

# Studying Social Circus - Openings and Perspectives

Culture Has an Impact!  
Seminar in Tampere, Finland  
December 12th – 15th 2013



Copyright © Authors 2014  
Edited by Katri Kekäläinen

“Wellbeing Effects from Social Circus” is based on a publication with the same name (Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre 2013), translation from Finnish to English by Eerika Kokkonen

Photos: Alice Bonzanini, Stephen Cadwell, Circus Kumarani,  
Karen Abplanalp, Afghan MMCC, Riitta Yrjönen  
Layout: Riitta Yrjönen

The seminar on which this publication is based was supported by the Effective Circus Project, The School of Communication, Media and Theatre and the Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre, University of Tampere and the Aladdin’s Lamp of Pirkanmaa Region.

ISBN 978-951-44-9426-0 (pdf)



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Foreword</b> .....	5
Sofia-Charlotta Kakko and Katri Kekäläinen, The Effective Circus Project	
<b>Circus as a Whole</b> .....	6
Hélène Réveillard, ay-roop	
<b>Social Circus in a Warzone</b> .....	14
David Mason, Mobile Mini Circus for Children	
<b>Developing Community Circus in Aotearoa New Zealand: Evaluation techniques and conclusions</b> .....	27
Frances Kelliher and Thomas Hinz, Circus Kumarani and the Circability Trust	
<b>Studying the Effects of Social Circus Projects amongst Adults with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland</b> .....	38
Jim Webster and Nick McCaffery, Streetwise Community Circus	
<b>Wellbeing Effects from Social Circus</b> .....	45
Jukka Lidman and Riitta Kinnunen, Social Development Co Ltd	
<b>Measuring Happiness: Assessing the Intrinsic Value of Youth Circus</b> .....	52
Dr. Stephen J. Cadwell, Galway Community Circus and Dr. Brendan Rooney, Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology	
<b>Effectiveness Evaluation in Social Circus Projects: A Methodological Proposal</b> ....	61
Dr. Tania Fiorini, University of Padova and Ilaria Bessone, Msc, University of Milan	
<b>Social Circus as an Art for Social Change: Promoting Social Inclusion, Social Engagement and Cultural Democracy</b> .....	70
Dr. Jennifer Beth Spiegel, Concordia University in Montréal	
<b>Defining Constructs for Evaluating Circus-Based Youth Development</b> .....	76
Jacqueline L. Davis, PhD Student, University of British Columbia and Jennifer P. Agans PhD Student, Tufts University	
<b>Seminar programme</b> .....	86



## Foreword

Sofia-Charlotta Kakko and Katri Kekäläinen, The Effective Circus Project

This article collection is the product of the Culture Has an Impact! seminar that was held in Tampere, Finland in December 2013. This celebration seminar was the high point of a 5-year run of two national social circus projects administrated by Tampere University's Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre. The seminar was organized partly in collaboration with the Aladdin's Lamp network of Pirkanmaa region and the Effective Circus project.

The Effective Circus project (2011-2014) continued the work started with the national Social Circus project (2009-2011). Both projects were funded by the European Social Fund (through the North Ostrobothnia Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment, Finland). In these projects we established social circus as a permanent part of the Finnish circus scene and the wellbeing services purchased by municipalities. While the first project focused on finding the good practises in social circus teaching, the second project went a little further. The aim was to prove that there are indeed wellbeing effects that can be reached with social circus.

The Culture Has an Impact! seminar served as a platform for the project to both broadcast its results, and to ignite an international discussion on the future of social circus studies globally. As an immediate result of the seminar, a network for circus researchers, The Global Institute for Circus Studies was formed. This publication can be thought to be the first practical product of this new network, as it showcases the work done by many of the founding members of the network.

These articles introduce different social circus projects and evaluations going on around the world, from New Zealand and Canada to Finland, France, Italy, Ireland and even Afghanistan. We are proud and happy to present this publication and hope it to be the first of many to come!

Sofia-Charlotta Kakko  
Project manager of the Effective Circus project

Katri Kekäläinen  
Project coordinator, the editor of the publication

# Circus as a Whole

Hélène Réveillard

Most of the guest speakers came to the Culture Has an Impact ! seminar because they were circuses or academic researchers already involved into processes of study. I came because I was not.

I come from a different organization regarding those who were represented here in Tampere, with another way of working and approaching outreach projects, but with the same passion and interest in circus. I have also a common concern about studying the impacts of circus on its audience. We live in a world where we increasingly have to demonstrate the need and the interest of our actions and it may be a key to be part of it, to continue to develop our projects.

I am in charge of production and development of contemporary circus projects in ay-roop, and I will begin presenting my organization and our position and interest in circus, given that we gather different roles and missions. I will then reflect on what was said and questioned during this seminar, how I consider it from my opinion, and how it can affect my professional approach.

## Presentation of ay-roop

ay-roop [ajRup] was the « heave ho ! » of the circus big top riggers in the 18th century. Nowadays, ay-roop refers to an organisation that was created in early 2005 in Rennes - France, with the willingness and aim to support circus artists in their creative process while developing cultural projects in its territory.

We presently conduct three main activities at ay-roop: support to contemporary circus artists, organization of circus events, and development of artistic and cultural outreach initiatives - a consistent set in favor of circus arts.

### *Support to circus artists*

We are participating in artistic creation by supporting artists in their paths, their doubts, the fulfillment of their projects, empowering the initiators and their teams, encouraging them to think about their functioning... This support for the structure and the development is a daily commitment: moral, human and financial.

ay-roop currently supports six circus companies from both France and abroad who are working on several artistic disciplines: new magic, juggling, German and Cyr wheels, clown... Each of which have their own artistic universes and approaches<sup>1</sup>.

We work with them on three different missions of administration, production and touring, depending on their needs. The companies remain responsible as producer of their projects and we work collaboratively on achieving

---

1 Monstre(s) / Etienne Saglio, new magic and juggling (FR) ; Ludor et Consort / Ludor Citrik, clown (FR); La Plaine de Joie / Tanguy Simonneaux, German and Cyr wheels (FR) ; WHS / Ville Walo and Kalle Nio, object twirling, magic and video (FI) ; Nuua / Olli Vuorinen and Luis Sartori do Vale, juggling (FI) ; Tr'espace / Roman Müller, diabolo juggling (CH)



## Organization of circus events

ay-roop runs circus event in the city of Rennes and its area every year. We recognised the need for us to live and develop some projects in the territory we belong to, to share and spread our passion amongst our community.

Those events are areas of reading and discussion around our position. More than programming time, they are about following the approach of supporting arts projects from the conception to the meeting with the audience. This goes hand in hand with the desire to discover and share with the broadest audience the richness and the diversity of circus arts.

Our first event, « Numéro de Cirque », took place in April 2011 as a three-day event where we welcomed short contemporary circus shows on a shared stage. Numéro de Cirque was a resounding success, following which we were invited in January 2012 and April 2013 to Les Champs Libres in Rennes where we had a carte blanche to make live circus shows and artists.

These moments confirmed that circus has a real place to take in the cultural life of our city. There is a great demand for it, and in response we developed an annual circus event which travels around the different cities in the Rennes' area. In April 2013 we organized our first « Temps Fort des Arts du Cirque », which will continue to be a biennial event. We will play with the even years organizing a « Focus » on a specific theme, as Nordic Circus in April 2014.

As we do not have our own theatre or big top, we welcome various shows in partnership with other theatres and share the costs with them. We are also funded by our local institutions but we still invest a lot in the organization of those projects. It is a hardly balanced and risky economy and we have to be committed to make it happen.



### *Development of circus outreach initiatives*

ay-roop's interest in circus as an artform but also its will of transmission, extend throughout the year via outreach and discovery projects. Through initiations, workshops and courses, in partnership with social, educational or medical structures, we are committed to share our passion.

We imagine and build each time the projects hand-in-hand with our partners, depending on the specificities and the needs of the participants, on the wills of the structures... We also pay attention on the circus disciplines and on the artistic or pedagogical approaches of our instructors.

We work both with artists we support and with circus artists and trainers who are interested in these sort of projects. They come from different parts of France and Europe, but we particularly focus on the regional area to reduce the costs and create a local dynamic.

Our project partners are the main participants in the funding of these activities, however we are also supported by national and local cultural institutions. We generally apply for a financial subsidy for each individual project, depending on the supporting programs (for instance health and culture or justice and culture), and we began last year to be funded for our global activity regarding the access to arts and culture through cultural activities.



It is about working on what seems impossible and try to go over it. Circus becomes a tool to question its own limits, work on self-development, trust, solidarity, social fulfilment... Our actions are not an answer nor a single entertainment, but offer an experience and open a door.

This work is one of our strong bond tools and local roots by bringing people together, and intertwines with our two other activities: the artistic support and the organization of events. The actions carried out become then footbridges between the public and the circus arts, to make live this discipline on a local scale, and offer it to the greatest number of people. However, our work and reflections are mainly empirical regarding those circus outreach activities. We are deeply committed in our concrete daily work, and it has been incredibly interesting and inspiring to participate to this seminar in Tampere, to reflect and take some time to think about studying the effects of circus.

## Studying the effects of circus, reflections

The question of studying the effects of our action arises as we develop an increasing number of projects. We usually conduct assessments or brief evaluations after our workshops; however we are not running in depth studies as such. We can nevertheless see the need and the interest of such a work, and hence my presence and interest here in this seminar.

I have been observing, listening and talking a great deal during this seminar, and three main points seem relevant to me. All the actors involved in social circus projects need at some point these studies. They remain a source of many questions, however are part of an ongoing process to which an international collective collaboration will give new perspectives.

### *A need for all the actors*

It is important for all the actors involved in the development of social circus projects to have access to data regarding circus activities. We have said and seen here that it is of paramount interest for funding bodies and in particular the political institutions. There is a clear need for these groups to be convinced that circus has a real place in the development of artistic and cultural activities, matching with the political goals of well-being and access to social and cultural life.

It is also interesting for the artists or the instructors. They are not all experts on social circus and some people may need concrete details to complete and widen their own feeling and observation, making visible the interest of their action.

The social, educational or medical partners also need studies on the effects of circus. We work with enthusiastic contacts within these structures, but often they may feel isolated or poorly understood inside their own organization. Circus workshops are less common than theatre or dance and it may be necessary to give them tools to prove the positive impacts and to demonstrate the interest of such projects inside their structures.

It is then essential for the project managers to take a step back thanks to these studies, to gain an overview on their activity and on their way of working and processing. For project managers such as we are in ay-roop, it is also

useful to defend our job. Our economy is frail and hardly balanced and we still need to prove the interest of these actions and the importance of intermediary as us to build projects between artists, publics, partner organizations and funders.

Even if it is not necessarily a need, we have seen through testimonies that some participants and families may also find it relevant to have some keys of understanding about circus effects, finding their own place inside it.

### *How to measure and study?*

I came with several questions of method and content about studying the effects of circus, as well as the artists and trainers I work with, and it was interesting to see that those questions are shared by many circuses and researchers.

Studying is a process of questioning, and it is essential to improve a scientific rigour to conduct the studies properly. The presentation of Marja-Liisa Honkasalo, professor of Culture, Health and Well Being at the University of Turku, was particularly inspiring. She distinguished different levels of evaluation (political, ideological and scientific) and their implicit goals, but also some strength or weaknesses of study processes. She highlighted the need to return to those essential methodological questions about why and what do we want to study, for who, from whom...

It lead to safeguarding questions such as: are we, as project managers, the appropriate people to study our own projects ? Are we able to write our own questionnaire without influencing outcomes with any personal opinions ? Do we want to evaluate our action or develop a research on our activity ? It may be difficult or potentially not robust to lead a study without answering those preliminary questions.

As a newcomer in this social circus network, I felt through this seminar that we were already engaging quite deeply in this process. All the work recently produced represents a first big step but we still are in the movement of questioning and we need to keep it present in mind, to give time and space to the development and the improvement of our studies.

### *What to do with the studies ?*

One of the common thread we have discussed is then to know what to do with the studies we do undertake. Everyone is producing independent work and studies, but why not use them as a common tool ? Why not compile and exploit various studies together ?

For the non-researchers, studying represents a lot of time and investment in addition to the everyday activity; we do not always have the time and capacity to conduct study and it may be a lonely and hard work. We have nevertheless a lot of common points and it is important to make this visible. The presentation of Stephen Cadwell showed it as such, having many common results in his study with the Effective Circus Project work, and being very excited about the outcomes.

But the sharing of our differences may also help us to develop our projects. For instance, in France the national cultural institutions mainly support artistic activities when they are conducted by artists. It is closely related to the

development of the cultural policies and the recent legitimation of circus as an artform (circus formerly belong to the Ministry of Agriculture). However, I feel, and many experiences presented here support my sense, that is also interesting to build some projects with pedagogical trainers. I would then suppose that an international or European compilation of studies can prove and make the processes move.

We need to keep looking around, to observe how it is made, how it is operated elsewhere. It is a good way to stay awake, to share our experiences, and then go further in the development of social circus projects.

This seminar experience was for many of us a very nourishing and inspiring time. We need in our practise these times of thinking and sharing, especially on an international scale. But working on such a scale means that we need to speak a common langage and translate many of our reflections. And it is finally a tough job.

I did not use previously - because I did not know it in french - the expression « social circus ». It was easy to understand what it was about when I first heard it, it is a gathering formulation, but I still wonder what does it mean ? Is it a stake for circus to be social, or is it intrinsic ? Is it not the role of art to convert into action and give tools to those who are in need ? I truly believe in circus as an artform with a huge potential of action, through its physical, emotional and collective approach, and that is why, as a whole, circus is powerful.



# Social Circus in a Warzone

David Mason - Founder of MMCC (Mobile Mini Circus for Children)

## Introduction

We would like to share some of the insights we have accumulated during last 11 years of passionate, hard-working, full-time experience in Afghanistan, working on Social Circus. This article highlights some of the amazingly positive and extremely constructive applications of social circus, which is ideal for underprivileged children especially in extreme conditions (such as in Afghanistan). We explain how unique Afghanistan is (particularly the rural areas) to both implementing Social Circus activities and researching the effects of it. We also encourage researchers to choose MMCC for a more comprehensive research on Social Circus, and the strategies developed by MMCC in the areas of Cheerful Pedagogies<sup>1</sup> techniques and Social Circus methods.

## 1. History of MMCC

When the 'Mobile Mini Circus for Children' (MMCC) was launched in 2002, and during the first few years of its activities, the managing team knew nothing about Social Circus. The founder himself (David Mason) had never seen a live circus performance even. The sole motivation for the MMCC's co-directors (David Mason and Berit Muhlhausen) from the very beginning was to radically change the life of as many children in as many places in Afghanistan, to offer them a better, more joyful, positive, social life experience and give them the childhood they had been deprived of after so many decades of war.

Our methodology took as a reference point, and remains to this day, the children themselves and their desires. The children educated us and showed us what they wanted, how they learned best and what worked for them. We designed our activities based on the knowledge they themselves provided us. In this way, we have only been very good listeners, observers, providers, facilitators and primarily a bridge between them and the adult world.

Our approach evolved partially out of the scarcity of information available to us at the time: we lacked resources, qualifications, working manuals, or any guidelines of any kind to follow. We gradually realized exactly that lack of predefined work plan and instruction was a privilege and advantage in itself. We had to discover and reinvent everything from scratch, rely on our senses and intuitions and never lose the contact to our main reference that was the children themselves.

Later, after 4 years of developing our activities and pedagogies in isolation in Afghanistan, we were told by some visiting French clowns that what we were doing was 'Social Circus'! That was the first time we had heard the name and became so happy to know what we were doing did in fact have a name – 'Social Circus'. In a nutshell, our approach was like the flight of the bumblebee: Aerodynamically, the bumblebee shouldn't be able to fly, but the bumblebee doesn't know it so it goes on flying anyway.

---

1 Cheerful Pedagogy is a creative, joyful and playful way of teaching by involving the senses and experimenting rather than memorizing. It has developed many techniques and educational tools mainly based on Social Circus principles that make the process of learning very fun and sensible.

## 2. What is a Warzone?

'Warzone' is usually imagined as a highly fatal and dangerous region of explosions and flying bullets, by its nature not a proper place for any kind of circus or clowns. But even in a country suffering as much conflict as Afghanistan there remains a daily life that very often seems to be quite normal. However, bombings, killing and the vagaries of war happen every day throughout the country and it touches every single individual to different degrees and at different times.

Our main centre in Kabul has plenty of old shrapnel scars - and a few new ones as well - but for the most part, the past 11 years have been 'normal'. In this article, warzone refers to such a similarly unstable and dangerous environment, where occasional attacks disturb an otherwise functioning routine. Even in peaceful countries free of armed conflict, an individual could still find him- or herself in trauma-inducing social, emotional, and psychological situations. People do suffer and show the same symptoms related to traumatic experiences as those living in a 'warzone'. Therefore many of the Social Circus and Cheerful Pedagogies methods developed by MMCC in Afghanistan are as useful and effective here as they are anywhere.

The main characteristics of a warzone in a pedagogic context are as follow:

- **Instability**  
There is basically nothing stable and regular that can be trusted, from the educational system to any social infrastructure.
- **Humiliation**  
Very often one's image of oneself is defined by relying on what one has. Losing loved ones and properties or any valuables including a way of living, changes this personal image dramatically. Then not only the loss should be coped with but also the humiliation caused by the broken image of one's identity.
- **Lack of economic, emotional, artistic and cultural resources and support for children**  
This is both caused by war directly and by adults who are affected by war and prioritize all the resources for physically surviving rather than investing on soft values for children such as implementing cultural and artistic activities.
- **Accumulated suppressed feelings of anger, disappointment and betrayal**  
Generally there are not enough outlets or ways to express these feelings and very often it is considered a weakness to express them. The natural result is a suppressed pool of all traumas, negative feelings and difficulties of what happened over many years of conflict.
- **Partiality and fragmentation of the society into different hostile factions**  
The political, religious, ethnic and regional interests in war naturally promote and impose an isolated identity to individuals who will themselves become victims of this hostile identity and will carry on hostilities for generations.
- **Loss of hope and a feeling of powerlessness resulting in apathy**  
Lack of stability results in frequent failures even after time and effort has been invested. In the absence of development, and progress people, and particularly children, lose their sense of purpose.



photos Afghan MMCC



[www.AfghanMMCC.org/Fur](http://www.AfghanMMCC.org/Fur)



[www.AfghanMMCC.org](http://www.AfghanMMCC.org)

photos Afghan MMCC

We wish you all a happy, peaceful and joyful Eid  
عید شما مبارک اختر مو مبارک شه



- Lack of vision and belief in a strong achievable aim  
Hopelessness in itself makes children forget about a productive future and forces them into a state of boredom and lack of enthusiasm.
- Transforming from a living person to a fighting or surviving person  
The peaceful living values and attitudes are gradually change to a value set defined by war that is based on either a culture of fighting or simply surviving.
- Difficulties in identity formation and development  
There are not many easy, joyful, inspirational and positive samples of “who to be” in a warzone for children. This makes the process of developing individual values and personality very difficult and very often the results very poor.

After many years of war, gradually a new culture of surviving is shaped which has a different value set and approach to life. This is obviously good for surviving but it eliminates many peacetime values and makes living rather an obligation and intolerable duty than a pleasure and blessing. The culture of survival is certainly not happy and joyful and children who grow up in such a society enter into adulthood deeply scarred.

Together, these consequences of war create the perfect storm that ultimately causes a disintegration of a society and creates seemingly insurmountable problems for its citizens as well for the rest of the world. Unfortunately, in terms of humanitarian aid and nation building, there is more of a focus on so called reconstruction and rebuilding of all the hardware without considering the soft values and necessities that are much more essential for children and the country as a whole.

### 3. What is Social Circus in Warzone?

We use the term Social Circus mainly as social, physical, and artistic activities with more focus on creating an environment of communication and social relations. Social Circus in our terminology is as much a process of training in a variety of skills as it is performances and building support networks for further developments that can sustain a joyful culture and tradition of practicing social circus. One of our main focuses is on discovering and improving physical, artistic and social abilities of children and creating different platforms for children to express themselves as individuals as well as teams. The transformative power of circus connects education and physical art with emotional and social development. Social Circus is a tool for transformation, discipline, creativity and artistic expression. For us games and circus arts are tools for teaching social skills, overcoming trauma and developing essential capacities and the ability to take responsibility.

The following activities are among our main focus in Afghanistan:

MMCC based on its methodology has developed many ‘**Educational Entertainment Performances**’ in the last 11 years. A typical Educational Entertainment Performance lasts for up to one hour and includes one or more educational parts of 8-15 minutes about essential life skills. The performances naturally include different circus arts such as acrobatic, singing, comedy, dancing and juggling usually accompanied with live Afghan traditional music. These performances are performed by children as well as adults mainly in the schools for very large audience. The educational parts are developed with the adult artists, junior artists, children audience and experts of relevant fields. Health and peace education, drug abuse, child labor and malaria prevention, children rights and hygiene are among the incorporated educational themes in the performances. These performances are financed by the donors such as UN Mine Actions agencies for example that has supported performances geared toward

teaching and protecting children from the dangers of landmines and unexploded ordnance, in ways they can easily and thoroughly understand.

Workshops on different circus skills such as juggling, acrobatics, theatre and painting are a crucial part of our Social Circus work. They teach children new ways of thinking and playing while expanding their creative horizons. One of our workshop packages that has been conducted numerous times nearly all around the country is a 5-day workshop starting with an Educational Entertainment Performance. This workshop is followed by training children in 5-6 groups of 10-30 each for the next 4 days in singing, acrobatics, juggling, painting, and theatre. During this workshop, the MMCC team assists the children to develop a full show for their school and local community members for the final celebration in the last day. Beside this MMCC conducts many different workshops packages developed for children as well as teachers in the schools, other children centres and MMCC's own regional and national centres.

A country with over 30 years of war has naturally lost and forgotten many of soft values and positive attitudes towards its children. Making big events, gathering children across the country for national and regional festivals and competitions and celebrating different occasions by big performances and its coverage by media has gradually influenced how people and authorities think about children. Social Circus has been playing a very important role in highlighting children who are the absolute majority (Afghanistan has the youngest population in the world) and influenced the decision makers from parents to politicians to improve children's conditions.

