcome of the session and increases the potential for impact.

I have found, from self-observations, interviews with practitioners and direct feedback from students, that the foundation for my practice and craft, supporting and tying together the above, is relating. Having a unique relation to the students is my channel to make an impact, it makes my inputs relatable and funnels many informal conversations where mutual exchange can shift perspectives and enable development in both myself and the student. Authenticity is perhaps the most essential virtue in this practice.

I have been challenged on my character by holding a multi-faceted role. Being a representative of staff, yet not a teacher. Participating on equal grounds with the students in the sensuous classes yet holding the responsibility for the everyday frame of the course. Being the front figure of Sisters, yet also facilitating the whole school. All under the investigation of the sister performance method, the practice of a folk highschool teacher, making sense of it all through process facilitator glasses and donating my own body to the poetic process of the Sisters method.

In regards to Ryslinge, the process of finding my place both socially and professionally has been a smooth and joyful process. I believe because I have entered the context authentically, being driven by intrinsic motivations and genuine curiosity. I have been invited in and given the possibility to expand my placement to include an extra organisation, with responsibilities and a central position to all the students. In regards to the course, I have been alternating between being a co-student and an authority figure. What comes before anything else is to maintain the respect and trust of the students, both as a professional but just as much as a human being. I have not been able to approach this by showing up as my authentic self, because the frame means that I have been present as my poetic self, *the journey man*. An aspect of my being that I am still getting acquainted with and experimenting with how to express and relate from. One point of the poetic self is that it is not a fiction but part of you. The only situation I have been in where I have felt the risk of losing respect and trust has exactly been a situation where my being became fiction and not honest.

In this role, I believe generosity is also a key factor, I have been in many sessions of sharing great vulnerability and testing out out-of-ordinary modes of being, to be in this space requires me to give as much of myself as the students while maintaining trust and respect, something that goes together but proved challenging to live out. As I have grown comfortable with my poetic self and I have grown authentic in my being the journey man,

this balance has become more natural and easy to navigate and enabled me to create value for the students and thereby also for both Ryslinge and Sisters.

On the second dimension – Business and Org. development

The Danish folk highschoools are intentionally isolated environments and Ryslinge is no exception. It is a conscious strategy to be somewhat of a bubble, allowing the students to step out of the time that they live in and into a space of immersion and contemplation, a space where they can lose themselves to a passion and not worry about evaluations and results. The school set high demands to the students to engage in and make an effort for the group and community. Sisters work with otherworldliness, immersion and intervention to be a radical alternative to everyday life and society. With Ryslinge seeking integration and community and Sisters working hard to build an otherworldly, mysterious universe and deliberately not integrate, at a first glance this seem an unlikely match, prone to failure. I identify this particular balance as the most fragile point in the collaboration and the most important conversation to be had for further exploring the match.

That said, many conditions are in place that support collaboration and both parts have lots to gain from their synergy.

- Ryslinge (and other folk highschoools) offer unique frames for contemplation and total immersion in the performance method over extended periods of time.
- The building arrangement have allowed Sisters to become a satellite within the school, offering a space to enter otherworldliness.
- Being in a context that differs from the Sisters universe, and that insists on the engagement of the students, forces them to switch between the poetic mode of being and ordinary life rapidly, reinforcing “integration” - the translation of the poetic into ordinary life.
- Ryslinge is dedicated to theatre, making the integration safe for our students and allowing for experimentation with intervention in safe ways.
- Ryslinge is hosting an out of ordinary course within the field of theatre and performance arts, giving them marketing value and extending their network of international performers.

Making this type of collaboration across fields between organisations, requires clear agreements, communication and a lot of flexibility from both parties. In this case, with a strong difference in value base I see the overlap of vision as the most important aspect of the successful collaboration.

Common for the two organisations is their approach to leadership and internal organisation. Both are characterized by a very high degree of freedom for the staff, whom are encouraged to put their own being and craft in to their work. The leadership hold some strong outside frames and the practitioners roam freely and without control within them. In both orgs the leadership have a strong relation to the students and in that way follow their process closely.

On the third dimension – My vocational field

Initially my investigation on the third line of work revolved around the large-scale project Sisters Academy and how the school of a sensuous society looks. The unique context of my placement has exposed me, not to Sisters Academy, but to two different and distinct takes on alternatives to business as usual education.

