

The Benefits of Circus Arts Practice and Performance on Adolescent Wellbeing

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## ABSTRACT

The Benefits of Circus Arts Practice and Performance on Adolescent Wellbeing

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As the circus arts continue to evolve in Quebec rapidly, there is an increasing interest in exploring this domain, particularly regarding its influence on child development. This study aims to understand how circus arts performances affect the wellbeing of adolescents. In this qualitative research, ten adolescents taking classes at the École de Cirque de Verdun were observed with a view to better understand their wellbeing through circus practice and performance. The data collection methods include observations, curated journals, and interviews. The study's findings encompass the participants' definitions of wellbeing, the importance of healthy relationships, and the significance of having strong role models in their lives during adolescence. The results offer insights into how their circus rehearsal influences their wellbeing. These findings highlight that artistic expression, physical abilities, and personal growth collectively contribute to the comprehensive development of young individuals during this crucial life phase.

Keywords: Circus education, adolescence, wellbeing, play, risk, socializing, circus performance, child development, Quebec circus.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Circus arts have been experiencing rapid development and evolution in Quebec over the past four decades. Montreal has become one of the major hubs of contemporary circuses worldwide. Every July, circus artists from around the world gather to showcase their talents at Montréal Complètement Cirque (MCC) for two weeks. This event invites Montrealers, tourists, industry specialists, and wide-ranging audiences alike to immerse themselves in circus activities and spectacles. Artists, teachers, educators, and participants gather to revel in circus productions and share their passion for the performing arts. Despite their diverse paths and careers, they all share common reasons for pursuing circus arts—its transformative power and the sense of community it fosters.



*Figure 1:* The Pre-preparatory 2019, *En Attendant le Train*. Picture: Benoit Leroux

Circus arts can bring change to individuals' lives, as seen in the case of social circus, a form of art-for-social change that combines community play and performance with specific circus training. According to Jennifer Beth Spiegel, studies have documented various benefits associated with participation in social circus — following the art-for-social change model as it applies to the circus arts. Amongst other benefits, social circus allows participants to reconnect with their bodies, fostering a greater awareness of their physicality.

Through the mastery of circus skills, individuals can enhance their physical expression and improve their mobility. Social circus promotes empowerment, self-confidence, happiness, wellbeing, and enjoyment. Jenifer Beth Spiegel states, "Studies have documented myriad positive impacts of social circus, which include helping participants to 'reconnect with their bodies' and increase their physical expression and mobility, to 'feel empowered' or 'self-confident,' as well as boost their general 'sense of happiness,' wellbeing, or 'fun'" (Spiegel, 2021: 219).

In the article, she achieves this by referencing authors who have researched circus art and social circus, including Alisson Funk (circus education), Jacinthe Rivard (social circus), Reginald Bolton (circus in educational settings), and Steven Cadwell (social circus). These authors play a pivotal role in the existing circus research. Given the relative novelty of circus art research, these authors are foundational in shaping our understanding and utilization of circus arts. A common thread among these authors is their emphasis on the myriad benefits circus art offers individuals.

Circus arts have played a significant role in my life for the past twenty years. I have been diagnosed with ADHD, a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects attention regulation (Centre for ADHD Awareness Canada, 2015), as well as dyslexia, which impacts social isolation and

cognitive development (Lachmann, 2018). Despite this, practising in circus and later teaching allowed me to discover solace and a means of self-expression.

Throughout my journey, I embraced the roles of instructor or coach (teacher) and performer, which allowed me to develop a deep understanding of the circus. Initially trained in competitive gymnastics, I found a balance between rigorous training and a creative teaching approach that nurtured individualism. Furthermore, my degree in professional theatre has equipped me with theatrical techniques that foster self-expression within a safe environment. Over the years, I have evolved as a coach and administrator, creating new classes that combine gross motor development for infants with circus arts. Currently, I am the Director of the Training Department and Acrobatic Technique Coach in the pre-professional program at the École de Cirque de Verdun. This role has enabled me to contribute to the growth and development of aspiring circus artists. Circus arts have provided me with personal fulfillment and allowed me to make a meaningful impact on others' lives. By sharing my passion and expertise, I strive to empower individuals, nurture their creativity, and foster a sense of belonging within the circus community.

This research project is particularly significant due to my experience teaching children at École de Cirque de Verdun. I taught children between the ages of one and seventeen, as well as adults. During those years, I also had the privilege of working with individuals with diverse mental and physical disabilities and others of all abilities. Among these children were some who initially experienced fear and apprehension when faced with the prospect of climbing on a trapeze.

However, what I found truly remarkable was that regardless of the participants' specific needs or challenges, the outcomes were consistently positive. I observed that engaging in circus

arts brought them happiness, a sense of belonging and significantly improved their overall wellbeing. It was as if they had discovered a second home within the circus community that offered both a sense of acceptance and stimulating challenges.