Another main focus of MMCC is '**Capacity Building**' for a sustainable and progressive children culture and Social Circus activities in the whole country. This requires strategies to integrate Social Circus as a natural element in the government systems through ministries of education, culture and social affairs and the Afghan Olympic Committee as well as promoting it and making it introduced and accessible for a very large number of beneficiaries. Since 2002 MMCC has achieved remarkable results on this aspects and Social Circus has gained a very high status in Afghanistan.

#### 4. Why social circus in a Warzone?

Social Circus is a very effective tool for developing individuals and their social skills as well as developing communities. However its application in a warzone and its implications are not yet fully discovered and understood.

The following is a list of some specifications and qualities of the Social Circus as well as typical conditions of a warzone that justifies why Social Circus is such an ideal tool in a warzone. Some of these qualities are already used to address various childhood traumas in many parts of the world. Social Circus takes these a few steps further to address the specific traumas in a warzone.

- Use of the body as the ultimate source to trust when nothing else can be relied on by children who are neglected because of war
- Bringing joy as everything is so dull and sad and negative
- Learning skills and being able to perform almost anywhere and anytime without being limited and dependent on infrastructures and logistics that are not available because of war
- Reminding all the direct and indirect audiences (from the youngest children to elders, community leaders and politicians) of the value of artistic, cultural, and entertaining aspects of life so that trauma, sadness and misery does not dominate
- Delivering educational messages such as landmine awareness, health education, peace education etc.

These messages are more effectively delivered to children by Educational Performances than by any other, more stale methods

- Trauma therapies and giving tools to children to get in touch with the past and find their own individual ways of solving their problems. This is basically giving a voice to the children to both understand themselves and express their thoughts and emotions
- Increasing the social skills of children, as there are not many other training alternatives for them. These social skills are fundamental life skills for them as a means of standing up for their rights, as well as protecting and promoting themselves as individuals and an essential part of their communities
- Organizing and harmonizing as war in general disintegrates and pushes society towards separation and division. From coordinating 3 balls to be juggled by two hands to perfecting (through coordinating numerous actors across different genders, ethnic, regional and religious backgrounds) a one hour performance to running mega workshops in national festivals, this is all about healing the wounds of war on the nation and repairing the fractured sense of humanity and creating a collective peaceful identity
- Most Social Circus methods are child-to-child based which is perfect in the warzone where expert resources are very limited.
- Providing very positive, useful, samples for “who to be” in a warzone and inspiring children in their identity formations. Performers on the stage who are appreciated by thousands of audience every day as well as the audience are all introduced to and inspired by simply being good and bringing joy to others.

## 5. Challenges

The most challenging part of our work usually has to do with convincing the adults, (especially the educated class) of the efficacy of Social Circus. It seems the value of joy and educational entertainment is not fully appreciated and understood, especially in the academic world. Some still consider this a waste of time and think children should concentrate instead on what is traditionally considered good for their future and their productivity in adult life. Their simple argument is that childhood is preparation for adulthood. That is our exact argument too. We think children need to discover themselves and their world through their senses and learn life skills by experiencing the transformative power of play. This would naturally and perfectly prepare them for a happy, successful, and productive adult life.

Traditionally in general, many conservative local communities are sensitive to introduction of anything new to children especially when it has to do with entertainment, performing arts and circus. In our early years, we faced some resistance to the implementation of our activities especially from more conservative families and communities. We solved these problems by:

- Modifying our activities and adjusting them to the local culture and sensitivities
- Inviting the community leaders and parents to our centre and integrating them into our activities
- Establishing good relations with Afghan officials and working closely together with them
- Convincing parents and officials as well as community leaders that Social Circus is a very effective tool for developing life skills for the participants and very educational and entertaining for the audience
- Engaging locals and supporting them to orient themselves and develop their own Afghan Social Circus that fits to them instead of imposing any ideas from abroad
- Strengthening ownership from the local community
- Being flexible and creative with different restrictions imposed especially regarding female restrictions in activities
- Highlighting and exhibiting the best of performances of the children to the communities and, through the media, to the whole nation and thereby creating a feeling of pride

- Incorporating school related educational activities in our centre

Security is naturally one of the main concerns for everybody. Three key elements of our success in this regard are:

- Obtaining on the ground local knowledge  
With our activities spread in many regions of the country and involving plenty of trips every month we need to have real-time information on security. This together with a deeper insight to outlying regions provide us credible assessments on security for planning activities
- Being cautious  
To be careful with the decisions made and reacting immediately to the knowledge obtained and changing the plans, sometimes even cancelling the activities depending on the situations.
- Impartiality  
We keep the Social Circus strictly non-political and never provoke or sympathize with any of the parties in the conflict

Financing of all such activities is usually difficult. It can be even much more difficult where the financial strategies are all made by adults (without consulting children) who don't consider the soft values of cultural, artistic, and social activities for children. Our main focus for overcoming this problem has been:

- Reduction of expenses by implementing our programs in a very low-cost and sustainable manner
- Producing a range of Educational, Entertaining workshops and activities of Social Circus that fits into the donor community criteria and needs
- Relying on the local solutions by being innovative in producing material and equipment
- Developing decentralized management systems (for example by use of Funtainers, see Ch 8)

## 6. Principles

The following is a list of some of the main principles applied in development of our Social Circus activities:

- Focus on positivity and possibility
- Individual and collective harmonization
- Creation and promotion of achievable and positive social goals
- Obtaining approval and accreditation and admiration by audiences as well as each other, parents, and adults including community leaders
- Making sure children, parents, leaders and authorities understand what they have (children, culture, good life) and be proud of it and work on developing it
- Expanding, promoting and teaching others (sharing)
- Inspiring children to form and develop a practical joyful strong identity that is not only realistic in a war zone but it is very dynamic and strong
- Introducing new positive peaceful trends, identities, skills and idols

## 7. Cheerful Pedagogy

We have realized that games and entertaining activities, in addition to their positive emotional, personal and social impacts, are an excellent source of containing and transferring knowledge and information to children.

This has made us rethink and review knowledge itself from a perspective which is much easier to understand and even to feel rather than grasp intellectually.

We have gradually developed many educational tools that are first of all fun to play with but at the same time provide a much deeper understanding of different school subjects. For example, we have created a gigantic map of Afghanistan made of colourful poles with proportional heights representing Afghanistan's terrain as a source of play - to jump on and balance on - but as well for learning (feeling and sensing) the complex topography of Afghanistan.

Or another example, we have constructed a kind of playground carousel in the form of a big hanging globe (model of the earth) to which children can be attached and then both turned it and pushed to orbit a model of the sun. Through play, children then feel how the solar system works rather than having to grasp it as an abstract reality. Some of our Cheerful Pedagogy tools and methods are now utilized for beautification of a number of Afghan schools, developing workshops and educational performances.

Teaching is a creative art in itself. Our approach relies less on text-based methods and more on guiding children through an experience of learning with their senses. Play is essential: it increases a child's social skills such as trust, communication, and cooperation. The MMCC's pedagogic approach involves many group activities and games like partner-acrobatics and creation of complex human pyramids. By letting children take the lead rather than telling them what to do, we reinforce their inherent power and wisdom and provide organizational frames designed to help them take responsibility, blossom and grow. Seventy-five percent of all MMCC activities are run and taught by children.

## 8. Funtainers

Starting in Bamyan in 2008, MMCC has developed a very cost effective system for establishing semi-permanent bases for more activities in rural areas by modifying shipping containers into colourful, multifunctional rehearsal and performance spaces called 'Funtainers'. Equipped with circus, media and play equipment, the Funtainers serve as a base for children in local communities to meet and practice activities on their own with only very little practical support of adults. These Funtainers are all colourful and have many play equipment such as slide, seesaw, climbing structures etc. that make them functioning even when they are closed.

Inside the Funtainers beside all the performing equipment and sound system and stage etc., (depending on the activities of the region) there are different rooms installed such as workshop room, radio and sound studio for children radio production activities. The Funtainers are mostly run in a partnership with a school or children institution like orphanage or IDP (Internally Displaced People) camps. The partnership agreement not only make the children and partner organization or school to be a very active element in organizing the children but also it increases the local ownership and integrates Funtainers to an already existing system. The other advantage of the Funtainer system is that many costs such as rent, electricity, guard, etc. are eliminated. Unlike other solutions for housing any Social Circus activities, Funtainers are very well secured, easy to move if it is required and practical.

Beside the Funtainer's physical space, there is a whole system of capacity building the children and the trainers to gradually enable them to run the Funtainer activities independently. Each Funtainer has a numerous beneficiaries for its different activities, performing teams, a group of young trainers and a mobilizer who is supervised by the regional manager. Activities of the Funtainers are coordinated with the regional capacity building centres and National centre in Kabul.



photos Afghan MMCC

## 9. Invitation to Afghanistan for research (why Afghanistan?)

We believe that our activities in Afghanistan are ideal for a comprehensive Social Circus research because there is a great diversity of activities and target groups in different regions conducted by MMCC that give many choices and options to the research. Among the child participants in the activities there are many who, especially in the rural areas, are not exposed to alternative cultural or any other kinds of activities that could interfere with the results of the Social Circus and Cheerful Pedagogy activities. Therefore there would not be confusion of what is result of which activity because nearly everything would be the result of the activities of MMCC.

MMCC has developed many methods and systems that are employed in its regular activities that are repeated year after year and season after season and give a consistency of causes to any effects to be assessed in various time spans. MMCC, with 11 years of work in Afghanistan, is well established to provide all the requirements of any research and facilitate it.

In a period of 2 weeks' time of Social Circus training we can easily observe numerous measurable indicators of the changes in the collective and individual behaviour and skills of the participant children. Some of the indicators of the changes observed in the works with the children of IDP camps are as follow:

- Decrease in the number of children behaving chaotically, for example climbing on to the roofs and the walls of the centre
- Decreasing number of bloody casualties of children fighting in the 15 minutes of their recess times
- Increase in focus and concentration of the children while doing activities
- Increase in the frequency and duration of eye contact during their conversations
- Increase in frequency of open and peaceful body postures
- Steadily decreasing personal space leading to more physical closeness, and indicator of rising trust
- Increase in duration of listening and focused attention time in their conversations
- Decrease number of interruptions per minute in their communication
- Increase in speed of learning and understanding instructions
- Increase in attentiveness and ability to follow the instructions indicating improved listening skills

## 10. Some Facts about MMCC

- 2.9 million in live audiences and participants of workshops in 26 provinces of Afghanistan since 2002
- 1900 children have received circus educations and performed in public
- Incorporation of subjects such as landmine awareness, drug abuse, peace education, health education, back to school campaign, malaria prevention, child labour, in all the educational performances
- Implementation of hundreds of Cheerful Pedagogies and Social Circus workshops for children of schools, institutions, orphanages, children's prisons, IDP camps and for master trainers of ministry of education
- Organizing annual national and regional festivals, championships and performances
- International tours to Japan, Denmark, Germany, Italy
- MMCC has a main centre in Kabul, 4 regional centres and so far 21 Funtainers (modified container circus centre) with an estimated 40 staff and 450 active children
- MMCC has established Afghan, Japanese, and Danish federative organizations and is in process of providing its capacities to more countries.



photos Afghan MMCC



**David Mason** is the Founder of MMCC (Mobile Mini Circus for Children), the Advisor to FMC (Fédération Mondiale du Cirque) and the Co-Director of MMCC.

In 2002, he founded MMCC in Afghanistan, dedicating his life to giving young Afghans an opportunity to explore their creative potential through a convergence of mind and body by Social Circus. This is a way of learning that heals traumas and promotes growth in country beset by war. MMCC is a Social Circus organization where teachers and children together innovate cheerful pedagogies, perform, teach and produce media.



photo Afghan MMCC

# Developing Community Circus in Aotearoa New Zealand: Evaluation techniques and conclusions

Frances Kelliher and Thomas Hinz , Circus Kumarani and the Circability Trust

This presentation focuses on four community circus programmes independently evaluated in 2012/13 as part of a two-year research project called 'Developing Community Circus in Aotearoa New Zealand'. Together Thomas and Frances have nearly 30 years experience running community circus projects with a focus on the integration of disabled people with all ages and abilities. Thomas founded Circus Fantasia in Rostock Germany in 1995 and with Frances in New Zealand Circus Kumarani in 2003 and the Circability Trust in 2012.

## Background to the research

The Lotteries Community Sector Research Fund approved a joint research proposal in 2010 from Dargaville based Circus Kumarani<sup>1</sup> and Auckland based researcher Rachael Trotman. This fund supports partnerships between community organizations and researchers, to undertake research to achieve community benefits. The research project team also included Frances and Thomas <sup>2</sup> and researcher Alex Woodley of Point Research<sup>3</sup>.

## Purpose

The purpose of the research is to support the development of community circus in Aotearoa New Zealand. The research project explored these questions.

- What is community circus and how does it differ from other forms of circus?
- What benefits does community circus provide and to whom?
- What does good practice in delivering community circus involve?
- What is effective in evaluating community circus?
- What is the 'current state' of community circus in New Zealand?  
How can community circus flourish in New Zealand?

---

1 [www.circuskumarani.co.nz](http://www.circuskumarani.co.nz)

2 [www.communitycircus.co.nz](http://www.communitycircus.co.nz)

3 [www.pointresearch.co.nz](http://www.pointresearch.co.nz)

## Research components

The research involved the following components.

Method/component	Description
<b>National online survey</b>	In April 2011 an online survey was sent by email to 114 people connected with community circus in New Zealand, with a 60% response rate (68 people). Respondents were asked to describe community circus, its target audiences, benefits and national strengths, needs, priorities and opportunities.
<b>Literature review</b>	In 2012 an international literature review was completed on what community circus is, its reported benefits, good practice and how to sustain and evaluate community circus activity. Implications for community circus in New Zealand were also explored.
<b>Evaluation of four community circus programmes</b>	In 2012/13 the following New Zealand community circus programmes were evaluated: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. An Auckland based all ages, all abilities community circus programme involving adults with mental health experience and intellectual disabilities, Deaf children and young people and children aged four to thirteen, which resulted in two public performances of a show called 'Circolina's Leap' (see <a href="http://www.communitycircus.co.nz">www.communitycircus.co.nz</a> for a YouTube clip of the programme and performances). This programme was provided by Auckland Community Circus (now Circability)</li><li>2. Circus Kumarani's Dargaville based SKIP programme for pre-schoolers – a community circus programme for under 5 year olds provided in partnership with the SKIP programme (Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents)</li><li>3. Circus Kumarani's community circus programme with a class of 8 to 10 years olds at Dargaville Primary School, during Term Two in 2012</li><li>4. Circus Kumarani's 'Northland Stars' community circus programme, for 'high achievers' in circus skills Northland wide.</li></ol>
<b>Workshop</b>	In February 2012 a workshop was held with around thirty participants at the Auckland Circus Convention in Henderson, Auckland, on what community circus needs to thrive in New Zealand. The findings from this workshop are included in the report containing the stakeholder interviews, described below.
<b>Stakeholder interviews</b>	In 2012, 17 interviews were undertaken by phone and face to face with community circus leaders. Eleven of these interviews were with national leaders and six with representatives of key international organizations (Cirque du Soleil, American Youth Circus Organization, Belfast Community Circus, Australian Circus and Physical Theatre Association, Finland Social Circus and the European Youth Circus Organization).

Please refer to the eight individual reports for each of the components above, which are accessible at [www.circuskumarani.co.nz](http://www.circuskumarani.co.nz) or [www.communitycircus.co.nz](http://www.communitycircus.co.nz) and on the Cirque du Soleil Box platform.

This paper summarizes community circus evaluation in the literature review, plus the evaluation methods used to assess four community circus programmes and the main evaluation findings from these programmes.

## Building Character and Community - Community Circus: A Literature Review

### Academic and research based literature on community circus is sparse.

There is a commonly held sense from the literature that community circus is powerful and positive wherever it occurs – that it simply ‘works’. The evidence for this predominantly lies in stories of what happens for circus participants, which are mostly anecdotal and informal. Rigorous independent evaluation of community circus programmes is rare. On the other hand, stories are everywhere in the literature of transformative experiences for individuals, groups and communities through taking part in community circus.

Evaluation of community circus activity tends to be either of specific community circus programmes (and particularly school based programmes), or needs analyses for the sector (and especially the youth circus sector). These evaluations tend to be qualitative (based on people’s views and perceptions) and to focus on the experiences of participants of community circus and/or the views of community circus providers and practitioners.

Key evaluation methods for community circus programmes include interviews with participants and key stakeholders, participant or non-participant observation and review of documentation (e.g. Woodhead 2003, McCutcheon 2003, Carr 2005).

In terms of community circus programmes, evaluation tends to focus on the benefits and impacts for participants (Woodhead 2003, McCutcheon 2003). In all cases, quantifying the impact of community circus is a challenge, as it can be hard to gauge before and after effects, some impacts are long term and it can be difficult to ‘prove’ that the circus programme was the key factor in any particular change or effect.

The very nature of community circus also resists traditional forms of measurement and documentation: “One’s achievement in circus is fleeting, usually un-recorded and non-statistical. Its success is most deeply recorded by the artist herself, needing no external value judgement” (Bolton 2004:185). The impacts of taking part in community circus can be profound yet may not be consciously registered by the participant for some time, if at all.

On the other hand, some evaluation studies have demonstrated a high level of self-awareness by the community circus participants of the changes that occurred, not only for themselves but also for their wider communities (McCutcheon 2003).

Numerous relevant evaluation toolkits exist that can support the evaluation of community circus activities, e.g. Jackson’s evaluation toolkit for arts organizations to evaluate their work<sup>4</sup>, Trotman’s *Promoting (Good)ness: A guide to evaluating programmes and projects* (2008)<sup>5</sup> and Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI’s) *Prove and*

---

4 See <http://www.artscouncil-ni.org/departs/all/report/VoluntaryCommunityArtsEvalToolkit.pdf>

5 See <http://www.arc.govt.nz/albany/fms/main/Documents/Auckland/Volunteers/Promoting%20Goodness.pdf>

*Improve: A self-evaluation resource for community organisations* (2008)<sup>6</sup>. Overall, the nature of community circus lends itself to story based evaluation techniques, visual methods such as Photovoice<sup>7</sup> and longitudinal studies that can show 'downstream' and longer-term impacts.

The measures of success for community circus will vary depending on the programme, its audience and its goals. In McCutcheon's 2003 study of five schools providing circus programmes, for example, success was measured by popularity of the programmes, both within the school and its wider community, and in the decrease of various anti-social and identified destructive behaviours. From the evaluation studies reviewed key generic areas of measurement for community circus include:

- Participation levels (who, how often, for how long etc)
- Self-reported benefits for participants (at individual and group levels)
- Capturing before and after changes for participants
- Wider community impacts
- Audience feedback.

Community circus is well suited to story based evaluation methods, visual methods such as DVD and participatory methods that actively involve those taking part.

## Evaluation Summary

Evaluation methods were studied as part of the international literature review as well as looking at compatible art and community evaluation models. In deciding which evaluation methods to use we found it helpful to take a group approach to designing evaluation; involve all key players, identify the objectives of the programme to be evaluated; identify objectives of the evaluation; match tools and methods to meet evaluation objectives; use a mix of methods to get breadth and depth and be creative and use visual methods as far as possible.

Overall results from all the evaluations showed positive impact on participants and in the community; and gave direction on how to improve the programmes. Having an independent researcher also added weight to the results, raised the profile of the programme and was valuable in both reporting back to funders and applying for more funds. Both that and the results may have contributed to winning a national award.

Visual methods proved very powerful. A 20-minute documentary of Circolina's Leap was produced and 20 photos were chosen for an exhibition.

The audience ratings producing 'statistics' were very well received by funders in particular, e.g. 79% major impact on audience perception of disability from the Circolina's Leap programme.

## Methods and main findings from the four evaluations:

### 1. Circolina's Leap - An all ages and abilities Auckland based project

Evaluation methods were self-assessment by participants at the first rehearsal; face-to-face interviews with participants; audience feedback straight after both performances; a discussion forum after the first performance; and debriefs the week after the performances, with participants and the project team. Photos and video docu-

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.ceni.org/publications/ProveandImprove.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.photovoice.org/>

mentation were also used with a video screening of a 20-minute documentary and exhibition of the photos produced after the show. A three-minute video can be viewed at [www.communitycircus.co.nz](http://www.communitycircus.co.nz)

Circolina's Leap was a 12 week programme involving separate weekly circus classes with children and young people; adults with intellectual, physical and learning disabilities; deaf children, young people and adults; and adults with experience using mental health services. These groups came together for three joint rehearsals and two public performances in May 2012.

There were significant reported benefits for participants, with Deaf participants giving the highest ratings overall in terms of what they learnt from the project. Having two acting narrators onstage for Deaf participants and audience members was also considered valuable.

Evidence of need for more programmes was given with 91% of the 35 participants wanting more because it is fun, cool, exciting, a way to make new friends, be challenged and work with others. Holding the performances at a professional theatre, with good quality production also heightened the experience for participants.

Audience feedback was extremely positive with seventy nine percent of audience respondents stating that the show had some to major impact on their view of disability, with 27% reporting a major impact.

Wider community benefits relate to the connections made through this project between the key organisations involved and relationships forged among the participants and their families, caregivers and supporters.

The Circolina's Leap Project won the 2013 Arts Access Aotearoa Community Partnership Award.



photo: Karen-Abplanal, Circus Kumarani



photo: Kelliher, Circus Kumarani

## 2. Circus Kumarani's SKIP programme (Strategies for Kids and Information for Adults)

This is a partnership between Circus Kumarani and Kaipara SKIP (Strategies with Kids, Information for Parents). SKIP is a national government programme that works in communities to support parents to build positive relationships with their children. The programme has been provided for four years as weekly one-hour circus skills sessions for children aged 0-5 and their parents.

Evaluation methods were a joint face-to-face interview with the SKIP coordinator and circus teacher, face-to-face interviews with 8 parents/caregivers and a short feedback form.



Perceived benefits for children were increased confidence and willingness to try new things; socialisation and trust building, moderation of difficult behaviour, managed risk taking; positive and fun interaction between children and adults and children learning to take turns, cooperate and follow instructions.

