

SOCIAL CIRCUS – A GUIDE TO GOOD PRACTICES



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THE ORIGINS OF THIS GUIDE

When I began writing this guide in May, I had barely even heard of 'social circus'. My friend 'the Photographer' told me that they had photographed a circus group at a nursing home and another friend, 'the Old Acquaintance', instructed – as far as I knew – social circus groups. Now, after a three-month journey of discovery, I am much wiser. I have interviewed social circus instructors and read their weekly and monthly reports on instruction, participated in social circus seminars, visited several circuses from Oulu to Helsinki, immersed myself in circus literature and watched a few fascinating performance demos. I have amassed a vast amount of knowledge. I have learnt to appreciate circus instructors' professional skills and dedication to their work. I have read and heard descriptions of successful – and also less successful – teaching situations. Long conversations with a few circus instructors have been particularly rewarding for my work.

I would like to thank you for your patience and willingness to engage in in-depth reflection on instruction and circus with me.

While working on several different sources of material, I sometimes had an overabundance of topics. At other times, it was a struggle to find the right words. Words wriggled, turned a somersault or were too trite to describe something that was only just taking shape. I believe and hope that the voices of different circus instructors can be distinguished from my text and even conflicting views have found their way into the right places.

The guide I have written takes a grass-roots level perspective on social circus and compiles experiences and observations concerning its opportunities and prerequisites from many different quarters. It is one viewpoint on a multi-level form of circus that is constantly finding new applications.

I would like to thank all circuses, circus instructors and participants who were involved in the Social Circus project between 2009 and 2011. You made this guide possible.

Tampere, 28th July 2011
Hilkka Hyttinen

SOCIAL CIRCUS PROJECT 2009–2011

The Social Circus project is an ESF project run by the Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre and mainly funded by the Lapland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. The project has aimed to embed social circus as a permanent feature in the Finnish circus scene. In order to achieve this goal, we have organised social circus instruction provided by seven circuses in seven different municipalities over a period of two years. In addition, we have organised two major social circus seminars for circus actors and three regional seminars to present social circus to municipal actors. We have initiated national discussions about social circus terminology and brought different parties together, thus building a network of social circus actors. We have published a brochure entitled *Hyvinvointia Sirkuksesta* ('Well-being from Circus') to introduce social circus and help open up the concept of social circus to those outside the field as well. This guide, in turn, is intended for those involved in the circus field to make sure that every experience gained and all the information learnt during the project will be shared as the project ends.

In our project, we have used the concept of 'social circus' to describe the types of circus activities organised during the project. All circuses naturally use their own terms to define their own activities, but in this guide 'social circus' refers to circus instruction aiming to provide well-being for participants. Circus helps people learn life skills, such as independence, self-confidence, success and social skills. In this context, all teaching groups that convened during the project are classified under social circus.

During the project, there has also been a lot of discussion about special groups. When special groups are mentioned in this guide, the concept refers to a group of participants with a specific feature in common. This common feature may be the same neighbourhood, the same class at school, a multicultural background, the same diagnosis or, say, substance abuse.

On the whole, the Social Circus project has made it possible for over 60 teaching groups with more than 850 participants to try out circus activities with the help of more than 30 circus instructors. All the circus instructors and project co-ordinators working in circuses have written several reports during the project, analysing their own activities and collecting good practices in social circus instruction. In addition, we have visited all the circuses involved and arranged discussion events where people have also been able to voice their positive and negative experiences in person. All the details and observations laid out in this guide are based entirely on the experiences of the circus instructors involved in our project.



Target groups involved:

- Primary school children with no leisure activities
- Special education classes
- Pre-primary groups
- Young people participating in outreach youth work activities
- Children and young people taken into care
- School classes falling within flexible education arrangements
- Children with intellectual disabilities
- School classes in housing estates
- Immigrant girls
- Preparatory classes for immigrants
- Marginalised young people from housing estates
- Young people with neuropsychological disorders
- Young substance abuse rehabilitants
- A group of visually impaired people
- Families with special needs children
- Clients of family support centres
- Students using wheelchairs
- Day-care groups
- Families with young children falling within social welfare services

The Social Circus project would not have been possible without the major contribution and enthusiasm of the circuses involved. A debt of thanks for the project and this guide is therefore owed to Sorin Sirkus, Cultural Centre Pii Poo for children and young people, Cirko – Centre for New Circus, Espoo School of Performing Arts, Oulun Tähtisirkus, fire show group Flamma and Sirkus Supiainen, as well as to the skilled and knowledgeable circus instructors of all these circuses.

I hope that their experiences will also help you to make your dreams of social circus come true.

Tampere, 24th August 2011

Sofia-Charlotta Kakko
Project Manager
Social Circus Project
Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre



photo: Hilkka Hyttinen

I. LAUNCHING SOCIAL CIRCUS ACTIVITIES

1.1. Before starting a new form of work

What does social circus have to offer?

Social circus offers circus organisations credibility, a new kind of visibility and appreciation. New groups help increase day-time circus activities, while circus instructors find employment in new assignments and enhance their professional skills. At the same time, circuses find new co-operation networks and new types of audiences.

For circus instructors, social circus opens up new job opportunities as well as opportunities to expand their own competencies. Social circus also makes it possible for them to gain new perspectives on circus and teaching in basic circus instruction and a new kind of joy and enthusiasm for their own work.

'During the project, I have learnt a lot about myself and about being human. Every time I teach and meet a group, I come across new things.' – A circus instructor

Points to consider

Launching a new form of activity requires a lot from a circus: careful planning, willingness to develop its

own activities, professional skills, a vision of what it is aiming at and allocation of financial resources. Before launching new activities, an organisation would do well to identify its internal competence areas and strengths as an organiser of circus activities. It is usually possible to identify several strengths and sources of motivation, and the more thoroughly these are discussed within the organisation, the more motivated the entire circus becomes to develop activities with a long-term view. Achieving real results calls for commitment to development work both from the circus as a whole and from individual circus instructors.

Identifying resources

At the planning stage, the first order of business for the circus is to identify its own operational resources realistically: interest, professional skills and schedules among existing circus instructors, demand for further training and recruitment, costs, financial investment, use of facilities and equipment, as well as organisation of work. The initial volume is up to each circus: a single group is quite as good as five different groups. The key points here are identifying the organisation's



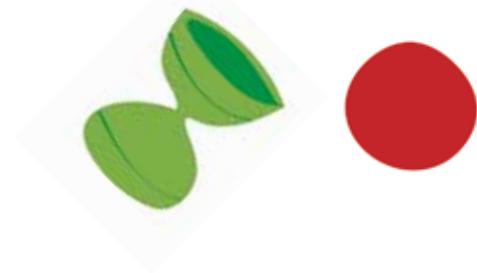
own resources, its willingness and professional skills to carry out the activity carefully and properly from start to finish and its motivation to move the activity forward.

Identifying target groups

The planning stage also involves identifying target groups. These may include residents in a service housing unit, people in substance abuse rehabilitation, children at a day-care centre or young people with intellectual disabilities. If the circus can find suitable groups from its immediate circles, in the neighbourhood or through existing partners, it is easier to start the activity.

When choosing target groups, the circus must consider in advance what its own values are in terms of instruction. If the circus believes that circus instruction is based on voluntary participation, for example, a circus class held during a compulsory school class is not the right choice. In this situation, an after-school club might be a better match for the circus.

It is also advisable to listen to circus instructors' wishes and make use of their strengths when selecting target groups. Bringing the right instructor and the right group together is a good start for launching social circus and guarantees experiences of success in the future. Circus instructors can cope better when they can work with the kinds of groups they prefer.



Once good results are achieved as the activity becomes established and professional skills increase, it is easy to expand the activity to cover new target groups.

1.2. From purchaser to partner

Commercialisation and customisation

Commercialisation means that services are packaged so as to make them easy to buy and manage. By means of commercialisation, it is possible to convert a well-functioning circus workshop, for example, into a concept that is easy to reproduce and can be further tailored to meet the needs and wishes of each target group and purchaser.

Commercialisation means tailoring an existing service to meet customer needs. Successful partnership always requires creative application and flexibility, even if the service offered by a circus is already packaged and standardised.

Social circus instruction works best when the purchaser takes an active part in the activity right from the planning stage. It is best to first identify the purchaser's wishes and the target group's needs at the brainstorming and planning stage. The next step should be to assess the feasibility of the idea and plan.

The circus should check within its own organisation and with the purchaser whether the real needs and resources match the prepared plans. The way in which the service should be applied to meet the purchaser's needs will usually become clear during co-operation negotiations. When the service is tailored in close co-operation with the purchaser, the teaching

group and its own instructors, this creates the best conditions for the activity to succeed and lead to real results.

A smooth start is also guaranteed if the first partners themselves have actively wished to start circus activity. It is pleasant to start developing something new with enthusiastic and interested partners.

*) More about this topic can be found in Chapter 6, CIRCUS TOOLKIT, section 6.7, Commercialisation of circus activity.





Co-operation negotiations

Before starting a new group, circus instructors would do well to have personal co-operation negotiations with the purchaser organisation and its staff (such as the manager, instructors, leaders, or the school principal and teachers).

It is advisable to have at least two negotiation sessions prior to starting practical work. When the entire purchaser organisation knows and understands what circus activity means, it is easier for them to commit to its implementation. Staff with a favourable approach towards circus may function as an important support resource in the circus instructor's work. At the same time, co-operation negotiations also provide circus instructors with an opportunity to familiarise themselves with their future working environment.

As part of co-operation negotiations, it is advisable to tell a bit about the backgrounds of the circus and its instructors, discuss any possible special characteristics of the group and the type of activity implemented for them, as well as to agree on common practices.

Personal face-to-face negotiations are a far more efficient way to plan the activity than e-mail messages or telephone conversations

Ensuring commitment

In addition to co-operation negotiations, the circus organisation should study the partner's operating methods. Differences stemming from the different operational cultures of the purchaser and the circus may easily cause misunderstandings and frustration.

Communication may be facilitated by setting up regular follow-up meetings from the very beginning, in order to provide both parties with important information about how they are progressing. This will also make it easier for the partner to make a commitment. Through genuine dialogue and development work, both parties stand a chance to learn from each other and complement each other's professional skills set.

In addition to interest from the partner's management, successful circus instruction requires the target group's own teacher/instructor/leader to commit to and participate in the activity. The circus instructor's work becomes easier if the group's own leader is enthusiastic and participates in joint planning efforts. The best result is achieved when contacts are open and active and when the target group's own teachers/instructors/leaders radiate enthusiasm and willingness to also learn circus skills themselves.

One way of ensuring commitment that has proven to be efficient is to organise a circus class or short course for staff members, geared towards promoting their well-being at work prior to starting actual instruction. This allows teachers/instructors/leaders to get a first-hand feel of circus in advance and an idea of what to expect during actual instruction.

A school as a partner

There are many different opportunities for co-operation between a circus and a school. Circus instruction may be provided during school classes, as part of basic education or physical education, or as an optional subject, for example. On the other hand, circus may also be introduced into the school as

an afternoon club or some other form of extracurricular circus activity organised in school premises.

Schools perceive the activity to be good and important, but fitting it into the timetable requires flexibility, which is not always easy within the framework of the curriculum. The primary level class teacher system makes it easier to add extracurricular contents at primary school when compared with lower secondary level, because class teachers are relatively free to organise their own classes. In terms of time use, it is often expedient to organise instruction where the group already is. It may take such a long time for a group to travel to the circus that it disrupts the timetable for the rest of the day.

'It may sometimes feel that you need a proper circus space – as a space, the school limits both body and mind. Alternating between circus and school facilities may increase enthusiasm for training, create some circus magic and bring out new training and performance ideas. When a certain group that usually convened at school visited the circus, this also liberated them to move in a different way during the following classes at school; for instance, they had courage to shed some scarves and skirts,' a circus instructor relates their experiences with a lower secondary level group for immigrant girls.



1.3. Points to agree on

As part of the co-operation negotiations between the circus and the purchaser, it is important to agree on each party's roles and responsibilities for the activity as exhaustively as possible. The aim is to ensure smooth and open co-operation and communication. Points to be agreed on between the purchaser and the circus include: 1. Content and objectives of the activity; 2. Written agreement; 3. Roles and responsibilities; 4. Communication; 5. Contacts; 6. Information measures; 7. Rules; 8. Group size; 9. Duration; 10. Facilities; 11. Circus equipment.

1. Content and objectives of the activity

Jointly agreed objectives guide the activity and are important in terms of the content of work. Besides deciding on the content, it is also important to go through group and individual objectives during co-operation negotiations. At the same time, the parties should agree on the ways in which achievement of the objectives is to be monitored and evaluated.

* For more information about objectives, see section 1.4, Setting objectives.

2. Written agreement

The best way to guarantee smooth progress and good end results is to have a sufficient number of negotiation sessions and a written agreement. Negotiations should cover the rules relating to instruction covering cancellations, etc. A jointly prepared agreement helps both parties adhere to what they have agreed, thus avoiding misunderstandings and facilitating evaluation of results. The agreement should be signed by the representatives of the purchaser (the school principal, the group instructor/teacher or

some other competent individual) and the circus providing the service..

* An example of a written agreement can be found in Chapter 6, CIRCUS TOOLKIT, section 6.6, Sample co-operation agreement.

3. Roles and responsibilities

In addition to circus instructors, instruction may involve the groups' own leaders, teachers, special needs assistants, personal assistants or other adult participants. The best way to guarantee successful instruction is to agree on the roles and responsibilities during circus classes with the people responsible for the group prior to launching the activity – who is to instruct during classes and in what way – complete with each participant's roles and responsibilities.

If possible, it is advisable to organise a brief orientation session about safety and circus techniques for all concerned. In some groups, changing assistants may also require a brief orientation before the class. It is always advisable to agree on legal liability and insurance arrangements in writing to cover any possible accidents and damage to equipment.

4. Communication

It is a good idea for the circus and the purchaser to agree on communication during initial negotiations by creating opportunities for joint meetings, for example. In addition to an initial meeting, an interim meeting and a final meeting have been considered important in terms of ensuring the partner's commitment. These meetings provide the circus with opportunities to also explain the progress of instruc-





tion to those decision-makers of the purchaser organisation who are not involved in everyday instruction. This ensures that the presence of the circus in the purchaser organisation does not slip their minds.

5. Contacts

During initial negotiations, it is important to appoint a contact person for both the circus and the purchaser. Contact people will communicate information about any possible changes in both directions. The flow of information through a designated individual is usually smooth and easy and does not take too much time from the circus instructors or their counterparts. For so-called mixed groups consisting of voluntary participants, a more effective solution may be keeping direct contact with each participant or his or her parents.

6. Information measures

Information and marketing measures form an important part of systematic development of the activity with a long-term view. To begin with, it is good to agree on how the activity is called and in what ways information about the activity is to be communicated to the target group or their parents for example.

* For further information, see section 1.5, Information and marketing.

7. Rules

It is useful to agree with the group leader that participants will adhere to the jointly agreed rules during circus classes. This is to avoid confusion, ensure safety, promote trust between the group and the circus instructor and guarantee the clarity of instruction. The group's internal



rules may be drawn up during the first class, for example, in co-operation with the participants.

*To read more about circus class rules, turn to section 3.1, Basic structure of a circus class

Circus class activities are often unstructured in nature and sometimes even boisterous. For the sake of a good atmosphere and mutual understanding, it is crucial for teachers to accept that circus instruction is separate from their own classes. On occasion, a group's own teachers have used denying a student participation in circus classes as a punishment for undesirable behaviour outside circus classes. It is advisable to discuss discipline and sanctions with the teacher and make a joint decision on the matter. It is also important to clearly explain to the participants what disciplinary consequences will be used for breaching the shared rules.

8. Group size

The presence of two circus instructors has been found to be the most effective way of teaching social circus groups. In addition to the group size, the number of instructors required also depends on how the group's own leader participates in instruction – as part of the group or as an assistant to the circus instructor. It is advisable to first assess every group's abilities and needs for support and assistance together with the group's leader and only then decide on the group size. The following guidelines on effective numbers of participant groups are indicative and are based on groups led by two circus instructors.

In general terms, 8 to 14 participants is considered to be a suitable size for a group. For special groups, ten participants is a very good number to ensure interaction and concentration. With ten participants, the situation remains well under control, individual instruction is possible and a group with different abili-

ties and challenges is able to work together. It is difficult to determine the minimum group size, because even a very small group may work well. A small group challenges the instructor and only restricts some forms of play and games. Groups with more than 15 students generally require a third circus instructor. A third instructor makes it possible to provide intensive instruction for a large group and individual attention and instruction for students, while also making it easier to address behavioural issues.

- Two circus instructors can work well with a large group, too: 'The class went smashingly! Everyone was excited and although the group was big, there were enough instructors and assistants to keep it all together and we had no problem leading the class,' rejoices an instructor leading a group of 17 primary school students.

9. Duration

The duration of circus instruction should be determined in co-operation with the purchaser and according to the needs and objectives of the purchaser and the target group. The special characteristics of the target group have a bearing on the suitable duration of an individual circus class, while the objectives set for the target group influence the planned duration of the circus instruction period as a whole. It should be borne in mind that long-term and short-term activities have different objectives and results and these should be discussed with the purchaser in advance. Some groups and purchasers benefit the most from instruction periods or intensive courses organised from time to time, whereas the best option for others is a long-term activity organised once per week.

10. Facilities

When circus instruction is provided outside the circus, it is necessary to organise an inspection and planning visit to the teaching facilities. Representatives of the circus should agree with the purchaser on who else has access to the same facilities. In addition, they should check the reservation system, storage facilities, locker rooms and equipment available. When instruction is provided in the circus premises, it is also advisable to create a clear reservation system within its own organisation. This is to avoid double-bookings and ensure that the facilities are always fit for instruction.

11. Circus equipment

It is advisable to start considering immediately at the brainstorming stage whether there is enough circus equipment available for use by new groups or whether the circus should acquire some more. During co-operation negotiations, the parties may agree which will be responsible for the purchase, storage, maintenance and insurance of equipment. When instruction is organised outside the circus, using its own equipment, it would be wise to agree on transport and consider the costs and time involved and how these should be compensated to the circus and the circus instructor. An effective equipment reservation system and a jointly agreed storage space makes it easier to run the activity smoothly. In order to avoid surprises and ensure safety, it is also advisable to always check the condition of supplies and technical devices before every class.



The objectives of social circus may include:

- Experiences of success
- Doing things together (courage to trust and touch others)
- Courage to try and fail
- Developing social skills
- Improving concentration
- Discovering one's own creativity
- Improving body perception – developing control, balance and co-ordination
- Developing community spirit and creating a good team spirit
- Making friends
- Creating joy and humour
- Increasing personal initiative
- Growing self-esteem





1.4. Setting objectives

Jointly agreed objectives ensure all parties' commitment and motivate and guide the activity. It is possible to include practising social skills in all circus training in addition to learning circus skills. Besides practising a specific skill, further objectives of discipline training may include a positive self-image, self-esteem and, in particular, concentration and body control.

It is often possible to give classes that are identical in terms of content in both basic instruction and social circus groups. The approach to instruction determines whether a specific group is a basic instruction or social circus group. Basic instruction mainly focuses on learning circus skills and related objectives. In social circus groups, in turn, the two different sets of objectives – social objectives and circus objectives – are already acknowledged at the planning stage. The objectives set at the beginning should always be revisited during the activity to check their progress and relevance together with the purchaser.

Circus objectives

It is often useful to set objectives relating to circus skills together with group participants so as to allow them to keep track of their own development. However, objectives should not be set too high to allow all participants to gain important experiences of success. On the other hand, objectives that are too easy to achieve may decrease motivation among faster learners.