Witnessing these transformations firsthand has further reinforced my belief in the power of circus art as a catalyst for positive change. It has motivated me to continue my work as a teacher and advocate for inclusivity and the benefits of circus arts for individuals of all abilities. The impact on the wellbeing of these children has been truly profound, and I am grateful to be a part of their journey.

### **Problem Statement**

Throughout my fifteen years of teaching circus arts, I have had the opportunity to instruct over 200 students per year, amounting to a total of more than 2,500 students thus far. Each participant comes to circus classes with different motivations, interests, educational backgrounds, and individual needs. However, it is remarkable to witness the transformative power of circus arts as they progress through their classes. Over time, I have observed significant improvements in their communication skills, a reduction in anxiety levels, and an overall increase in happiness.

The École de Cirque de Verdun embraces an inclusive policy, providing a safe environment for all individuals (see Annexes 2,3,8). This entails adapting equipment, teaching methods and approaches to cater to the unique requirements of each student. Students diagnosed with mental or physical disabilities have found a sanctuary where they can feel comfortable and supported.

For instance, in 2017, a young participant diagnosed with ASD (Autism Spectrum Disorder), characterized by difficulties in communication, emotional intelligence, and nonverbal

behaviours (D'Amico and Lalonde, 2017), enrolled in our pre-professional program. Over two years, he dedicated four hours a day, five times a week, for thirty-six weeks, to his training. During this time, he learned to juggle, support his fellow participants, flip through the air, dance, and even pick up acting skills. At the end of each year, the students put on a one-hour performance for a week. Surprisingly, within just four months of starting the classes, his parents happily shared that he was now comfortable interacting with others and being held, something he had never done before.

Radio Canada Sports even conducted a brief interview about my student's journey in the program, highlighting how he has been an inspiration and how the program has positively influenced his life ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBJkP\\_IgDQ4&t=4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBJkP_IgDQ4&t=4s)). This video shows my student training but also offers a look into his aspirations for a better future.

I have observed these recurring patterns becoming more evident. Children and adults with varied backgrounds and abilities find effective coping mechanisms through their involvement in circus arts. Nonetheless, I have observed that these favourable outcomes need to be consistently mirrored among adolescents. Even though many seem to take pleasure in and thrive through circus arts, the difficulties they confront in their daily lives frequently influence their engagement in classes. Sometimes, they come to class feeling overwhelmed and encounter challenges in fully participating.

Interestingly, this dynamic changes when they transition to performance practice and rehearsals. Performance practice is when the instructor switches between learning skills and creating a performance. Rehearsal is the phase during which the coach ceases to introduce new skills for the performance and instead focuses on practising the performance itself. During these sessions, their engagement becomes more profound and involved. Participants demonstrate

improved confidence, self-esteem, and reduced stress levels after each performance. After the shows conclude, participants tend to thrive and radiate happiness.

This raises the question of whether adolescents indeed experience enhanced wellbeing after engaging in circus performances. While previous research has shown the positive impact of circus arts on the wellbeing of children and adults, the specific effects on adolescents still need to be determined.

***Educational studies.*** During my bachelor's in child studies, I read into various developmental stages, from conception to age twenty-five (Fusar-Poli, 2019). This academic pursuit exposed me to influential philosophers who revolutionized the field of developmental education. For instance, John Dewey emphasized the importance of experiential learning (Baldacchino, 2014).

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory explored how the environmental impacts children's development (Akbayrak and Douglas, 2021). The social development theory proposed by Vygotsky and the play theory put forth by Piaget (Veraksa and Samuelsson, 2022) significantly altered our understanding of child development. These are just a few examples among many other significant contributions.

Throughout my studies, I was particularly interested in gaining insights into adolescence. While extensive research has been conducted on this stage of development, it remains one of the least clear and defined periods. There are well-documented milestones for when a child should start walking, jumping, or crawling (Berk, 2013).

However, the understanding of adolescent milestones varies among theorists, needing a consensus on its exact boundaries. This discrepancy prompted me to question whether there

might be a way to explore some of the significant moments that occur in adolescents practising the circus arts.

## **Research Question**

Based on my educational background and practical knowledge of circus arts training, I have identified behavioural and developmental patterns that warrant further exploration. In light of this, my research aims to address the following questions:

1. What does wellbeing mean to adolescents?
2. What is the impact of circus performance on adolescent wellbeing?

Many of my adolescent students frequently express how they feel better after performing on stage. Parents have also approached me to discuss the noticeable positive changes in their children, such as reduced stress and increased happiness. In this research, I want to understand the student wellbeing point of view of their performance experience.