Perceived benefits for parents and carers were learning to be a better parent, having the opportunity to play and have fun with their children, making friends, trying new things, learning new skills and seeing their children progress.

Reported community benefits were increasing social connections in the community, providing a place for parents with young children to go and raising the profile of SKIP and Circus Kumarani.

Parents, carers, SKIP and Circus Kumarani support the continuation and expansion of this programme.



### 3. Circus Kumarani's Dargaville Primary School programme

This was an eight-week programme at Dargaville Primary School with 28 eight to ten year old children. Their families were invited to a final performance for the whole school.

Evaluation methods were before and after ratings and assessment by the children against a range of elements such as coordination and confidence. Feedback from the children halfway through the programme; photo based feedback where children took photos during the classes and then described the photos in words; a phone interview with the class teacher and a face to face interview with the Circus Kumarani teachers at the end of the programme.

Half of the 19 children who responded said that their communication with others had improved and around a third stated that their confidence, coordination, concentration, comfort in a group and balance had improved. Eighty percent of audience children would like to learn skills.

The programme received positive responses from parents, audience, school and participants. The class teacher noted that the children in her class had grown in pride and confidence from the programme, had improved their coordination and motor skills and that teamwork and relationships among students had been enhanced. The performance was considered a non-threatening way of engaging families in the school, and some families attended who would not normally have come to the school.

learning enjoyable fun trust believe smiling leaping awesome practicing  
excited spinning looking careful concentrating watching crouching straight  
movement helped swinging teamwork come on happy balancing



Photovoice - Words children used to describe photos they took were “concentrating, fun, movement, learning, balancing, watching, teamwork, smiling, happy, spinning and awesome”

#### 4. Northland Stars

Northland Stars began in 2008 and provides a regular forum for those with circus skills across Northland to develop these skills, teach others what they know and build friendships. Participants come together for a three to four hour session to improve their circus skills on a monthly basis depending on the availability of resources and people to run the programme.

Evaluation methods were a key informant interview, short face-to-face interviews with 12 participants and two impact profiles. These showed that participants value the programme and gain transferable life skills e.g. self-discipline, social and communication skills, teamwork, flexibility and perseverance. The programme fosters circus talent, helps strengthen the circus community and broadens worldviews through exposure to national and international circus travellers.

The programme does require resourcing to fund teachers, equipment and transport and circus teachers with new and higher level skills.

Where pockets of circus activity exist in a region there is value in a programme such as this to connect the circus community and support 'higher achievers' to develop and share their skills. This kind of programme can lead to employment and income generation for participants and teachers, and can result in the creation of public circus performances and the development of circus programmes for the community. It can also provide a pool of future circus teachers and nurture skilled amateur and professional circus performers.



photo: Circus Kumarani

Overall, Northland Stars provides an important vehicle for the fostering of circus talent in the Northland region.

## References

**Bolton, Reg** (2004) Why circus works: how the values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people. PhD thesis, Murdoch University.

**Carr, Michelle** (no date), Circus skills – An alternative to team sports and conventional physical education for reluctant exercisers, Robert Townson Public School, Raby, New South Wales.

Community Evaluation Northern Ireland (CENI) (2008), Prove and Improve: A Self- Evaluation Resource for Voluntary and Community Organisations, Belfast, accessible at <http://www.ceni.org/publicatio>

**McCutcheon, Sharon** (2003), *Negotiating Identity Through Risk: A Community Circus Model for Evoking Change and Empowering Youth*, Masters Thesis, Charles Sturt University, Australia.

**Trotman, Rachael** (2008), *Promoting Good(ness): A guide to evaluating programmes and projects*, prepared for the Auckland Regional Council, accessible at [http://www.arc.govt.nz/albany/fms/main/Documents/Auckland/Volunteers/Promoting %20Goodness.pdf](http://www.arc.govt.nz/albany/fms/main/Documents/Auckland/Volunteers/Promoting%20Goodness.pdf).

**Woodhead, Paul** (2003), *A study of in-school Circus programs with emphasis on the management and teaching practices, and efficacy of the visited programs in terms of student welfare, performance and physical education opportunities, in the USA and UK*, Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia, accessible at [http://www.churchilltrust.com.au/site\\_media/fellows/Woodhead\\_Paul\\_20022.pdf](http://www.churchilltrust.com.au/site_media/fellows/Woodhead_Paul_20022.pdf).

**Thomas Hinz** and **Frances Kelliher** founded Circus Kumarani in New Zealand in 2003 and Circability in 2012. Thomas also founded Circus Fantasia in Rostock Germany in 1995 which he is managing again in 2013. These projects work with all ages and abilities with a focus on disabled people. They set up the research project 'Developing Community Circus in Aotearoa New Zealand' in 2009. Circability won the 2013 Arts Access Aotearoa Community Partnership Award for a circus show involving deaf, disabled people, children and people using mental health services. They plan to set up a social arts hub in Central Auckland in 2014.



# Studying the Effects of Social Circus Projects amongst Adults with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland

Jim Webster and Nick McCaffery, Streetwise Community Circus

This presentation was divided into 4 sections. First, Jim gave some background into the work that we do through Streetwise Community Circus in Belfast. Second, Nick discussed the practical elements of a 'typical' circus workshop. Third, Jim spoke of the ways to communicate the value of what we do to funders and potential client organisations, and finally Nick spoke of the ways in which projects are evaluated in order to identify the range of values that social circus projects have when working with adults with learning disabilities.

## Section 1: The background.

At Streetwise Community Circus, when we are not organising teaching or talking, we are street entertainers; and most of the staff that work with us either are, or have been, or will be street entertainers. We began in 1995 by forming a cooperative of street entertainers, and our organisation reflects our background by focussing on skills such as juggling, unicycling, stiltwalking etc. At present we do not include aerial skills in our workshop – although we are not opposed to this idea! We are dominantly an organisation which sends out teams of tutors to run workshops in the community, rather than existing as a circus school.

In 1999, a new member (Simon Smoleskis) who had experience of working in the field of autism raised the idea of developing circus workshops for people living with disabilities. At that time in Northern Ireland he was the only circus tutor working in a disability setting. Now, 14 years later, the success of this work means that there are only a handful of circus tutors in Belfast who do NOT work with people with disabilities, and we now have a team of about 15 tutors who specialise in this area, running projects throughout Northern Ireland.

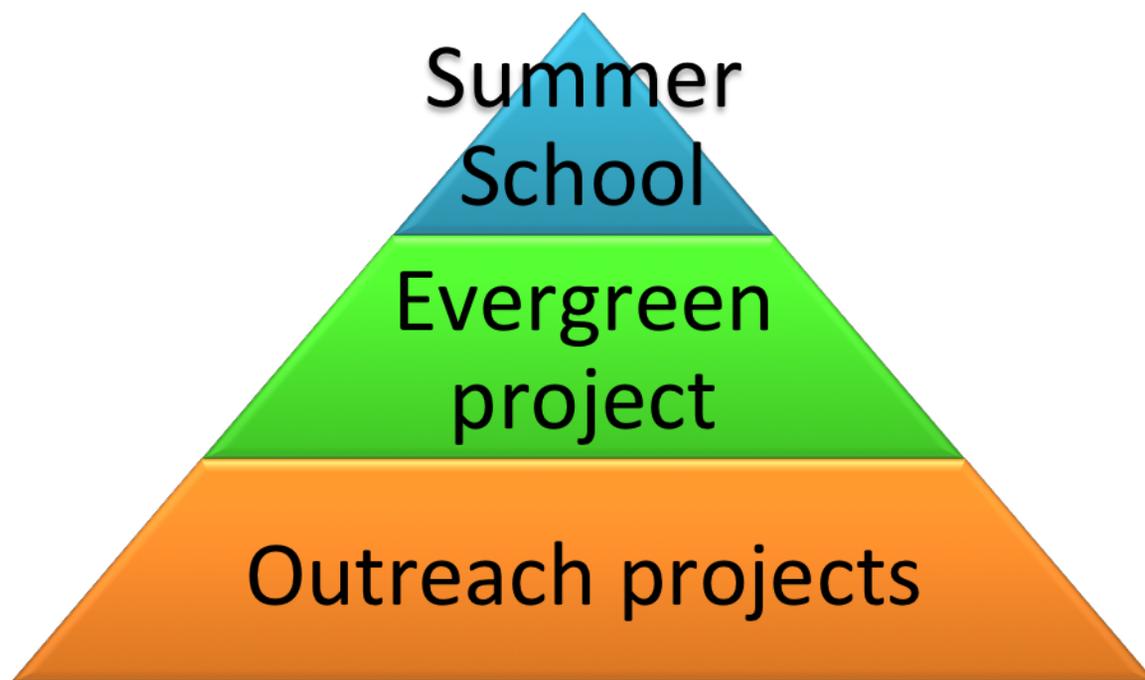
The reason for this success is simple. As circus enthusiasts, all of our tutors are aware of how we had learned circus skills: it begins with finding an interest in those skills, then getting access to someone who can teach you those skills effectively, then being motivated enough to want to practice, and of course, running through all of these stages is a healthy dose of having fun and enjoying the practice of circus.

Through observations of our projects it is clear that so many of the benefits associated with learning circus skills – such as bringing people together using circus as a common bond, increasing self-efficacy and self-esteem, and an increase in fitness levels/mobility – are of direct relevance to adults being cared for in the health and social services sector in Northern Ireland. There are obvious correlations between what circus can provide for this client group, and what the care system in this country is stating that these individuals need.

Our client group, mainly learning disabled adults, would generally have greater proportions of low self-confidence, low self-esteem and below average co-ordination – therefore learning circus can become an ideal activity for maximising these benefits. It is the circus ethos of challenging ourselves and working on new skills – discovering what we **can** do rather than becoming dominated by what we **cannot** do – that really has an impact on this population. Many of our clients would spend much of their lives being told what they cannot do, so circus skills

provide an opportunity which can have far reaching consequences far beyond the skills themselves: from the perspective of both the individuals themselves, as well as the way that they are viewed by others.

Streetwise would love to run programs with everyone, endlessly; however, in the real world funding limitations mean that we have to create a sustainable infrastructure. We have to overcome the problem of making circus accessible to as many people as possible whilst continuing to allow people the opportunity to develop the skills they have been introduced to. As such, we have developed a pyramid structure of projects:



The base of our pyramid consists of identifying as many funding streams as we can to try to reach as many people as possible to introduce the fun and benefits of learning circus. This stage is all about making circus accessible throughout the country using outreach projects, in day centres, in schools etc. These can range from one off intro workshops to longer term 20 week projects with a showcase event at the end.

The centre of our pyramid – the Evergreen project has been designed to ensure that those participants who have been introduced to circus, and who would like to continue learning new skills have the opportunity to do so. We run a regular Thursday night workshop throughout the year, and individuals come to us to take part.

The peak of our pyramid is performance based. The Streetwise Summer School is a 2 week project held in August each year, where 20 of our performers, drawn from outreach and evergreen projects, gather together to devise, rehearse and perform a 1 hour piece of circus theatre. This is led by an international director and has become very popular.

Very recently we have added another level to this pyramid – the flag on top if you like. Since October 2013 we have been developing a small scale touring group of performers who have been meeting weekly to devise a show suitable to be put on the road.

This process reflects our ethos as a company to continue to develop our own potential as providers of circus performance skills to a wide range of participants, and the dedication of our performers who are able to realise their own potential through circus. For this process to work effectively the next stage should always be accessible for those participants who wish to step up a level and develop as individuals.

## Section 2: What happens in a workshop:

A circus workshop run with adults with learning disabilities is based on the same 2 principles as any other circus workshop that Streetwise facilitates:

1. It is the responsibility of the individual participant to develop their own skills through practice.
2. It is the responsibility of the tutors to ensure that every encouragement, opportunity and assistance is provided to ensure that each individual participant has the ability to develop their own skills.

And so we teach a range of circus skills to a wide range of clients, and the design of a workshop largely relies upon where in the 'pyramid' the workshops are located. For example, a one-off workshop in a day centre may focus more on introducing ourselves and the skills that we teach in a fun and informal atmosphere. We worry less about structure and routine, and more about engaging with our participants through circus. On the other hand, a session held as part of our Summer School may have to be more focussed on refining a routine, ensuring group dynamics are high, minimising feelings of pressure associated with imminent performance etc. In short, our tutors need to be aware of the context for each workshop.

As such, it helps us as tutors to think of 3 ideal stages of a project:

### 1. Introductions

These sessions enable tutors and participants to get to know each other, and for tutors to enable the participants to engage with a wide range of equipment and skills until the participant discovers the one or two things that they can connect with.

### 2. Focus

These sessions are designed to help individuals develop their skills with their chosen discipline. This may be on a broad spectrum of skills, from spinning a plate to riding a giraffe unicycle – each of our tutors has to be able to react to each individual participant.

### 3. Performing skills

The final session involve developing a performable routine out of the skills that each participant has learned. These may be group routines or solo shows. They may involve complex juggling patterns, or throwing and catching a single ball. Regardless of the perceived notions of disability, our tutors strive to discover the best way of demonstrating the impact of our circus projects on the lives of our performers.

It is my assertion that the fact that all of our tutors have some experience of street performance is vital to the success of our work. It is the street performer's skills of adaptability and creativity that are particularly necessary when faced with participants who do not necessarily engage with circus disciplines in the way that you may see in an established youth circus. Whilst it is true that our disability projects are based on the exact same ethos as any of our other circus projects (see above), the practical reality is that our tutors are often relied upon to develop new and accessible ways of teaching that ensure full participation and accessibility.

We are also relied upon to ensure that any performance is placed in the right context. Just as a street performer picks the ideal spot to maximise their chances of putting on the best show, so we identify the best circumstances for our performers to communicate their passion for learning new skills. We need to be very aware of the best ways to showcase the skills of our performers, and whilst we are aware of the extremely significant positive impact of our work, we are also aware that we have a responsibility of duty to our performers.

The work that we do with individuals with disabilities at Streetwise is carried out as a part of our commitment to enable anyone in Northern Ireland to experience circus – if they want to. When working with this population, the challenges that we face are often complicated by attitudes towards and about disability. Although we often work with some incredibly enthusiastic and supportive client organisations and individual staff members and carers, we do find that some carers can provide the biggest challenges to our work.

Over the years we have encountered individuals who are, for various reasons, uncertain of our intentions to teach circus to their charges. And it is our responsibility to challenge and overcome these attitudes towards individuals with disabilities. Often these objections come across as humorous – we have been told not to put one young man on stilts as he had poor ‘eye-to-leg’ coordination. Similarly, we were told that another participant would never be able to walk on stilts as they had once had a ‘funny turn’ on an escalator.

However, we are also often faced with challenges that are worth confronting seriously. Carers are often genuinely concerned that we may be putting individuals at risk through teaching them certain skills – and this is true, but this is also a part of the fabric of learning circus – we are taking a risk! The important thing is that we are taking that risk in a well-managed and supportive environment. We have worked with several individuals who are learning disabled and have epilepsy, and who are very competent stilt-walkers. In terms of supervision in circus workshops, the one-to-one care for a stilt walker is possibly the safest place that an individual with epilepsy can be! They are being constantly monitored by at least one member of staff.

Perhaps most important though is the assumption that putting a disabled person on stage is making them look more disabled. This is a concept that we have to take seriously. The issue of public performance is based on consent as well as context. None of our participants are ‘forced’ to perform, and all of our showcases are designed to ensure that we present our clients in the best light that we can. Whilst we are prepared to challenge public concepts of disability, we need to make certain that this is done professionally and with care – and most importantly only ever at the request of the performers with whom we work.

Essentially though, our most powerful weapon is fun. If an audience understands that the performers are enjoying themselves thoroughly on stage, we are happy to enable that performance to go ahead. So, whether it is a part of an arts festival, or a parade, or a stand-alone show, inside, outside or both, our performers have the opportunity to learn and perform skills that the majority of the non-disabled population do not have.

### Section 3: Funding issues.

At Streetwise we believe in the value of what we do and one of our bigger challenges is finding ways to develop, expand and improve; and at the end of the day it comes down to money. Arts funding in the UK and Ireland is extremely competitive; not enough to fund all the excellent projects from across all the sections of the community and all the art forms. We are lucky to secure regular funding, although no-one could expect increases in the near future. Therefore we have to look outside to new sectors and obviously the education and health sectors make sensible options for exploration.

We are currently working with various partners in the health sector although getting additional funding is extremely difficult because financially we have a very difficult case to argue. Everyone involved in our projects thinks they are wonderful; however when we ask for money from a health trust that is currently making cuts, we are asking them to fund clowns while they are sacking nurses. Therefore we need to look at what we do not through the eyes of circus people but through the eyes of health managers. We need to look at cost benefits of our work and attempt to quantify potential savings as a result of what we do. I believe we are valuable if we can find ways to measure it.

Without wanting to appear crass, the reality of developing social circus or community arts programmes often has a price tag that needs to be explained. The following 2 examples represent some of the ways that we have found to communicate the fiscal benefit of our work.

#### Longford Halloween festival

The first example which is not directly related to our circus workshops but makes the point is a festival in Longford in the Republic of Ireland. The festival have employed us every year at Halloween to go all over the county making lanterns in primary schools for children to carry in a lantern procession in the main town. The festival is run by the local health promotion agency funded by local government. Ireland has been in the grip of recession for years with all civil servants having to accept 15% pay cuts across the board so I was interested how they could justify spending money on a festival. The explanation from the festival director was that the year before they started the cost of emergency call outs of police, fire and ambulance services to smaller unofficial gatherings at outlying communities at Halloween in the county was approximately €500,000. By spending €30,000 on a festival that attracted outlying populations into the city centre, the emergency services bill was reduced drastically. It is this kind of thinking we need to use to value ourselves to larger funding organisations.

#### “Billy”

Our second example concerns an individual with whom we have worked for a number of years. Having met us in a day centre he came to our regular weekly workshop, has attended five summer schools and is now in our performing group. He has a difficult family background, and is living with his sister and her terminally ill husband because his own mother is too frail to look after him. In the past he took out his frustration by damaging vehicles in and around the day centre. Before he started with us the local trust had paid out over £25,000 to repair damage. Since beginning circus programmes he has completely stopped this behaviour.

Evaluation of what we do is a key element not only to improve what we do but as a marketing tool which demonstrates the value of our work in terms that make sense to outside agencies who at present do not understand circus or its benefits. But of course, the financial savings of circus are not the only impact of our work, and it is not the only ‘selling point’ we can make to future partner organisations.

### Section 4: Evaluation of our own circus projects.

The story of how Streetwise began to evaluate our projects in such depth is one of serendipity and frustration. As a funded arts organisation we have always engaged with an evaluation process of one kind or another. For many years, this evaluation was limited to telling our funders that we spent their money wisely and if we could only have some more, then we could have a greater impact. We provided funding bodies with examples of how many individuals we had worked with/performed to/engaged with. We were asked for information on our audiences’ gender, age, sexual preferences, perceptions of disabilities, residence details, etc. etc. In short, we contributed to a

system of data collection and analysis that had little to no relevance on the actual impact of what we did. It simply did not record the value of our work.

At the event of our first Streetwise Summer School in 2009, in a very last minute decision, our administrator decided to collect some feedback from our audience directly (rather than simply providing a head count and making certain assumptions about their religious backgrounds and sexual preferences). This data was presented verbatim to the funding body as an example of the actual impact that this performance had had on the participants and their families and carers. This information was no doubt filed correctly by the administrative officer in charge of our funding applications.

Although I (Nick) was not involved in this particular performance, I did go to see the show and was blown away by the potential that our work could have across the realms of physical, social, cognitive and emotional well-being. By the time of the following year's summer school I was very eager to get involved and eager to collect more of this feedback and data and give this knowledge some further thought and analysis. It became an opportunity to finally merge my very distinct lives as a social anthropologist at the early stages of my post-doctoral career with my life as a circus teacher and street performer.

And so, the approach that I have taken with my evaluation is ethnographic. I am a participant as well as an observer in the field of circus, and I attempt to collate as much data as possible wherever and whenever I can. This led to a more detailed account of audience reaction to the show, but also included questions specifically for parents and carers regarding the impacts of the 2 week process on the performer's lives.

My first in depth attempt at describing a small scale project in a school for children with special educational needs, resulted in a rather lengthy investigation of the entire ethos of our work as an organisation, from a variety of angles. I spent time with the participants, became involved in the showcase, monitored their reactions to the workshop and show, gathered and analysed feedback from the audience of the show, gathered feedback from the participants, their teachers, and the head of the school. This was done through a combination of interview and questionnaire. I also conducted a focus group with the tutor team involved and recorded comments about their work in general.

Subsequent evaluations have elaborated upon these themes, and we are committed as an organisation to continue to investigate the impacts of learning and performing circus amongst adults with learning disabilities. We produce at least one full length investigation each year, and a series of smaller project evaluations. This process of gathering, analysing and publishing ethnographic data on our projects has benefitted us in several ways.

- 1) Developing a richer understanding of the potential benefits of our work. We know now that our work can have the potential to improve various aspects of our participants' well-being – from improved speech and language skills, to physical fitness, social well-being, individual confidence and self-efficacy –as well as learning new circus skills.

- 2) Developing new tools to ensure these benefits are targeted. Our tutors are becoming aware of these benefits and are increasingly working towards developing skills and methods for teaching that focus on these benefits. We are also contributing to a conversation with other circus practitioners, by making these evaluations available to everyone via our website.

- 3) Communicating the benefits of circus to non-circus organisations. By presenting our evaluations to a number of different audiences we hope that we can contribute to a conversation outside of our own context. As circus practitioners we have a good idea that circus works. What we need to do is convince others of the real value of

our work, and work in tandem with them to identify themes that can be positively impacted through our work. The future for this work for me personally, is to begin to collate these reports and contribute to a richer and more academic understanding of the field of social circus and learning disability. And to continue to find ways of making the field of social circus more generally a viable and valuable topic for further academic investigation. The future for us as an organisation at Streetwise is to continue doing what we do, get better at what we do, and do more of it with a lot more people!

**Jim Webster** embarked on a performing career when he arrived in Belfast in 1986 following a career as an international middle distance runner. A founder member of Belfast Community Circus, Jim worked as one half of the double act Jim and Don from 1988 until he set up his own company Streetwise in 1991 and embarked on a solo career as a circus teacher and street entertainer. Since then Jim has established himself as one of Ireland's leading street entertainers, working with five different double acts: Webster and Brown, Jim and Mr Nick, Jim and Mr Wizzy, Jim and Syd and now Jim and Dr Nick.