Social objectives

Prior to starting instruction, circus instructors would do well to agree with the group's own instructor/teacher/leader on the types of social objectives to be set for the group. It is not always necessary to discuss objectives relating to social development with group participants. This means creating a hidden curriculum for the group. In other cases, however, speaking about and agreeing on the social objectives together with the group may be an important part of the nature of the activity.

A hidden curriculum for social skills, agreed with the group's own teacher, contributed significantly to the work of a primary-level special education class: 'This group has been highly motivated right from the start and students have practised intensively. The group asked for extra training time every time. The boys made major breakthroughs in areas such as taking other people into account, performance, self-confidence, behaviour, less severe tantrums, co-ordination, and mobility in general. The school's principal came to thank us in person for our great and valuable work.' – A circus instructor.

The circus instructor's objectives

A circus instructor's job description does not cover rehabilitation or therapeutic objectives. Even in social circus groups, circus training essentially focuses on practising circus skills. If the intention is to set direct therapeutic objectives for instruction, the circus instructor needs to be paired up with a therapist, or the instructor needs to have therapeutic training and experience. Nevertheless, circus training may as such be rehabilitative for participants, but it cannot be the circus instructor's professional objective to rehabilitate participants.

1.5. Information and marketing

Circuses market their activities and communicate about them with many different objectives and to different target groups. The same applies to social circus. New circus groups are marketed to purchasers in one way and to prospective participants in another. When the activity is marketed to municipal bodies, for example, it may be useful to speak about social circus and its welfare effects, but when addressing future participants, such as a lower-secondary class, it is advisable to market and communicate about the activity using a different type of language. It is preferable to simply speak about circus instruction or to come up with another name for the activity that is even more interesting to the target group.

When addressing the media, it is important to take care not to label group participants according to a category (such as 'socially excluded' or 'those with social problems'), but rather focus on positive achievements and participants' experiences. It is always advisable to request an advance copy of any interview given to a reporter to check the facts before it is published

Marketing to purchasers/partners

Most people are still unfamiliar with circus as an art form and a topic of instruction. Sending brochures or e-mail alone will seldom lead to results when marketing new social circus groups. Personal visits, making use of existing networks and various presentations work better. Trade fairs, festivals and various training events provide good opportunities to create new contacts and increase awareness of the circus's own activities

'We presented the activity of our existing circus group at a social sector training event. Among the audience was a therapist working in child welfare services, who was excited by our presentation and contacted us. So we were offered a chance to organise circus activities for families receiving social support,' a circus instructor describes a successful PR effort.

It is also possible to market new social circus groups direct to potential purchasers. The best way to reach an organisation's staff is to attend teachers', staff's or principals' meetings or organise a circus class or a day event for them. Well-chosen visual material and a fascinating experience will often speak volumes more than words about what circus is all about: opportunities, prerequisites of the activity and results. If the circus has its own video or other visual material, this will serve as a splendid calling card when it wants to present circus instruction.

In addition to and in support of personal visits, it is also possible to use e-mailing lists, intranets and the circus's own website. In addition, most cities, other municipalities and cultural organisations have their own information channels through which the circus can market its activities as per agreement. Once the circus starts co-operation negotiations with a purchaser, marketing is still necessary in order to create a positive image and explain the content of the activity to the purchaser and the target groups.

External information about the activity

As part of planning and co-operation negotiations, it is good to consider how to communicate to audiences outside the group. Open days, family events and parent-teacher meetings are good opportunities to provide information for interest groups and answer questions from participants' family members.

It is possible to agree at the beginning of instruction whether there will be events before starting the activity, halfway through, at the end or even more frequently. In addition, the parties should agree on who will be responsible for providing information for other audiences outside the actual group (the purchaser organisation, the circus providing the service, municipal cultural services, the media, etc.) and on when and how this will be carried out.

It is useful to always invite interest groups to performances, for example, if the group has public performances. Invitations also provide outside audiences with information about the group's different stages and progress.

It is also useful to communicate about the activity to wider audiences by preparing a press release and sending it to different media outlets, for example. Visibility in the media supports marketing efforts and increases awareness of the social circus activity.

- 'We had difficulty filling and launching groups. Our own PR resources are limited. A report broadcast by a regional service of the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE boosted our marketing efforts. The TV programme resulted in several interested contacts, as well as new purchasers and group participants.'



photo: Ritta Yrjönen



photo: Mia Bergius

Marketing to target groups/participants

Marketing that directly targets participants aims to attract interest, inspire them to get involved in the activity and create good conditions for the circus group's work. Effective ways to reach new participants include the 'circus as part of physical education' demonstrations and sample classes for students, verbal communication, a circus performance followed by a discussion and Q&A session, etc. Other good marketing channels include advertising brochures and posters, commercials run on a school's or a youth centre's central radio system or TV screens, e-mailing lists and intranets.

A resourceful and open-minded approach towards methods works especially well when the aim is to reach target groups outside schools and other institutions. Sometimes the best marketing people for the activity are satisfied participants, who bring their friends or siblings along.

Small things can contribute to the flow of information. For instance, a list of circus classes/performances or open days, etc., attached to the noticeboards of the circus and the purchaser organisation may sometimes work better than an e-mail message that only reaches one person or is forgotten once it is read.

'An open group that convened at the youth centre was formed by taking posters to a nearby school. The aim was to offer a leisure activity to children who don't usually have any. We also held some circus classes at local schools and some of the participants came to the youth centre to continue the activity.'

Information provision within a group

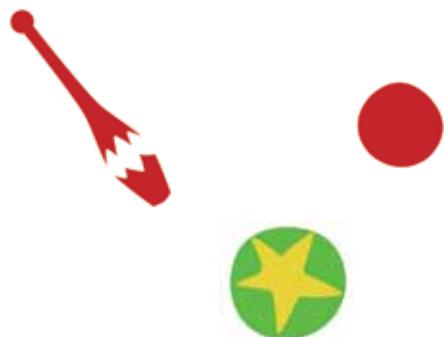
The circus instructors may agree among themselves and with the group leader on how to handle the flow of information within the group: Should they set up a closed Facebook Page or a blog for the group, does a mobile phone round reach everyone, or would traditional verbal communication work best, accompanied by a printed information bulletin? Can the children's parents be reached through the participants, or should parents be informed separately?

- *The issue of informing the parents of an immigrant group was solved creatively by the circus instructors.*
- *The group started to use SMS text messages, such as 'No theatre today' or 'Training second floor'. A simple message was easy to translate into the recipient's own language using a dictionary, for example, thus ensuring the flow of information.*

It is a good idea to distribute both written and visual material to groups, because participants may find it easier to understand things presented in drawings or in writing rather than in a spoken form. It is important that written bulletins, images and information shared verbally with participants tell the same story and do not conflict.

It is advisable to carefully consider when, how and to whom information is provided. One participant's parents were indignant when they found out that their child participated in a circus club for children at risk of exclusion. They felt that their child, who had participated in the activity, was not at risk. The risk of exclusion was mentioned in an e-mail message only intended for the school's teachers and was inadvertently forwarded direct to parents by a teacher.

In general terms, it is advisable to speak about a social circus group simply as a circus group when addressing the participants. Adolescents especially are very particular about the name and nature of the activity and they may feel that social circus is a stigmatising term. It is also a good idea to open up the concept of social circus to group participants, thus ensuring that they understand why the activity is called by that name in some contexts.





1.6. Assessment and evaluation

During co-operation negotiations, it is good to agree on the ways in which the activity should be evaluated, who will do it, and when and how it will be done. The progress and results of the project may be evaluated both with the purchaser and within the circus organisation. It is also possible to assess individual students' progress. Student assessment may be carried out in co-operation with the purchaser, but it may also be performed personally with each individual student.

Project evaluation together with the purchaser

It is advisable to create a model for evaluation criteria together with the purchaser as early as during co-operation negotiations. By way of an example, a simple three-level model defines the quality of the service as follows:

1) exceeds expectations/objectives; 2) achieves objectives; or 3) falls short of objectives. At an evaluation meeting, circus instructors may present good results to the entire purchaser organisation by means such as images, videos or a performance. At the same time, they may invite the partner to provide information about the effects of the circus activity and observations on positive experiences. It is also possible to assess individual students' progress as agreed.

Project evaluation within the circus organisation

It is advisable to invest in and reserve enough time for self-evaluation. Evaluation meetings covering the entire working community make it possible to have

value discussions about the quality and success of the activity, break down feedback provided by the purchaser, and plan and focus future activities. A constructive, yet honestly critical breakdown will develop the service provided by the circus and promote satisfaction within the working community.

Student assessment

Assessment may serve as a circus instructor's tool to motivate participants. Individual student assessment may be carried out using a certificate of performance level, for example. Once a student has completed certain studies in acrobatics, for example, the student is awarded a certificate (such as levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5) or an entry on his or her own club card. At the purchaser's request, assessment may also be carried out in the absence of the student by the circus instructor and the group's own teacher, for example.

Joint assessment discussions organised every six months for the entire group have yielded good experiences. An open assessment brings out everyone's strengths, while also drawing attention to areas for improvement and providing the whole group with information about its progress. In addition to circus skills, it is possible to assess social skills. The primary aim of assessing individual and group objectives and progress is to encourage and motivate participants.

- 'We invest in self-assessment. Students of all ages are able to assess their own progress and performance in the group surprisingly well. In the assessment, we only had to specify that even an attempt to perform a trick was worth rewarding, not just its successful performance,' a circus instructor clarifies the assessment criteria for a group of primary school children.



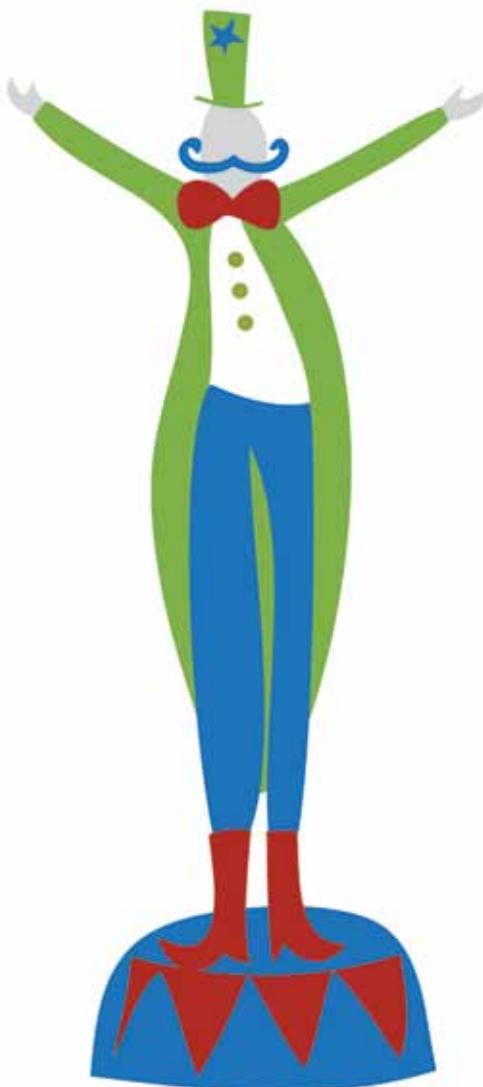




photo: Riitta Yrjönen

2. CIRCUS GROUP AND BEGINNING THE INSTRUCTION

2.1. Role of the circus instructor



The instructor's attitude towards the students and the situations that come up has a significant impact on the group. By controlling his or her own activity, by engaging actively or remaining in the background the instructor will have a significant effect on the training. Relevant education, professional skills and an extensive work experience together with a sense of situation are among the instructor's most important tools. However, to make the task less daunting it is important to mention that you do not have to do everything in every situation. A great deal of the work will be done by the group and by circus and its magic.

With many groups, using your body works better than verbal language. It is naturally important to pay attention to how the participants understand instructions, but it is at least equally important to study how the instructor understands the group. It is not always easy to interpret the students' behaviour or feelings. Understanding how people work, patience and tolerance will go a long way towards solving difficult situations.

Humour is a wonderful instrument. Making yourself the target of laughter may help the group to be more open: things do not always have to be so serious, and people are allowed to make mistakes.

To read more about a circus instructor's work, turn to Chapter 5: CIRCUS INSTRUCTOR.



2.2. Varied needs of groups and participants

Social circus suits many kinds of groups and responds to many different needs. The group may be an ordinary lower-secondary school class or again, consist of families in need of social support. It is essential to understand that in a social circus group the process is more important than the goals. What we learn about ourselves and the world while practising circus skills is just as much a content and a goal as is the actual learning of the skills.

This is how an experienced instructor puts it: "The important thing is not just 'sorting out the problem,' but also prevention. It is important to provide experiences of success and to improve the students' self-esteem. Teenagers rarely feel that they are succeeding in school. With lessons learned from social circus, it will be easier for them to enter other types of education and life in general."

The professional skills of a circus instructor can be applied to leading different groups, and special groups can be taught just like any other group. Even though some of the participants in circus groups have medical diagnoses, it is important that they are taught as individuals, not as diagnoses. The target group determines what special skills or capabilities the instructors should have in addition to circus skills.

Many social circus instructors are very motivated and feel that their work is psychologically rewarding. "It is pleasing and rewarding to provide impulses to activity which will inspire people, especially those who are so sensitive that they cannot cope with today's world without support," says a circus instructor working with special groups.

The differences in basic skills will create a challenge with the instruction of some groups: the weaker individuals must be allowed more time and their work must be supported. The talented, on the other hand, need continuous new challenges, while they must also be told that repetition is important in all training. The strengths and weaknesses of the individuals in a group become visible fairly rapidly. The instructors should bear both of these in mind, so that they can assist the students to overcome their weaknesses and, on the other hand, highlight their abilities even more. Particularly in large groups, those who are quieter can easily receive too little attention. A professional circus instructor will work equally with all participants and provide challenges and instruction to everyone.

The participants often surprise their instructor. "I have noted to my delight that not everything is what it seems. The quietest and most reserved participant can suddenly break out and show the others how the creative expression exercises really ought to be done."

2.3. Group process in circus

The basic task of the circus instructor is to manage the group process and how it unfolds. Team-forming exercises, games, play and shared experiences are tools which skilled instructors can adapt to suit their own groups. During a long process, however, the energy and motivation levels will inevitably fluctuate.

After an enthusiastic and energetic period, interest may temporarily flag or even vanish. The potential reasons are many, and it is not always easy to find a solution. Sometimes it helps to bring in new equip-

ment or to repeat exercises that the group likes. The instructor may be comforted by knowing that it takes time to create a stable group with a culture of its own. In some cases it may take up to six months before a group is really consolidated.

As the group and its activity become more stable, the participants gradually begin to trust their instructor and the entire group more. As trust increases, what is called a rebellion phase may easily occur, meaning that limits will be tested and the instructor will be challenged. Instructors have noticed that sometimes the absence of just one participant may crucially alter the group dynamics. As the trust between the instructors and the participants becomes stronger and more deep-rooted, the group has less need of challenging the rules. At this point it will be possible to increase the responsibilities and privileges of the members. An important phase in the teaming up has been reached when the participants begin to encourage and support each others' work.

Groups often include strong personalities, who will occasionally even ask the others to calm down or carry out a task. This is not necessarily a bad thing, if the aim is to bring order in a good-natured manner instead of curbing the creativity of others. In such situations, the children will function as role models for each other, and the group may become more self-directed.

2.4. Participation in instruction

Even before the actual start of the activity, the instructors should consider their own attitude towards the students' participation in circus classes and in the

exercises during the class. The requirement for absolute participation and complete voluntariness are the two opposites, between which a number of different instructors and groups are found. The choice may be affected by the instructor's attitude, the character of the group or the wishes of the purchaser.

Attendance at classes

The requirement that attendance at classes is compulsory may also be voiced by the purchaser in the case of groups within schools, detoxification programmes or foster homes. Regular attendance and the assumption of responsibility may be part of the hidden curriculum for the group.

An instructor describes his attitude: 'There are many boys in their mid-teens who have never committed themselves to anything in their lives. We require that everybody takes responsibility for their own activity, attends classes and engages seriously. An understanding of limits and responsibilities creates trust and security in the students. You have to realise when the young person needs time in order to participate and when they are lazy and need a bit of 'push'. This challenges the instructor's professional skills.'

Sometimes the idea is that joining the circus group should be easy and as many children and young people as possible should be involved. Open and voluntary groups of this type should be allowed plenty of time to form and stabilise. Those who would need the activity most may not necessarily attend the first class, but they may find the courage to join after a

few weeks. Because of this, you should not close the doors too soon, and flexibility about age limits is also a good thing. In groups of this kind it may be a triumph for certain individuals to show up at all. The idea is that once a person is present, the enthusiasm of the others may rub off on to them. Here it is important for the instructor to pay attention to the group and to listen to personal feelings, as well as to discuss shared rules of play.

In the case of open and voluntary groups, one potential means of motivation is to institute a roll call. When a student has been present for a set number of times, they will be allowed to choose a discipline that they like, etc. If, on the other hand, someone is often absent without explanation, they will not be allowed to continue and someone else will take their place. One of the shared rules may also be that coming in late or leaving early will not be allowed and will be recorded. Too many such marks will mean that the participant is not allowed to continue.

Participation during classes

Some instructors like to be strict in that if you attend, you should also participate in everything and not just in the things you like. In other words, you cannot attend a circus class just to 'hang around'. If a participant does not wish to work, they are told to go home and come back the next time.

The key here is the instructors' ability to support the group and the participants. They should understand when to give up and conclude that at this time, circus seems not to matter to the student. The problem can be discussed with both the student and the group's regular teacher. When circus is part of compulsory school programme, it may be possible to agree with

the group's regular teacher/instructor that those who are not interested need not attend and can take a walk or do other exercise instead.

No matter what the group is like, it is sometimes better to let a little time pass and observe whether the reluctant student is working up an enthusiasm or not. Sometimes the fact that something is voluntary may actually increase commitment and motivation. At other times, lack of enthusiasm is simply a sign of initial hesitation and a need for the ice to be broken. Looking forward to a show or being allowed to work with interesting equipment may inspire the participants.

However, there are groups in which voluntary attendance or participation in the work is not a good idea. The negative energy of the non-enthusiasts may gradually discourage the whole group.

At other times, the instructor's patience may be rewarded: "I remember once a student just mooched about for two classes. Then suddenly he got up and took the key role reserved for him, and did it wonderfully."



2.5. Special groups

Practically all people who belong to a special group are aware of it, and it is useless to try to hide the fact that the activity has been designed to meet their particular needs. A circus instructor should be open-minded, approach each group without preconceived ideas and avoid generalisations and labelling.

The best source for information on the special characteristics of a group and its participants are their teachers, instructors or leaders. It is also worth noting that the participants are individuals, and no day is necessarily much like the previous one. During the beginning circle of each class, the instructor can try to become aware of the day's mood and allow the participants themselves to say how they are feeling. The instructor's humour, sense of situation and, where needed, assertiveness are good qualities in a team leader and will work in most situations.

If the group's regular teacher(s) or assistant(s) can participate in the circus classes, that is a great help and is often indispensable. They may either participate themselves or assist the circus instructor as needed. In this way, these other professionals can support the circus instructors and provide new information on how to work with the group. At the same time, the students and teachers can acquire a new perspective on each other.

The information in the following examples is collected from instruction during the project. All of the examples are indicative and are based on the observations and experiences of circus instructors.

Children and young people in need of special support

(e.g., classes with flexible education, children and young people with ADHD and Asperger's Syndrome)

The challenge for this group is independent practice during circus classes. Not everybody is happy with too much freedom in practising and independent preparation for performances.