The Danish folk highschool is an old institution with rich and extensive traditions and pedagogy and my analysis is barely scratching the surface. In regards to my own journey some of the interesting points I have found that separates this institution from BAU education in a positive way follow

- Communities of practice
 - The students are organised around subjects or fields of professionalism in groups learning and practicing together. This mode of learning is thoroughly described by Lave & Wegner in their 1991 book *Situated Learning*
- Beyond professionalism
 - Through living, learning and working together and being within frames that emphasise strongly on community, the students have a massive development in regards to interpersonal relations, social competencies and personal leadership. They grow to take responsibility for themselves, the community and others, take action on and have awareness of own development. The exposure to diversity in perspectives on life and values challenge their own perspectives and force a reconsideration on values and how life is lived. As well, as building empathy and understanding of others.
- Lose yourself
 - The unique frames offer time and space for contemplation, immersion and experimentation. This setting offers a unique break from the culture of merits that rule society and allows for a practice driven by inner motivation rather than by results and achievements, itself a different mode of being and being together.

The sisters hope performance method – sensuous learning is a method for training performers in conducting classes on any subject or matter that they provide but in a sensuous and/or poetic mode of being. The method is based on four different logics as illustrated below. The activism logic is the foundation of the project toward the vision of a sensuous society. The educational aspect is included to target schools, a societal institution that almost all youth passes through, meaning that this is an area with huge potential for

impact. The performers or teachers conduct their own research, it is a central aspect to the method to identify and develop on a research question and collect data to gain knowledge and pass on knowledge found. The way data is collected and the perception of what data is, is also heavily expanded and tested. One of the approaches to data collection that sets this

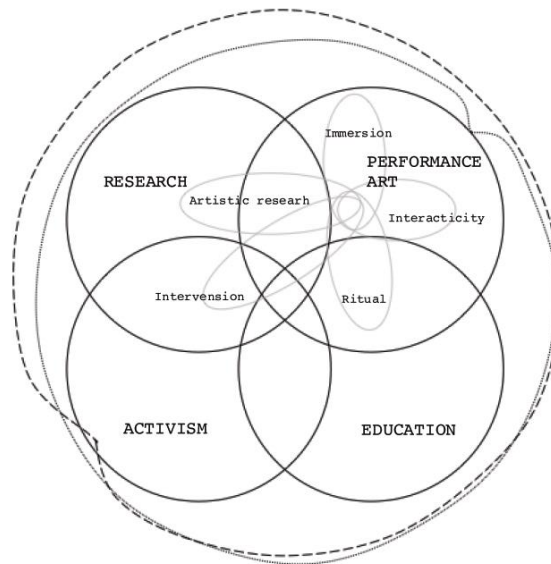


Figure 9: The four logics of the Sisters performance method - Sensuous Learning

method markedly apart is that most data is collected during the experience in the form of note books rather than being collected in an interview separate in time from the experience.

The performance art logic support the experiential, sensuous and poetic modes of being that the method seeks to evoke in the audience. It is a means of living out ideas and thoughts about what could be, the performers – and the audience – donate their bodies to experiments of alternative realities. By creating immersive universes, it is possible to live, for example, the school of a sensuous society rather than merely speculating on how it would be and be conducted. This means that the conclusions on the conducted research are all lived and experienced.