During this time Jim has developed the company Streetwise Performance Limited to excel in three directions: as an agency for street performers throughout Ireland; as an events management organisation; and as one of Ireland's leading carnival production companies. Since 1995 Jim has also led and administered Streetwise Community Circus which now has over 25 tutors providing circus workshops throughout Ireland. Jim has led the development of the Streetwise disability team which is now a leading provider of circus workshops for individuals with learning disabilities delivering over 200 workshops a year.



**Nick McCaffery** began his professional performing career as a street entertainer for Thorpe Park theme park in 1992, and continued to develop his skills after moving to Belfast in 1995. Whilst studying at Queen's University Belfast (1995-98 & 2001-2005), Nick was the president of the University Juggling club, and was chair of the committee that organised the 1st and 2nd Belfast Juggling Conventions in 2001 and 2002. Over the years Nick has performed in three double acts: Double Trouble (1998-99), Jim and Mr Nick (2000), and Jim and Dr Nick (2007-present).

Nick also performs as a solo walkabout entertainer; as a juggler, stilt-walker and unicyclist; and as a compere for a variety of events. Since 1998 Nick has been a member of Streetwise Community Circus, teaching circus skills throughout Ireland, and also acted as committee chair from 2005-07. Over the last couple of years Nick has been working with Jim Webster in developing the Streetwise disability team, and is slowly conducting research studying the potential impacts of teaching circus skills to individuals with learning disabilities. Dr Nick is an actual doctor.

# Wellbeing Effects from Social Circus

Jukka Lidman & Riitta Kinnunen, Social Development Co Ltd

Social circus has many benefits for the participants. The effects of social circus activity were the subject of a study that was conducted during the Effective Circus project in 2012–2013. The research data was gathered by using surveys and interviewing the circus participants and their teachers, instructors, nurses and specialists. Completed surveys were collected from 164 people, and the researchers interviewed almost 50 people. Additional interviews were conducted by the circus instructors, and the recordings and notes from these interviews were also used in the research analysis.

The results from both the surveys and the interviews show that social circus has tangible social, psychological and physical benefits. The research demonstrates that circus significantly enriched the daily lives of most of the participants in the target groups of all ages, providing them with variety and recreation. It is suitable for people with physical and developmental disabilities, mental health rehabilitants and the families using child welfare services.

Many participants find circus activity rewarding and they have positive experiences from it. The circus is a place where they can learn challenging, enjoyable and interesting tricks that are previously unfamiliar to them. It is crucial to concentrate on controlling the body and equipment, balance and movement. Focused practice leads to success. The atmosphere is positive and failing is acceptable, because everyone fails at some point; willingness to try is what is needed to learn new things. Doing things with others promotes team spirit. Performance is an important part of circus – after all, the participants will be excited to show off their new skills. Positive experiences from performing increase the participants' courage to perform.

The experiences gained in circus also have an effect in other areas in life, because many of the things that are learned in circus can be applied in the world outside. Circus gives more confidence to perform which encourages self-expression and makes it easier to be the centre of attention elsewhere too. Accumulating new skills and learning new things strengthen the self-esteem. Having to wait one's own turn in circus teaches patience and helps the participants be more considerate. According to the study, circus clearly has a positive impact on these areas. It is not possible to make conclusions of more far-reaching effects of circus activity based on the data collected in this research. For example, a group of students in flexible basic teaching may focus on the circus practice during the circus lesson and forget to tease each other. Circus also includes trust building exercises such as falling into the arms of the other group members and realising that they can be trusted to hold one up. This temporarily improves the team spirit, but soon after the circus sessions young people return to their old habits and behavioural patterns.

What makes circus exceptional is its variety. It attracts different kinds of people and they can all find their own special field of interest, if they so desire. However, the participants need motivation and courage to try the circus tricks. Usually it takes only a few practice sessions before circus really captivates the participants, but not everyone will warm up to it – for some, it can be hard to admit to their friends that circus is actually pretty cool.

## Other studies on wellbeing and health effects from artistic and cultural activity

The Arts and Culture for Wellbeing programme (2010–2014) initiated by the Finnish government aims at promoting health and wellbeing by the means of art and culture and increasing social inclusion on the individual, community and society levels. In the background memorandum Hanna-Liisa Liikanen and the research group state that art and culture affect health and wellbeing. The conclusion is based on several national and international studies.<sup>1</sup>

According to the research, artistic and cultural activity enrich the everyday lives and interaction of children and young people. Culture supports children's and young people's learning, wellbeing and health. Among over 65-year-olds, communal cultural activities have been observed to have effects on both their physical and psychological wellbeing. When compared with the control group the elderly who participated in cultural activities felt healthier and less lonely; furthermore they had fewer problems relating to their general health.<sup>2</sup>

The research shows that the social interaction, the sense of community and the feeling of belonging people derive from cultural activities, improve their wellbeing and prolongs their life expectancy. Engaging in the activities with other people has more health benefits than doing the same activities alone.<sup>3</sup> Participating in the creation of art makes people feel better, happier and healthier. Cultural hobbies help people make friends, search new experiences and set new goals for themselves. Collaborating in the creation of art is considered more important than art itself.<sup>4</sup>

According to the study, people who have art as a hobby have lower blood pressure, less stress, and less pain and psychological symptoms. Art has positive effects also on the treatment of people with memory disorders and improves their ability to communicate.<sup>5</sup> When it comes to the connection between art and health the causal effect is not clear: good health might be a prerequisite for a rich cultural life, and cultural activities must accommodate a person's health.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to prove that there is a link between cultural leisure activities and improved wellbeing.

## Children and young people

Circus activity provides children and young people with positive life experiences and supports their spiritual wellbeing. The majority of children and young people have enjoyed having circus as a hobby. They have found it inspiring. It has created opportunities for having a good time together with the group and for social interaction.

---

1 Liikanen, Hanna-Liisa (2010). Taiteesta ja kulttuurista hyvinvointia – ehdotus toimintaohjelmaksi 2010–2014. Opetusministeriön julkaisu (The Ministry of Education and Culture publications ) 2010:1, pages 59–65.

2 Cohen, G. D., Perlstein, S., Chapline, J., Kelly, J., Firth, K. M. & Simmens, S. (2006): The Impact of Professionally Conducted Cultural Programs on the Physical Health, Mental Health, and Social Functioning of Older Adults. *The Gerontologist* 46:6, 726–734. Ref. Nummelin, Satu (2011). Kulttuurin hyvinvointivaikutukset: onnea, elämyksiä terveyttä. Turun kaupungin kaupunkitutkimus- ja tietoyksikkö. Tutkimuskatsauksia 1/2011.

3 Hyyppä, Markku (2013). Kulttuuri pidentää ikää. Kustannus Oy Duodecim.

4 Matarasso, Francois (1997). Use of Ornament? The Social Impact of Participation in the Arts. Comedia. Published online.

5 Staricoff, Rosalia (2004). Arts in Health: A Review of Medical Literature. Published online.

6 Kultur – En Del av ett Hälsosamt Liv? Kulturrådets skriftserie 2008:4. Published online.

The activity has uplifted the mood of many and increased their tranquillity. The participants have courage to make mistakes in circus and they find that learning new things is inspiring.

Social circus also supports the ability of children and young people to work in groups and to build a sense of community. Children and young people have gained more courage and have acquired experience in performing. The team spirit of a school class has improved because of circus. Some have learned to understand differences and have acquired more knowledge of themselves. Circus has also given the participants more self-confidence. They have more experiences of success, and the encouraging atmosphere of circus has taught them to accept failing.

However, circus has little effect on people who lack motivation to try. It is not possible to get results without motivation. The impact on familial interaction is also small if there are members in the family who do not participate.

Social circus activity has been organised for children and young people who are at greater risk of marginalisation, because their social or cognitive skills may not be sufficient for working or studying. The deficiency of life skills can result in a situation where a young person is excluded from his community and the society.

Figure 1 presents the answers to the survey conducted with children and young people. The respondents have experienced significant psychological, physically and social benefits from circus.

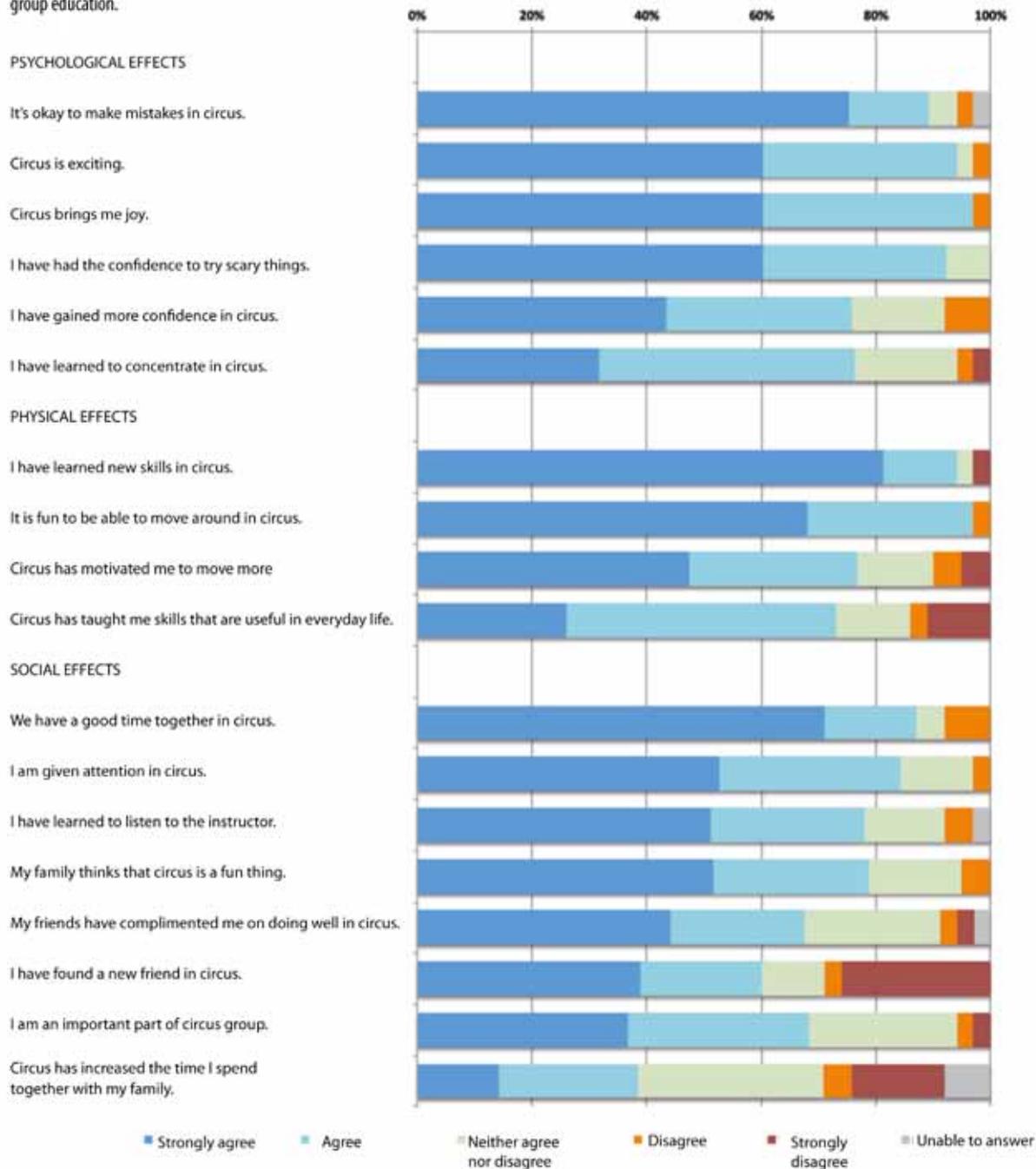
## Families

The families who use the child welfare services are dealing with crises such as a divorce. Family services and the rehabilitation period in the family crisis centre aid the families to create a balance in their life situation, help them find the strength to handle problems and support the parents in raising their children. The goals are family-specific: a better daily rhythm, better interaction within the family or finding shared activities and things that support the family cohesion. Social circus has been introduced as a way to support the families and it has found its place within the scope of the family services.

The instructors in family work and family crises centre report that circus has produced joy for both children and parents. It offers the parents and the children something fun to do together, which also teaches them how to work together. The joy of success is a special benefit of circus. Failing is not seen as failing, because the point of the activities is doing them together. Circus develops the interaction within the families when the parents learn to talk to their children in instructive and encouraging ways. The employees of the centre and the parents are equals in the circus sessions, because everyone is there to be directed and to learn new things. The case worker becomes closer to the family, which advances the family work and collaborative solutions.

Circus activity also has many benefits for the families that do not need child welfare services. In the baby circus and the circus for small children the parents get to spend relaxing and re-energising moments with their children. It's good for the parents to see the joy of their children when they learn new exciting things. Circus activity helps the parents get more accustomed to handling their small children and doing things with them. The parents notice that the children are not made of glass, because the personnel make sure that all the tricks are safe. Circus offers the family a shared hobby, gives the parents the joy of seeing their children succeed and strengthens the parents' idea of their children's abilities.

**Figure 1.** The results from a survey conducted with young people on the effects of circus activity. The results have been compiled from the responses given by young people with Asperger's diagnosis, an occupational therapy group, a suburban circus group and the children and young people in lower secondary small group education.



As a part of child welfare work, circus provides a welcome counterbalance to working with the families and dealing with the more difficult issues. Circus reveals a different side of both the parents and the family workers. The employees are occasionally released from the responsibility of leading the activity when the circus instructors step in. This gives the employees a chance to fully engage in the activity, to observe the families and have a good time with them. The circus also changes the parents' attitudes toward the staff and they may have free conversations with each other. Many children are naturally social, but circus makes them even better at connecting with others. The children practice circus with their parents and might invite the staff to join in. Circus broadens the employee's role next to the parents when they are getting instructed themselves.

## Elderly participants

The goal of the circus for the elderly is to bring joy to the daily lives of the elderly, to broaden their chances of self-expression, to create opportunities for them to learn and succeed, and to organise experiences of doing things together and participating in group activities. In addition, the activities noticeably improve the wellbeing of the elderly care personnel and the interaction of the entire staff in the retirement home.<sup>7</sup>

This study demonstrates that the elderly people enjoy themselves in the circus. Most of the elderly approach the circus practice with great concentration and make use of their strengths. Circus also promotes good team spirit. Circus is different from the other leisure activities in the retirement home, because it creates possibilities for playful togetherness and a degree of surrendering to the practice in a way that allows the elderly and the staff to interact as equals. Everyone finds his or her own interests and roles within the group.

The research shows that for many of the elderly, circus improves their ability to be more considerate of other people, to co-operate in their treatment and to accept being touched. Circus has increased the social interaction among the elderly and developed their courage to engage in the activity. Positive mood and being able to perform make the elderly less anxious and increases their tolerance of pain; this makes their daily activities run more smoothly. With the help of circus the nurses have gotten a better connection with the elderly as well as a better sense of their abilities. Circus has also been seen to improve the physical mobility of some of the elderly.

The nursing staff also benefited from circus. Circus has improved their connection with the elderly and given them better sense of their abilities. Circus has taught the workers some new ways to motivate the elderly people and given them ideas for group activities and physical exercises. It has also increased co-operation among the nurses, improving the workplace atmosphere.

## Visually impaired participants

Social circus has various effects on children with visual impairments. According to an expert in the rehabilitation of visually impaired children, they show improvements in their physical stamina and muscle tone. The social effects are particularly pronounced because the children join a group with the children who are just like them. Many have formed new friendships during the circus activity.

---

7 Kuitu, Pilvi (2013). Sosiaalisen sirkuksen toiminnan vaikutukset vanhusten hoivaympäristössä. Final project, Tampere University of Applied Sciences.

Circus activity organised for 7 - 13-year-olds within the Effective Circus project has produced positive results. Most of the children have co-occurring disabilities such as hearing impairments, developmental disabilities or brain damage. All the children have past or ongoing experiences with physical rehabilitation.

## Participants with intellectual and developmental disabilities

The study shows that circus offers variation and revitalisation for the people with intellectual and developmental disabilities as well as for the people who take care of them. The people with disabilities are encouraged to try a variety of tricks and learn new skills. Circus increases the sense of togetherness and supports their activity in a group, for example by teaching them to be patient. The group instructors who participate in the circus activity get a clearer idea of what their clients' abilities are, and for many clients the circus exercises improve their ability to concentrate and to co-operate with their treatment. Circus gives the instructors ideas for how to direct the intellectually and developmentally disabled patients. According to the study, circus supports the direction and mood of the people with developmental delays regardless of their severity and nature.

## Conclusion

The study shows that social circus has obvious effects on wellbeing. The social effects were visible in all of the target groups. Circus activity is naturally social: it unites the participants and offers the group something to do together, and at best, it also brings the participants together outside the circus. Psychological effects are reported primarily by those who have problems tolerating failure and with self-esteem. Circus is also a nice hobby that gives the participants a chance to be active and spend pleasant time together.

Measuring the effects of circus activity is challenging. This study does not lead to any conclusions about the long-term effects of the activity, because it has not been possible to implement a required follow-up time. Overall, impact evaluation on the preventive activity has been quite rare in Finland, because reaching convincing results requires several years of study. Another challenge for examining the effects is that the circus participants may have an array of other hobbies, which makes it difficult to isolate the effects that can be traced to the circus activity.

In spite of this, circus activity seems to be responsible for many positive effects. Naturally some participants do not report any great benefits. However, the data collected in the study demonstrates almost a comprehensive positive impact from circus activity. These positive effects should be the subject of continued measurement in the future. Convincing follow-up research helps collect factual knowledge of the effectiveness of preventive wellbeing services.

**Jukka Lidman** is a researcher in the Social Development Ltd. With researcher Riitta Kinnunen he has implemented the evaluation on the wellbeing effects on circus and the guidebook for the circus organizations for the Effective Circus Project.

Lidman has implemented several evaluations on organizations and projects, focusing on showing the effects and impacts and impressing the actions. His essential objects for research are increasing the wellbeing, social inclusion and multi-disciplinary co-operation.

Lately his job description has included more and more evaluation consultation on measuring the effects and developing the data acquisition. Lidman has a Masters degree in both Administrative Sciences and Social Sciences.

**Riitta Kinnunen**, MA, works as a researcher in the Social Development Ltd. Central themes in her work have been prevention of the exclusion of youth, multi-professional cooperation and social rehabilitation. Kinnunen has implemented several reports on the theme of wellbeing, such as service needs assessments, surveys on customer satisfaction, evaluations of operational models, wellbeing barometers and compilations of the good practises of services. She considers the research on wellbeing effects and its development to be very important and interesting field.



The article is based on the publication *"They're smiling from ear to ear!" – Wellbeing Effects from Social Circus* (The Effective Circus Project, Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre, 2013), translated by Eerika Kokkonen.

# Measuring Happiness: Assessing the Intrinsic Value of Youth Circus

Dr. Stephen J. Cadwell, Galway Community Circus and Dr. Brendan Rooney,  
Dun Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology

## Project Summary

- Problem:** There is a need to bridge the gap between youth circus performance assessment methods and the lived experience of youth circus participants.
- Theory:** If an appropriate version of Aristotle's eudemonia is used as a criterion for performance assessment, a more accurate description of the effect of a youth circus' work will be possible. An inference can be drawn between the activities undertaken and the development of those activities with reported feelings of happiness
- Study:** This study will use self-reporting questionnaires and non-parametric statistics to explore the relationship between the effort expended during an activity and the positive emotional states related to those activities



photo Alice Bonzanini

**Outcome:** If our theory is correct, the analysis will show that the eudemonia criterion provides a closer, more accurate description of a Youth Circus participant's experience and, as such, the youth circus' work. Results revealed a ceiling effect for positive emotional expression and activity. Further analysis, using Chi-Square test of independence, revealed a significant relationship between reporting experiencing negative emotions and periods of inactivity during the circus activity.

## Introduction

For the last nine months I have been fortunate enough to work with Galway Community Circus. They are a youth arts charity based in Galway on the west coast of Ireland. Galway Community Circus has been in existence since 2002 and over the last five years their membership has grown from roughly forty young to over two hundred and fifty. The circus offers classes and training in circus arts for young people between five and twenty years of age and operates a special bursary programme to ensure that economic difficulties do not stand in the way of a young person's membership. My work there has been rich and varied, mainly revolving around administration and PR but also including work in classes, on productions and even the occasional performance. One of the major projects I worked on was the Community Impact Report, a six month performance review that was to document and analyse where the organisation excelled and where there was room for improvement.

I was in a very fortunate position. I had a great deal of academic experience under my belt, specifically in the philosophy of art, and now I was engaged in a project where I could utilise those skills in a practical way and still be associated with the art world. The first step in managing this project was to find the most appropriate method or system for measuring the performance of a not-for-profit youth circus. There are dozens of performance assessment methods available, but many of them rely on commercial profit and loss as their criterion for success, a criterion which didn't suit this organisation.

After a great deal of searching I discovered the Artistic Vibrancy system developed by du Preez and Bailey for the Australian Council for the Arts. Du Preez and Bailey describe the concept behind this system by writing, "Artistic vibrancy is a catch-all phrase that tries to capture the goals and qualities that artists and arts organisations strive for." (Du Preez and Bailey 2009 p4) Du Preez and Bailey interviewed artists, educators, performing arts organisations and specialist academic researchers to try and determine what norms and ideals are shared by not-for profit small to medium sized arts companies. It was an ideal fit for this project. It offered a means to sensibly track and measure the performance of the organisation without relying on profit & loss but instead focussing on a set of ideals that they found to be relevant to arts practitioners.

Artistic Vibrancy can be broken up into five broad categories:

- Artistic quality or excellence
- Audience engagement and stimulation
- A fresh approach to the preservation or development of the art form
- Artist development
- Community relevance

An artistically vibrant company will strive for excellence and high quality work within its field, communicate and engage with their audience, try and the develop their art form in novel ways while in turn developing themselves as artists and finally maintain a close relevance with their community. The most important concept within artistic vibrancy was the idea of regular self-assessment. To facilitate this Du Preez, Bailey and their team developed a self-reflection tool-kit which offers a variety of methods by which an organisation can examine itself and measure its artistic vibrancy.