The best option is well-structured instruction which is repeated in the same way each time. The group needs a great deal of encouragement so that the activity does not dwindle down. It is important that the instructor's speech is understandable. Unnecessary adjectives and complex descriptions when providing instructions should be avoided. A student who seems not to attend while the instructor is explaining tasks can nevertheless often follow the explanations accurately when carrying out the exercise. The following wishes expressed by the young people regarding the practising: "Respect for the others, permission to make mistakes and enough peace for practising" describe the participants' needs and fears.

"During the final class one of the students said, 'I have always dreamed of learning to ride a unicycle. You have made that come true, and I can also be part of a performance!' To begin with, this boy was an angry twelve-year-old spouting bad language."



Young people and young adults at risk of social exclusion

(e.g., young people from housing estates with a weaker socio-economic status and no leisure pursuits, young people participating in daytime activity as required by the social services, special education groups)

In these groups, the basic task of circus activity is to prevent the social exclusion of the young people by providing coping skills for day-to-day situations and life in general. When the goal is to keep up an enthusiasm for the work, the example and motivation provided by the instructor is of great importance. At the very beginning, it is advisable to promote team formation in particular. Physical games and exercises, circuit training, strength training and stretching have been found to work in most cases. Various relaxation exercises are also good. It is advisable to focus less on play, or to speak of it as games. The instructor should adopt a relaxed and informal attitude while also providing clear limits. The participants will often test the instructor either intentionally or by accident. In a positive climate the students will gradually begin to work independently.

"My most memorable observation is from a class where we practiced a backward vault with students placed in a special group at school. I had the boys work as assistants to each other in performing the vault. The purpose of this exercise was to create trust in the fellow student, and it worked well. One of the boys said: 'I would never have thought I could do a backward vault.' This is a good description of the class and the experience of success."

Immigrants

With immigrant groups, understanding and verbal observations are limited by differences in language skills, especially at the beginning. During the beginning circle time it is possible to look for a shared language and perhaps have each participant talk about their cultural background in whatever way they wish. To facilitate understanding, the shared rules in the group, for example, can be shown in pictures. Language barriers and cultural differences will sometimes also affect the level of enthusiasm. It is advisable to make strong efforts to create a team spirit, using group exercises, for example.

During the first month the group might focus on various exercises to engender trust and familiarity, as well as on working as a single group or in pairs. Actual circus disciplines could receive less attention than group exercises. Physical contact may not be self-evident to everybody, and it must be practiced gradually. Since some have difficulty with physical contact, building pyramids may be a good way of defusing tension. In some multicultural groups, girls and boys must be separated for cultural reasons, especially during the lower secondary school years. As trust improves, physical contact between the participants, or between them and the instructors, gradually becomes possible.

Awareness of the dates of religious feasts in different cultures will help in planning the instruction and preparing for eventual absences. Respect for different values and cultures also means that the circus instructor should dress appropriately during classes. It is advisable to wear fairly loose clothes that cover most of the body.



photo: Mia Bergius



"I encounter each individual as a human being. If a child or a young person has some kind of a barrier, I try not to be overbearing. I don't pay attention to long skirts or demand that they should not be worn during certain exercises. Once the activity really starts, both scarves and skirts will suddenly be flung away."

Day care groups and small children in supported education

Small children are usually very enthusiastic about everything, but they require a continuous flow of new things in order to stay focused. They will focus better if exercises are interspersed with play and practice does not last too long. If the group likes motion, exercises with elements of dance, accompanied with music, will work particularly well. However, the instructor should immediately deal with children running wild or splitting into sub-groups. Mini goals for each class (such as, "If we can all work well, we'll finish by going to the manège to do something special", etc.) will clearly help the students to curb excesses of feeling. With these groups, the use of imagination is particularly useful. Shared hatching of ideas, chatting and invention, or maybe a picnic in the yard are also part of circus activity. Providing immediate feedback on behaviour and using self-evaluation are very useful for these groups. Such practices and exercises as time-out, Gathering Peas and Traffic Lights work with these groups (for more information, see Chapter 3.1, Basic structure of a circus class).

"In one of my groups, three kids just ran around and did silly things. I took them aside and told them who I was and that I would be watching them. That cooled them down. When they began to run wild again, I immediately walked up to them and they quieted down."

Students with intellectual disabilities

In practice, circus exercises can be tailored so that students of any level can participate. As regards people with intellectual disabilities, the inter-individual differences in capabilities can be seen more clearly than in other school groups.

The work will be easier if the instructor is aware of the physical and psychological requirements of each student, if personal assistants are available and if the instructor knows how to adapt the exercises safely.

For children with severe disabilities, simple tricks, acrobatics, pyramids and such things as holding a hoop will generally work. In one group, a major experience of circus and a success for the participants was relaxing in an aerial pouch. Another thing to bear in mind is that in these groups, stopping one thing and starting another will take more time than in mainstream groups. When the instruction is arranged during the school day, the assistants will be provided by the school, which will help a great deal. The assistants know what the students are capable of doing; on the other hand, they can also encourage the instructor to try difficult and challenging tasks.

"I have also come face to face with my own prejudices about what the children can do. At first I didn't think we could even use a tightrope. But then a tightrope was left in the room by accident after the preceding class, and one of the girls simply wanted to walk on it. So that's how we started tightrope walking. We naturally support the students, but just the fact that they want to step on the tightrope is a big thing."



Supported families

(families living in a support centre or regular clients of the social services)

Here, the primary goal of circus activity is to improve interaction within the family. Positive attention and improving self-esteem are important since the families often deal with problems related to this. For many, the circus class may be the only time during the week when they have the time to pay attention to others.

It is important to be sensitive to the family's energy level and wishes, as regards both the content and the duration. "We'll spend one hour together and talk about things." If the families wish, you can continue longer, or you can stop sooner.

The challenges lie in the age range of the group and the need to provide meaningful activities for everybody. The ages may range from one to forty years. All age groups should be involved equally, to provide family-oriented positive activity for the whole family. It is important that parents are also given the opportunity to try out different mediums in peace and to try climbing up to a trapeze, for example, without the children hanging on to their legs. Teenage participants are an interesting group when attending with their families, and for them, it is important to find activities which are not too childish.

"The team spirit, with ages and backgrounds losing their importance, has been tremendous. We've achieved this simply by doing things together, us instructors included. At times, this has meant that we have played around with pictures and shared laughs. At other times we've had quite long chats in between exercises. We've discarded practically all rules and improvise all situations pretty freely."

Substance abuse rehabilitants

It is important that this group is committed to regular activity. One of the ways to achieve this might be to stress the unique character of the activity. Co-operation with the group's regular counsellors is important and will assist in planning the workshop in line with the group's needs. The confidentiality of personal information, required by law, will restrict access to detailed information about the participants, but at the planning stage it should be possible to review general-level risk factors, such as violence or anxiety.

Circus instructors should be aware of potential withdrawal symptoms in the participants. These may include anxiety, nervousness and restlessness. If they occur, the participant should be left in peace or allowed to rest. On the other hand, praise for good work and attending the class may even help with withdrawal symptoms.



A fire art workshop purchased by a private service provider allowed the participants to explore who they were. According to feedback from the group coach, the participants gained positive results in self-knowledge and self-confidence, they found new and inspiring things for their lives, they became willing to try new things and the social exclusion of young people was prevented.

"The workshop was a success. The clients felt that it was a refreshing exception to daily routines and appropriately challenging with regard to their personal resources. The clients' concentration on the tasks was at times almost magical." One of the participants felt that the sound created by fire twirling was so soothing that she would have liked to tape it. She twirled for a long time with her eyes closed, and after the activity was very satisfied with the experience.



photo: Mia Bergius

3. CIRCUS CLASS



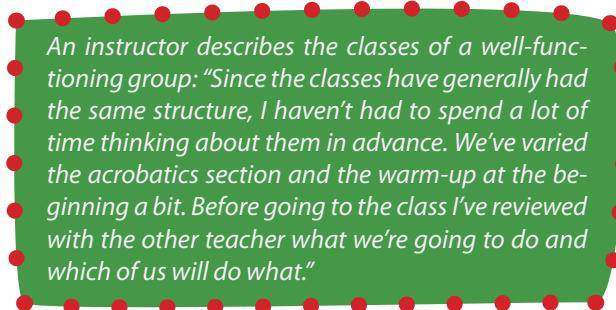
Training in circus skills helps you to

- Learn to know other children and adults
- Learn to work in a team
- Learn to know your own body
- Practise motor skills
- Gain more courage
- Gain experiences of success
- Support and help others
- Increase your creativity

3.1. Basic structure of a circus class

Repeated structure

For many groups, a stable class structure that is always repeated works well. Stability and security provide a good working environment for the students. A repeated structure also facilitates the advance preparation by the circus instructor.



Sample basic structure of a circus class

1. Beginning circle time
2. Warming-up
3. Stretching and strength exercises
4. Games and play
5. Training of disciplines
6. Practising for performance
7. Final relaxation
8. Ending circle time

In the following, the basic structure of a circus class is described in more detail. The contents of each section will first be explained in general terms and then by describing an individual sample exercise. The content of training in specific disciplines will be omitted here, since that is part of the basic professional skills of circus instructors.

Instead, practices that form the framework for the class are described (beginning and ending circle time), hints for structuring the class are given (play time between exercises and feedback at the end of the class) and the goals for each section of the circus class are described (team formation, self-evaluation).

The main purpose of circus instruction is to bring the students gradually to practise independently. Self-directedness is also the main challenge in the instruction.

It is easy for a skilled instructor to adapt the exercises to suit any group and to respond to situations encountered during the classes. If necessary, play time can be included after each circus discipline, and creative expression exercises are also useful.

Not everything works for everyone, sometimes a warm-up to begin the class is not sensible, at least when the group is new (groups with substance abuse rehabilitants or young boys may be examples of this), but even in this case it is best to rely on your own reading of the group.

In addition to using their professional skills, all instructors also use their own personalities as an instruction tool, and they will assemble the class structure that best suits themselves and the group.

*More about this topic can be found in Chapter 6, CIRCUS TOOLKIT, section 6.1, Circus Club, six/ten classes.

RULES

Shared rules will be agreed on during the first class. During the next class, everyone will sign the rules. At the beginning, and otherwise if necessary, the rules may be reviewed during the beginning circle time. The rules may be printed on the back of the club card or photocopied for everyone.

1. Encourage others
2. Allow others to work in peace
3. Do not touch the personal things or equipment of others
4. Listen to and obey the instructors
5. Listen to all instructions to the end before you begin anything
6. Do not fool about
7. No violence
8. Hats, mobile phones, etc. are set aside
9. Always wear appropriate clothing and gear
10. Have fun, but not at the expense of others

signatures of all group members

1. The purpose of the beginning circle is to teach verbal/corporeal self-expression, listening to others, being the centre of attention and being a part of a team. During the beginning circle, each participant has the chance to be heard. The group assembles, maybe sitting down on cushions. The cushion marks the place of each participant, and as long as everyone is listening, they can adopt any position on the cushion. When everyone has a designated place and is allowed to change positions, they will concentrate better.

During the beginning circle everyone takes turns to talk about something, such as: "Something nice that happened to me lately", "What animal I would like to be", "My favourite food", "What I am good at" or "What I would take with me to a desert island". Depending on the group, the level of difficulty of the topics may vary, and gradually you may also ask them why (e.g., "Why is that your favourite food?") Games where movements are imitated are also useful.

2. The objective of the warming-up is to prepare both mentally and physically, to tune up for circus training, to let off excess energy, to learn to know each other and to improve team formation. For some groups it is better that the warming-up remains similar every time. It is a good starting point if the instructor takes part in the warming-up exercises. In the case of students with attention deficit, 2–3 warming-up sets may be done since they will not necessarily be able to concentrate for long periods.

3. Stretching and strength exercises are a part of the warming-up. Various games are also good for warming up. Strength exercises help the students to become aware of their own bodies. It is of course important that the instructor is skilled enough to show and explain the exercises correctly and safely.

For some groups, a suitable warming-up or strength exercise could be kettlebell (giryā) training. For teenage boys this has proved much more interesting than normal warming-up exercises.

'Parisian Lifts' is a warming-up exercise where the students move about in the space using different styles. The instructor calls out a number to indicate the size of the group that the students must form. "Number five": five students form a group and lift one student up. The student is held up until the instructor has counted to twelve. In this way, the participants practise group activity and learn about closeness, trust and co-operation.

When splitting the group, you can vary the basis by using hair colour, size, month of birth and the like

4. Games and play build trust towards both the instructor and the other participants. They encourage team spirit and create positive energy. In some groups, games and play only work after the members have achieved sufficient reciprocal trust and have got over thinking, "This is just too childish". Everyone will join in play if it is camouflaged as a game or an exercise to improve your condition (see also Point 3).

In addition to boosting team spirit and warming-up, games have other "hidden meanings", such as co-operation, use of wits or body control. Play time between exercises helps to cool down, focus, pay attention to others and listen. A bit of play at the end brings the group together and further improves co-operation and team spirit.

“

Play time between exercises helps to cool down, focus, pay attention to others and listen.”

”

'Strictly Come Dancing' tag: Whenever the 'It' catches another person, that person must begin to dance in a style that they either invent or copy from somewhere. The person caught can only be saved by walking up to them and beginning to dance in the same style.

'One-upmanship': Name something that you are good at. Boast about as best you can. The others will applaud you for your boasting. The exercise helps the participants to accept each other as they are, and the applause makes it easier to talk about oneself. The exercise also often reveals skills that would otherwise remain hidden. These skills can be brought out by the instructor during the circus training.

5. Discipline training is used to practise circus disciplines. Each time, it is useful to review the disciplines and tricks practised during the previous class and to include something new in the review process. The elements trained include body control, trust in oneself and others, having courage, responding to challenges, gaining experiences of success, working in a team and learning to know others. In trying out various circus disciplines, the participants practise their technique and gradually find their favourite medium.

Sometimes it may be useful if students queueing up for something are allowed to practise with something small, such as the rola-bola. Queueing up can also be avoided by circuit training where the whole group rotates between designated spots. This has proved useful for groups with difficulties in concentration. Circuit training means that each participant remains at a given spot for only 1–5 minutes, depending on the group. Moving from one spot to the next is easy, and there is no need to focus on any one thing for long. Various circuit arrangements are good for working with both small and large groups.

Circuit training helps to avoid queueing, and the circuit may include exercises of different types.

6. Performance practice, drama and theatre exercises prepare the students for performance, support their expression, teach them to have an audience and to be one, and bring variety and joy into the training.

'Magic Words' is an exercise in which the students invent their own magic words to invoke magic into the room. To begin with, the whole group or smaller sections can think of a magic word for the whole group. As they gain more courage, they can take turns to speak their personal magic words.

7. Final relaxation comes before the ending circle. It is a good thing to calm the group down, to enjoy sitting still and to relax for a moment. At the same time, they learn to be comfortable with physical contact and being close to other people. Relaxation can be gradually prolonged at each class.

'Mattress Relaxation': Four or so students lie down next to each other and are covered with a mattress so that only their faces show. The group remains so for a moment, thinking of what happened during the day, what was good and what could be improved.

8. The ending circle brings the participants together, and everyone has the opportunity to give feedback. The aim is to make everyone visible and emphasise that they are important for the group. In the circle, everyone picks a word to describe the feeling or thing that they remember best about the class. Sometimes it may be difficult to verbalise one's feelings immediately after the class, and the shyer ones may be allowed to pass.





photo: Riitta Yrjönen

Feedback can also be given through facial expressions or using the thumb. It is important for the instructor to tell the group that negative feedback is also allowed.

Class OK: a smile and thumbs-up mean that the class was fun. Class not ok: downturned mouth and thumbs-down. The ending circle can also be used to watch photos or a video made during the class.

3.2. Flexibility and adaptation

Challenging students

Sometimes the participants are shy in social situations, and it may take time to get the work going. For this reason, the initial exercises and play are designed to gradually increase social cohesion in the group and to support the students' desire to join in. In some groups the participants cannot be given too "free hands", but rather, the class must follow closely the instructor's plan. In such groups, a strict structure and style of instruction, as well as brisk transfers from one section to the next, will help the group to concentrate and create a secure atmosphere. Some groups are very self-directed and need less instruction. The best way is always for the instructor to observe and read the group closely and to respond flexibly to changes. A skilled instructor is able to interpret situations and has the social intelligence to help solve any problems encountered.

Circus classes evoke a wide range of emotions and responses. "After several classes that had run like a dream, during the final minutes of a class one of the boys suddenly lost it. It took us time to realise that he was so upset only because the class was ending."

The instructor should always set the goals according to each group, monitor the progress and adapt the work accordingly. As a rule, every group has a few people with motor or other challenges. Nevertheless, everyone must be provided with meaningful activity and the chance to succeed. Suiting the work to the group's capability may mean, for example, that exercises requiring a good coordination are not introduced at the beginning, or that music is selected very carefully.

Here is an example of the use of music in a group for substance abuse rehabilitants: "We had a CD player but no music, and we borrowed CDs from the participants. However, the group's regular counselor told us that the electronic music we were playing could make the participants feel they were attending a party with drugs. That was something we hadn't thought about at all. Something soothing





Music or no music?

Music relaxes, inspires, helps to focus and provides rhythm.

Music affects the emotions, creates mental images and moods.

The instructor should think carefully about the pros and cons of music. The choice is first of all affected by the group and its circumstances.

Music may be used at the beginning and end of the class, so as to provide a framework.

Music from a different culture may work better than something familiar which will evoke memories and thoughts.

It should also be remembered that silence can relax and liberate.

would have worked better."

3.3. Progress of training

A lesson plan drawn up in advance will help the instructor to lead the class and to adapt the exercises according to each situation. Each group is different, and situations may change quite rapidly. It is acceptable to be flexible with the plans and perhaps postpone something until the following class, rather than have everyone hurry up with their work. However, it is better not to tell the group that something must be skipped, as they may feel they have failed or been too slow.

Many people in every group need to learn to be patient, to wait their turn and to gain sufficient skills levels. Some will immediately want to take up great challenges and are frustrated at having to do simple tricks.

The members may wish to try out tricks with great confidence before they are fully comfortable with them. In most cases, having them alternate between different exercises and equipment will keep up their interest. Occasionally, the participants have to be warned about excessive enthusiasm – maybe by stressing the importance of training for safety, in such disciplines as acrobatics or fire art.

Self-directedness is a challenge for many instructors. Sometimes if the instructor is not standing there to tell the student what to do, they may gradually give up and direct their energy to something else. Most students also need simple and clear instructions. It is better not to include too many instructions in one

sentence. "Now each of you take one ball in your hand and go and sit down on the yellow mat as we go through the instructions." Each element must be given as a separate instruction.

On the other hand, it is challenging and confusing that sometimes the students are also irritated by instructions, encouragement and reminders.

Pacing during the class

One of the challenges is to pace the work so that the group becomes more, instead of less, enthusiastic. Here, a good sense of situations and an eye for the game are useful. Keeping track of the energy level of the group helps to select a suitable exercise. Sometimes the best choice is an energetic race, at other times slow and methodical work. If everyone suddenly wants to use the same equipment, it may be best to focus on practising with that. If, on the other hand, the students seem to need a break, it is better to have it immediately.

If necessary, the instruction can be divided into two or more sections: 45 minutes of training and 45 minutes of other work related to the performance (such as making equipment, constructing pois, making a drawing of one's circus character, inventing and elaborating on one's story).