The experience of circus performance uniquely influences students. Performance is clearly distinct from traditional teaching and learning methods. Participants come alive when performing, embracing challenges in ways they have never done before. Professional artists often share how the circus arts have saved their lives, and it is plausible that adolescents may experience a similar transformative effect. Hence, the central focus of my research is to investigate the impact of circus art training and performance on the wellbeing of adolescents.

## **Impact of the Study**

While the circus arts are undergoing rapid evolution, the research conducted in this field has yet to delve into and fully document the transformative effect circus has on individuals. This is primarily due to the novelty of circus research. The circus community widely acknowledges the profound impact of circus arts; unfortunately, this knowledge has not yet been thoroughly

demonstrated through empirical research, though there has been interesting research exploring the benefits of circus as a tool for physical literacy (Jeffreies *et al.*, 2019). Individuals such as Kriellars, Aubertin or Borteletto have done research on physical literacy. Unfortunately, there is a gap due to the extensive scope of circus art and the limited number of researchers in the field.

By conducting this study, I aim to advance the relationship between the fields of circus arts and education and contribute to filling a critical gap in the existing literature. I hope my research will provide empirical evidence that supports and validates the experiences and beliefs held within the Quebecois circus community. This will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the transformative potential of circus arts and its unique contributions to personal and social development.

I hope my research findings will enhance pedagogical approaches and educational practices. Circus arts possess distinct qualities that go beyond traditional teaching methods, fostering multidimensional growth in individuals. Through my studies, I will highlight the connections between pedagogy and developmental outcomes within the realm of circus arts. Educators, practitioners, and policymakers can leverage this knowledge to design effective circus arts programs and integrate them into educational settings, offering students a holistic learning experience.

In addition, my research will inform wellbeing interventions for adolescents. By exploring the impact of circus performance on adolescent wellbeing, I plan to uncover specific mechanisms and factors that contribute to positive outcomes. This knowledge can be utilized to develop targeted interventions and programs that harness the transformative power of circus arts, promoting wellbeing and resilience among adolescents.

By bridging the gap between theory and practice, this research benefits the circus world and enhances existing performance and education methods. It fosters a clearer understanding of the intricate connection between pedagogy, development, and circus arts, paving the way for innovative approaches to personal growth, artistic expression, and wellbeing.



**Figure 2:** The Pre-preparatory 2023, *Papillon*. Picture: L'École de cirque de Verdun

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

As I stated earlier, this research aimed to investigate the impact of circus performance, including the rehearsal process, on the wellbeing of adolescents. To achieve this, the literature review will be divided into four distinct sections (a) circus art and child development, (b) Social Circus, (c) circus and educational curriculum, (d) adolescence and wellbeing, and lastly, (e) performance and education. Each section will provide a comprehensive overview of relevant studies and explore critical aspects of circus arts and its influence on various areas.

The first section will examine the existing research conducted on the intersection of circus arts and the field of child development. By exploring this body of literature, we can gain insights into how circus activities contribute to young individuals' overall development and wellbeing. In the second section, we will delve into the concept of social Circus. This approach draws on circus techniques to provide support and aid individuals facing crises. By exploring the literature on social Circus, we can understand how it serves as a valuable tool for fostering wellbeing and resilience among adolescents. Proceeding further, the third section will explore the integration of circus arts within educational settings such as primary schools, high schools, and colleges in Quebec. The fourth section will focus on performance as a crucial component of circus arts. We will explore the literature surrounding the effects of performance on the wellbeing of adolescents, examining aspects such as self-expression, confidence building, and social interaction.

Throughout this literature review, we will examine the definition of adolescence and the concept of wellbeing to establish a clear understanding within the context of circus arts and its impact on young individuals. By exploring these four key sections, we aim to gain a comprehensive understanding of how circus performance, including the rehearsal process, can

influence the wellbeing of adolescents. This research has the potential to illuminate the significance of circus arts in promoting wellbeing and enhancing the lives of young individuals across different settings.

### **Circus and Child Development**

In Chapter 4 of the thesis, a clear comprehensive exploration of the pedagogical approach employed by the ECV will be explained. This approach is designed to integrate various developmental theories, serving as a guiding framework for their instructional methods in the context of circus arts education. Incorporating these developmental theories is instrumental in understanding children's learning and growth processes within this unique domain. By examining these theories, we can gain valuable insights into how circus arts pedagogy aligns with and capitalizes on principles of child development, with the goal of enhancing learning outcomes.

Including developmental theories within the circus arts approach allows educators and practitioners to design instruction that caters to learners' specific needs and capacities at different stages of development. By drawing on the knowledge and research provided by influential theorists, the ECV ensures that evidence-based approaches and the latest understanding of child development inform their pedagogical practices. This integration establishes a solid foundation for comprehending the profound impact that circus performance can have on the wellbeing of adolescents.