As I began working with the tool, adjusting certain parts to make it fit with the broad spectrum of activities undertaken by the Galway Community Circus, I noticed something missing. I was tailoring the kit's methods used to analyse audience response in order to account for our member's satisfaction with the circus classes when I realised there was very little room for emotion. There was a strong focus on feelings of value for money, position among peers and relevance to a community, but the actual emotional impact of the work undertaken by an arts organisation was missing.

This stood out to me as an important issue, not only for the overall quality of data submitted for the report, but because having had the opportunity to work and spend time with the members of the GCC I knew that the circus had a significant impact on their emotional lives. I had heard a great deal of anecdotal evidence to suggest that the fun they had at circus, the pride they had in their achievements and the happiness they experienced while training was one of the main reasons they returned week after week, year after year. Parents told to me how often their children would report positive stories about their time at circus and how that encouraged them to spread the word to other parents and as to why they felt no qualms about paying for performances, cabarets or class fees.

In order to fulfil the brief of the project, the emotional effect of the circus needed to be measured. This had less to do with providing a holistic or sensitive account of the circus' work and more to do with accurately tracing and representing what I held to be a key component in the circus' recent success. But I needed a way of documenting this anecdotal evidence in terms that would correspond with the artistic vibrancy self-reflection kit and be palatable to the board of directors, key stakeholders and funding bodies.

The artistic vibrancy system gave me a framework and a starting point but I had to develop an extra element beyond the five listed above in order to capture the emotional impact, as well as the artistic vibrancy, of the GCC. To do this I needed to do three things. Firstly, to find out how the members of Galway Community Circus actually felt. Secondly, to document these feelings in a way that showed a relationship with the performance of Galway Community Circus. Thirdly, to find a conceptual framework that supported the putative relationship between those activities and the emotional responses of the members.

The need for a clear conceptual framework comes down, quite simply, to funding. At a recent meeting of the Caravan network<sup>1</sup> EU ministers sketched out the goals and ideals for the €16 billion youth development scheme Erasmus +2. One of this programme's primary goals was to improve the well-being of young people in the EU. If this project can document a statistical relationship between a certain approach to teaching youth circus and the well-being of young people then an argument can be made to maintain or increase funding and as such help organisations like Galway Community Circus carry on their work. Unfortunately well-being, and other related

1 The CARAVAN network is an association of 12 international circus schools whose objective is to promote circus practices in youth education throughout Europe and to favour their development, through concrete actions such as youth exchanges and training for trainers.

2 <http://eu2013.ie/news/news-items/20130626erasmuspluspren/>

terms, are spoken of freely and regularly without satisfying definitions. In order to ensure the best possible argument in favour of youth circus training as a positive force in the well-being of young people I needed to find a strong and stable definition for well-being. Aristotle's eudaimonia was determined to be the most suitable definition for this current project.

To explain, in the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle discusses and analyses the best life that a person can lead. The term he uses to describe this life-lived-as-well-as-can-be is eudaimonia. Regularly, eudaimonia is translated as happiness or flourishing. Both of these translations work, but they require some explanation. For example, Ackrill writes "eudaimonia ... is a life, enjoyable and worthwhile all the way through" (Ackrill 1980 p19). This explanation of eudaimonia captures some crucial aspects of the concept. Eudaimonia is happiness, and flourishing, but as an end in itself and not as a means to an end. It is a way of living not the goal of a life. It is a process not a product.

Overall, it should be thought of as living well, or for my purposes well-being. Ackrill also comments on this when he writes "eudaimonia is constituted by activities that are ends in themselves" (Ackrill 1980 p19). Eudaimonia isn't the product of activities; rather, it is the activities and these activities must be done well. For any activity there is a better and worse way to do it. The success or failure of each activity is determined by the goal of each activity, so what is the best way for a surgeon to act is based on the success of the operation whereas what is best for a construction worker is the creation of a safe and sturdy building. If all the activities of a life are performed excellently, that life will be eudaimonia.

The function that eudaimonia needs to perform in this study two-fold. Firstly, from a purely pragmatic perspective it is helpful to have a term that is more precise than happiness or well-being and also has a rich history of study and conceptual elucidation behind it. This means that while it is not in the common parlance there is a great deal of texts and information about it, so should someone desire to know more about it, they can do so very easily.

It should be pointed out that eudaimonia is a term that is still the subject of frequent heated debate among Aristotle scholars; in this project eudaimonia will only be used in a very limited way. My concern is not to explain how we are to reach eudaimonia, but rather the exact opposite. My argument is that the members of Galway Community Circus feel happy and are fulfilled by the activities undertaken by the organisation. I can best describe this relationship between action and emotional response in terms of eudaimonia; if eudaimonia is a complex life-long process then their experiences in the circus form one component of it. If this argument is correct then there will be a relationship between what activities the members undertake, how they undertake them, and the emotional effect these activities have. To put it simply, the study will try to show that there will be a significant relationship between self-reported activities engaged in and self-reported experience of happiness and positive emotions. If I can document this relationship then I can explain to funders, like the board of Erasmus +, that youth circus' like Galway Community Circus contribute positively to the well-being of young people without relying on feelings or intuitions but instead backing up my claim with solid statistical data.

I designed a study that would run concurrently with the larger community impact study to test this hypothesis and support the argument I want to make.

## Methodology

### Participants

The participants in the study were drawn randomly from the current membership of Galway Community Circus. Participation was voluntary and the sample was made up of 33 members aged between 5 and 20 years of age. Of those 33, 11 were male and 22 were female. This ratio, while unequal, accurately reflects the overall gender balance of the youth circus. Ten were aged between 5 and 7, five were aged between 8 and 11, nine were aged between 12 and 14 and seven were aged between 15 and 20.

### Materials & Methods

Given the broad range of ages within the sample, the materials and methods used to record participant's experiences would need to be different and age appropriate. For the eldest group the simplest approach could be taken. As young adults there was little concern about the veracity of their responses or their willingness to help. An online questionnaire was made available through a private online social-network group for 14 days and responses were drawn within that time. For the younger teens, it was decided that face-to-face paper questionnaires were to be made available for voluntary completion during before and after their class time. This allowed for more immediate responses and avoided any concerns respecting their online privacy. For the 8 to 11 year olds we decided to have a panel discussion which was recorded. The thinking behind this was down to the fact that that age group have a lot to say, but many are reluctant to answer written questions as it is too closely related to school work and causes concerns over answering 'correctly'. With the youngest group I designed a series of games based on multiple choice questions. This allowed them to choose answers without having to read or write.

### Procedure

One of the major problems faced by this study was its reliance on the community impact study. It was this larger, simpler project that gave rise to and enabled the present study. But as the time frame and research team for the present study were so limited the procedures had to be designed in such a way as to work well for both the community impact report and the measuring happiness study.

The solution was to design both the report and the present study in such a way that the data could be read in detail for each group of stakeholders (staff, members, volunteers etc.) and then each age group within the members, while at the same time, the results from the different member age groups could be coded to be read as being representative of the general membership. This was achieved by making each set of questions follow the same narrative.

The questions posed to the senior members became like a template and for each group a simplification of the phrasing occurred. This meant that there may be a stark difference between the questions posed to the young and oldest members but the results could be coded in the exact same way. This enabled the results to reflect the spectrum of ages of participants. For example, a senior member would have been surveyed about the regularity of which they perform a specific set of aerial techniques in class whereas a junior member would have been asked how regularly they climb and balance. This allowed for greater detail in the dominant community impact report and easier codification of results for the satellite emotional study.

## Results

To explore the relationship between expressed happiness and performed activities, categorical responses were obtained and coded using SPSS software. Initially, in order to calculate expressed happiness, responses to the question “Which of these words describe the feeling of learning something new at circus?” were coded by two independent researchers depending on whether or not they contained positive emotions or feelings (Fulfilled, Successful, Like I have achieved something, Better than I did before, Part of a team, Accomplished, Happy, Like I have done something valuable). However, a ceiling effect was observed in the data, whereby all responses involved positive comments. A similar observation was made when coding for activities. Initially, the aim was to code responses based on whether or not participants mentioned particular activities, yet a ceiling effect was observed here whereby all participants reported engaging in these tasks. Thus all participants reported both positive emotions and the same activities, limiting the variance in the data and inhibiting the ability to explore the relationship between the two variables.

Rather than inferring a level of happiness or a level of activity from closed question responses, the decision was made to test the reverse / opposite hypothesis. This meant that instead of exploring the relationship between happiness and activity, the research explored the relationship between self-reported negative emotions and reported inactivity. To derive this information from participant responses, researchers coded the data to identify where participants reported experiencing negative emotions (e.g. fed-up, bored...) and where they reported periods of inactivity (hanging around, waiting). Each of these variables was coded dichotomously as “featured” or “not featured”.

To explore the relationship between negative expression and inactivity, a Chi square test of Independence was conducted. This identified a significant relationship between negative expression and inactivity (see table X). That is, significantly more participants that mentioned inactivity also mentioned negative emotion, than we would expect by chance. Thus expression of negative emotion is significantly related to reporting inactivity during the circus time.

Table X

Expressed / Remembered? Emotion	Mentioned some Inactivity (waiting)	Only Mentioned Activities	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
All Positive	6 (17%)	22 (61%)	8.036	1	.005**
Some Negative (fed up, bored)	6 (17%)*	2 (6%)			

\*std. res = 2, thus this cell departs significantly from chance

\*\*statistically significant

% = % of total sample

While this may suggest that inactivity allows for negative emotions to be experienced, it is possible that this is merely an artefact of the design and methods. These are self-report measures and so it is possible that the observed findings merely identified that some participants are more likely to remember and report these negative aspects. In order to explore this further, a similar Chi square test of Independence was conducted to test the relationship between expression of negative emotion and self-reported expectation of activity in the circus. This test identified no significant relationship between negative expression and expectation (see table y). That is, there was no relationship between the expression of some negative emotion and the expectation of inactivity in the circus. Thus, all participants enter the circus with the same positive expectations, regardless of whether they expressed negative emotions after the circus.

Table Y

Expectation	Mentioned some Inactivity (waiting)	Only Mentioned Activities	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
All Positive	8 (22%)	19 (53%)	.667	1	.414
Some Negative (fed up, bored)	4 (11%)	5 (14%)			

% = % of total sample

photo Stephen Cadwell



## Discussion

These preliminary findings revealed a ceiling effect. This could be seen as a problem but what they actually show is that a high majority of the participants surveyed reported strong feelings of happiness as being primary among their responses to the circus. This means that the overall intuition behind the study is backed up by the data but the usefulness of those results are very limited. With positive responses to similar activities across the board we're left with a situation that these may just be people with a positive outlook who partake in the activities and there is no relationship between the activities and the emotional responses. So to try and pursue the goal of the study we had to reverse the analysis and seek out occasions where negative emotional responses were reported. This is not to say that we had to find people who reported being unhappy at circus, but rather those whose positive emotional responses (happy, successful, better than I felt before) were reported alongside negative, or less positive emotional responses (such as bored, fed up or angry).

There were a smaller number of participants who gave negative emotional responses (listed above) but these participants also reported moments of inactivity at circus. So while almost all participants reported positive emotional responses, and listed similar activities, a much smaller number also gave negative emotional responses but they also listed passive activities such as waiting, hanging around or messing. This shows that there is something of a correlation between not feeling positive and not partaking fully in the usual activities. For example, we can think of an instance where certain participants found themselves to be bored or fed up because they had to wait to do aerial or acrobatics, which could suggest that if they had been able to partake in the activity they wanted to unimpeded that they would have felt more positively.

However, we wanted to ensure that the participants who responded more negatively just didn't enjoy the circus as much as those who reported more positively. To explore this issue we examined the expectations of all the participants. We wanted to see what they expected when they came to circus. An interesting result from this question was that there was no significant relationship between those who offered negative responses and those who expected less from circus. This would suggest that all the participants came to circus expecting similarly positive experiences and it was only those who found access to their usual activities impeded that gave more negative emotional responses. At this stage, these results go a long way to support our hypothesis and suggest further study.

In conclusion, the results of this study offer strong support to the hypothesis that young people who participate in youth circus training have strong feelings of happiness chief among their reactions. The results of the study also show that the positive emotions reported coincide with training in a specific set of activities. The combination of these two results supports the overall description of these positive emotions in terms of eudaimonia. To develop this study and pursue these hypotheses a greater sample group would be needed. If the numbers of participants surveyed could be increased the ceiling effect of responses could be neutralised and the focus could be directed positively towards actions and associated emotions. Also, increasing the sample size will offer a finer demarcation of emotional responses allowing for a more subtle understanding of the 'happiness' that is involved in the process of eudaimonia.

The future of the study is bright and exciting, with time and effort the project can truly flourish.

## Works cited

Ackrill, J.L Aristotle the Philosopher Oxford University Press, Oxford 1980

Aristotle Nicomachean Ethics Hackett, Indiana 1999

Cadwell, Stephen "Galway Community Circus Impact Study" Galway Community Circus, Galway 2013

Du Preez & Bailey "Meaningful Measurement; A review of the literature about measuring artistic vibrancy" Australian Council for the Arts 2009

**Stephen Cadwell** completed his Ph.D. under Prof. Rowland Stout in University College Dublin in 2011. His thesis focused on materialism in Arthur Danto's philosophy of art. Having moved away from strict academic philosophy to a more interdisciplinary approach he has shifted his interests from aesthetics to emotion, performance and film. Recently, he has written extensively on horror as an aesthetic response and is trying to be more positive with his new work on happiness. He lives on the west coast of Ireland, works with lots of circuses, and divides his time evenly between research and film-making.

**Brendan Rooney** holds a PhD from University College Dublin and lectures on the MSc in Cyberpsychology, as well as the undergraduate BSc (Hons) in Applied Psychology at the Dún Laoghaire Institute of Art, Design and Technology, Ireland. He is also currently chair of the Psychological Society of Ireland's Special Interest Group for Media, Art and Cyberpsychology. Brendan's research interests include the psychological processes of cognitive and emotional engagement with film, entertainment and performance.



# Effectiveness Evaluation in Social Circus Projects: a methodological proposal

Dr. Tania Fiorini, University of Padova and Ilaria Bessone Msc, University of Milan

## Social circus in Italy

Social circus projects dealing with a number of different contexts and targets have existed in Italy for many years. While the projects presented below are not meant to depict an exhaustive portrait, they give an idea of the diverse ways social circus is developing in the country. Since 1997 Foundation Uniti per Crescere Insieme (former Association Viviamo in Positivo until 2005) has been undertaking social circus projects in different Italian cities, within hospitals, schools, detention centres, in the streets and at the house of social circus 'Casa Circostanza', attended by adolescents with and without disabilities, and with diverse social and cultural backgrounds (Uniti per Crescere Insieme, 2010). The project Scuola di Circo Corsaro began its activities in 2006 in Scampia, in the suburbs of Naples. This area is well known as a Camorra stronghold, and the activities of Circo Corsaro address children and youngsters living in the area and in the neighbouring Roma camps to prevent school non-attendance and involvement in criminal organisations (Associazione Giocolieri e Dintorni, 2013). Finally, a number of subjects (among others, Teatro C'Art in Castelfiorentino and Daniele Giangreco in Perugia and Florence, whose project will be presented in details below) employ social circus to target 'disabled' children and adults.

With the intention to establish connections between different organisations and open up opportunities of exchange, research and training in the domain of social circus, in 2011 the Working Group on Social Circus was created, thanks to the coordination of Associazione Giocolieri e Dintorni. At the moment, the group includes the representatives of the main social circus projects in Italy and experts in the domain of health care and social work.

Drawing on existing definitions (i.e. Caravan Circus Network, 2011 and Cirque du Soleil, 2012) the Group looks at social circus in Italy as an effective strategy to promote health on the territory – that is, a responsible management of one's development process – and social cohesion, by countering disadvantage and expanding opportunities of participation as well as individual and community development. Social circus operates in domains which society itself recognizes as relevant, taking charge of supporting interventions through public or private institutions. For this reason, social circus develops within the frame of projects with specific objectives, strategies, methodologies and actions. The identification of evaluation processes and methodologies should be included within a phase of accurate planning, against the backdrop of different contexts and types of projects.

This article focuses on one of the most innovative evaluation methodologies currently adopted by social circus projects in Italy, outlining theoretical aspects and operating procedures.

## The project Spiazza la Piazza

This social circus project addressed the social representation of 'disabled' subjects defined according to the Italian law 104/92<sup>1</sup>. The achievement of this objective involved the creation of a circus performance and its representation in public spaces such as streets and squares<sup>2</sup>. This choice fitted into the idea of fostering integration processes, as well as the principles of project sharing and dissemination. The group involved possessed all the features of the 'artistic group' capable to create a show addressing any kind of audience. The goal was to take part in street theatre festivals and involve communities, schools, and society in general, with the participation and under the supervision of the project manager Daniele Giangreco<sup>3</sup>.

Since the beginning both hosts and staff of a day-care centre participated in the workshops and were trained in circus and drama techniques, in order to be able to build characters, contexts and situations. Every session ended with a discussion about ongoing processes and emerging critical issues. This creative process led to a show staged initially in different towns of the region Umbria, and then in bigger cities such as Turin, Perugia, Terni, and Verona. In the end, it reached one of the most important social theatre festivals in Italy, 'Proscenio aggettante' in Castrocara Terme (Forlì-Cesena), and was awarded a prize with the following motivation: "For understanding the true spirit of theatre and communicating joy and emotions to the audience" (Giangreco, 2013).

The instructor and the participants discussed the fact that performing in public spaces necessarily entails understanding the context and accepting any member of the audience, even those who attend the show accidentally. Street theatre may be seen as an effective metaphor of the integration process, as it allows the observers to stay, to leave, and, in some cases, to actively participate in the performance, entering the stage and becoming actors themselves. As artists, the hosts of the day-care centre are no longer subjects in need of help and assistance, but become people who actively contribute to the promotion of health on the territory, entertaining audiences not only in streets and theatres, but also within day-care centres for elderly people, kindergartens, and schools. As such, the main idea underpinning the performances was to be appreciated as artists able to express talent and beauty, irrespectively of the different social conditions and inescapable individual differences.

To sum up, the theatre space represented a site of spontaneity and originality, which allowed the participants in the project to feel richer and more committed and to transfer the new skills acquired into everyday life, expanding possibilities of movement as well as ways of thinking.

---

1 The law number 104, promulgated on February 5th 1992, represents the Italian legislative reference for the assistance, social integration and rights of the so-called 'differently abled' people. It mainly addresses the latter, but it includes references to the people living with them. As such, the law assumes that autonomy and social integration can be achieved by providing personal and family support to the disabled person and his/her family, as well as psychological, psycho-pedagogical and technical help.

2 Hence the title of the project: "Spiazza la Piazza" in Italian means "amaze the square".

3 Artist, vice president of Association CIRCO INSTABILE and member of the Working Group on Social Circus in Italy.

## Theoretical foundations for the evaluation of effectiveness in social circus projects

As stated above, social circus represents an effective strategy of intervention for projects aiming at the promotion of health on the territory (Turchi & Della Torre, 2007). Projects such as Spiazza la Piazza, dealing specifically with the so-called 'differently abled' people, attempt to achieve this objective through a transformation of the social representation of the latter.

The literature about the needs of 'differently abled' subjects (including research, articles relating to interventions in schools, and documents produced by associations operating in this domain) highlights the central importance of working towards a transformation of attitudes, beliefs and actions; more specifically, it is pivotal to change the configuration that everyday discourse and "common sense" attribute to people with 'disability' (Turchi et Al., 2012).

Existing data account for the 'disabled' as somebody described and experienced as minus, that is, owning skills and competences which are always seen as different in diminishing ways. This 'implicit theory' (as it is not scientifically founded and often used unconsciously) generates practices and modes of interaction that lock the 'disabled' in the position of the minus. As such, actions and interventions need to be conceived in ways that promote a representation of the 'differently abled' as plus, that is, somebody who carries a 'positive diversity', meaning more and better skills than 'non-disabled' people (Bruner, 2002). It is in this sense that the project Spiazza la Piazza intends to change the social representation of the subjects defined as 'differently abled'.

The theoretical underpinning of this project-intervention translates, at the operative level, into the adoption of a 'Dialogic Model' (Turchi & Della Torre, 2007) that places discursive practices at the basis of the processes generating reality. In other words, reality as the subject matter of research is constructed by the speakers, and every intervention in the social domain acts upon a reality shaped by the interacting subjects.

Thus, it is possible to outline a reality in which modes of interaction and self- and other- generated descriptions are shaped by labelling processes which fix and lock the subjects' representations, affecting their possibilities of growth and development (Berger & Lockmann, 1997). This process involves, at different levels, the different actors engaged in the network to which the 'differently abled' subject, more or less explicitly, belongs. Insofar as the condition of 'differently abled' engenders and pervades the individual's construction of a social identity, there is a transition from a situation of 'biography' (as a component of the social fabric) to one of 'biographical career' (in which the subject's identity is reduced to the label 'differently abled'). In this second case the different speakers bind their potential as resources for the development of autonomy, undertaking instead a conservative role in relation to this process. The table below shows how different 'discursive repertoires'<sup>4</sup> relate to processes engendering both a 'biography' and a 'biographical career' (Turchi & Della Torre, 2007; Turchi, 2002).

---

4 The term "discursive repertoire" refers to a mode of constructing reality, understood in a linguistic way and with pragmatic value, which gathers different statements (named "meaning archipelagos") together, articulates in concatenated sentences and spreads as a truth claim which shapes and maintains the narrative coherence (Turchi & Celeghin, 2009).