Dividing the class time is a good idea when, for example, the group does not have access to a gym for the

whole period, or the group has difficulties in maintaining focus. One 45-minute period can be further split into 10–15-minute sections. In this way, the participants will have time to get well into their work and finish while nicely on top, with everyone still keeping their focus and in a good mood. The training time can be prolonged, as soon as everyone knows the basics and has more self-confidence and motivation.

Importance of repetition

The disciplines practised during the previous class should be briefly repeated during the next one. This brings continuity into the training, and the students acquire a thorough understanding of each discipline. You could also start each class using the same tricks, such as acrobatics.

Motor exercises which are repeated each time will support the participants in other disciplines and help them feel successful as their skills improve due to repetition. This model is useful for all stable groups with regular instruction. In goal-oriented, long-term work, it is a good plan to interleave repetition and the learning of new things.

Benefits of repetition:

- students make progress, almost without noticing
- progress increases self-confidence and enthusiasm
- knowing what lies ahead improves concentration
- students with motor challenges find it rewarding to do something that they already master
- exercises can be adapted to be more challenging





Advanced training

Most groups derive the greatest benefit from long-term activity. As training progresses, the participants develop their skills and their confidence and self-assurance increase. Over time, the instructors can gradually “fade into the background” and delegate some of the responsibility to the students.

At this stage, it is good to make room for independent work, and allow the students to choose what they want to do. It is useful for the participants to notice that they are able to work and progress even if the instructors are not always there to encourage and advise. In many groups, in fact, learning is gradual, and independent work becomes easier over time.

The circus instructor feels most successful when the group reaches a stage where a student who has mastered a skill shows it to the others. The participants begin to teach each other, and the group starts to be self-directed.



photo: Mia Bergius

Enthusiasm and motivation!

- A secure and calm teaching situation promotes learning
- Clear plans create order in the work and provide motivation
- A name that the group has selected creates team spirit and enthusiasm
- Team-forming and trust-building exercises increase courage and motivation
- Positive feedback encourages students to try
- Realistic goals provide experiences of success and motivation
- Seeing the performances of others motivates and increases enthusiasm for the work
- Success and showing one's skills to others motivates and improves self-confidence
- Joy and humour liberate and encourage students to try
- "Secure adult – inventive instructor" inspires trust and enthusiasm

3.4. Inspiring and motivating

Enthusiasm, a positive mood and success provide motivation. Being inspired is the key to being motivated. An enthusiastic mood creates a tingling sense of expectation. "What will be the next good thing?" There are many kinds of enthusiasm and inspiration. For a new group, the first goal is that everyone should at least join in. The first thing to do is to make each participant feel assured that the activity is safe. Trust often also arises when the group has first become inspired and motivated. On the other hand, being inspired also motivates people to join in even if they do not yet have complete trust.

"The children were inspired by watching a performance (on video) and ran screaming into the gym, demanding to do some acrobatics. So we modified our lesson plan, we gave up the drama exercises and did acrobatics and pyramids instead. This time, the group acrobatics was successful despite some little chaos. We took photos and could see that the children were motivated by seeing them."

Circus camps and festivals, recording classes on video, photos and watching the performances of others live or on video will create enthusiasm. Watching the work of others will broaden the students' perspectives on circus, as they realise all the things that can be done. One enthusiastic group, for example, was given a list of internet links to videos about juggling, so they could learn new tricks on their own.



photo: Riitta Yrjönen



Goal orientation

Goals and clear-cut plans may also involve conflicts: on the one hand, they may support development and commitment, while on the other, they may also restrict. Every six months, it is useful to arrange evaluations to discuss goals with the whole group.

This is also the time to update the group rules and possibly to discuss the collective and individual goals of the group. For some groups, collective goals are enough, while in others it may make sense to set individual goals as well. Individual goals have been found useful in motivating young people: when the students are given responsibility and they can influence the setting of goals, they are more motivated to practise.

Praise

The greatest challenge with teenagers is often to inspire them and have them join in. Giving praise may encourage them: "There now, you see it works!" Even a non-enthusiast may be inspired at getting attention and positive feedback. "Look at you, doing those special tricks already!" A student that has received praise will find it easier to join in, try new things and actually to fail. In the same way, the instructor may appreciate a skill, the making of an effort, being helpful or waiting patiently. Each instructor will have his or her personal style of praising and encouraging. What is essential is to use your own personality and your own words. In fact, the most important thing is that the instructor is present.

The positive feedback need not only concern a successful performance, for making an effort and carry-

ing something through is just as important and worth praising. But never give praise if there is no cause. Praise should always be earned. If a student learns a new trick or a teenager finally takes off his leather jacket during the fifth class, that should be appreciated immediately. "Wow!" The removal of the jacket is marked since it happens spontaneously. Giving praise will create a positive and happy mood for everyone that will last a long time.

Excessive praise, however, should not be given without cause or for self-evident things. This will dilute the effect of praise, the recipient may feel patronised, or the instructor will come across as too 'simple'.

An encouraging instructor wanted very much to support her students. She volubly praised two boys juggling with two balls. The whole group remembered this for a long time and also repeatedly reminded the instructor about her meaningless praise.

A circus instructor asks: "What to do if you get completely stuck during a class? For example, if the whole group simply stands there and refuses to do anything?"

Another circus instructor replies: "Once when that happened to me I told them, 'Well, don't do anything then. Just stand by and watch us instructors do it!' This shows the students that the instruction does not jump about to follow their rules, but follows the rules of the circus instead."





Good characteristics of instructors that will motivate groups:

- Openness, directness and sense of humour
- Positive attitude – overcoming negativity with positivity
- Mastery of technical skills and capability of adapting them to the group
- Ability to see each participant as an individual
- Being comfortable with making mistakes
- Ability to give participants responsibility for activity
- Encouraging
- Supportive and secure
- Capable of setting appropriate challenges and limits



3.5. Safety and security

Awareness of the responsibilities of the instructor, the circus and the purchaser will help all partners to take account of the risks and dangerous situations. The occupational safety of a circus instructor includes correct work positions and well-maintained circus equipment. The responsibility for looking after the equipment is shared between the instructor, the circus and the purchaser.

Shared rules

During the first meeting the group may draw up shared rules, which will increase the sense of safety and security and allow the students to perceive the safe limits within which to act. Violent or denigrating behaviour must not be allowed in any circumstances. Bad behaviour should be taken up immediately and the perpetrator should be reminded of the shared rules and sanctioned as provided for in the rules.

"Of course, the best thing would be that you agree with the group about sanctions the first time you meet. Good manners and the group rules should be made known to everyone. The rules should also be reviewed with adults. It is not necessarily obvious that adults will observe rules." - Circus instructor

Shared group rules and sanctions that have been jointly agreed on, such as in the case of violent behaviour, help to set up a secure work environment. Sanctionable acts and eventual sanctions should always be discussed with the whole group. Joint decisions motivate the participants to observe rules and to control their personal behaviour.

One group found a good and safe way of defusing aggression. If anyone was too frustrated, they would go

into the storage room to yell and beat the mattresses.

Time-out

The time-out bench can be set up in several ways, one of them being that a designated bench is placed at the side of the room, away from where the group is working. Violence, bad language or negligent use of equipment, for example, will lead to a two-minute time-out on the bench. No attention is paid to the sitter, but he or she is left alone to think about things. Occasionally, the sitter may need to be accompanied by an assistant or the regular teacher in order to stay on the bench. An egg timer is a good way of marking the time-out period. Time-out works particularly well with small children and primary school students.

There are often shy and fearful participants in groups, who may overreact to any danger. A skilled instructor will strive to create a climate and conditions where it is safe and secure to attempt even risky tricks. Participants may be motivated to avoid dangerous situations if they are described to them. Concrete examples 'from real life' may sometimes be used to explain the dangers related to exercises or equipment.

Detailed and specific instructions and training

At the start of the activity it is advisable to pay special attention to providing detailed and concrete instructions. If the group is large and noisy, instructions may be preceded by shouting, 'Stop!' or giving some other signal. The participants will recognise the signal, interrupt what they are doing and listen to the instruction.

Learning basic skills is particularly important from the point of view of safety. Some of the participants will be frustrated with having to learn basic circus skills. Those with more technical talent will want to move

on faster, if they feel that a trick or movement is too easy or if they do not understand why something should be done just so. Being hasty or sloppy is extremely dangerous in disciplines where there is a risk of injury to the performer or someone else. In acrobatics, for example, maintaining the appropriate posture is extremely important and can prevent serious accidents. Sloppiness may cause the task to be done in an inappropriate and dangerous way. Such behaviour easily spreads to others, which is why the participant should be guided to do calmer movements and sufficiently challenging tasks.

Fire

Fire often generates a healthy respect, and it is easy to justify any safety requirements. The power of fire can be demonstrated by showing a burnt boot or garment, for example. Sometimes the demonstration will cause laughter, but the group will soon understand that fire can really be dangerous.

Fire art workshops always include training in fire safety, practice in extinguishing fires and the distribution of written safety instructions.

Only after safety has been taken care of and the group has a command of the basic movements can real fire be used. At the start and always with minors, one fire manipulator to one instructor is a good ratio. The participants can also be divided into groups of three so that each one in turn will manipulate the fire, while the other two observe and look after safety.

Tricks that are a health risk should be avoided and actually not even be talked about. Fire breathing, for example, is extremely unhealthy, and should not be a part of any workshop.

Assistants

Assistants are often a good support and help in the instruction, when several things are happening at once, demanding tricks are done or assistance is otherwise needed. To ensure safety and smoothness of work, it is advisable to organise a brief advance training for the assistants about the best positions and moves and basic techniques, and also generally agree about procedure during the classes.

Security

Looking after the group's security and listening to them and taking them into account is easier when more than one person is responsible for this. Having two instructors will alleviate stress and provide additional security, since one instructor need not manage the overall situation on their own.

Security also includes mutual respect and acceptance between instructors and participants, as well as listening to each other. It should be remembered that according to good practice, the instructor should observe confidentiality in matters related to the students and the employer. Instructors should not speak to outsiders of things that take place at work. This shows respect for the students' privacy in particular, and for the trust shown by the employer.

"Instructors should also look after their own privacy. You shouldn't be cold and distant, but you'll need to be a little bit on your toes. I've noticed that being too friendly can actually increase the bursts of feeling in the group," says one instructor who has worked with substance abuse rehabilitants.

3.6. Documenting the activity

In many groups, the use of photos and videos has enhanced the participants' motivation, encouraged a positive development of self-image, helped to explore one's own body image and brought joy into the work. Videoing and photographing should be discussed with the group, so that you can agree jointly about how the images will be used and when they may be made. For example, videos can be used to document a student's development at the beginning, during and after the instruction course. Images often make it easier to understand what has been learned. A video made during circus classes also serves as a calling card when presenting circus instruction, or as a marketing aid.

You should, however, watch out that the participants do not become too engrossed in watching themselves instead of focusing on their work. From being good aids, videos and photos may gain the upper hand, so that some of the group start focusing on showing off, while others try to hide. In this era of mobile-phone cameras it is also advisable to talk with the group about using them and draw up rules for how they may be used in class.

Forms requesting permission for video and photographic records should be distributed during the first class. All minor participants should have their guardians sign permission for photographic and video recording. If any images are uploaded on the Internet, extra care should be taken to obtain permissions. The request form should specify clearly who will be making the photos or videos and when, and how and when the recordings will be used.

Assistance in collecting the form can be given by the group's regular teacher or counsellor. The teacher may inform the parents during the first parent-teacher meeting of the school year that circus instruction is part of the school curriculum or the group's scheduled activity, and may request the parents directly for a permission to video or photograph. The permission should always be given in writing.

Uses of videos and photographs:

- monitoring student progress
- information efforts and marketing
- illustration of tricks and the use of equipment
- visual memento of the activity for each student
- stimulation for training



Photo Miles Mettio

4. WRAPPING UP A COURSE OF CIRCUS INSTRUCTION



4.1. Towards a performance

Making up a long-term plan for the whole circus instruction period before the instruction starts will make it easier to prepare the classes and view the course as a process. The course may be rounded off by a show, an open training session, a party for the group, a final class with exercises that the group likes, a visit to a professional circus or something else that suits the group. All of these are exciting and rewarding experiences for the participants.

From the very beginning, the content of the classes

may be planned with a final show in view. It is advisable to reserve plenty of time for making up a show, for the students will need to feel secure during the performance.

If the performance creates too much stress, it will not serve as a team-building factor. When everyone is serious about the performance, both circus skills and social skills will improve both in teamwork and on the individual level.

Preparing a show will require a significant investment of time and attention by the instructor. This will be helped if the instructor is flexible and, on the other hand, capable of making decisions about such things as lighting or the properties required during the show. A systematic mode of work, clear structures and a consistent direction in the training will help structure the process.

4.2. Mini shows

In addition to learning circus skills, the participants will practise for the final show by improving their own creative expression and performance skills. Practising for the show can be started during the first circus class by arranging mini shows at the end of the class. The purpose of these mini shows is to gradually teach the skills of performing before others and of enjoying it. For some, taking a final bow will be enough, while others will choose a medium to show off with.

The performance should be voluntary and all pressure should be avoided. For example, the instructor may pick a few eager volunteers and possibly also a few less outgoing or shyer students who have learned a new skill during the class. By performing in mini shows and watching others perform the students are motivated and their stage fright will be alleviated.



Sample class structure including a mini show:

- Beginning circle
- Names game
- Warm-up game
- Training of disciplines
- Pause for refreshment
- Training of disciplines
- Expression exercise/play
- Game to split the group into sections
- Preparation of mini shows
- Mini show and final bow
- Relaxation
- Ending circle



4.3. Letting the group create the idea

When the instructor takes account of the participants' suggestions and opinions, the show will look like the group – and everyone can join in. Even during the first class you can begin to discuss the future show and how to practise for it. Ideas for the show can be hatched during the beginning circle time, for example, by asking the group's opinion, using either clearly defined questions or, particularly with young people, fairly open ones.

The flow of ideas for the story and the show can often be helped along by watching a circus performance either live or on video. That way, everyone can understand what a circus performance can be like and why costumes, props or music are needed. The purpose is not to copy others, but to find inspiration and start the process in the group.

Preparing a performance with a group can also be done with the help of play. The group moves about in the space while music is played. When the music ends, each participant writes or draws a picture of what they would like the show to contain, on pieces of paper placed out. The wishes can be anonymous so no one needs worry about what others think. The instructors assemble a theme for the show, using the students' wishes and thoughts, and form a topic for the next class. The story line is read out to the whole group. Everyone is allowed to participate in the planning, and everyone's wishes are taken into account. Another way is to have a group of enthusiasts work on the ideas and have responsibility for the whole or a part of the show.



photo: Riitta Yrjönen



4.4. Performance as high point of the course

A circus performance designed together as the high point to round off the course is a challenge, but also a goal that attracts many groups. It need not be a mega spectacle. A fairly short performance in the nature of a demonstration works just as well. Even if performing before an audience will cause nervousness and even fright in most participants, the feeling of success and togetherness after it is great. If the group has no performance or other goal to look forward to, the mood and eagerness may easily flag at some point. A performance as the objective of instruction and a climax increases energy levels, helps concentrate, teaches about responsibility and encourages students to practise.

- *In one group, the problem of how to wrap up the course was solved by making a video just for themselves. It was not possible for the group consisting of immigrant girls to perform outside the group. The girls came up with the idea of videoing their training sessions and mini shows with a computer camera. The instructors compiled a video show using the material, which the group then viewed together. Thanks to the video show, the girls were able to experience the first-night excitement and to share their successes.*

The excitement associated with a public performance begins to rise in the students as the show draws near. Some of them will be so nervous that the instructor may not even be able to use the word 'performance' so the group will not become too anxious. On the other hand, in most groups it is also evident that practising for the show brings out positive aspects: concentration, creativity and enthusiasm. As an example of the focused work by the students before a performance, nine-year-olds marched into the gym and began straight away to warm up and stretch, completely without prompting by the instructor.

The nearer the performance is, the better the team spirit normally is. Most participants are eager to take part, but some of them may be less enthusiastic and others may even refuse completely. It is important that everyone is encouraged to take the stage, whether in a big or a small role. For some, simply taking a mattress where it should be on the stage may be a big and important task.

In one group, the motivation and concentration of two boys disappeared in the middle of the training process. They began to feel negative about the coming performance. When talking to them it was found that getting on to the stage made them extremely anxious. The instructor and the boys jointly decided that one of them would manage the lights, while the other would be the props manager. The props manager also undertook to make the posters, to make up the performers and see to various other things. The next time the class met, the lights man was able to learn about lighting. The boys were really happy with their new tasks. By a joint process of hatching ideas, everyone was able to have meaningful tasks.

Before the show the instructor may invite a rehearsal audience to watch and provide comments and feedback. The instructors should not be shy about suggesting improvements or corrections, and they can stress the importance of having an audience during the performance. After the 'rehearsal performance' the show is still worked on before the dress rehearsal, which is where everything should be right.

The first performance relieves tension in the group, and the second one is normally more relaxed and balanced. Having a minimum of two performances creates the feeling of a real 'season' and allows the performers to improve on anything less than perfect during the first night. If the circus instruction ends with a performance, the group should have a brief joint session afterwards to discuss feelings about the performance and for proper good-byes.



5. CIRCUS INSTRUCTOR



5.1. Identity of circus instructor

The social circus instructor should consciously reflect on his or her professional skills and on their interest to engage in social circus. Awareness of your own motivation and strengths will help you to plan the content and structure of instruction, to find a group that suits you and to determine realistic goals for it. Some experience of life and a relevant education are very important for how the instructor encounters the students and copes with the stress of the work. In the course of work, the identity of instructor/teacher is consolidated, and the circus instructor will discover his or her own approach to the instruction. It will be easier to start work with any new group once you have a clear idea of what you are doing and you have confidence in your own teaching style.

The work of a social circus instructor involves a great deal more than just teaching circus skills. It is challenging and sometimes psychologically stressing due to the challenges of the participants. The stress is increased by personal high expectations of working as an instructor and the expectations placed on the participants' progress and the commitment of the group's regular teachers. The instructor should not be too hard on her- or himself – not every day can be a success, and sometimes you may feel that there is no way you can reach the same wavelength as the group.



photo: Hiljka Hyttinen



The positive characteristics of a circus instructor include experience of life, sense of situation, openness, courage, ability to improvise, flexibility, ability to accept personal failure, professional attitude to work, good communication and teamwork skills.

"You can also learn from mistakes. Sometimes it's only after the class that you realise what you should have done differently. Often, even after the class has been fairly successful, I'll sit and mope about having had to raise my voice to give instructions or restore order. Especially with slightly larger groups of lower secondary class students, this is a recurrent problem. Luckily, it is also possible to discuss this with them. Still, I personally have this idea at the back of my head that the meaning of all this is to have fun! There is also some conflict about where to draw the line between being matey and having authority. Personally, however, I strive to apply the 'instructor as participant' ideology."

each session is 2 x 45 minutes in duration, and they are arranged at intervals of 3 to 4 weeks.

During work supervision the employees can confidentially unburden themselves, find ways of managing challenging situations at work, learn about own and others' experiences, and find new angles and modes of operation in their own work. The sessions are led by trained work supervisors. Source: www.suomentyonohjaajat.fi



5.2 Work supervision

Instructors of special groups can benefit greatly from work supervision and, if possible, they should be given the opportunity to receive external support. A work supervision session once every two months is a minimum, and will help the circus instructor to relieve stress, have a direction and cope with the work.

For the employer, work supervision is an investment in well-being at work and will bring returns, as the circus instructors become more committed to and better at directing their own work.