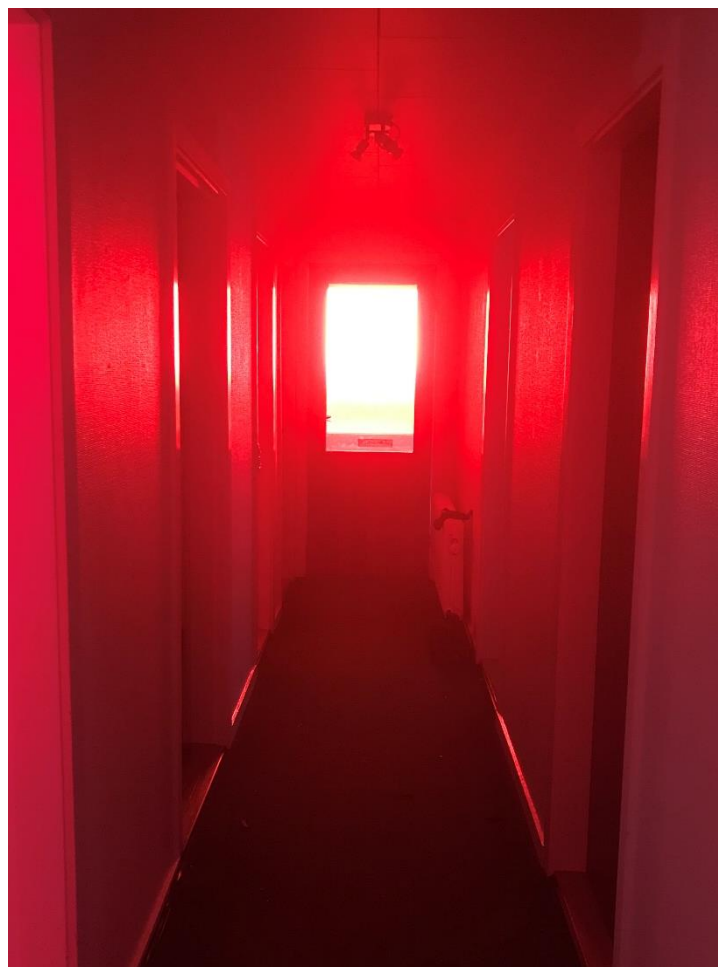
One major difference between the two organisations and their approach to building capacity in individuals is how the economy works. The Danish folk highschool is an esteemed institution and heavily subsidised by government in addition to the tuition fee. Sisters Academy is a radically alternative, activist project and purely funded by funds, primarily arts and culture funds and only charge a minor fee for participation to reach as large an audience as possible. In the perspective of government, Ryslinge runs a school and Sisters Hope create art, meaning that the economic reality of the teachers of the two are radically different. From my placement period, I can only conclude that making a living from capacity building workshops requires that one subscribes to widely acknowledged institutions or traditions and practice under their merit. Subscribing to beliefs that lie

outside the norm becomes activism or art and requires other funding for economic sustainability.

The placement has been an incredible journey, filled with growth, new relations and balance. I have thrived in this context, being surrounded by engaged people in a strong caring community. Living with the sensuous and poetic, close to nature and with time and headspace for focus and contemplation. I have been crafting new relations both personally and professionally. Learned about teaching at and running a folk highschool. Met and learned from a wide variety of experienced performers from the fields of performance arts, experience design, film, theatre, alternative education, movement, personal development and many more.

My open curiosity and initiatives have been welcomed warmly and repaid with responsibility and freedom to practice. I have crafted my own role in a complex context and navigated by intrinsic motivation. I have been introduced to poetic and aesthetic modes of being and methods and have formed a foundation from which to further explore and includes these into my practice.

It is not without sadness that I leave Ryslinge and Sisters performance method before the conclusion of the semester, but as we move through time, spaces change and the journey continues.



Timeline

Weeks 6-8

In Aarhus
work on internal assignment
research on Sisters Hope
ELP work
Teaching at Testrup
moving out and preparing for Ryslinge.

24. feb.
Moving to Ryslinge

Week two

The Sister – worksheets.
Being invited in
Giving astronomy talk
Direction for the journeyman

Week four

Leading artistic projects
First facilitation responsibility for Ryslinge
Break from the Sisters Performance
Method
Facilitating the whole school
Process consulting the groups

Week six

The Flow – movement, repetition, flow
states of mind, staying with what is
Facilitating Friday anchoring

Week eight

The Journey Man facilitating the course –
time to work in pairs, individual sparring
and coaching

Week one

Meeting the Sister and the Link
Introduction to Ryslinge
Meeting the Students
Transforming “femmeren” to “the sun”
Intro party
The Sister introducing the method

Week three

The (w)Hole – sexuality,
lightness/darkness, whole beings

Week five

The Link – time to work alone. Trip to
Odense

Week seven

The Ekko – Sounds, Love

Week nine

The Dramaturg
Saying goodbye and moving to Aarhus