Question			
How would you describe a so-called 'differently abled' subject?			
Answer examples			
Text	Meaning archipelagos	Repertoires	Observations
The 'differently abled' subject is someone who, according to implicit and explicit socially defined criteria, does not fall within 'normality' as something defined statistically, cognitively and physically.	Implicit and explicit criteria Statistical normality Limited expectations.	Description	This kind of discursive modality entails a description of the different elements without 'subjective', value judgments. (Biography).
I believe that the disabled is a person who cannot do the things normal people do. He/she is not independent; he/she needs to be looked after and demands a lot of care to his/her family members.	Do the things Normal people Independence Need of care	Opinion	The claims produced are expressed in terms of 'personal opinions' and legitimize a reality circumscribed to the speaker. (Hybrid).
The differently abled is somebody who has a lot of rights only on paper, but in the end the family needs to take charge of everything or almost everything, nobody really cares.	To have rights only on paper The family has to take charge of everything Nobody cares	Polemic	This discursive modality places polemical and ideological aspects at the core of the argument, excluding any possibility to manage or change the object of the polemic. (Biographical career).
A differently abled is a person who is not always normal. He/she always needs to be looked after because he/she is not independent. He/she can never be left alone and demands a lot of time not only to his/her family but also to society in general.	Not being normal Need to be looked after Not independent Cannot be left alone Demands a lot of time	Sanction	The reality outlined through this kind of discursive modality is unchangeable, certain, given. Transformation is not possible. This kind of reality is shaped on the basis of non-scientific theories. (Biographical career)

Thus, the research methodology requires the analysis (which can be computerized or manual, depending on the amount of collected text) of the different discursive repertoires identified at different times T0 and T1. The difference between the ways reality is defined at T0 and T1 accounts for the extent to which the objective is achieved. In our case the researcher is looking at whether and how the configuration of reality at T1 is different from the reality outlined at T0, and whether there is a shift towards reality shaping through generating repertoires (that is,

modes of constructing reality which allow transformation), rather than through implicit theories aimed at keeping the status quo.<sup>5</sup>

## The research methodology

The methodology employed to realise this project is called M.A.D.I.T. (*Computerised Textual Data Analysis Methodology*) (Turchi, 2007). This methodology requires the following criteria to be fulfilled, without which the research would lose its scientific character:

- A) The subject matter of research must be placed within a relevant epistemological framework
- B) Both theoretical references and methods (the operating procedures) must be consistent with the selected epistemological framework, entailing the following phases:
- Outline premises and assumptions underpinning the project
  - Define the objective/s in relation to the appropriate epistemological framework of the subject matter of intervention
  - Outline strategies consistently with the achievement of the identified objective/s
  - Employ adequate instruments in order to define the operating procedures
  - Plan the actions

As for point A), it is worth reminding that the proposed project situates within the level of 'conceptual realism', entailing a modality which considers reality as dependent on the categories of knowledge employed by the observer. As such, reality is seen as a construction rather than a fact, and the object of knowledge is the process of getting to know.

Once the relevant level of realism has been identified, the researcher needs to define the referential theoretical paradigm. The term 'paradigm of understanding' refers to a way of knowing which allows identifying the 'categories of the understanding' within which knowledge is produced. The paradigm, as such, refers to the aspect of 'how' the world is known, rather than 'what' is known, reflecting the epistemological assumption that "how we know shapes what we know" (Salvini 1998).

For these reasons, the referential paradigm for the realisation of the project is the 'narrativistic paradigm'. The latter identifies in narration, in the unfolding of discourse, and ultimately in the discursive processes, its 'object of knowledge'. Thus, reality is engendered by the discursive processes developing within a specific context, which in turn are supported by rhetorical nexus (Wittgestein, 1999). Therefore, the underpinning assumption of the narrativistic paradigm consists of 'discursive practices', that is, the ways of knowing generating a reality that stands out as something real due to its pragmatic effects, despite its lack of ontological value. The intrinsic character of the discursive processes is represented by the 'narrative coherence', that is the property of maintaining the discursive practices' consistency and integrity.

For what concerns point B), the premise corresponds to the selected theoretical-epistemological framework, which in this case coincides with the narrativistic paradigm, as argued above in point A). Secondly, according to the MADIT methodology, the objective needs to be abstract, sharable and verifiable/measurable. Against the backdrop of what has been outlined so far, the objective defined was the following: to engender a reality in which the subject defined as 'differently abled' is no longer seen as a 'minus' subject, but can rather be seen as a resource for the territory and is allowed to contribute to the wellbeing of the community.

---

5 The analysis of the protocols is currently underway.

The third aspect, referring to the identification of adequate, coherent and effective strategies to pursue the objective of the project, may be fulfilled through text collection and analysis. More specifically, the text gathered is produced by the different roles involved in the project: 1) the staff assisting the hosts of the day care centre, 2) the hosts' family members and 3) the audience of the show.

The text (that is, the instrument employed) is collected through the construction of an ad hoc protocol consisting of open-ended questions. This choice is relevant to the objective of the project, in that it allows the participants to freely express themselves without being hindered by closed-ended questions. At the same time, it allows the researcher to analyse the discursive process as it is produced by the respondent. The replies to the protocol are anonymous (the only information required concerns the role of the respondent as staff, family member, or audience).

The data analysis allows the identification of discursive repertoires and the connected meaning archipelagos (that is, the content sustaining discourse). The difference between the discursive configuration at T0 and T1 accounts for the shift towards a position of health promotion, and, as such, highlights the achieved quantum of the objective.

## Conclusions

To conclude, it is important to highlight the main characteristics of the proposed evaluation methodology. This kind of analysis presents different advantages:



photo Spiazza la Piazza



photo Spiazza la Piazza

It ensures the scientific character of both the intervention and the evaluation process

It is a cross-sectoral methodology: since it is not based on constructs whose definition varies according to the selected theoretical premises, it may be successfully applied to any kind of intervention and target.

It allows assessing the extent to which the objective of the project (which shall always be constructed as abstract, sharable, verifiable and measurable) is achieved in a neutral and impartial way.

In the light of the above, the methodologies which measure effectiveness in a rigorous way need to be brought out in order to allow the projects actually able to generate the claimed change to emerge, and, as such, the field of social circus to develop.

## References

- P.I. Berger, T. Lockmann (1997). "LA REALTA' COME COSTRUZIONE SOCIALE", edizioni IL Mulino, Bologna
- Associazione Giocolieri e Dintorni (2013). "CIRCOVERSO HANDBOOK. Outlooks in Social Circus for the development of Active Citizenship". Available from: [http://www.jugglingmagazine.it/new/fileadmin/Image\\_Archive/04\\_CircoperBambinieRagazzi/CircoVerso/Circo\\_verso\\_ING\\_150.pdf](http://www.jugglingmagazine.it/new/fileadmin/Image_Archive/04_CircoperBambinieRagazzi/CircoVerso/Circo_verso_ING_150.pdf) [10/01/2013]
- J. Bruner (2002) "LA FABBRICA DELLE STORIE", Editori LA TERZA, Roma Bari
- Caravan Circus Network (2011). "FRAMEWORK OF COMPETENCES FOR SOCIAL CIRCUS TRAINERS". Available from: <http://www.caravancircusnetwork.eu/assets/PDF/LEO1fnalLOW2.pdf> . [10/01/2013]
- Cirque du Soleil (2012). "SOCIAL CIRCUS GLOSSARY". Available from: [https://app.box.com/files/0/f/1356101222/1/f\\_2199424409](https://app.box.com/files/0/f/1356101222/1/f_2199424409) [20/12/2013]
- D. Giangreco (2013). "SPIAZZA LA PIAZZA". Available from: <http://www.danielegiangreco.it/produzioni/spiazza-la-piazza> [7/01/2013]
- A. Salvini (1997). "ARGOMENTI DI PSICOLOGIA CLINICA", UPSEL, Padova
- G.P. TURCHI -a cura di- (2002) "TOSSICODIPENDENZA generare il cambiamento tra mutamento di paradigma ed

effetti pragmatici" UPSEL Domeneghini editore Padova  
G.P. Turchi (2007). "MADIT: Manuale per la Metodologia di Analisi dei Dati Informatizzati Testuali", Aracne Roma  
G.P. Turchi, E. Celeghin (2009). "DATI SENZA NUMERI", MONDUZZI editore, Bologna  
G.P. Turchi, E. Celeghin, M. Sperotto -a cura di- (2012) "SPORT E MEDIA la configurazione della violenza in ambito sportivo", UPSEL Domeneghini editore Padova  
G.P. Turchi, C. Della Torre (a cura di) (2007). "PSICOLOGIA DELLA SALUTE. DAL MODELLO BIO-PSICO-SOCIALE AL MODELLO DIALOGICO", Armando, Roma  
Uniti per Crescere Insieme (2010). "PROGETTI". Available from: <http://www.unitipercrescereinsieme.it/i-progetti> [10/01/2014]  
L. Wittgstein (1999). "RICERCHE FILOSOFICHE", Biblioteca Einaudi, Milano

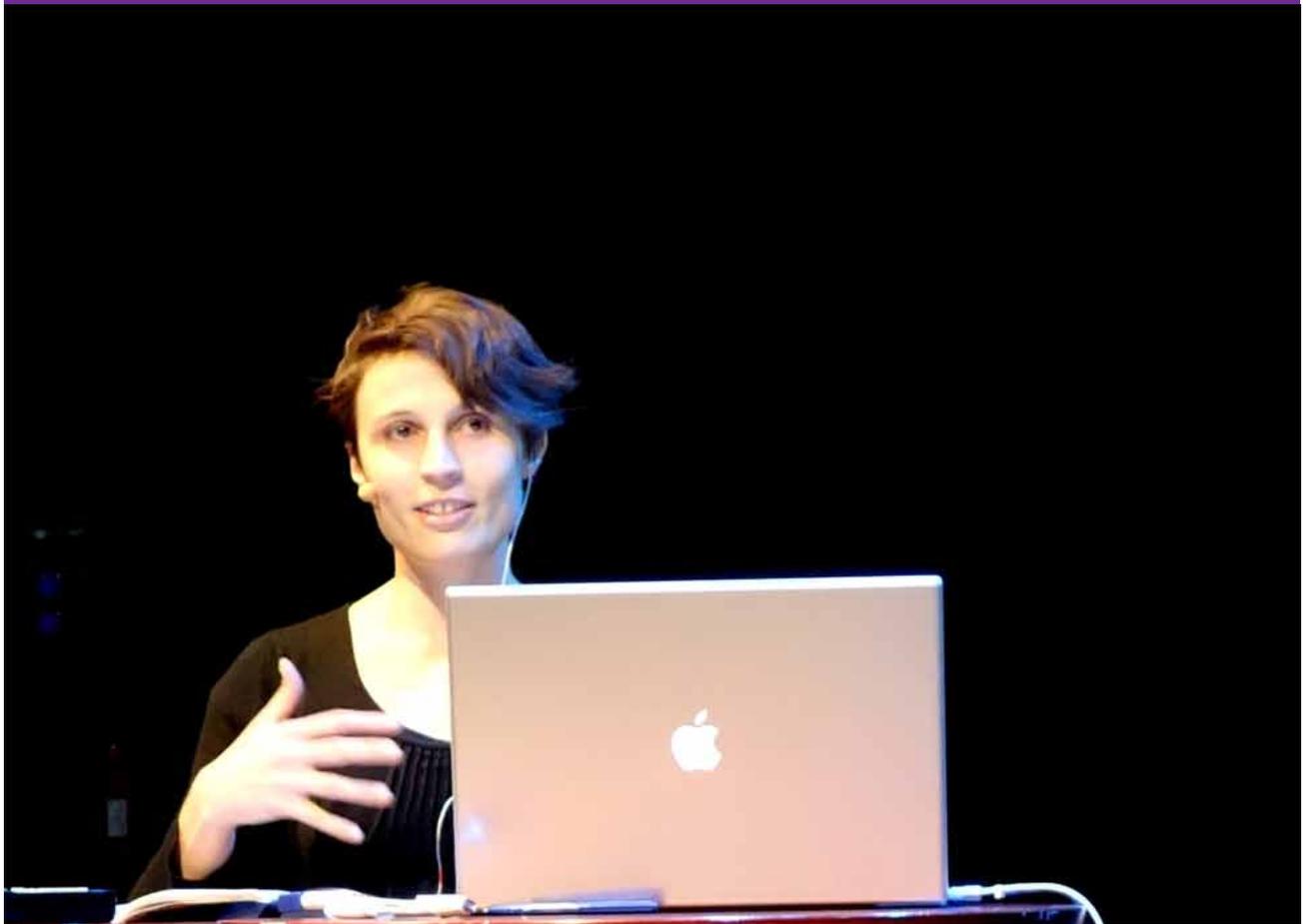


photo Piazza la Piazza

**Tania Fiorini** is a clinical and community psychologist, highly specialized in the methodology of text analysis (MADIT) at the University of Padova. She works with local authorities, health and education institutions to plan and realize social projects, with a specific focus on people with disability. She trains teachers, social workers and educators on the possibility to deal with this target within a framework of inclusion and health promotion. She is a member of the working group on Social Circus in Italy and, together with Daniele Giangreco, realizes social circus projects, managing their planning and evaluation processes.

In the last six years **Ilaria Bessone** has trained and worked as a circus practitioner, researcher and teacher in youth and social circus projects in different countries. Moreover, in 2008 she completed a master thesis on social circus and children's capabilities, and in 2012 she received an Erasmus Mundus Master degree in migration and integration.

She also collaborated on European projects such as the Circo Verso seminar. At the moment, she works as a circus artist and teacher in northern Italy, close to Torino, and is the scientific coordinator of the working group on social circus, promoted by Association Giocolieri e Dintorni, the Italian umbrella organisation for social circus. Moreover, she has recently started a Phd program at the University of Milano, Graduate School in Social and Political Sciences, with a project on the transformative potential of embodiment in social circus.



Ilaria Bessone, photo Riitta Yrjönen

# Social Circus as an Art for Social Change: Promoting Social Inclusion, Social Engagement and Cultural Democracy

Jennifer Beth Spiegel<sup>1</sup>, Concordia University in Montréal

In the fall of 2013, a five-year research partnership was launched by over three dozen researchers and practitioners across Canada entitled “*Art for Social Change: A Research Partnership in Teaching, Evaluation and Capacity-Building*” (abbreviated hereafter as the “ASC project”), under the leadership of art for social change veteran, Judith Marcuse. As part of this partnership, I undertook to conduct a field study on social circus to investigate how, to what extent and under what conditions social circus programs in Quebec are able to promote social inclusion and social integration in ways that might be exemplary of principles of cultural democracy, long touted as goals and virtues of art for social change initiatives (Goldbard, 2006, 2013; Graves, 2005). The study is grounded in an investigation of how social circus practices affect the development of what theorist and psychoanalyst, Félix Guattari, (Guattari, 1995) calls “social subjectivities” and “collectivities”; that is to say what ethical and aesthetic configurations are developed through the process of engaging in a social circus practice and how these affect social trajectories. As Guattari, along with many theorists of socially-engaged arts have pointed out, such practices are not only premised on particular understandings of human social development, but also orient that development through the precise ways in which they challenge their participants and encourage the interaction with others (Guattari, 1995; Nicholson, 2011; Ranciere, 2006). It is a mixed method study consisting of participant-observation research with social circus sites in Quebec; interviews with youth participants, instructors and community workers; and the creation and administering of validated questionnaires to investigate the extent to which social and cultural identity and behaviour have changed through engagement with the programs, and in what ways.

The following discussion explains why and how framing social circus as an “art for social change” and building on this framing to study the capacity of social circus to promote social inclusion and cultural democracy are pertinent for understanding the impact of such programs in Quebec and beyond. To do this I will briefly sketch: (1) the basic theoretical approach to framing social circus as an “art for social change”; (2) how social inclusion, social integration and cultural democracy might be considered as principles commensurable with the goals of current social circus practices in Quebec; and (3) the basic study design proposed to study the extent to which social circus programs in Quebec are in fact able to promote social inclusion, social integration and cultural democracy.

## 1. Social Circus as an Art for Social Change

There are many ways of defining “art for social change”. In the context of the “ASC project”, three types of art for social change are considered. As defined by founder of the International Centre for Arts for Social Change and ASC primary investigator Judith Marcuse, these are: (1) those that are artist-driven, wherein the social change content is in the work of a single artist or group of artists; (2) those in which the artist acts as a facilitator or catalyst to, art-making with groups, using specialized forms of art-creation; and (3) those in which the artist acts as a facilitator in group problem-solving contexts using arts-based processes but not necessarily with the goal of group art-creation (Marcuse & Marcuse, 2011; Marcuse, n.d.). In each of these cases, art for social change strives toward

---

<sup>1</sup> This research is part of a large Art for Social Change partnership research project directed by Judith Marcuse with co-investigators Anne Flynn, Lisa Doolittle, Annalee Yassi, Lynn Fells, Rachael Van Fossen and Katherine Boydell, made possible by funding from the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

effective engagement with social issues that integrate and celebrate imaginative thinking, helping people to find *new ways to see and be engaged in the world* (Boal, 1979; Goldbard, 2006; Guattari, 1995; Nicholson, 2011).

Social Circus programs typically fall under the second category. In Quebec and around the world, Cirque du Soleil's citizenship department has been a leader in promoting an approach to social circus that offers circus arts as a means of reaching out to and supporting marginalized youth, most notably through its Cirque du Monde programs (Cirque du Soleil, n.d.). As such, they became a partner in the ASC project, sharing their knowledge and approach with the broader community of art for social change researchers and practitioners, as well as the global network of social circus practitioners with whom they have been liaising for decades. Cirque du Soleil's Community Worker's Guide: When Circus Lessons Become Life Lessons explains, social circus as "a way of approaching social problems derived from an innovative fusion of circus arts and social intervention" (Lafortune & Bouchard, 2011, p. 13).

The aims and approach of social circus as it exists in Quebec are consistent with those of other arts for social change projects. Its focus on creative games as a means of exploring individual and collective capacities, transcending fears and exploding barriers faced in one's everyday life and social reality, are, for instance, very much in keeping with the now internationally utilized techniques developed by the Brazilian Theatre of the Oppressed founder, Augusto Boal, and collected in his book *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Boal, 1992). In 1974, Augusto Boal argued for the spreading of different artistic media amongst disenfranchised populations as part of a literacy campaign to help those who were being marginalized by rapidly modernizing societies. The arts were approached as languages, capable of complementing verbal languages. Boal elucidated the "syntax" of what were the dominant artistic languages utilized in his project: spoken/written; music; painting; cinema; and theatre. "By learning a new language," Boal claimed, "a person acquires a new way of knowing reality and of passing that knowledge on to others" (Boal, 1979, p. 121). Theatre was meant to subsume all other languages, including "movement" – since Boal's theatre deployed a great deal of physical theatre techniques. At the time, circus arts, and in particular the more theatrical style of the "new circus", were in their infancy. The particular ways that social circus could help people "know" and communicate reality were thus left unarticulated. Indeed, with the development of social circus programs and a small but growing body of literature of circus studies, these are only beginning to be articulated (Rivard, 2007; Rodrigues Avrillon, 2011).

There is much that is unique to what circus can bring to youth, derived in part by the particular approaches to social circus being developed in Quebec, as elsewhere, but also to what is unique about circus as an artistic discipline, or ensemble of disciplines, comprising a range of skills including juggling, clowning, acrobatics, partner acrobatics, aerials, and balancing disciplines like unicycle and rola bola, amongst many others). Through these disciplines particular ways of working together to juggle, create pyramids, keep one another from physical harm and tell theatrical stories together through the language of physical expression become paramount. The particularity of social circus, as a unique socially oriented artistic process, to allow for the development of personal and collective potential, as well as the expression of personal and collective identities particularly among youth in precarious situations, is now in need of rigorous study.

## 2. Social Inclusion, Social Integration and Cultural Democracy as Goals of Social Circus

As stated in the Community Worker's Guide, "social circus aims to ensure the all around development and social inclusion of people at risk, especially youth" (Lafortune and Bouchard, 2011: p. 13). If, however, social inclusion is a primary goal of social circus, what exactly social inclusion entails, and how it can be promoted, are now in need of being further developed and theorized. The McConnell Family Foundation, a Canadian organization dedicated to

helping Canadians build “more innovative, inclusive, sustainable, and resilient society”, as well as a partner of the ASC project, has made social inclusion fundamental to its mandate. As stated on their website “social inclusion lies at the heart of what it is to be a citizen. It is not simply to be accepted, but to be appreciated for the qualities, skills and values each person possesses. It is to belong and to contribute, to be fully a citizen with rights and obligations”. As framed by the McConnell Family Foundation, social inclusion thus goes beyond traditional framings of integration that seek to shape and insert individuals into societal structures. Social inclusion, rather, indicates a dialogic relationship whereby adjustments are made to programs and processes so that those who may have been marginalized for their difference are respected for who they are, including that which makes them “different”. Moreover, it acknowledges that those who have been marginalized can be active agents of transforming the world in which they find themselves. The question is: how can art for social change in general, and social circus in particular, facilitate such a process of social inclusion? And what tensions must be navigated in the process?

In the above discussion of the goals of social circus, we have already begun to elaborate how social circus seeks to support participants in their process of development and how this constitutes a unique approach to art for social change. If these are to be approached through the lens of art for social change promoting social inclusion it is, in part, because these elements allow a means for integrating and engaging with a broader society without sacrificing one’s own singularity. “We hope, above all, that marginality can enrich the social fabric. These young people first need to learn a language that will help them be a part of society... All we ask is that society come and listen and look at these young people in a new light. We are an interface: we need to build a bridge between these two realities” explains Michel Lafortune, former Social Circus director of Cirque du Soleil (Lafortune & Bouchard, 2011, pp. 16–17).

Attempts to “teach a language” while nonetheless respecting the “marginality” of those involved has, historically, been a delicate balancing act. Having aboriginal children enact morality plays was a common colonial strategy to transform the values and beliefs of youth in ways that encouraged children to be ashamed of their parents and culture of origin; this appears abhorrent and is now typically denounced by contemporary societies. Less extreme, but now highly controversial amongst critiques sensitive to avoiding the use of arts as forms of social indoctrination, were late nineteenth century arts projects that sought to integrate recent immigrants into American culture such as the use of theatre and performance in the Settlement Houses of the United States through the work of Jane Addams (Nicholson, 2011, pp. 31–35). The sharing of cultural values as a pillar of art for social change began to be embraced in the mid twentieth century. In 1943 American educator, Rachel Davis Dubois, wrote, “Economic democracy – the right of all to be free from want – we are beginning to envisage... But cultural democracy – a sharing of values among our cultural groups – we have scarcely dreamed of. Much less have we devised social techniques for creating” (Graves, 2005, p. 10). Half a century later, such “techniques” are now being explored. In 2006, community arts practitioner, Arlene Goldbard, elaborated “Within this framework, cultural development becomes a process of assisting communities to learn and express and communicate in multiple directions, not merely from the top – the elite institutions of the dominant culture –down” (Goldbard, 2006, p. 129); and indeed, many such initiatives now exist.