Work supervision means that the participant reflects on his or her relationship to the work. It helps to promote professional growth and co-operative skills and clarifies work roles. The ideal size of a work supervision group is about 3–6 people, and it is given to individuals, groups and work communities. As a rule,

With particularly demanding groups, work supervision is a practically obligatory investment that should be taken into account at the planning stage. In a group with neuropsychological problems, the first year was difficult for the circus trainers, as the children had multiple problems. The participants ranged from passive to hyperactive; many were violent and used extremely coarse language. "The second year, the work supervisors in the unit offered us supervision once a month. That was absolutely indispensable – it helped us to cope and to develop our work. I learned to see my instruction from a new angle and found new ways of understanding the participants," says a circus instructor.

5.3. Instructor teams

Having a team of two circus instructors brings many benefits. A good team has a natural feeling for dividing responsibilities in teaching situations, and the presence of two instructors is an excellent way of structuring the teaching situation. The instructors can find reciprocal support in each others' professional skills. Each group will also go through several ups and downs. During difficult spots, the support of the colleague is very important. Another way to improve coping is to include other adults besides the circus instructor, such as the group's regular teacher or assistants.

Instructor teams can be composed in many different ways. From the group's viewpoint it is good if at least one of the instructors is the same during every class. For some groups it is important that the whole team remains the same. In others, one of the instructors may change, depending on the discipline to be taught, for example.

For the success of the work it is indispensable that one of the instructors at least has a sound educational and professional background in circus. However, the other instructor may be experienced in drama expression or youth work and know about circus through their own interest.

An example of a good instructor team: "I and my colleague are really on a roll. We inspire each other hugely as instructors, and our eagerness and sense of fun and the way we split up the tasks either spontaneously or by agreement works really well. We trust each other and have a good sense of situations. We feel we are a brilliant team!"

Importance of instructors' gender

At times, the circus instructor's gender really matters, at others it does not. In many groups, gender is less important than the instructor being willing and capable to teach. In general, a team of two male or two female instructors in a group will work well, but the ideal would be to have one male and one female instructor for each class. Children and young people often look for reciprocity in either gender, depending on their home circumstances. In this case, the best solution is to have a male-female team of instructors.

As a team, one man and one woman seems to work well with lower secondary school boys, especially if they are immigrants. Boys and young men easily lose interest if they only have women instructors. The students require a man to show them how to fling oneself into something, and having men participating in the games and activity increases the students' enthusiasm. In Finland it has also been noted that immigrant boys have a great need to talk to Finnish men and to be in contact with them. Boys and young men are also often boisterous in groups, and a male instructor will have a calming effect. In contrast, for immigrant girls of lower secondary school age, a female instructor may be the only feasible solution; cultural reasons, for example, may prevent them from training together with boys.

Advance planning

In planning social circus and working with a peer it is important to set aside time for advance planning. This creates trust in the activity, oneself and the partner. The contacts need not be very elaborate.

Defining a clear direction and providing consistency will enhance your assurance and help you feel confident that the class will be a success. In many cases, meeting face to face to plan the course is much more effective than doing it by phone, for example. The ideal is that each class is planned in writing ahead of time, so that lesson plans are detailed enough down to the names of tricks. The plan is even more important if the circus techniques class is only 45 minutes in duration, for example, and changing the content is not possible due to time constraints. When both partners share the view of what happens during the class, working together is easy.

If the partner is flexible, it will be possible to change plans in mid-air, as is shown by the following example: "We worked so well together that we didn't have to speak to each other during the whole class. Some of the young people always gathered with either one of us, and we taught them about the things that we knew. If I didn't know something, I told the student to go to my partner. They did ask both of us for help throughout."

5.4. Sharing responsibilities in the team

A good match between the partners and a functional co-operation are important for instructors sharing a group. The group will be easier to deal with if the team agrees about who is in charge at any given moment. It is natural that the partner who is most familiar with a trick or discipline will be in charge when it is taught. The partners may agree that one of them takes charge of the younger and the other of the

older students. When one of the team is in charge of a given thing, the other one will have time to observe the progress of the class, to provide assistance to participants and to restore order where necessary. Sharing the responsibilities also makes for smoother transitions during the class.

When performances are being practised it is particularly useful to split the responsibility for instruction so that only one instructor is responsible for planning an act together with the participant or the group. Mastering the technicalities, expression and performance requires a lot of the performer, and having to work with two instructors may confuse and disturb concentration.

When roles and principles of working are agreed on, the instructor's authority is enhanced. Sometimes finding a shared understanding takes time and may require joint reflection and flexibility on both parts. Partners should not interfere with each other's instruction unnecessarily. The main thing during the class is to listen to the group and its needs. Sometimes a new instruction may provide clarity and help. An instructor may have helpful mental images, for example, to enhance the control of equipment, and they may be voiced.

People have different learning styles. Interfering with a partner's work always depends on the situation, and the main thing is to avoid a conflict in the participants' mind as to whom they should listen to. Instructors should respect each others' professional skills, and after the class it is possible to discuss what worked and what did not. If there is a conflict, it is a good plan to take a deep breath and remember that humour is an inherent element in teaching. A relaxed and close contact with the partner is just as important as with the participants.



5.5. Self-evaluation

Shared evaluation by the instructor team

In addition to the advance planning, it is useful to reflect afterwards on all teaching, training and performances. The reflections may be written in the instructor's diary. Each class should be analysed no later than the following day, for any later it will be extremely difficult to remember what happened and how the participants responded. Assessing the day briefly with the partner after the class is useful and should be a routine. At the end of the working week, summarising what has been done and reviewing the instructors' diaries together will help develop the work.

It is easy to become blind to one's own personal style. If that happens, external feedback may help in seeing where development is needed. In one group, the instructor was able to have a debriefing session after each class with a family worker who was involved. An outsider's observations on how the independent training of a family circus created a good climate and increased creativity in the families was something the instructor had not noticed. "The families were feeling good during free training, and they drew wonderfully on their creativity when the training was not closely led by the instructor. A situation which the instructors saw as chaotic was actually an instance of doing positive things together and an opportunity to learn to know other participants."

Internal evaluation in the circus

If the circus organisation comprises several instructor teams it is a good idea to arrange a monthly meeting of all workers for work development. This is most useful if each meeting has a topic or perhaps even an agenda, and if a chairperson and secretary are elected. The matters to be discussed may include updating the curriculum, joint activity by the groups, coping with work and topics related to work development. The points raised during the meeting should be recorded in minutes or perhaps on an Intranet page where those with access can easily find them. Debriefing and development sessions will become an important part of work community development and maintenance of welfare at work when the time set aside for them is considered as working hours.

In one circus, a system of working teams was set up to facilitate various work-related practices. Each working team is led by a 'team leader' who is also a circus instructor. They are teamed up with one or two circus instructors who follow the leader's working principles. The circus instructors in each team have sound enough education and experience to allow trainee instructors and students learning on the job to be included during classes. A team of this kind is very useful when stand-ins or assistants are needed or when special skills in a discipline are called for. The teams are also helpful in training new instructors. A suitable candidate is close at hand and will not require a great deal of orientation.

Feedback to the instructor team

The instructors should also practise giving each other constructive feedback. A pedagogue's best tool is self-knowledge, which can also be enhanced through constructive feedback. Even negative feedback to a partner is useful if appropriately given. Immediately after the instruction is not a good time for criticism. Instead, the matter should be approached more discreetly, such as: "Do you think we could start doing it this way?" or "Have you ever considered what might happen if X was done?"

- *Positive feedback will also inspire instructors and give them new energy. "A mother who was present during class stayed over to praise our work and the exercises we had used. She described what she had observed: how we had encouraged the students, how we used our voices, that our instructions were clear and we introduced each exercise with lively and encouraging words. What was most important, she said we had praised the participants abundantly and continuously. This is a good place to move forward from!"*

Tools for developing the work of circus instructors:

- Debriefing in personal work diary at end of day
- Debriefing session with partner at end of day / week
- Team meeting weekly
- Joint meeting of all teams / development meetings monthly
- Appraisals with employer / circus once every term
- Feedback questionnaires to participants, group counsellors or parents, etc.



A working team consists of the following

- Team leader / circus instructor
- 1–2 circus instructors
- Assistant / student learning on the job / trainee
- Group's regular teachers, personal assistants, parents, etc.

5.8. Wish lists of employers and circus instructors

What employers value in circus instructors:

- comprehensive circus skills and the ability to teach them
- professional skills to apply circus art to a range of goals and groups
- interest in development of curriculum, activity and self
- flexibility regarding working hours and conditions
- capability of directing one's own work
- possibility to use own car for transport (of properties as well)
- creative madness
- commitment to employer's values and modes of operation
- long-term commitment

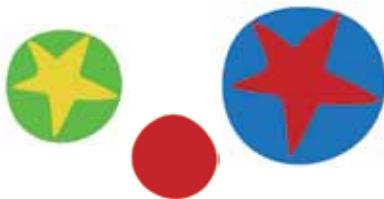


photo: Hilkka Hyttinen

What circus instructors value in employers:

- continuity and stability of work
- support for coping at work (work supervision)
- adequate remuneration in proportion to level of challenges in work
- further education
- opportunity to influence matters
- support and appreciation
- good work community
- adequate work facilities and rest rooms
- functional networks
- flexibility to accept changes in personal circumstances
- appropriate scope of job description

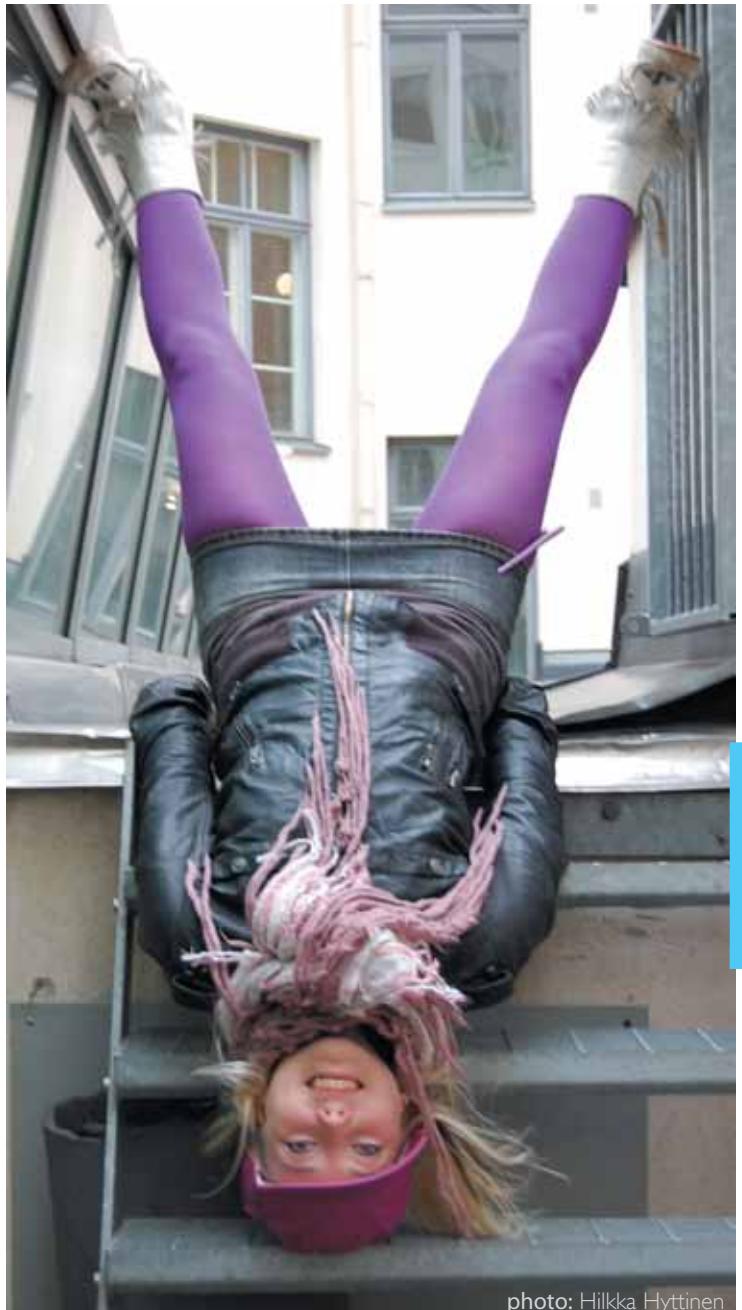


photo: Hilkka Hyttinen

“

Clear goals make for peaks of motivation and excitement in the work.

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6. CIRCUS TOOLKIT

This chapter contains various good practices collected during the project. You may find useful sources of inspiration for your circus among these tools. Feel free to select the practices that best suit your activity and adapt them according to need.

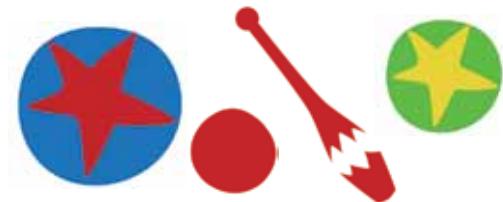
6.1. Circus club, six/ten classes

This structure is designed so that each class aims at a final performance before an audience as the last class. The instruction can also be concluded by mini shows by the groups after the sixth class.

The training is started at a slow pace, by trying out various disciplines, doing exercises for performance and selecting the equipment that each participant prefers. The exercises lead the participants almost by accident to new and varying situations. The final few classes focus on constructing the show, creating a story and rehearsing and performing it. Clear goals make for peaks of motivation and excitement in the work.

1. Everybody feels nervous!

During the first meeting it is important to put out feelers to find out what the group is like. The members are asked about their previous circus experiences and what they know about circus in general. During the first exercises it is normal that not just the participants, but also the instructors feel nervous. The nervousness may be defused by talking about things. The instructor presents the course curriculum.



Time and space should be provided for the members to get to know each other. Everybody's wishes should be respected. The exercises consist of games to learn each others' names and to get to know each other; the working methods and shared rules are agreed upon.

2. Getting going

The second meeting is spent by learning about circus and starting to practise. The class has a structure which will be repeated during every meeting.

3. Circus is fun!

Kolmannella kerralla paneudutaan lajien tekniseen
The third meeting is spent in technical training of the various disciplines. Another task is saying good things about oneself with the 'One-upmanship' exercise and learning to accept mistakes with improvisation exercises. There is a visitor, a circus artist, whom the participants can interview about the work.

4. Old acquaintances

The fourth meeting the participants practise with clubs, balls, poi, diabolo and rings. They practise physical contact with each other and working together, building pyramids, for example. At the end of the class everyone gives a mini show presenting what they can do.

Homework assignment: 1) Find out about the history of circus and write one page of text about something that catches your interest there. 2) Think of a question you could ask when the group visits a circus during the following class.



5. We're going to the circus!

The fifth meeting the group visits a circus (performance or presentation).

6. Group shows

The sixth meeting is spent in-group, trust and expression exercises. No circus disciplines are practised at all. The circus visit of the previous meeting is discussed, also using one-second statues. The homework assignment 'History of circus' is reviewed by means of drama. The texts of each participant are reviewed in small groups and one is selected to make a small performance for the other groups. This is the end of a course consisting of six meetings.

7. Clowns!

The seventh meeting, the participants redo the 'One-up-manship' exercise and continue with clowning. They look for their own clown and select a suitable costume and props for the character. Everyone will then present his or her new character in a fashion show. After that the group takes the stage in pairs to encounter another clown.

8. Practice makes perfect

The eighth meeting begins with discipline training. After that, the participants find a new way of use or purpose for a physical object and introduce it to the group. The acts for the show are rehearsed singly and in small groups.

9. Dress rehearsal for the show!

The ninth class begins with warm-up exercises and continues with planning and rehearsing the acts for the show. At the end, the acts are performed for the group.

10. The Climax!

The tenth meeting: Opening night! The group agrees when to meet for a wrapping-up party to watch the videos made of the show and to reminisce about the shared circus journey.



6.2. Fire art workshop of two/four periods

The duration of a fire art workshop for social circus is 10 hours. During the training the participants learn to work with at least one type of fire equipment, the basics of fire art and fire safety, and are able to continue the work independently if they so wish.

Target group:

- young substance abuse rehabilitants, immigrants
- group size: max. 14
- age limit: recommended minimum age 16 years
- duration: once a week for four weeks / weekend course, two days

Objectives:

- to generate captivating experiences not involving intoxicants
- develop self-expression
- provide positive tools for dealing with problems and difficulties in personal life
- support the development of a positive self-image, creativity and self-confidence
- improve concentration, physical coordination and familiarity with one's own body

The instructor brings the equipment and fuels needed for the practice and the necessary extinguishing equipment. The equipment is available to the participants throughout the course. The 10-hour course plan is indicative, and the instructors may adapt it to suit different situations and groups. To improve concentration it is advisable to take a small break after

every 90 minutes. In addition, the instructor should bring special equipment and plan other activity to maintain the group's interest.

Exercises

The start-up exercises can be done in- or outdoors. For twirling, the students must be trained in fire safety, including information on the history of the discipline, general aspects of fire safety, instructions for preventing injuries and in the case of accidents. The fire safety instructions are also distributed to the students in writing. Before using fire, the students will practise fire extinguishing with the equipment.

The clothing worn by the students is agreed on in advance and checked specifically at each class. A badly burned boot is a good example of what may happen if clothing or gear catches fire. The instructor should also bring extra pairs of rubber boots and non-flammable clothing that the students may borrow. Even less enthusiastic participants normally join in when the real activity begins.

After warming up, the participants may study the equipment at their own pace. Since they do not know what it can be used for, the training progresses through play and testing. At the point when the students begin to be frustrated with twirling the 'broom handle', a demonstration may help them stay focused. The instructors may demonstrate the work, or the students can watch a video.

Standard fire twirling is always the high point at the end of the course. Twirling with actual fire is practised outdoors. The participants may be divided into groups of three so that one does the twirling and the two oth-

ers watch the process. Each of them takes turns to practise twirling. In general, having responsibility will inspire and motivate the students.

The leaders need not always show an example. They may also demonstrate their technique at the end of the class. A demonstration at the beginning may be discouraging, especially in special groups. In a circus school, a demonstration at the beginning will provide additional inspiration and increase the prestige of the leaders.

Workshop of two periods

First day – 6 hours

Introduction and background of instructors
Round of introductions: participants talk about their own experiences of fire or circus
Fire group, history, presentation video
Stretching exercises
Basic poi movements, twirling directions, split time, equal time, wave and butterfly
1 staff; learning how to hold the staff – right- and left-hand 8 and front twirl
Two-staff twirling directions
Additional work with staffs, left- and right-hand reverse and twirls

Lunch break

Written safety instructions
Safety training, prevention, accidents (using a burnt boot as an illustration)
Review of basic moves
Discussion of experiences during the first day and instructions for clothing to be worn on the second day

Second day – 4 hours

Stretch-ups or warm-up play
Review of moves learned the previous day with staff and poi
Review of safety instructions
Presentation of fire safety equipment
Demonstration of extinguishing procedure
Practising extinguishing and first tryout of twirling with burning staff/poi (be sure to allow enough time for this)
Final discussion: "How do you feel now?"
Filling in of feedback forms

Workshop of four periods

1st meeting, 2 hours

The training is started outdoors with a demonstration by the instructors. Next, the group goes indoors to listen to a lecture on fire safety and to practise basic moves. Written fire safety instructions and the practice equipment are left with the students.

2nd meeting, 2 hours

Practising continues: basic moves and new moves for those who know the basics.

3rd meeting, 2 hours

Brief review of fire safety. Practising to extinguish equipment outdoors. At the end, a short fire exercise with two participants twirling at one time. Both instructors have one student to watch.