Increasingly participant-led programs are being embraced, not only because the values of inclusivity appeal to many community-engaged artists, but because programs aimed at social control, and that overlook the identity and singularity of their participants, have been shown to be ineffective and often damaging, creating greater anger, resentment, poverty and criminality. As physical education specialist, Peter Donnelly, and sports sociologist, Jay Coakley, note, “In present-day Canada the costs of assimilation are well documented in our multicultural society (e.g., residential schools, loss of language and culture even among ‘founding nations’), and recreation programmes designed to promote social inclusion need to keep principles of multiculturalism in mind. Similarly, current ideas of empowerment and self-determination suggest that participants become involved in designing

their programs. And programmes designed with a view to social control are now becoming recognized as short term, partial solutions to serious social structural problems" (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002, p. 5). Most scholars and practitioners now agree that the key to this is to make sure that participation is always voluntary and that interventions are participant-led as much as possible, inviting outside expertise as a way for participants to pursue and develop their own interests while expanding their sphere of possibility. Indeed, evidence now suggests that programs that encourage youth to take pride in their own cultural identity are far more effective at preventing youth alienation and criminality than those aimed at social control (Flores, 2007; Goldbard, 2006). A great deal of debate and controversy however remains in if and how social, cultural and economic tensions can be navigated through such programs.

Advocates of social circus as an alternative mode of community work with young people experiencing socio-economic difficulties, or living in precarious conditions, often point to the fact that circus has, in many places around the world including Quebec, emerged from an ongoing living tradition of street performance and has traditionally provided livelihoods to those marginalized from mainstream workforces. As Hubtubise, Roy and Bellot point out in their study on youth homelessness, circus "is coherent with the world of the street: nomads, gypsies, and wanderers have played preponderant role in the history of circus and the street arts occupations"(Hurtubise, Roy, & Bellot, 2003, p. 405). While, with the commercial success of companies like Cirque du Soleil, circus may no longer occupy the marginal position it once did, this research suggests that social circus training amplifies a dimension of the culture of marginalized youth and helps youth gain the training to explore their own strengths and interests in a manner that is appealing and cultural appropriate to many who may feel alienated by the various aid and outreach efforts traditionally offered. How can we corroborate this claim? Under what conditions can social circus be successful at affecting social change in a manner that allows youth to flourish and engage with the world in a manner that allows meaningful transformation of the conditions of one's life and the life of one's community? Moreover, what is unique about social circus as a means of affecting social change in this manner?

### 3. Toward a Study Design for Understanding the Process and Impact of Social Circus in Promoting Social Inclusion, Social Engagement and Cultural Democracy

While a small number of qualitative studies now exist detailing the paradigm of social circus as a mode of youth intervention (Rivard, 2007) and the role of social circus in reconfiguring identity and art (Santiago, 2011), careful study of the manner in which such reconfiguring of cultural identity affects social inclusion in the context of social circus remains to be done. In 2004, a comprehensive study of the state of knowledge concerning the social impact of participatory arts entitled *Social Impacts of Participation in the Arts and Cultural Activities: evidence, issues and recommendations*, reported that the mechanisms linking participatory arts activity to empirical outcomes was insufficiently theorized in the existing literature and published studies (Statistics Working Group, 2004). We therefore proposed a mixed method approach, drawing on participant observation and analyzed through a theoretical lens sensitive to the ethical and aesthetic dimension. Such an approach will allow us to analyze the very particular ways that social circus projects navigate the potential tension between the process of introducing youth to new skills, modes of creating and engaging with the world and the process of encouraging exploration and development of personal and collective identity, desires and goals unique to particular participants. As previously mentioned, this is terrain that arts and cultural development work has been navigating for decades. However, how this is negotiated, and the precise reconfigurations of agency and identity to which it gives rise, are only beginning to be fully appreciated. This means careful attention to how the social and artistic configurations of the practices themselves, as well as how they are experienced and taken up, transformed and

extended in the process of social and collective development or “becoming”, to borrow a term from Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

While careful observation and analysis, considering the literature on arts for social change processes and the reconfiguration of social and bodily identity in contemporary circus practice, may offer a significant contribution to theorizing the methodology of contemporary social circus, this observation needs to be supplemented with interviews and focus groups with participants, instructors, community workers and other members of the community to fully appreciate the impact of the process as it is experienced by those involved from different vantage points. Through interviews we will be able to better understand how modes of seeing, creating and engaging developed through social circus practices are being extended into other dimensions of life. We will be able to compare the experiences of those who have pursued social circus to those who have not, to discern patterns of social integration and engagement. Finally, questionnaires are needed to ascertain the extent to which the experiences articulated by those interviewed may be generalizable.

As a field study in the Art for Social Change project, the approach to delivering arts for social change deployed by particular social circus sites will be analyzed against other arts for social change pedagogical and partnership models to discern how these affect the manner in which these influence the ways in which social circus practices affect social inclusion, integration and cultural democracy. Similarly, the appropriateness of evaluative approaches and measures will be compared, as will similarities and differences in the results using different approaches and measures, to also contribute to methodological insights in the field. Fundamentally, our hope is that in studying both the creative process and social impact of social circus programs we will be able to derive results that will shed light on how and what social and artistic mechanisms are acting as catalysts of social change, and how this may be affecting the social and cultural horizons of youth in precarious situations at the present time.

### Works Cited:

Boal, A. (1979). *Theatre of the Oppressed*. (C. A. McBride & M.-O. L. McBride, Trans.) (1985th ed.). New York: Urizen Books.

Boal, A. (1992). *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. (A. Jackson, Trans.) (2001st ed.). New York: Routledge.

Cirque du Soleil. (n.d.). Social Circus - Cirque du Monde. Retrieved February 12, 2014, from <http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/about/global-citizenship/social-circus/cirque-du-monde.aspx>

Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. (B. Massumi, Trans.) Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Donnelly, P., & Coakley, J. (2002). *The Role of Recreation in Promoting Social Inclusion*. Toronto.

Flores, K. S. (2007). *Youth Participatory Evaluation: Strategies for Engaging Young People*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Goldbard, A. (2006). *New Creative Community: The Art of Cultural Development*. New York: New Village Press.

Goldbard, A. (2013). *The Culture of Possibility: Art, Artists & The Future*. New York: Waterlight Press.

Graves, J. B. (2005). *Cultural Democracy: The Arts, Community, and the Public Purpose*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Guattari, F. (1995). *Chaosmosis: an ethico-aesthetic paradigm*. (P. Bains & J. Pefanis, Trans.) (2006th ed.). Sydney: Power Publications.

Hurtubise, R., Roy, S., & Bellot, C. (2003). Youth Homelessness: The Street and Work - From Exclusion to Integration. In L. Roulleau-Berger (Ed.), *Youth and Work in the Post-Industrial City of North America and Europe*.

Boston: Brill Leiden.

Lafortune, M., & Bouchard, A. (2011). *When Circus Lessons Become Life Lessons Community Worker 's Guide*. (Asiastis, Trans.). Montreal: Cirque du Soleil.

Marcuse, J. (n.d.). International Centre for Arts for Social Change.

Marcuse, J., & Marcuse, R. (2011). Art for Social Change: a call for partnership. In C. McLean & R. Kelly (Eds.), *Creative Arts in Research for Community and Cultural Change*. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises Ltd.

Nicholson, H. (2011). *Theatre, Education and Performance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ranciere, J. (2006). *The Politics of Aesthetics*. London & New York: Continuum.

Rivard, J. (2007). *Le mouvement paradigmatique autour du phénomène des jeunes qui vivent des difficultés : l'exemple du programme Cirque du Monde par*. Université de Montréal.

Rodrigues Avrillon, H. da S. (2011). *Le cirque social du rire aux larmes: Espace de médiation et de reconfiguration identitaires et artistiques aux Etats-Unis et au Brésil*. Université Lumière Lyon 2.

Statistics Working Group. (2004). *Social Impacts of Participation in the Arts and Cultural Activities Stage Two Report*. Sydney.

**Dr. Jennifer Spiegel** completed her doctoral thesis in 2010, "Theatricality and the Production of Ecological Subjectivity" at the Centre for Cultural Studies, University of London. In 2012, she completed a two-year project as a research fellow in Communications at McGill University on "Performance, Media and Civic Engagement". Dr. Spiegel is currently a post-doctoral research fellow at Concordia University in Montreal, leading a study on the impact of social circus programs in Quebec as part of a large, 5-year Canada-wide research programme entitled "Arts for Social Change Research Partnership in Teaching, Evaluation and Capacity-Building". She was also a co-investigator for a feasibility study on "Social Circus and Health Equity" aimed at developing a framework for evaluating Ecuador's national social circus program.



# Self-determination Theory as a Framework for Evaluating Circus-based Youth Development and A Preview of the Circus and ME: AYCO Youth Circus Study

Jacqueline L. Davis, presenter  
PhD Student, University of British Columbia

Jennifer P. Agans, co-author  
PhD Student, Tufts University

## Overview

In the classic story of *The Little Prince* (de Saint-Exupéry, 1943), a Turkish astronomer discovers the Little Prince's tiny planet and names it Asteroid B-612. At an international astronomy conference, the astronomer delivers his important discovery but is ridiculed by his scientific colleagues for wearing a traditional Turkish costume. Some years later the Turkish astronomer presents his findings again, this time wearing European clothing, and this time his report is accepted.

This parable serves to illustrate the importance of knowledge translation in the fields of youth circus and social circus. Social circus practitioners use language and expressions within their native land that may not be readily comprehensible by people outside the circus ring, in particular such stakeholders as funders, arts councils, and departments of education or social work. It falls upon circus arts practitioners, when describing the processes and outcomes of social circus programs, to use language that will best be understood and accepted by the audience receiving the information. We have coined the term *circademic* to describe a circus arts researcher who speaks both languages – that of social circus and that of academia – to serve as a translator between these two worlds. The ultimate goal is to describe with some precision those processes, outcomes, and presumed benefits of social circus programs so that stakeholders can perceive those benefits, become motivated to support social circus programs, and invest in greater numbers of young people having access to the activities and opportunities afforded there.

In this spirit, what follows in Part I of this paper is a theory of youth circus and how it maps onto a theory of human motivation and personality. To undertake this mapping it was first necessary to investigate the definitions of youth circus terms and translate them into psychological constructs as they are understood in the psychology literature. This sets the stage for future research into the effects of youth and social circus programs.

In Part II we will present a brief preview of a survey-based study-in-progress that took place through the American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO). This is one of the first studies, as far as we are aware, to capture a picture of circus youth in the U.S. and to investigate the relationship between circus-based physical activities and measures of positive youth development and self-determination.

## Part I: Self-determination Theory as a Framework for Evaluating Circus-based Youth Development

**Youth Circus:** The late Dr. Reginald Bolton (1945–2006) was a pioneer in the “New Circus” movement of the 1970s (Ott, 2005) that brought circus arts out of the circus tent and into the lives of ordinary people in backyards, schools, summer camps, and community halls (Bolton, 1987). Bolton’s (2004) doctoral dissertation, *Why circus works: How the values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people* ([www.regbolton.org/why-circus-works-reg-bolton](http://www.regbolton.org/why-circus-works-reg-bolton)), plays an important role in setting the stage for research in youth circus. In the dissertation Bolton (2004) presents the “practice-based evidence”<sup>1</sup> he gathered during a lifetime of teaching circus arts to children and youth.

We begin this discussion of how circus arts appear to promote youth well-being with six elements, rights, or values that Bolton (2004) believed to be essential to a healthy childhood. Furthermore Bolton (2004) asserted that these same elements are not only found within circus, but are provided by circus. These six elements are and He used a “digital mnemonic” (an outline of a hand, with each element written on a finger and the palm) to name these elements after an old nursery rhyme (see Figure 1). He wrote:

“...[C]ircus, in its very nature, **is composed of the same elements** which characterize a fulfilled childhood... **In fact it is my contention that circus actually represents childhood** -- the real childhood we all experienced, as seen from the inside, with fear, awe, dreams, nightmares, love and so on; not the belittling external view of childhood.” (Bolton, 2004, p.198)

We shall return to this homology after we look at another model of human well-being known as *self-determination theory*.

**Self-Determination Theory** (SDT) is a theory of human motivation and personality that focuses on self-motivated and self-determined behavior ([www.selfdeterminationtheory.org](http://www.selfdeterminationtheory.org)). SDT postulates that human psychological development involves three innate psychological needs which must be met for optimal growth and which, if not met, can lead to reduced well-being: the need for autonomy, competence, and belonging (relatedness) (Ryan & Deci, 2000). *Autonomy* concerns the need to have choices in one’s life; *Competence* is the need to feel able to achieve challenging goals; and *Relatedness* refers to the need to feel connected to others (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Since the 1980s, countless studies have validated the critical role of these three psychological needs in the workplace, healthcare, athletics, healthcare, and education (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Strong links have been found between the satisfaction of the needs for autonomy, competence, and (less robustly) relatedness and *intrinsic motivation* (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation, which refers to engaging in optimally challenging activities for the inherent pleasure of doing so in the absence of external rewards (Deci & Ryan, 1985), is linked to desirable outcomes including persistence, concentration and positive affect across contexts including sport and education (Standage, Duda, & Ntoumanis, 2005).

In light of Bolton’s (2004) practice-based evidence regarding youth circus, we hypothesized that youth circus participants are intrinsically motivated to do circus in part because youth circus programs may satisfy the needs for autonomy, competence, and belonging in young people. Our intention was to begin building a plausible case that circus arts programs are fertile social environments for meeting young people’s basic psychological

---

1 We are indebted to Steve Morgan, an advocate for positive-risk taking in mental health services, for the concept and term of *Practice-based Evidence*. [www.practicebasedevidence.squarespace.com](http://www.practicebasedevidence.squarespace.com)

needs. The construction of this case necessitates unpacking Bolton's (2004) six elements and aligning them with the psychological literature so that this hypothesis can be tested in the future. What did Bolton (2004) mean, in psychological terms, by *Self-Design, Fun, Risk, Trust, Dreams, and Work*, and how might they relate to the three psychological needs of SDT within the youth circus context?

**Transmuting Bolton's Elements into Constructs:** A *construct* is a characteristic or internal attribute that cannot be directly observed (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2013), the manifestation of which is inferred through verbal report (such as questionnaires) and observable behaviors. An online database called *PsycINFO*, which contains over 3.5 million records in the psychology literature, is searchable by constructs and their synonyms. We looked up Bolton's (2004) six original terms, and the synonyms Bolton also uses, to see if PsycINFO's thesaurus recognized them "as-is," and if not, to find the best-fit constructs that came closest to our interpretation of Bolton's original meanings. Once best-fit constructs were found, we made suppositions as to how these constructs might satisfy the three psychological needs of SDT (*autonomy, competence, and relatedness*; Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci 2000). While Bolton (2004) begins with *Self-Design*, we will visit this construct at the end and begin instead with:

### **Fun = Play, Playfulness**

*Fun* according to Bolton (2004) refers to wholesome, classical good-times whereby children engage in creating their own play as opposed to being receivers of entertainment. Developmental psychologists uphold play as a significant contributor to key functions and systems including physical, social, and cognitive development (Hertzman & Boyce, 2010). The SDT perspective holds playfulness as a dimension of *intrinsic motivation*, the inherent human propensity to explore, learn, and create out of one's own volition (Ryan & Deci, 2000). We assert that the *playfulness* inherent to youth circus activities makes practicing skills more fun which increases the likelihood that a child will become intrinsically motivated to persevere and thus develop competence.

### **Risk = Positive Risk-Taking**

The prevailing view of *risk* in prevention science includes biomedical and psychosocial factors, such as poverty, single-parent homes, or violent neighborhoods, associated with increased odds of developing mental health problems (Coie et al., 1993). However, the *social circus sector* utilizes circus arts programs internationally as interventions for these populations (Cirque du Soleil, n.d.). Social circus has long held risk as a vehicle of growth and development, and in the circademic literature risk is taken to mean *safe risk* (McCutcheon, 2003), *constructive physical risk* (Bolton, 2004), and *confronting, assessing, and managing risk* (Ott, 2004). Bolton (2004) asserts that "...circus activities are not only inherently safe, but may be a means of teaching risk-assessment and risk management from an early age" (p.19) and thus an agent for positive personal growth. Youth circus programs support autonomy in that students of all levels and abilities have choices about the degree of *positive risk* they take, and a sense of belonging grows through the support of peers and coaches in a non-competitive setting where small successes – and temporary failures – are shared.

### **Dreams = Aspiration**

Bolton (2004) talks of circus as igniting children's dreams to envision a future in which they "...can design their own lives and map their own routes and travel as far as they like" (p.133). Hope for the future is considered to be a vital component in positive youth development (Schmid & Lopez, 2011). Youth must connect today's behaviors to tomorrow's goals in forging positive pathways to adulthood (Schmid, Phelps, & Lerner, 2011), and to achieve those goals they must envision themselves as sufficiently competent and autonomous. We hold that youth circus provides a context

for the repeated practice of meeting short and long term goals that can lead to higher *aspiration*. By supporting autonomy and competence among a group of peers, youth circus programs cultivate autonomous, competent role models that inspire participants to envision themselves as self-determining.

### **Trust = Tactile Communication (Touch)**

“Circus gives the opportunity to touch, to hold hands and bodies, with each other and with adults in a healthy, non-threatening, non-sexual context” writes Bolton (2004, p.193) in his assertion that the foundation beneath all circus skill-learning is *appropriate physical contact*. The sense of touch is biologically wired to develop trust in human beings. A spectrum of physiological and emotional benefits, including lowered cortisol (stress hormone) and increased oxytocin (bonding hormone; Field, 2010) are imparted through human touch. Another term for touch, *tactile communication*, is a form of non-verbal behavior (Deethardt & Hines, 1983) that promotes trust and cooperation among group members (Kraus, Huang, and Keltner, 2010). Youth circus programs not only foster the trust of others, they instill a sense of trust-worthiness as students learn that they themselves can be trusted. Safe touch and trust contribute to a sense of belonging within the youth circus context where youth can also trust that their needs for autonomy and competence will be supported.

### **Work = Persistence, Grit**

The effort required to develop circus skills, Bolton (2004) writes, tends to be overlooked in books and film, but when they actually try it themselves children quickly discover that learning circus skills demands hard work. An important indicator of school readiness in young children, according to the Approaches to Learning recommendations of the National Education Goals Panel (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995), is *persistence*. Tremendous determination is required, Bolton (2004) notes, to master the unicycle or a complex juggling routine, and student achievement is “real, tangible, undeniable, and not at the mercy of a teacher’s value judgment. The balls are in the air, or they are not. You are on the wire or you are off” (Bolton, 2004, p. 157). *Grit*, a construct associated with persistence (Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007), “entails working strenuously toward challenges, maintaining effort and interest over years despite failure, adversity, and plateaus in progress” (Duckworth et al, 2009, p. 1087-88). We suggest that circus readily fosters persistent practice in part because of the wide choice of activities circus offers. Having choice is intrinsically motivating for continued practice and thus leads to increased competence.

### **Self-Design = Self-determination**

We now arrive at Bolton’s (2004) first element, Self-Design, of which he writes: “This aspect of the child encompasses self-actualization, self-awareness, self-design, self-presentation, and individuation. In educational theory, it is ‘the belief in or the process of developing the actuality of one’s idealized image’” (p. 21). We propose that the self-invention, individuation, and identity Bolton (2004) speaks of are summed up as *self-determination* itself, and this sum is simultaneously an element of his model and the ultimate outcome of the integration of the five other constructs: *Positive Risk-Taking, Playfulness, Aspiration, Trust and Tactile Communication*, and *Persistence* (see Figure 2). In sum, work is fun when it is intrinsically motivating, and this increases the likelihood of persistent practice and therefore competence. When held by trust, a sense of belonging develops in which taking risks is possible, and where there is positive risk-taking there can be growth. In growth, one aspires to a future self that autonomously commands its own destiny and takes a road toward the possibilities. In all, Bolton’s (2004) constructs of circus and childhood are likely candidates for supporting young people’s autonomy, competence, and sense of belonging.

**Future Research:** In this exercise we have undertaken a theoretical alignment of Bolton's (2004) work with the psychological literature and research in SDT. In proposing this alignment we would like to clearly state that our claims remain theoretical at this time and must be followed by the empirical assessment that participation in youth circus programs actually fosters positive psychosocial outcomes in young participants. With this paper we lay the foundation for future work that examines: whether Bolton's (2004) six constructs actually exist in youth circus programs; whether and how these constructs contribute to the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in circus arts programs; and whether Bolton's constructs, independently or together with SDT, support youth well-being in circus-based youth development programs. We hope that the effort taken to unpack Bolton's (2004) six constructs will facilitate communication between youth circus and social circus practitioners and the researchers and stakeholders who stand in the wings, ready to support community circus projects. Dressing our language in the right costume could make all the difference.

## Part II: A Preview of the Circus and ME: AYCO Youth Circus Study

In Part I of this paper, we presented a theory of youth circus (Dr. Reg Bolton's homology of childhood and circus) and mapped it onto a theory of human motivation and personality (self-determination theory) while translating observations from youth circus practice into defined psychological constructs. The purpose was to set the stage for future research into the effects of youth and social circus programs because research on the efficacy of circus-based physical activity is in its infancy. Preliminary studies are needed to better understand the participation patterns of youth circus and to investigate the degree to which circus-based physical activity may be related to positive youth development and self-determination. Furthermore, it is also necessary to explore circus educators' approaches to psychological need support for their students and to learn about the perceptions that youth circus educators have regarding the benefits and possible shortcomings of circus-based physical activity in the young people they teach.

In August 2013, the American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO) held its biennial national youth circus festival at the School for Acrobatics and New Circus Arts (SANCA) in Seattle, Washington. This provided an opportunity to take our own advice and conduct a bit of empirical research on the children and teens who do circus, and on the youth circus educators, that would be present at the festival. We later extended the study in an online format to include participants who could not attend the festival.