4th meeting, 2 hours

Short practice period indoors and fire exercises outdoors. Final high point: fire twirling.

6.3. Final party of circus club – timetable and programme

Sample programme for a two-hour party which may be adapted to a Christmas or an end-of-spring party.

- ◆ warming up, 15 minutes
- ◆ reviewing individual acts and walk-through with a partner / some do face painting, 25 minutes
- ◆ arranging stage and audience seats
- ◆ some do face painting, 15 minutes
- ◆ positioning of personal equipment, 5 minutes
- ◆ audience enters, show, 30 minutes
- ◆ bring-a-dish party / chatting and learning to know the children's parents, etc., about 30 minutes
- ◆ 'facial circle' including both children and adults, wishing a happy Christmas or a nice summer, 5 minutes

6.4. To support motivation

Various rewards can be used to boost motivation. Different incentives should be used on short- and long-term courses, as well as when teaching small children or young people. The following are a few examples of possible means of motivation.

Certificate of Level Achieved

After completing the training in a given discipline, the student is given a certificate (levels 1, 2, 3, 4, 5).

Intermediate feedback

The student receives spoken/written feedback at various points during the course.

Stickerboard

A stickerboard on the wall is used to display which tricks each student has learned.

Course certificate

Confirms the attendance of the student at the course. The certificate does not necessarily include an evaluation.

Student feedback

The students are given regular opportunities to provide spoken or written feedback on the instruction.

Visual feedback

The exercises and progress are monitored by taking photos or making videos.

Trick list

Every student has a personal list to keep a record of the tricks they have learned.

Club card

A personal card on which attendance and completion of circus disciplines is recorded.

Picking up peas – self-evaluation

Self-evaluation is carried out at the end of a class, possibly before or after the ending circle time. This is particularly appropriate for 6-to-13-year-olds.

In this method of self-evaluation, the student evaluates the success of the class from his/her own perspective and assesses the measure of peas that she/he would deserve for that class (quarter teaspoon/teaspoon/table spoon). In this way, the student can evaluate his or her behaviour and will calm down

because of the possibility of getting a reward. Everybody gathers peas into a large glass jar and once it is full, the students are allowed to request specific disciplines or games.

From the full jar the peas are transferred into a larger jar. If the larger jar is filled before the end of the course, the participants will win a special prize according to the wish of each, such as being allowed to practise a specific discipline, an ice cream, a soft drink, or a special cool-down relaxation.

Immediate feedback during class

Traffic light cards can be used to provide immediate visual feedback on the success and behaviour of a student. A 'coloured light' may be easier for many to grasp than speech, since the behaviour and its consequences are then clearly connected to each other.

Using the cards requires skill and consistence. If the instructor decides to use the traffic light cards, they must be used systematically. It is important to show a green card whenever there is success. Children can easily start worrying if they see no green light, as they think they have failed.

The green card is always used in positive contexts: when someone succeeds with something or behaves appropriately.

The yellow card means that the student should calm down – they are going in the wrong direction. Two yellow cards mean that the student must take some time away on the bench. A red card means an immediate period on the bench. Violence, for example, always leads immediately to the red card.

"I was puzzled at first when two boys gave me the thumbs-down during the final feedback for several times running. 'Now what's bugging you?' I asked. 'We never do well, and that's boring,' they said. We had been diligent with the red and yellow cards, but had forgotten the green one. Yet green is the most important of them."



6.5. Agenda for weekly and monthly meetings of circus instructors

Sample agenda for weekly meeting:

- situation of each group: attainment of goals, changes in goals, changes in group composition/dynamics, other changes in groups
- future events, seminars, meetings, visits, performances, etc.
- matters related to working hours
- exchange of good practices, reading matter, etc.
- review of instructors' professional skills: any new observations?

Sample themes for monthly meetings

1. Review of situation in groups and in social circus
2. Work with autumn/spring curricula, where needed
3. Dissemination of good practices
4. Return from autumn/spring break, plans for the end of term
5. Review of groups with a view to Christmas party / spring performance
6. Decision of main lines of autumn/spring show
7. Details of show
8. Final preparations on show day
9. Any other business

6.6. Sample co-operation agreement

Sorin Sirkus has drafted a preliminary sample agreement on co-operation, which is shown in the following.

1. Parties to the agreement:

Service Provider

Name		Domicile	
		Business ID-Code	
Address			
Telephone		E-mail	

Contact person 1		Contact person 2	
Name		Name	
Position		Position	
Telephone		Telephone	
E-mail		E-mail	

Purchaser:

Name		Domicile	
		Business ID-Code	
Address			
Telephone		E-mail	

Contact person 1		Contact person 2	
Name		Name	
Position		Position	
Telephone		Telephone	
E-mail		E-mail	

2. Content of agreement::

This Agreement covers the number of Social Circus workshops bought by the Purchaser from the Service Provider, the duration of each workshop, the number of students and teachers participating in the activity, the special characteristics of the group, the workshop objectives, the content of the workshops, general guidelines for the activity and the responsibilities and obligations of Purchaser and Service Provider..

3. Number, duration and number of participant of workshops

Period of validity of this agreement			
Number of workshops		Duration of each workshop	
Timetable of workshop series			
Number of students		Number of teachers	
Special characteristics of group			

4. Goals and content of workshops

The goals of the workshops depend on the participants and the number of workshops. The goal of short-term series (1 to 3 workshops) may be to develop a single skill or to provide a positive experience. In longer-term series there may be several goals, they may be more comprehensive and if necessary, they may also be modified to better suit the needs of the group.

One workshop session consists of beginning circle time, warming up, stretching exercises, circus discipline training, eventual cooling-down relaxation and ending circle time. During the beginning circle time all participants are asked if they have any news. The warm-up and cool-down exercises consist of games, play and practice, selected according to the target group and the goals of the activity. The ending circle time reviews the participants' feelings after the class and provides feedback.

The circus disciplines for the workshops are selected according to the participants, the goals of the activity, the specialities of the circus instructor and the level of challenge of each discipline. The most common disciplines for beginners are juggling with balls, rola roll and solo floor acrobatics. Many circus disciplines

require good motor skills and the ability to follow instructions, which is why they may not be suitable for the first workshops or for all groups. Such disciplines include the trampoline, the unicycle and air, pair and pyramid acrobatics.

Goals of the workshop series*	
Favourite disciplines in the workshop series	

* e.g., learning to work in a team, providing experiences of success, development of self-expression, development of interpersonal skills, development of motor skills, encouragement in creative experimenting

5. General guidelines for activities

On the basis of this agreement, Purchaser commits itself to the following guidelines:

- Circus activity is normal activity and not a reward for good behaviour, for example. The decision of whether or not a participant can take part in circus instruction is made in co-operation with the circus instructors.
- Each participant shall bring appropriate clothing to be worn during the circus class.
- Participants must look after their personal hygiene, e.g., feet and hands should be washed before the class.
- Participants must bring their own drinking bottles. During the circus classes, special breaks for taking a drink cannot be arranged.

6. Responsibilities and obligations of Purchaser and Service Provider

Under the terms of this agreement, Purchaser is responsible for the following:

- Participants are accompanied at the workshops with a sufficient number of the regular teachers and assistants of the group to ensure adequate order during the workshop. It is recommended that the teachers and assistants participate actively in the workshops.
- Insurance for the participants and compensation for equipment broken by the participants.
- Provision of eventual auxiliary equipment required by the participants during the workshop.
- Procurement of necessary permissions for participation and photographing/ videoing from the students' guardians The workshop series may include trips to give a performance, and the activity may be photographed or videoed for marketing purposes by Service Provider.
- Notify Service Provider of all changes affecting the workshop series by e-mail as soon as Purchaser becomes aware of such changes The cancellation of individual workshops and changes of contact persons shall be notified no less than two (2) weeks before the first workshop which the change affects. Changing the times of workshops and changes in the group composition and duration of workshops shall always be negotiated with Service Provider no less than two (2) weeks before the first workshop which the change affects.

Under the terms of this agreement, Service Provider is responsible for the following:

- Each workshop is led by 1–2 qualified circus instructors.
- The group is instructed in safe circus activity according to the goals agreed.
- Provision of safe and appropriate facilities and equipment for circus activity at Service Provider's facilities. Some of the workshops may also be arranged at Purchaser's facilities, in which case Purchaser is responsible for the facilities being suitable for circus activity.
- Protection of the participants' privacy and the confidentiality of matters disclosed to Service Provider.
- Notify Purchaser of all changes affecting the workshop series by e-mail as soon as Service Provider becomes aware of such changes The cancellation or postponement of individual workshops, as well as changes in the duration of workshops and changes of contact persons must be notified by Service Provider no less than two (2) weeks before the first workshop which the change affects.

6.7. Commercialisation of circus activity

Sofia-Charlotta Kakko, Pia Karkkola

What does this mean?

Commercialisation means that the services are so formulated as to be easy to buy and manage. In other words, for example, circus workshops are formulated according to concepts that are easy to repeat. The idea of commercialisation and business concepts may seem strange, but in fact, many associations are thinking about matters related to commercialisation as part of their normal activity. They are simply using a different terminology. Using the concepts of commercialisation as the basis for thinking provides an excellent tool for associations to evaluate and develop their activity.

Why should you commercialise?

- creating clear-cut packages clarifies your own activity
- it is easier to plan for resources when you have carefully thought out each element of the service
- it provides an opportunity to improve monitoring and measuring
- it gives you a more professional and reliable image and helps you market your services successfully
- it is easier to approach possible purchasers
- your services are more tangible
- assessment and purchasing are easier
- pricing and communications become easier

How do you do it?

Questions to guide the commercialisation of services:

1. Defining the operating environment

- **OPERATING ENVIRONMENT:** What is the financial, social and political environment in which your association operates and produces circus-related welfare services?

- **ACTOR:** What are you like as an actor? What is the relation of circus-related welfare services to your core activity?

- **TARGET GROUP:** Who belong to your target group? What is the life situation of your target group? What interests does your target group have? What is important for your target group?

- **OTHER SERVICE PROVIDERS:** What other service providers are active in your environment? What services do they offer for your target group? How is your service different from those of other service providers? Can you see any potential for co-operation with other service providers?

- **COMPETITORS:** Who are your immediate competitors? How do you differentiate your services from those of your competitors? Are your strengths apparent in your marketing? Do you use the various marketing channels as effectively as your competitors? Can you see any potential for co-operation with your competitors?

- **PARTNERS:** Who are your co-operation partners? What do your co-operation partners get from you? What do your co-operation partners give to you? Whom do you need as co-operation partners and why? Whom do you not need, and why?



2. Identifying the customer and customer needs

- **IDENTIFYING THE CUSTOMER:** Who is the service user? Who pays for the service? Who decides about purchasing the service?

- **IDENTIFYING CUSTOMER NEEDS:** What needs does the service user have? What needs does the body paying for the service have? What needs does the purchasing body have?

- **UNDERSTANDING CUSTOMER NEEDS:** What results does the service user expect? What results does the body paying for the service expect? What results does the purchasing body expect?

3. Finding solutions

- **USER'S NEEDS:** Think of each need at a time: How will you solve each of the user's needs? What characteristic in your service will promote solving each need? How do the service solutions provided by you differ from those of other service providers or competitors? What sales arguments can you use when marketing your services to the user?

- **PAYER'S NEEDS:** Think of each need at a time: How will you solve each of the payer's needs? What characteristic in your service will promote solving each need? How do the service solutions provided by you differ from those of other service providers or competitors? What sales arguments can you use when marketing your services to the payer?

- **NEEDS OF THE BODY DECIDING ABOUT THE PURCHASE :** Think of each need at a time: How will you solve each need of the purchasing body? What

characteristic in your service will promote solving each need? How do the service solutions provided by you differ from those of other service providers or competitors? What sales arguments can you use when marketing your services to the purchasing body?

4. Pricing

- **BASIS OF PRICING:** Will the service be self-financing? Will the association's core activity be financed through service activity? Will the association's service activity be financed through core activity? How much is the purchaser prepared to pay for the service?

- **FINANCING CHANNELS:** What financing options are there for providing the service? What financing channels will ensure that the activity is as long-term and continuous as possible? What different pricing principles will you draw up depending on the purchaser and target group?

- **COSTS INCURRED BY THE ACTIVITY:** What costs will be incurred because of the activity? How much resources will be needed for the following, for example:

- marketing the service
- planning and tailoring of the service within the circus
- co-operation meetings
- eventual travel costs and travel time
- renting in-house or external facilities for the circus classes
- preparing the facilities
- moving or purchasing equipment and replacing broken equipment
- instruction during the circus classes, using as many instructors as required

- cleaning the facilities
- arranging the final performance
- gathering feedback
- reporting

5. Designing the service

- **SERVICE DESCRIPTION:** What does the service include? How is it provided and who is in charge of providing it? How does the purchaser participate in customising the service? How is the service conceptualised in practice?

- **CORE SERVICE AND AUXILIARY SERVICES :** Are there auxiliary services priced separately, that you can annex to the core service being purchased?

- **QUALITY:** How is the service quality monitored? What experiences are there of providing the service, or what previous experiences do you have that will contribute to the provision of high-quality services? How is the service developed further?

- **SERVICE PATHWAY:** What service encounters occur during the service? How is the customer taken into account during every contact on the service pathway, beginning from the first contact to the gathering of feedback?



SOCIAL CIRCUS IN EUROPE

Riikka Åstrand

Circus has been used in Europe as a method to solve various social and educational challenges for several decades. In some European metropolises, social circus is already such a well-established form of activity that the city or local authorities know to contact social circus organisers as required and purchase circus courses to tackle various localised problems, such as putting a stop to young people's risk behaviour. Major social circus organisations have secured solid financial support from their own city and the long-term benefits of the activity are widely recognised. In addition to support from local authorities, social circus activities are often financed through other local project funds, grants from foundations and subsidies from ministries. Individual sponsor donations also form an important source of income for some social circus organisations.

Social circus activities are organised diversely in different countries for a wide variety of target groups and the activities are mostly formulated according to the types of challenges which the local community needs the circus to help tackle. Many social circus organisations have originated in the need to solve an urgent problem emerging in the local community.

Circus Elleboog was established in Amsterdam after the Second World War to bring security and provide a

sensible pastime for children who had lost one or both of their parents. Its activities developed gradually and currently the circus school aims to meet challenges brought about by high immigration, in particular, in Amsterdam's immigrant-dominated housing estates.

The French **Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde**, in turn, was established in Bagneux, a commune on the outskirts of Paris plagued by serious unemployment, to prevent cultural and social exclusion. The City of Bagneux was originally founded as a place to live for the hundreds of families of immigrant origin who had moved in to work at a large local factory. When the factory was closed down, the entire area was suddenly full of unemployed, rootless residents and the city needed some sort of new hope and something to do for the offspring of families stuck in a life with few prospects for the future. The circus school Le Plus Petit Cirque du Monde was established to meet this need.

Circus Upsala, based in St. Petersburg, was set up to help children living on the streets of the city. The circus school was established by two young women, one of whom was a German social worker and the other a Russian theatre director. They put together their first circus group by setting up with their circus equipment in the vicinity of an underground station

filled with street children. Some of the children became inspired to train and they gradually became the circus school's first group, which moved on to train in a nearby school gym. The circus school's leaders needed to learn many things before the activities got into full swing: they had to offer the children daily meals to give them energy to train and teach them to tell the time for them to be able to turn up at the right time. The most important thing for the children was that, for the first time, they were treated as human beings. They escaped from the shadows to the light – quite literally, as the group started to perform in their own tent within a few years. The circus school changed the lives of the participants who used to live on the streets and provided children doomed to a hopeless future with a chance to have a good life.

In Central Europe, social circus activities are often organised by circus organisations focusing on more traditional youth circus activities alongside social circus projects. Some circus schools clearly distinguish between youth circus and social circus activities, while others believe that youth circus is by nature a form of social circus. These opinions are influenced by the goals set by each organisation for its own activities. Some have very goal-oriented youth circus activities specifically geared towards learning circus skills. Youth circus is therefore considered to be clearly distinct from social circus, where the objectives are primarily related to aspects other than circus skills. Some circus schools, in turn, also consider skills to be of secondary importance in youth circus, while their primary objectives are related to supporting young people's growth by means of circus activity.



The Belfast Community Circus, for example, operating under the shadow of the troubled history of Northern Ireland, superficially resembles a traditional youth circus, but the circus itself feels that social circus forms the basis for all its activities. One of the most important objectives of its activities is to unite young people living in a city split in two by war and religion to work together, thus building a more harmonious future for the entire area. This being the case, although its activities are closer to traditional youth circus, its objectives make it more akin to a so-called social circus.

In the UK, social circus activities are also commonly referred to as 'community circus'. The term describes one of the key objectives of the activity, namely, genuine collaboration where no-one is excluded due to financial, ethnic, religious or physical qualities. Several community circus projects share a special objective of enabling children with various disabilities to participate in a recreational activity together with other children.

While the division between youth and social circus is not always quite clear-cut between different schools, the objectives of social circus are nevertheless perceived everywhere in relatively consistent terms. The primary goal of social circus is not to learn circus tricks; instead, circus is used as an instrument to focus on a range of other basic needs and skills. The most important objectives in various social circus projects include learning social skills, creating and improving team spirit and increasing self-esteem.

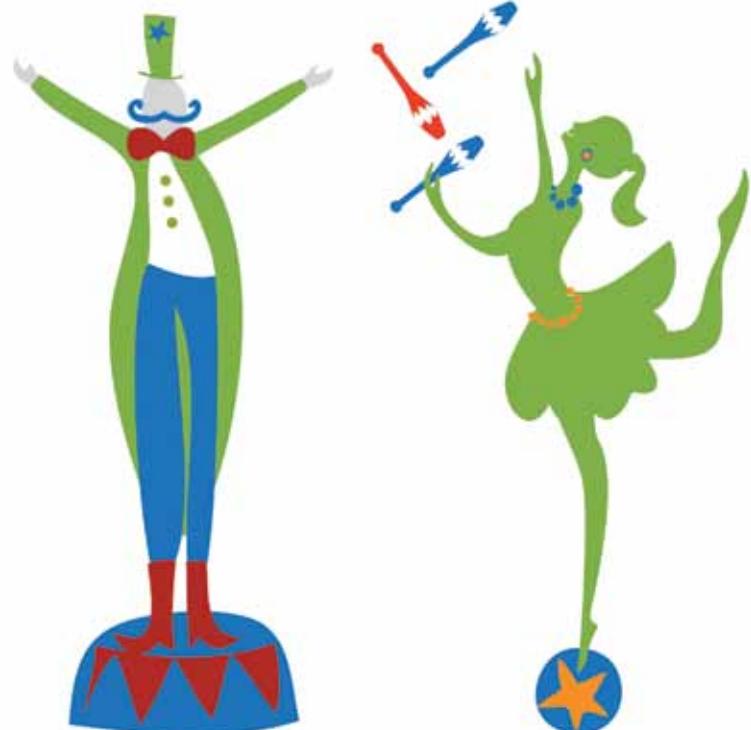
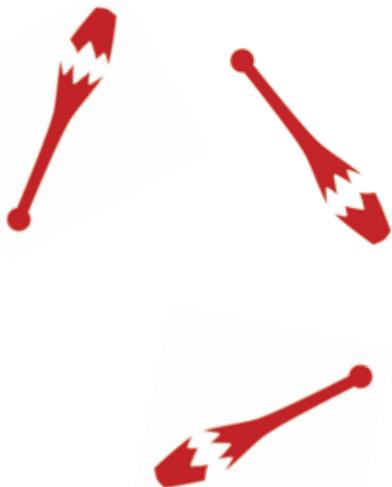
In addition to recreational after-school activities, social circus is also organised in other settings, such as schools and other institutions. Circus Elleboog has a

long-standing project with a school for special needs children, where children come to the circus once per week to practise tricks as part of their regular school timetable. The **Ecole de Cirque de Bruxelles** visits every afternoon club in a low-income residential area of Brussels, giving a circus class in every club once per week. Circus Upsala has started activities in St. Petersburg prisons, teaching circus skills to young inmates. The Berlin-based Cabuwazi, in turn, organises a wide variety of social circus projects with goals such as promoting a healthy diet by means of circus at local schools.

Social circus has offered support to a wide range of children and young people as well as entire neighbourhoods and other communities in Europe for dozens of years now. As an activity, social circus is only getting stronger as demand for projects to stimulate people and promote community spirit is constantly on the increase.

Links:

- <http://www.lepluspetticirquedumonde.fr>
- <http://www.belfastcircus.org/>
- <http://www.elleboog.nl/>
- <http://upsala-zirk.org/>
- <http://www.cabuwazi.de/>





SOCIAL CIRCUS IN EUROPE

Riikka Åstrand

CIRCUS ELLEBOOG - AMSTERDAM

Established: 1949

Field of activity: Youth circus and social circus projects..

Operates in Amsterdam: two buildings in its own use, one located in the city centre. Additionally, regular time slots in 25 other gyms around the city.

Form of activity: association

Number of employees: office workers (32 hrs/wk) and circus instructors (18–20 hrs/wk); 38 employees in total, 15 voluntary workers and 25 trainees

Number of participants:

Weekly open teaching groups: about 900 participants per week

School groups: about 900 participants per week, annual total of 11,000 participants

Artistic activities: Three different performing groups of young people, operating in different parts of Amsterdam. The groups perform in theatres and tour the Netherlands.

Annual budget: €1.4 million

Funding sources: €800,000 from the City of Amsterdam, plus various foundations and project funds, participation fees, Cirque du Soleil social circus fund.

Role of social circus in the activities:

The building in the centre of Amsterdam hosts a fee-charging youth circus, mostly catering for children from middle-class families. All the association's other activities are social circus activities. Projects with various special groups in Amsterdam's immigrant-dominated housing estates. Participation fees for the 'regular youth circus' amount to €220 per year, while social circus charges €70 per year (may be adjusted flexibly as required). The circus also has plenty of co-operation projects with after-school activities.

Key partners for social circus: City of Amsterdam and local authorities.

EXAMPLE PROJECT:

A circus school for Moroccan fathers and their children, also including Dutch fathers with their children

Starting point: The City of Amsterdam was concerned about the uncontrollable wave of violence that had flared up in a housing estate with a predominantly Moroccan population. Families no longer had any authority over their young people. The local administration asked Circus Ellebook for help to solve the problem.

Project objectives:

- to get fathers of families of Moroccan origin to create contact with their children in order to increase the well-being of families and

- make it easier to bring up their children;
- to bring fathers and children of immigrant and Dutch origins together, thus offering opportunities to learn from each other's good practices for interaction between fathers and children;
- to develop trust and co-operation skills and to have fun together.

Course and class content: Circus training and plenty of contact exercises and different types of play. At the end of the course, everyone – fathers and children together – participates in a public performance intended for their families and friends.

Course structure:

- 12 fathers with their children participating
- Local school gym as a training space
- One group meets 10 times
- Course taught by a male and a female instructor of Moroccan origin; it is important to have both male and female instructors for cultural reasons

Project funding: Course funded by a local authority

Project outlook: The course has been organised eight times and is currently becoming a permanent part of activities.

ECOLE DU CIRQUE DU BRUXELLES

Established: 1982

Field of activity: Youth circus, circus instructor training, social circus projects, international projects

Operates in Brussels

Form of activity: association

Number of employees: 20 full-time office and project workers and about 60 hourly paid instructors teaching 5 trainees in their circus classes

Number of participants: About 1,500 participants annually in different courses: weekly courses, holiday courses, etc.

Artistic activities: Some performances in youth circus activities

Annual budget and funding sources: The social circus budget can be equated with the cost of one full-time employee's yearly working hours, funded by the City of Brussels. As a whole, the activities receive funding from the Belgian French Community, a ministry and through participation fees.

Role of social circus in the activities: Two sides:

Cirque Quartier and Handy Cirque

- The neighbourhood circus, Cirque Quartier, offers circus for the local community in a poor and restless city district. The project includes open training sessions organised every week for local children, an extensive project at nearby after-school clubs and a youth project combining circus and basketball.
- Handy Cirque is circus instruction provided for 15 groups of children with disabilities.

EXAMPLE PROJECT:

Neighbourhood Circus: open training sessions

Starting point: The circus school operates in one of the most notorious districts of Brussels. The area is restless and is home to numerous low-income families. In order to blend in as part of the local community, the circus has set up open circus training called 'Espace Roulette' for local children. In addition, the circus organises an annual festival for local residents.

Project objectives:

- to become involved in the local community, so that the circus would not remain an isolated enclave in the area;
- to provide local children with an opportunity to participate in a low-threshold leisure activity;
- to develop local children's self-esteem and positive identity.

Course and class content:

- The circus provides normal youth circus instruction, but training sessions are open to all interested participants.

Course structure:

- There are as many children as happen to turn up (2-20 depending on the week).
- The training space is the circus school's own gym located in the midst of an unruly residential area.
- Training sessions held once per week.
- There is a 50 cent entrance fee aiming to ensure participants' motivation.
- The circus aims to make it possible for the most motivated participants to transfer to regular youth circus groups by charging reduced fees, for example

Project outlook: The course is a permanent part of the circus school's activities.

ALBERT AND FRIENDS INSTANT CIRCUS

Established: association in 1983, charity in 1997

Area of activity: mostly the London area

Form of activity: both a company and an association

Number of employees:

full-time: 2

part-time: 2

voluntary: 15-20

hourly paid/freelance: 2

Number of participants:

Regular weekly teaching groups: 250

Short courses: 6,000

Annual total: about 6,300

Artistic activities: One performing group. One production running for 12 months, small gigs at different events, tours to Edinburgh every year and outside the UK several times per year.

Annual budget: about €250,000

Funding sources: An operating grant from Arts Council England (€88,000), small discretionary grants from foundations and other such bodies (€60,000), project grants from the British Council, fees from workshops, participant fees, performance fees (very small proportion), small private donations, fund-raising events

Role of social circus in the activities: Social circus currently accounts for 75% of work. Funding was previously based more on participant fees, but now the circus receives more grants for its activities and participants do not always have to pay a fee. All work carried out at schools is social circus: target groups include children with behavioural problems and disabilities and those from low-income areas.

Key partners for social circus: Schools, youth centres, social organisations, disability groups, special schools' own association 'Mousetrap', the British Safety Council, foundations, funds and educational institutions, local authorities and theatre and dance groups.

Projects implemented:

- A five-year period of circus instruction at a school involving the same group of 35 students until the age of 11, sessions held once per week, several performances over the years. The school is very multicultural (56 different languages) and most of the children are in an economically disadvantaged position.
- Circus provided at the multicultural school's after-school club once per week throughout the school year..
- Circus as part of a special school's curriculum for children aged 11 to 14 throughout the school year. Participants with learning difficulties and physical disabilities. Ended with a performance at an international festival..
- Family projects: an after-school circus school with families.

EXAMPLE PROJECT: Circus in a school environment

Starting point: A school asked Albert & Friends to offer students a non-formal kinaesthetic learning environment by means of circus, in order to provide support for language problems, behavioural problems and learning difficulties.

Project objectives: To build up children's positive self-esteem and social skills and to integrate children as part of Albert & Friends' open circus school group.

Over a four-year period, children's attention span, behaviour, teamwork skills and language skills have improved, while their tolerance towards others has increased. Some of this development is thanks to circus classes.

Course and class content: A warm-up game (usually object manipulation or movement as the theme), circus training (aerial acrobatics, balancing and/or object manipulation), ending with a physical game. The course involves performances and, subsequently, games to improve drama and expression skills. Ends with a performance for families and friends – possible performance at a festival.

Course structure: 35 students, at least 3 circus instructors, with the class teacher involved as a participant on occasion.

A 1.5-hour session once per week, course duration generally 30 weeks per year.

Project funding: Some funding from Albert & Friends' core funding, the school compensated part of instruction costs through a swap, i.e. by making its own gym available for the circus school's other uses; partly funded by a local authority's project.

Project outlook: A second equivalent project is ongoing, currently in its second year. A more general curriculum for equivalent activities has been prepared and tested as part of this project. Albert & Friends also aims to transfer the project to other schools as part of physical education within the curriculum.

UPSALA CIRCUS

Established: 2000

Area of activity: St. Petersburg

Form of activity: association

Number of employees:

full-time: 6

part-time: 8 (6–8 hrs/wk)

voluntary: 4

Number of participants:

Regular weekly teaching groups: 60

Short courses: 0

Annual total: 60

Artistic activities: Performances by the main circus group, smaller side project performances, older students' performances

Annual budget: €132,000

Funding sources: Sponsors, etc.

Role of social circus in the activities:

Circus pedagogy is a method to socialise children. The main idea is to offer such extreme experiences through circus that replace street life.

Key partners for social circus: Animation Studio 'Da', Circus Helsinki

EXAMPLE PROJECT:

Starting point: Children are growing up in families with drug and alcohol problems. Circus Upsala provides help in teaching social skills and in schooling, health care and leisure activities.

Objectives: To give children a new lease of life. It's simple, it's brilliant and it works.

Group size: 20 students

Class content: Training in circus acrobatics, modern dance and theatre

Class structure: Training sessions held 5–7 times per week.

Project funding: European funding, two major Russian corporate sponsors, donations

Project outlook: The project has now operated for 11 years. Results have been surprisingly good. Former street children have been given a new lease of life thanks to the project. The project's outlook is bright: a big new tent and three new groups (special children, children from an orphanage and a basic group) are starting out and the Upsala Circus is also opening a socio-cultural centre.



CABUWAZI

Established: 1994

Area of activity: Tents and buildings in five different places in Berlin

Form of activity: Non-profit company

Number of employees:

full-time: 34

part-time: 10

voluntary: 15

hourly paid/freelance: 50

Number of participants:

Regular weekly teaching groups: 1,000 regular participants

Short courses: 5,000 participants per year

Annual total: about 6,000

Artistic activities: Each regularly training circus group is also ready to perform. Groups have 3–10 performances twice per year: before Christmas and in the spring/summer. Additionally, some small gigs at corporate events, etc.

Annual budget: About €2 million

Funding sources: From four levels of administration: local, regional, national (for special projects from the Ministry of Health, for example), the EU (EVS, youth exchange, ESF). In addition, local and regional grants from the Ministry of Labour, foundations, German National and Regional Youth Circus Networks, donations from parents, corporate sponsors, performance fees, ticket revenue and revenue from tent rentals.

Role of social circus in the activities:

Activities are open to everyone – all circus is social circus.

Key partners for social circus: Primary schools in troubled areas with many children of immigrant origin and those with disabilities, for example; day-care centres, a local employment office and youth employment projects, the immigration office, other local youth organisations, joint projects of schools and youth organisations.

Projects implemented:

- Working with schools and day-care centres in the mornings or afternoons: a group of schoolchildren spends a whole week in the tent; a group of schoolchildren visits once per week; circus instructors teach at a school once a week; children visit the tent during their 1.5-hour break from school.
- Afternoon circus from 2.30 pm to 7 pm: regular open groups + groups divided by circus discipline. Some attend once/twice per week, others come every afternoon.
- Integration into the world of work for unemployed young adults, from 2 weeks to one year (incl. unemployed people with difficulties finding employment, practical training periods through school, community service instead of prison).

CARAVAN

The European youth circus and education network CARAVAN has carried out a two-year research project on the theme of social circus training, and has established a European framework of competences for social circus trainers. The results of this project, supported by the Leonardo programme of the European Commission, is downloadable from the website: www.caravancircusnetwork.eu.

CIRCUSES INVOLVED IN THE PROJECT:

CIRKO CENTER FOR NEW CIRCUS

Established: 2002

Area of activity: Helsinki

Form of activity: association

Number of employees: 4 full-time employees, about 60 hourly paid/temp workers per year
Number of participants: no weekly courses

Artistic activities: 3 own professional festivals, about 10 premieres per year, about 100 performances and 10,000 spectators every year

Annual budget: about €600,000

Funding sources: Ministry of Education and Culture, City of Helsinki, own revenue, grants from foundations

Role of social circus in the activities: ESF project activity

Key partners for social circus: Cities of Helsinki and Vantaa, various agencies as part of the neighbourhood circus in Vantaa and Vuosaari.

Projects implemented:

- A neighbourhood circus project in Vantaa (duration 18 months, continues in autumn 2011 with funding from the Centre for Economic

Development, Transport and the Environment) and Vuosaari (duration 2 years, continues for one group). School circus activities as part of the neighbourhood circus in Vantaa and Vuosaari.

- Family circus at a Vantaa family rehabilitation centre in the spring of 2011.
- Children's home circus in the winter of 2010.
- Family circus at the Vuosaari family support centre.
- Fire art workshops at the youth activity centre Vamos (there are hopes of continuing the project and the same concept is used to launch activities in youth workshops operating under the Education Department in the autumn of 2011, with funding from the Education Department's own budget)
- Pelimanni day-care circus in the spring of 2011 (co-operation will continue in the autumn with a grant received by the day-care centre and may also evolve into a family circus)

EXAMPLE PROJECT: Neighbourhood circus

Starting point: To offer leisure activities for children and young people on the Koivukylä estate in Vantaa, who had few recreational opportunities before. The venue is a local youth centre.

Project objectives: To provide a fun and instructive regular leisure activity free of charge for children and young people; to team up participants and commit them to the new activity; to also increase awareness of circus activities within the children's wider community by organising circus performances.



Course and class content: Plenty of play, doing things together, performance rehearsals, acrobatics and juggling, complete with aerial acrobatics and practising trampoline tricks.

Course structure: A continuous leisure activity with training sessions held once per week for 1 h 15 min. A total of three circus groups at the youth centre concerned (2 children's groups and 1 youth group).

Project funding: The Social Circus project in 2009–2011; the Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment in autumn 2011.

Project outlook: The aim is to offer a continuing opportunity to participate in circus activities in Koivukylä even after the project.

ESPOO SCHOOL OF PERFORMING ARTS

Established: 1999

Field of activity: basic education in circus and theatre

Form of activity: association

Number of employees: 6 full-time workers (administration and full-time teachers), 8 hourly paid teachers

Number of participants: basic education in the arts, wellness groups, camps and short courses, totalling about 650 people per year

Artistic activities: student performances

Annual budget: about €650,000

Funding sources: City of Espoo operating and rental grants, government transfer from the Ministry of Edu-

cation and Culture, tuition and course fees .

Role of social circus in the activities:

Preventive and rehabilitative art education forms part of the school's activities. Espoo School of Performing Arts participated in the Social Circus project co-ordinated by the University of Tampere in 2009–2011. Inspired by the project, the school also organised circus activities for elderly people in an Espoo service housing unit under the name Ikkisirkus ('Senior Circus'). After the project, the activities will be continued in service housing units and possibly in other forms as well, to be further specified during the autumn of 2011.

Key partners for social circus: City of Espoo Järvenperä School

EXAMPLE PROJECT: Circus instruction for children and young people with severe multiple disabilities

Starting point: Järvenperä School is home to a teaching group providing integrated education for children with special motor difficulties, etc. The teaching group had requested circus instruction. Co-operation with the integrated education group had been planned before, but the Social Circus project made it possible to launch co-operation.

Project objectives: Circus training without therapeutic objectives; the starting point was to have fun and bring joy through new experiences. By trying out circus activities, participants developed their motor skills and body control.

Course and class content: Trampoline training formed the core theme running through all circus training and provided an excellent way to develop students' balancing skills and increase their confidence in their own body. In addition to trampoline training, the course introduced various circus skills,



such as hoops, the trapeze, the tightrope and poi. Students were then allowed to choose their preferred circus discipline for the 2011 spring performance. Järvenperä School assistants participated in circus classes to help students. Training involved plenty of mental exercises as part of warm-up and stretching in particular. The structure of a class was mostly equivalent to regular circus classes within basic education in the arts, albeit the skills included in training were much simpler.

Course structure: On average, the group received instruction once per week in the Järvenperä School's circus room during the 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 school years.

Project funding: The project was part of an ESF project.

Project outlook: Co-operation with the school will continue in the future as well.

FIRE SHOW GROUP FLAMMA

Established: 2002

Field of activity: Fire and light art

Form of activity: association

Number of employees: No paid employees; salaries are paid by the Ajan Pyörä co-operative where Flamma is a member.

Number of participants: In 2010, the group had 53 members, with about 15 people participating in weekly training sessions.

Artistic activities: About 100 fire art shows all over Finland in 2010, about 10 fire theatre performances

per year in the Pyynikki Summer Theatre; training courses on the basics of fire art.

Annual budget: €17,200

Funding sources: Grants, membership fees and performance proceeds

Role of social circus in the activities:

In 2009, Flamma joined an ESF project entitled 'Social Circus', which was co-ordinated by the Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre and funded by the Lapland Centre for Economic Development, Transport and the Environment. As part of the project, Flamma has organised short circus courses for young substance abuse rehabilitants, for example, in Tampere during 2010–2011. Flamma also provides social circus instruction for groups outside and after the project by prior arrangement.

Key partners for social circus: Villa Hockey, A-kilta ('A Clinic')

Projects implemented: eight 10-hour workshops on the basics of fire art.

EXAMPLE PROJECT: A 9-hour workshop on the basics of fire art for young substance abuse rehabilitants (aged 17–28) at Villa Hockey

Starting point: The group consisted of 6 new participants and 8 of those who had already completed Flamma's basic course, which means that this was a combined basic and advanced course. The aim was to inspire new participants' interest in the art and teach the basic poi and staff movements, while also stimulating the more experienced participants with new tools and tricks.



Project objectives: Flamma's workshop introduces students to the basics of fire art and fire safety. The aim is to offer young people exciting experiences that do not involve substances, help them with self-expression and development of their self-esteem, while also providing positive tools to deal with problems and difficulties in their own lives. A further aim is to promote development of a positive self-image, creativity and self-confidence. The purpose of instruction is to develop participants' concentration, body coordination and knowledge of their own bodies.

The aim is for young people to learn to work with at least one type of fire equipment and the basics of fire art and fire safety during the training, and be able to continue the work independently if they so wish.

Class and course content and course structure:

- Introduction of the instructors and the course
- A round of questions to course participants: experiences of circus/fire, expectations
- Flamma's presentation + video
- Warm-up
- Basic staff movements, complete with new movements
- Lunch break
- Basic poi movements
- Other tools: hoop, fans, rope dart, sword, skipping ropes, devil stick, stilts
- Coffee break
- Lecture on fire safety
- Practice in extinguishing fires
- Fire training
- Equipment transport, cleaning
- Final stretching
- Feedback

Project funding: The project was part of an ESF project.

Project outlook: Flamma will organise training courses in the future, provided that there is enough demand.