What follows is the short description of the Circus and ME: AYCO Youth Circus Study (in progress) that was presented at the Culture Has an Impact Conference in Tampere, Finland (December 2013) by Jacqueline L. Davis.

### "Circus and ME: The AYCO Youth Circus Study"

Approval for the study was granted by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia (UBC). Partners include UBC, Tufts University, and the American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO), with considerable support from the School for Acrobatics and New Circus Arts (SANCA). The principal investigator is Dr. Tal Jarus, Professor, Department of Occupational Science and Occupational Therapy at UBC; co-investigators are Jacqueline L. Davis, doctoral student in Interdisciplinary Studies at UBC, and Jennifer P. Agans, doctoral student in Child Study & Human Development at Tufts University.

**Objectives:** This survey-based study aims to a) explore the relationship between recreational circus-based physi-

cal activities and indicators of positive youth development (PYD) and self-determination theory (SDT), and b) identify some of the perceptions that youth circus educators have regarding the benefits and adverse effects of circus-based programs for young people. Data obtained from surveys of youth circus participants (ages 10-21) will be analyzed to see whether there are any patterns of PYD and SDT among the youth in this study and whether participation in youth circus programs is associated with these constructs. Data obtained from surveys of youth circus educators will contribute to a better understanding of elements that are common across youth circus programs that might be helping or hindering youth development in these contexts.

Research questions at the heart of this project include:

- What are the participation patterns of youth in circus-based physical activity, including objective, subjective and contextual dimensions?
- Are there patterns of positive youth development, psychological need satisfaction, concentration, positive affect, motivation, and persistence (grit) among youth in circus programs? Do these correlate with years of experience, participation patterns of youth circus, age, gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status?
- To what degree do circus youth feel their competence, relatedness, and autonomy development are supported by youth circus educators?
- For youth circus educators, what benefits (physical, social, developmental etc.) have they personally witnessed that they believe have emerged through circus-based physical activity? Conversely, what adverse effects have circus educators personally seen that could be attributed to circus-based physical activity?

**Participants:** The samples of youth and adults obtained to take the survey represent the sub-population of the national youth circus sector that was able to attend a summer festival of the American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO) in Seattle, Washington. A second phase of the study included the same survey in an online format through Fluid Surveys that was disseminated through youth circus organizations and online social networks in the United States. Consent was willingly given by all participants.

**The surveys:** The youth survey comprises 124 items. These include questions to assess circus participation patterns, and adapted versions of validated scales to assess psychological need satisfaction, psychological need support, motivation, concentration, positive and negative affect, PYD, and grit. Two open-ended questions provide opportunities for youth to write about their experiences in circus. Demographic questions query age, gender, ethnicity, amount of time in circus program, etc., as well as other activities participants are involved in and self-reported weight. The survey for youth circus educators contains 18 demographic questions and three open-ended questions.

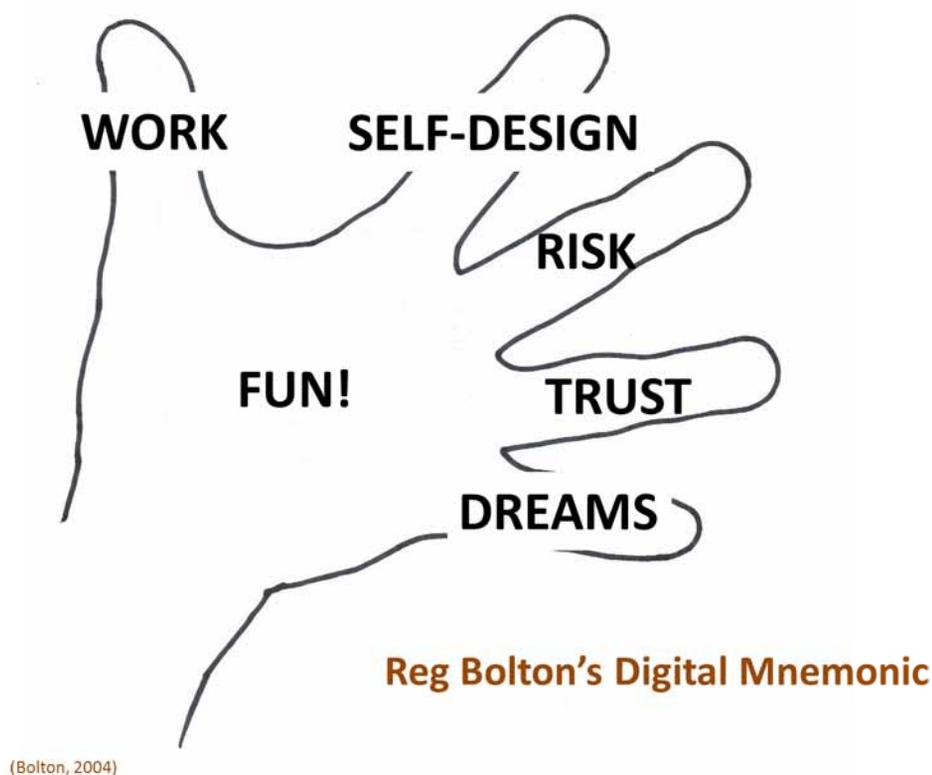
**Data analysis:** Educators' surveys: Using NVivo text analysis software, qualitative responses will be coded to identify common constructs listed. Those lists will then be aggregated by creating categories based on similarities. Frequencies of the categories will be calculated in order to identify most frequently listed constructs.

Youth surveys: Using SPSS statistical analysis software, descriptive analyses will be conducted on each of the scales' scores, as well as chi square tests to probe for differences among theoretically-meaningful groups of participants (e.g., boys vs. girls, participants with different levels of experience). Correlations between participation patterns in circus activities and scores on the scales described above will also be examined. Regression analyses will also be conducted to examine the extent to which youth circus experiences and experiences with youth circus educators predict positive youth development and self-determination.

**Update:** By the time the surveys closed in November 2013, over 100 youth ages 10-21, and over 100 youth circus educators had responded. The timeline for completion of the AYCO Youth Circus Study is: data collection (August-November, 2013); data analysis (January-March, 2014); results submitted for publication (spring 2014). We look

forward to sharing our findings with the national and international youth and social circus sectors! ~ J.D. & J.A.

**Figure 1**  
**Reg Bolton's Digital Mnemonic:**  
**A Visual Companion for a Six-Strand Exploration**  
**Bolton's (2004) Original Concept**



(*Self-Design*) Monday's child is fair of face – “The index finger, the one that points, represents self-design, individuation, showing off.” (*Fun*) Tuesday's child is full of grace – “... the ticklish, sensitive palm represents the element of fun, play, laughter and happiness.” (*Risk*) Wednesday's child is full of woe – “The middle finger, the one that sticks out and gets hurt most often, represents risk.” (*Dreams*) Thursday's child has far to go – “The smallest finger, alongside all the bigger ones is about aspiration, as it dreams of being big one day.” (*Trust*) Friday's child is loving and giving – “The ring finger, cosily [sic] enclosed by the others, suggests trust and comfort, and also raises the important issue of touching.” (*Work*) Saturday's child works hard for a living – “The thumb is utilitarian and functional, and evokes the idea of hard work and resilience” (Bolton, 2004, p.20).

Figure 2

Reg Bolton's Digital Mnemonic:  
A Visual Companion for a Six-Strand Exploration  
Translated into best-fit constructs for research in developmental circus arts  
(Adapted by Jacqueline L. Davis, 2012)



Bolton, R. (2004). Why circus works: How the values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*. Perth, Australia: Murdoch University.  
Full text: [www.regbolton.org/why-circus-works-reg-bolton](http://www.regbolton.org/why-circus-works-reg-bolton)

## References for Self-determination Theory as a Framework for Evaluating Circus-based Youth Development

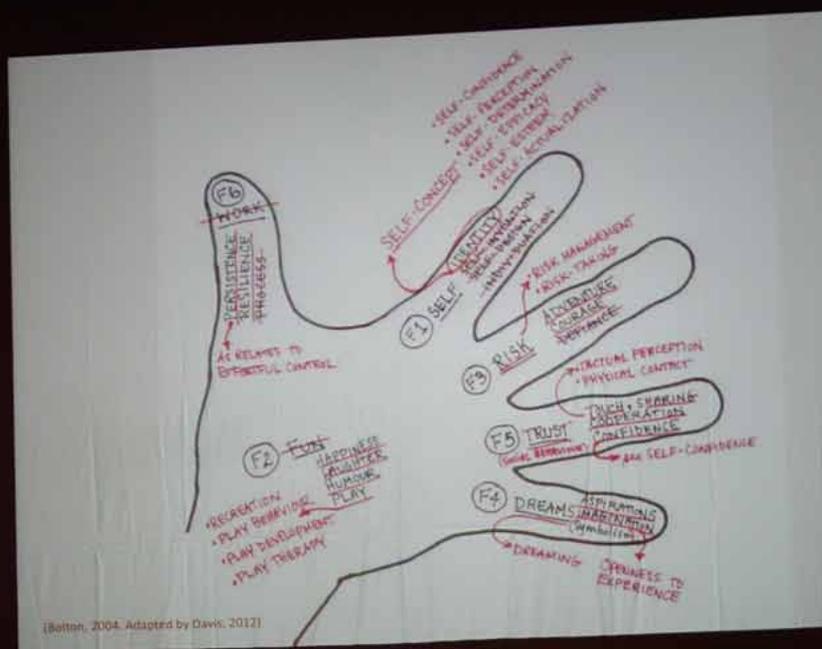
- Bolton, R. (1987). *New Circus*. London: The Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.
- Bolton, R. (2004). Why circus works: How the values and structures of circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*. Perth, Australia: Murdoch University. Retrieved from [www.regbolton.org/why-circus-works-reg-bolton](http://www.regbolton.org/why-circus-works-reg-bolton)
- Cirque du Soleil. (n.d.). *Social Circus*. Retrieved from <http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/about/global-citizenship/social-circus.aspx>
- Coie, J., Watt, N. F., West, J. D., Asarnow, J. R., Markman, H. J., Ramey, S. L., et al. (1993). The science of prevention: A conceptual framework and some directions for a national research program. *American Psychologist*, 48 (10), 1013-1022.
- Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Deci, E.L., & Ryan, R.M. (2000). The “What” and “Why” of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227-268.
- Deethardt, J.F. & Hines, D.G. (1983). Tactile communication and personality differences. *Journal of Nonverbal Behavior*, 8, 143-156.
- de Saint-Exupéry, A. (1943). *The Little Prince*. Reynal & Hitchcock.
- Duckworth, A.L., Peterson, C., Matthews, M.D., & Kelly, D.R. (2007). Grit: Perseverance and passion for long-term goals. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 92(6), 1087-1101.
- Duckworth, A.L. & Quinn, P.D. (2009). Development and validation of the Short Grit Scale (Grit-S). *Journal of Personality Assessment*, 91, 166-174.
- Field, T. (2010). Touch for socioemotional and physical well-being: A review. *Developmental Review*, 30(4), 367-383.
- Gravetter, F.J. & Wallnau, L.B. (2013). *Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences, Ninth Edition*. Belmont, California: Wadsworth.
- Hertzman, C. & Boyce, T. (2010). How experience gets under the skin to create gradients in developmental health. *Annual Review of Public Health*, 31, 329-347.
- Kagan, S.L., Moore, E., & Bredekamp, S. (Eds.) (1995). Reconsidering children’s early learning and development: Toward shared beliefs and vocabulary. Washington, DC: National Education Goals Panel. Retrieved from <http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/goalsv1.pdf>
- Kraus, M.W., Huang, C. & Keltner, D. (2010). Tactile communication, cooperation, and performance: An ethological study of the NBA. *Emotion*, 10(5), 745-749.
- McCutcheon, S. (2003). Negotiating identity through risk: A community circus model for evoking change and empowering youth. *Unpublished master’s thesis*. Victoria, Australia: La Trobe University.
- Ott, D. (2005). A phenomenology of youth circus training at Fern Street. *Unpublished doctoral dissertation*. Tempe, Arizona: Arizona State University.
- Ryan, R.M. and Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55, 68–78.
- Schmid, K.L., & Lopez, S.J. (2011). Positive pathways to adulthood: The role of hope in adolescents’ constructions of their futures. In R.M. Lerner, J.V. Lerner, & J.B. Benson (Eds.) *Advances in Child Development and Behavior: Positive Youth Development* (pp.72-84). London: Elsevier, Inc.

Schmid, K.L., Phelps, E., & Lerner, R.M. (2011). Constructing positive futures: Modeling the relationship between adolescents' hopeful future expectations and intentional self-regulation in predicting positive youth development. *Journal of Adolescence*, 34, 1127-1135.

Standage, M., Duda, J.L., & Ntoumanis, N. (2005). A test of self-determination theory in school physical education. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75, 411-433.

Jacqueline Davis is a doctoral student in the Interdisciplinary Studies Graduate Program at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada. Jackie was awarded a Killam Predoctoral Fellowship for her proposed research on the effects of community-based circus arts on the physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development of young people. She holds a Master's degree in Human Development & Psychology from the Harvard Graduate School of Education where she coined the term developmental circus arts as the theory and practice of using circus as a vehicle for positive youth development. Jackie is a founding member of the American Youth Circus Organization [www.americanyouthcircus.org](http://www.americanyouthcircus.org) and [CircusLearning.com](http://CircusLearning.com) both of which promote the participation of youth in circus arts.

Jen Agans is a doctoral student in the Eliot Pearson department of Child Study and Human Development at Tufts University in Medford, Massachusetts, USA, where she is researching participation in movement activities (e.g., sport, dance, circus) and the role of such participation in fostering healthy active lifestyles. She also works closely with Jackie Davis in both research (including a study of positive development among youth in the American Youth Circus Organization) and practice (co-directing the Silver Lining Circus Camp in Temple, New Hampshire, USA), and has been involved in youth circus since she was 12 years old.





# **Culture Has an Impact!**

## **CELEBRATION SEMINAR**

of

Effective Circus Project  
and Aladdin's Lamp of  
Tampere Region

12.12.2013 – 15.12.2013



## Culture Has an Impact!

– Celebration Seminar of Effective Circus Project and Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region  
December 12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> 2013

### The Effective Circus Project

**Effective Circus Project** (2011-2014) continues the work of Social Circus Project (2009-2011) by developing the field of social circus in Finland. The main goal of the project is to give circus organisations tools for proving the effects of circus. This will improve their possibilities to find funding for social circus activities and improve employment for social circus professionals.

The Project organizes social circus lessons in various communities in Finland, advances the methods for studying the wellbeing effects of circus, sells workshops promoting wellbeing at workplaces and organizes work seminars for commercialising the wellbeing services with the circuses and the communities. The project also co-operates internationally.

The Effective Circus Project is an ESF (European Social Fund) project that is administrated by the Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre at the University of Tampere. The project is mainly funded by the Lapland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. Other funders include cities of Tampere, Turku, Vantaa, Lempäälä and Oulu and the pilot circuses Sorin Sirkus, SirkusUnioni, Sirkus Magenta, Culture Centre Pii Poo, Oulun Tähtisirkus and Monitaideyhdistys Piste.Pirkanmaan

### Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region

**Taikalamppu - Aladdin's Lamp** is a Finnish network of eleven regional art centres for children and young people. The art centres located throughout Finland have been set up to develop methods and models of cultural activities for children and young people. Each centre has its own development tasks. Taikalamppu – The Aladdin's Lamp of the Tampere Region consists of the City of Tampere Art Arc Cultural Education Programme for Schools and Children's Cultural Centre Rulla, and the Municipality of Lempäälä and its Cultural Centre Pii Poo. We at the Taikalamppu – the Aladdin's Lamp of the Tampere Region develop methods of multi-art cultural education, cultural services aimed at children and young people needing special support, and Social Circus activity models.



The Aladdin's Lamp network is established and supported by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

## Thursday December 12<sup>th</sup> 2013

(Teatterimonttu, Tampere University, Kalevantie 4, D-part)

### 8.30 Coffee and registration

**9.00–9.10 Welcome!** Effective Circus Project and Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region

**9.10–9.20 Seminar opening** Pentti Arajärvi, Central Union for Child Welfare

**9.20–9.50 Aladdin's Lamp - 10 Years of Children's Culture**

Tarja Pääjoki, University of Jyväskylä

**9.50–10.20 Accomplishments of Effective Circus Project** Sofia-Charlotta Kakko, ECP

**10.2–10.40 Circus performance** Sorin Sirkus

– Short break –

**10.55–11.20 Culture Program in Schools – the Models of Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region: Art Ark and Cultural Stairs**

Jaana Ylänen, The City of Tampere Cultural Education Unit Taite

**11.20–11.45 Senior Circus** Pilvi Kuitu, Cultural Centre Pii Poo

**11.45–12.10 Overview of the Social Circus Activities at Sorin Sirkus**

Tytti Vuolle, Sorin Sirkus

**12.10–12.20** Directions for afternoon's workshops

**12.20–13.20** Lunch

### Workshops

**13.20–14.20 Workshops 1**

**14.30–15.30 Workshops 2**

- 1) Methods and Devices of Occupational Therapy Groups, Effective Circus Project, Sorin Sirkus
- 2) Family Circus for Children with Special Need of Support, Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region / Effective Circus Project, Cultural Centre Pii Poo
- 3) Who Decides? – Mask Workshop on Children's Relation to Decision Making, Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region, Cultural Centre Pii Poo
- 4) Wau! – Culture for Babies at Child Health Clinics, Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region, the City of Tampere Cultural Affairs
- 5) The Beaver Who was Able to Fly – Museum Pedagogy in a Hospital Environment, Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region, The City of Tampere Cultural Education Unit Taite

– Coffee in the hallway between workshops –

**15.45–16.00** Conclusion of the day

**18.00 Sorin Sirkus Christmas Show Syöksy**

(Sorin Sirkus, Ahlmanintie 63)

## Friday December 13<sup>th</sup> 2013

(Teatterimonttu, Tampere University, Kalevantie 4, D-part)

**8.30** Coffee and registration

**9.00 – 9.15** Opening of the seminar day

### Workshops

**9.15 – 10.15 Workshops 1**

**10.25 – 11.25 Workshops 2**

- 1) Senior Circus, Effective Circus Project, Cultural Centre Pii Poo
- 2) An Artist at the Kindergarten, Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region, Culture Stairs, Cultural Centre Pii Poo
- 3) Circus Spark, Circus in Koivikkopuisto school,, Aladdin's Lamp of Tampere Region, Art Arc Culture Program
- 4) Magic and balance: Measuring Moods in Circus groups, Effective Circus Project, Sorin Sirkus
- 5) Methods for Studying the Effects of Circus, Effective Circus Project. (Workshop 1 in Finnish, workshop 2 in English)

**11.30 – 11.45** Conclusion of workshops

**11.45 – 12.45** Lunch

**12.45 – 13.15 Effective Circus Project's Research of the Wellbeing Effects of Circus**

Sofia-Charlotta Kakko (Effective Circus Project) & Jukka Lidman (Social Development Co Ltd.)

**13.15 – 13.45 The Effects of Aladdin's Lamp. Results of an Evaluation Research within the National Children's Culture Network Aladdin's Lamp** Esko Korkeakoski, University of Jyväskylä

**13.45 – 14.30 Reflections** Päivi Känkänen, National Institute for Health and Welfare, Marja-Liisa Honkasalo, University of Turku & Arsi Veikkolainen, Third Source & Lauri Savisaari, City of Tampere

**14.30 – 14.45** Coffee break

**14.45 – 15.30 Cirque du Monde and Social Circus International Mapping**

Karine Lavoie & Emmanuel Bochud, Cirque du Soleil, Canada

**15.30 – 16.15 Measuring Happiness: Assessing the Intrinsic Value of Social Circus**

Stephen Cadwell, Galway Community Circus, Ireland

**16.15 – 16.30** Conclusion of the day



**19.00 – 20.30 Evening reception hosted by the City of Tampere**  
(Teatterimonttu, Tampere University, Kalevantie 4, D-part)

## Saturday December 14<sup>th</sup> 2013

**8.30** Coffee

**9.00 – 9.10** Start of seminar day

**9.10 – 9.55 Studying the Effects of Social Circus Projects Amongst Adults with Learning Disabilities in Northern Ireland** Nick McCaffery & Jim Webster, Streetwise Community Circus, Northern Ireland

**9.55 – 10.40 Outcome of Social Circus on the Optimization of Social Participation of Young Adults Living with Physical Disabilities in Transition to Adult Life**  
Frédéric Loisel, Lucie Bruneau Rehabilitation Centre, Canada

**10.45 – 12.15 International Panel Discussion** led by Deb Wilks, Flipside Circus, Australia.

Panelists: Eleférios Kechagioglou, Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde, France & Thomas Hinz and Frances Kelliher, Circability, New Zealand & Jennifer Spiegel, Concordia University, Canada

**12.15 – 13.15** Lunch

**13.15 – 14.00 Self-determination Theory as a Framework for Evaluating Circus-based Youth Development** Jacqueline Davis, University of British Columbia, Canada

**14.00 – 14.45 Analyzing the Effects of Social Circus: Reflections on the Concept of “Result”**  
Ilaria Bessone, Giocolieri e Dintorni, Italy

**14.45 – 15.00** Coffee break

**15.00 – 16.30 Workshops:**

1) Physical Literacy Assessment and the Circus, Patrice Aubertin, SSHRC Industrial Research Chair for Colleges in Circus Arts & Dean Kriellaars, University of Manitoba, Canada



- 2) Circus as a Therapeutic and Educational Tool, Jill Maglio, Holistic Circus Therapy, USA  
3) Social Circus in a Warzone, David Mason, Mobile Mini Circus for Children, Afghanistan  
**16.30 – 17.00 Reflections** Paul Miller, Circus Mojo, USA & H el ene R eveillard, Ay-roop, France

## Sunday December 15<sup>th</sup> 2013

(The Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre, H ameenpuisto 28 D)

**10.00 – 14.00 Final Lunch & Roundtable discussion:**

**International Cooperation & Next Steps in the Field of Global Social Circus Research**



<http://www.vaikuttavasirkus.fi/>  
<http://t7.uta.fi/en>