**OULUN TÄHTISIRKUS
(‘OULU STAR CIRCUS ASSOCIATION’)**

Established: 2008 (known as Stellan sirkuskoulu, or ‘Stella’s Circus School’, from 2000 to 2008)

Field of activity: circus instruction and performance activities

Form of activity: non-profit association

Number of employees: 2 part-time, 3 hourly paid

Number of participants: 120 weekly students, about 50 students on short courses every year

Artistic activities: Summer circus Titaanit ('The Titans'), July 2011; 1–2 productions every year involving circus school students and instructors

Annual budget: about €60,000

Funding sources: 50% from student fees, proceeds from training and performance fees; 50% from grants (from the City of Oulu, for example)

Role of social circus in the activities:

We are involved in the Social Circus and Effective Circus projects and sell social circus services to local authorities and communities.

Key partners: City of Oulu Educational and Cultural Services; Luovi Vocational College; associations and other NGOs, such as Hyvän Mielen Talo and Nuorten Ystäväät

Projects implemented: As part of the Social Circus project, circus instruction for immigrant and special education classes at Koskela Primary School; circus instruction for immigrant girls at Terva-Toppila Lower Secondary School; and circus instruction at Heinätori Special School and for a group of students with intellectual disabilities at Luovi Vocational College

EXAMPLE PROJECT:

Starting point: The circus provided regular weekly circus instruction for an immigrant class at Koskela Primary School, combined with a small teaching group of native Finnish children. Instruction continued through two school years.

Project objectives: To test and seek social circus teaching methods, to offer pleasant circus experiences and to increase awareness of circus at the school.

Class and course content and course structure: Students were provided with opportunities to try out different circus techniques: acrobatics, hoops, balancing and juggling. Instruction also made use of methods of drama pedagogy and plenty of play. In the spring of the first year, the group prepared a performance combining shadow play and circus. Students and their teachers made some circus equipment and props for the performance. Circus practice continued for a second year.

Project funding: The Social Circus project was funded in Oulu by the City of Oulu, Oulun Tähtisirkus and Koskela School.

Project outlook: A regular circus club will be launched at Koskela School in the autumn of 2011, with funding from the municipal Education Services. Several organisations have purchased wellness services relating to social circus, mostly short courses, from Oulun Tähtisirkus.

CULTURAL CENTRE PII POO FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Established: 2005

Area of activity: Tampere Region/nationwide

Form of activity: association

Number of employees: 2 full-time, 1 part-time, 8–15 freelancers depending on the month

Number of participants: about 26,000 visitors/participants per year

Artistic activities: Participants' performances in different projects

Annual budget: about €280,000

Funding sources: An 'Aladdin's Lamp' cultural grant from the Ministry of Education and Culture, Municipality of Lempäälä cultural education programme, funding from individual projects and assignments (grants, commercial services), own revenue (open cultural centre activities for children and young people)

Role of social circus in the activities:

Social circus activities realise all the objectives of Pii Poo's basic operational ideology and policies. Social circus is an inclusive and art-driven activity implemented on the participants' own terms with a view to promoting their well-being. Working with social circus forms a significant part of Pii Poo's development work for various special needs groups. Social circus work has been the guiding star for development work and it has also opened up doors for other activities. Pii Poo wants to promote the use of different art forms in support of well-being.





photo: Susanna Lyy



Key partners for social circus: Municipality of Lempäälä, City of Tampere, in particular cultural services for institutional care units; University of Tampere Centre for Practise as Research in Theatre; Malike service provided by the Finnish Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities; Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences (vocational special needs teacher training); partner circuses; the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Aladdin's Lamp Network.

Projects implemented:

- Schools' cultural education programmes: Oma Sirkus ('Own Circus') project in Lempäälä; Sirkus Soikoon ('Resounding Circus') project as part of the City of Tampere Taidekaari ('Art Arc') project (both were projects for special education classes lasting one school year)
- Äijä-sirkus ('Lads' Circus') for young men in need of special support in co-operation with Tampere City Mission
- Ikäsirkus ('Senior Circus') for groups of retirement home residents through the City of Tampere Kulttuurikaari ('Cultural Arc') project
- Kaveri-sirkus ('Buddy Circus') for after-school groups
- Family circus for families with at least one special needs child and development of the family circus methodology
- PikkuSirkus ('Little Circus') for families using social services
- Circus in Action (an optional subject group of lower-secondary students)
- Workshops promoting well-being at work, Tsemppisirkus ('Spurring Circus') for staff working in care institutions
- Social circus methodology training for vocational special needs teachers (Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences)

- Circus groups for babies and toddlers (open groups)

EXAMPLE PROJECT: Senior Circus

Starting point: As the social circus work carried out with children and young people produced good experiences, Pii Poo wanted to test the method with other target groups as well. Pii Poo suggested a joint social circus pilot for elderly people to the City of Tampere Kulttuurikaari ('Cultural Arc') project. We were able to recruit a hospital psychogeriatric department and residents of the Koukkuniemi retirement home to participate in the project.

Project objectives: To mobilise elderly people, offer experiences of success and support well-being; to bring joy, increase interaction between nurses and clients; and to introduce new tools for communication.

Course and class content: The workshop consisted of a social warm-up game, an introduction to circus disciplines, trying out different types of equipment, performance exercises and cool-down relaxation. During the course, the group prepared a performance given to an audience of invited guests.

Course structure: To begin with, there was an information meeting for staff, followed by two training sessions for staff members. The course covered 10 two-hour workshops for nurse/patient pairs or pairs of residents.

Project funding: The City of Tampere Kulttuurikaari/Ikäkaste project ('Cultural Arc'/'Senior Immersion')

Project outlook: Based on project feedback, objectives were achieved. Inspired and encouraged by this feedback, a RAI research project will be launched in co-operation with the University of Oulu, the City of Tampere institutional care services and the Koukkunie-



mi retirement home to study the effects of circus instruction for elderly people. The Senior Circus project has also inspired Pii Poo to test introducing other art forms into retirement homes or other elderly services in keeping with the good practices identified during the project. The project has also attracted wider interest in similar activities in other institutional care units.

SORIN SIRKUS

Established: 1985

Form of activity: association

Number of employees: 10 instructors on a monthly salary, 8 hourly paid instructors, complete with project-specific workers and about 25 voluntary workers at different events

Number of participants: about 300 weekly students; students on short courses, at summer camps, in adults' circus groups, and visiting school classes and social circus participants totalling about 700 people
Artistic activities: About 100 individual performances at different events every year. In addition, the annual Christmas show plays a significant role in terms of both visibility and finances.

Annual budget: €862 000

Funding sources: The Ministry of Education and Culture, the City of Tampere, student and course fees, performance fees and individual grants

Role of social circus in the activities: Social circus is primarily a day-time activity. In the evenings, the facilities are used by groups in basic education in the arts. In the future, social circus activities may also be

organised in other facilities. Social circus is an important and developing part of Sorin Sirkus activities.

Key partners for social circus: The University of Tampere, the Caravan network, partner schools and clients.

Projects implemented: Social circus instruction lasting 1–2 school terms has been provided for the following participants:

- a lower-secondary class of students with Asperger's syndrome;
- lower-secondary classes in flexible basic education;
- a neuropsychological special education group for primary-school children;
- lower-secondary level special education classes;
- a lower-secondary immigrant class;
- a supported pre-primary class.
- Additionally, short workshops at a children's home and for young unemployed people.

EXAMPLE PROJECT: Lower-secondary level special education class for boys, one school year

Starting point: The physical education classes of this all-boys special education group were considered to be difficult. The boys had self-esteem issues and ample experiences of failure in life and at school. In addition, individualism and authority issues were pronounced in the class. Sorin Sirkus had already worked with a flexible education group at the same school and the word about the benefits of the activity got out. The boys' special class teacher wanted to try out circus with the group.

Project objectives: Motivation from a new activity, successes through circus, finding trust, improving



motor functions, raising teamwork and social skills

Course and class content: Gaining insight into teamwork through individual exercises. Classes started with warming up and concrete physical exercise. During the term, participants first got a taste of each circus discipline and were then allowed to pick their own favourite. The course ended with a circus performance starring all social circus groups.

Course structure: 27 classes, once per week, 1.5–2 hours per session; from autumn to spring, with 12 and 15 classes respectively.

Project funding: The project was part of an ESF project.

Project outlook: The students in the class finished their basic education and the project ended, but the circus is planning co-operation with the same teacher and a new class.

SIRKUS SUPIAINEN ('CIRCUS SUPIAINEN')

Established: 1997

Field of activity: Performance activities, instruction and working with audiences and event organisation nationally and internationally

Form of activity: association

Number of employees: 1 full-time producer, an instructor, 1–4 circus instructors at camps and clubs and 1–3 voluntary workers

Number of participants: 7 students in children's circus, 1.5 hrs/wk. Additionally, some camps with about 20 students each.

Artistic activities: In its performances, Sirkus Supiainen combines circus, theatre, puppet theatre and performing arts. In 2010, the circus had two of its own works on tour, while also performing at individual events and in collaboration productions.

Annual budget: about €50,000

Funding sources: Own revenue (proceeds from performance activities, camp and course fees, event participation fees and own fund-raising revenue), complete with occasional grants from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, for example.

Role of social circus in the activities: In addition to artistic work, social circus forms a considerable part of activities in the form of individual circus clubs and camps where participants include special needs students.

Key partners for social circus: Schools and parents

Projects implemented: annual clubs and camps

EXAMPLE PROJECT:

Starting point: The 'unruly' boys at a relatively large school needed an interesting supervised activity.

Project objectives: Identifying one's own body sensations, finding and improving the ability to concentrate, interesting and challenging learning, co-operation, enhancing self-esteem.

Course and class content: Diabolo juggling techniques

Course structure: Warming up, a new trick, training and performing old tricks on one's own; sharing.

Project funding: The ESF project and a local school.

Project outlook: The project will continue.

LITERATURE RELATED TO THE TOPIC

Riikka Åstrand

General circus literature

Circus for everyone: Circus learning around the world. Author: Robert Sugarman. Publisher: Mountainside Press, 2001.

The book lists a large number of various youth circus projects around the world and relates stories and anecdotes about learning circus skills.

Ihmeen väkeä. Suomalaisen sirkusen sankaritarinoita. [Extraordinary people. Heroic tales from Finnish circus. In Finnish.] Author: Tomi Purovaara. Publisher: Like, 2008.

The book explores the recent history of Finnish circus through interviews with 27 different actors in the circus field.

Jalat tukevasti ilmassa. [Feet firmly up in the air. In Finnish.] Author: Pentti Heinonen. Publisher: Minerva Kustannus Oy, 2004. *An autobiographical work on the vagabond life of a Finnish acrobat couple.*

The Many Worlds of Circus. Editor: Robert Sugarman. Publisher: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.

This US series of articles compiles different authors' views on the history of circus and performances.

Pieni sirkusopas. Sirkusopetusmateriaali peruskoulun opettajille. [A small guide to circus. Circus instruction material for comprehensive school teachers. In Finnish.] Author: Mette Ylikorva. Publisher: Tampereen Taidekaari, 2011. *A practical guidebook to doing circus at comprehensive school, for example.*

Sirkusen vallankumous. [Finnish translation of the French original: Avant-garde, Cirque ! Les arts de la piste en révolution.] Editor: Jean-Michel Guy. Publisher: Cirko – Centre for New Circus/Like, 2005.

A French series of articles providing an extensive overview of the circus field from artistic, pedagogical, sociological as well as economic perspectives.

Sirkuselämää. Suomalainen sirkus kautta aikojen. [Circus life. Finnish circus through the ages. In Finnish.] Author: Eero Taivalsaari. Publisher: Otava, 2006.

History of Finnish circus.

Sirkuspyramidi [Circus pyramid] magazines [In Finnish]. Publisher: Finnish Youth Circus Association.

The Circus pyramid magazines contain contextualising articles about different phenomena in circus from Finland and around the world, including several articles about social circus.

Sirkustaitojen käsikirja. [A handbook of circus skills. In Finnish.] Authors: Markku Aulanko & Kari Nieminen. Publisher: Otava, 1989.

A basic guide to the world of circus tricks.

Teatteri [Finnish Theatre Magazine] 3/2011: A special issue on circus. Publisher: Kustannusosakeyhtiö Teatteri. *The special circus issue of the Finnish Theatre Magazine includes articles on topics such as contemporary circus, different circus groups and applied circus.*

Research papers and reports touching on the topic of social circus:

Cirque du Monde in Mexico City: breathing new life into action for young people in difficult situations. Authors: Jacinthe Rivard, Guy Bourgeault & Céline Mercier. Published in the International Social Science Journal (Volume 61, Issue 199, pages 181–194, March 2010).

The article describes the practices included in the action programme of a social circus called 'Cirque du Monde' and social circus in young people's lives.

Le mouvement paradigmatic autour du phénomène des jeunes qui vivent des difficultés: L'exemple du programme Cirque du Monde. [The paradigmatic movement around the phenomenon of young people experiencing difficulties: The example of the Cirque du Monde programme. In French.] Author: Jacinthe Rivard. Publisher: Université de Montréal, 2010.

This doctoral thesis seeks answers to the problems faced by young people in every big city by exploring the phenomenon by means of the action programme of a social circus called 'Cirque du Monde' from an international perspective, making use of many different theories.

"Mustakin olis voinu tulla joku huligaani jos en mä olis siihen sirkukseen jumittunut". Harrastustoiminta syrjäytymisen ehkäisijänä – tapaustutkimus Suvelan sirkuksesta ja Iceheartsista. [I'd probably have ended up being some sort of hooligan if I hadn't become stuck in this circus'. The role of recreational activity in prevention of exclusion – A case study on Suvela Circus and the Icehearts. In Finnish.] Author: Riikka Åstrand. University of Helsinki, 2007.

A Master's thesis exploring areas such as the effects of a circus school in young people's growth process and the properties of recreational activity that prevent social exclusion.

Negotiating identity through risk: a community circus model for evoking change and empowering youth. Author: Sharon McCutcheo, Faculty of Arts, Charles Stuart University, 2003.

A Master's thesis exploring what effects circus has and how and why circus empowers a community and an individual in a school environment.

Research project on social circus programs. How social circus programs and institutions are promoting and respecting children's rights. Author: Mota Marianthi. Freie Universität Berlin.

A German Master's thesis exploring the work of the Berlin-based Circus School Cabuwazi in particular.

Why Circus Works. Author: Reginald Bolton. Publisher: Murdoch University, 2004.

A doctoral thesis where the author describes how circus works both on the basis of his own experiences and through several other examples.

Youth circus: Exploring the production process behind performances. Author: Owen Gaynor, 2002. (www.circusarts.org.uk/i-want-to/research/youth-circus.php)

A research-oriented travel report where the author describes his visits to three circus schools in different parts of the world, with a view to determining how circus schools succeed in their objective of combining social youth work with building a high-quality circus performance.

Histories of Finnish youth circuses:

Sorin Sirkus: kaksi vuosikymmentä. [Sori Circus: Two decades. In Finnish.] Author: Petri Pakarinen. Publisher: Sorin sirkus, 2006.

Haminan Teinisirkus. [Hamina Teen Circus. In Finnish.] Editor: Katja Toivonen. Publisher: Painoviestintä 2008.

More general literature on the applied use of the arts:

Kolmannella lähteellä. Hyvinvointipalveluja kulttuurin, liikunnan ja nuorisotyön aloilta. [Third Source. Well-being services in arts & culture, sport and youth work. In Finnish.] Editors: Nelli Koivisto, Kai Lehikoinen, Riitta Pasanen-Willberg, Minna Ruusuvirta, Pasi Saukkonen, Pirita Tolvanen & Arsi Veikkolainen. Publisher: Kokos-palvelut, Theatre Academy Helsinki, 2010.

A series of articles focusing on applied physical and cultural education in different target groups and pondering more extensively on organisations' activities and customers in these areas. Includes three social circus case studies.

Nuorisotutkimus-lehti. Taiteellinen toiminta ja hyvinvointi. [Finnish Youth Research Journal. Artistic activity and well-being. In Finnish.] Vol. 28, 4/2010. Publisher: Finnish Youth Research Society.

Perspectives on carrying out artistic activities with various youth groups in areas such as dance and theatre, in the context of child welfare services and with young immigrants.

Taide ja toiseus. Syrjästä yhtoisöön. [Art and the other. From the margin to the community. In Finnish.] Editors: Mari Krappala & Tarja Pääjoki, 2003. Publisher: Finnish National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health.

The authors have worked in the Arts and the Self (Taimi) subproject of the Academy of Finland Researcher Programme on Marginalisation, Inequality and Ethnic Relations in Finland. The articles approach the relationships between artistic expression and marginalisation from different perspectives.

Taidekohtia. Nuorisobarometri 2009. [Art-turning points. Youth Barometer 2009. In Finnish.] Author: Sami Myllyniemi. Publisher: Finnish Youth Research Network.

The theme of the 2009 Youth Barometer is arts and culture. In addition, the publication sheds light on current views on the key turning points in young people's lives, such as transitions from education to employment and from adolescence to adulthood, by means of survey data.

Taiteesta ja kulttuurista hyvinvointia – ehdotus toimintaohjelmaksi 2010–2014. [Art and Culture for Well-being; proposal for an action programme 2010–2014. In Finnish; English summary available.] Ministry of Education and Culture/Hanna-Liisa Liikanen.

In addition to the proposals for action relating to the action programme, the publication provides context to the theme by describing practices in other countries, good operating models and current research in Finland and abroad.

Taidekasvatuksen Helsinki. [Art education in Helsinki. In Finnish.] Editors: Tuulikki Koskinen, Pekka Mustonen & Reetta Sariola. Publisher: City of Helsinki Information Centre 2010.

This extensive series of articles describes the diverse art education work carried out with children and young people in Helsinki at youth centres, art institutions and schools as well as in organisations. Includes three articles on circus.

Taide keskellä elämää. [Art amidst life. In Finnish.] Editors: Marjatta Bardy, Riikka Haapalainen, Merja Isotalo & Pekka Korhonen. Publisher: Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art/Like, 2007.

Contextualising articles and case studies on the use of art-driven methods with children, elderly people, alcoholics, people with depression, etc. The first extensive series of articles on the applied use of art in Finland.

Other interesting reading:

Drama and the adolescent journey. Warm-ups and activities to address teen issues. Authors: Linda Ruth Hodges Nelson & Lanell René Kemp Finneran. Publisher: Heinemann, 2006.

A practical guidebook for people working with teenagers on the use of art-driven methods in the context of problems relating to adolescence in particular.

Drama Workshops for Anger Management and Offending Behaviour. Author: James Thompson. Publisher: Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd., 1999.

The book presents two working methods that make it possible to approach various behavioural problems combining a creative art-driven method and teamwork with social work. The book covers both a theoretical perspective and guide-book-type practical guidelines, with main focus on drama techniques.

Lasten ja nuorten taideterapia. Kasvamisen voimavara. [Art therapy for children and young people: A resource for growth. In Finnish.] Author: Daniela Seeskari. Publisher: Kirja kerrallaan, 2004.

The author, who has long-term experience in doing art therapy with children and young people, describes art therapy, doing art therapy with children and young people, as well as various trends in art therapy. The book mostly focuses on visual art therapy, but it also includes plenty of more general information relating to the topic, which is applicable to other art forms as well.

Iloa ja voimaa elämään – Nuorten taiteen tekemisen merkitykset Myrsky-hankkeessa. [Bringing joy and strength into life – The meanings of young people's artistic efforts in the Myrsky ('Storm') project. Authors: Katriina Siivonen & Sirkku Kotilainen & Annikka Suoninen. Publisher: Finnish Youth Research Network/Society.

An extensive study on the Myrsky ('Storm') youth arts project financed by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, which diversely describes the meanings of doing art in young people's lives.





photo: Ritta Yrjönen

SOCIAL CIRCUS PROJECT
<http://sosiaalinensirkus.fi/english/>

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