***Hands-on Learning.*** John Dewey is an American philosopher born in Vermont in 1859; his contributions to educational philosophy emphasize the value of a hands-on approach to learning. According to Dewey, children require more than passive absorption of theoretical concepts; they must actively engage with and apply what they have learned (Dewey, 1986).

Dewey believed that the most effective learning method is through direct experience and hands-on engagement with the subject matter (Baldacchino, 2014). Dewey's philosophy aligns with the notion that students learn best when actively involved in learning, applying their knowledge in practical contexts, and reflecting on their experiences. By providing opportunities for students to engage in real-world experiences and apply their learning, educators can enhance their understanding and promote more profound levels of comprehension. Dewey's ideas have profoundly influenced educational practices worldwide, emphasizing the significance of experiential learning and the active involvement of students in their own education.

***Learning through Socializing.*** Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, developed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) theory, which highlights the crucial role of social interaction and collaboration in children's learning and development (Newman and Holzman, 1993). His sociocultural theory underscores the importance of social interaction in the learning process. Vygotsky argued that children acquire knowledge and skills through socialization, collaboration, and interaction with more knowledgeable individuals. The ZPD encompasses the range of tasks or skills a child can accomplish with the guidance of more knowledgeable individuals, such as teachers, parents, or peers. It is within this zone that optimal learning and cognitive growth take place.

Vygotsky proposed that children learn best when they engage in social interactions and observe and interact with others (Berk, 2013). Through these social interactions, children can imitate and replicate the behaviours and skills they observe in adults and more skilled peers, gradually internalizing and applying them in their everyday lives. Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social learning and the value of working in teams or groups, as it provides

opportunities for collaborative problem-solving, sharing of knowledge, and scaffolding of learning experiences.

**Learning through Play.** Jean Piaget was a Swiss psychologist known for his extensive research on cognitive development and his influential theory of cognitive development. His work focused on understanding how children learn and develop cognitive abilities (Krishman, 2010). Piaget proposed that children progress through distinct stages of cognitive development as they interact with and explore the world around them. These stages include the sensorimotor stage (0–2 years old), the preoperational stage (2–7 years old), the concrete operational stage (7–11 years old), and the formal operational stage (11 years old to adulthood) (Bakırıcı *et al.*, 2011). Each stage represents a unique set of cognitive abilities and developmental characteristics that children acquire and build upon. Piaget's (2013) theory highlights the importance of play in cognitive development.

According to Piaget, play is a natural and essential activity through which children actively construct their understanding of the world. Through play, children engage in exploration, problem-solving, and imaginative activities that contribute to their cognitive growth and the development of problem-solving skills. By recognizing the significance of play in cognitive development, Piaget's theory underscores the importance of providing opportunities for children to engage in open-ended and imaginative play. This type of play allows children to actively manipulate objects, experiment with ideas, and develop problem-solving abilities (Piaget, 1951).

## Circus and Education

This section will focus on exploring studies examining the relationship between circus arts and child development. It is important to note that this section will not cover the

implementation of circus arts in curriculum settings, as that will be addressed later. Instead, the emphasis will be on understanding how circus arts impact child development, including the utilization of art therapy with circus arts and the positive effects observed in children with various disabilities.

***Child Development and Circus Arts.*** Reg Bolton, a renowned clown and researcher, dedicated his life to studying the correlation between circus arts and child development. His doctoral thesis titled *Why Circus Works: How the values and structures of Circus make it a significant developmental experience for young people* (2004) focuses primarily on implementing circus arts in educational settings and as an educational approach. Bolton's work is divided into several sections, including an exploration of childhood, an examination of contemporary circus arts, a historical overview of circus arts, and integrating education with circus arts.

In his thesis, Bolton draws upon the works of two influential developmental theorists, Lev Vygotsky and Jean Piaget, to illustrate the correlation between child development and circus arts practice. He explores how circus arts align with the theories of Vygotsky and Piaget, highlighting their similarities and demonstrating the developmental benefits of engaging in circus activities. Bolton employs a unique tool in his research, using a nursery rhyme that helps children remember the days of the week through hand movements. This tool serves as a means to establish a correlation between child development and circus arts.

Bolton's nursery rhyme connects specific developmental aspects with each day of the week and relates them to the practice of circus arts. For instance, *Monday's Child* focuses on developing self-actualization, self-awareness, self-design, self-representation, and individuation. *Tuesday's Child* emphasizes the importance of learning through laughter and play. *Wednesday's*

*Child* centres on the ability to take safe risks and embark on new adventures. *Friday's Child* highlights the significance of trust in oneself and others and the ability to form meaningful connections. Finally, *Saturday's Child* underscores the values of persistence and resilience through hard work. Bolton provides examples in his thesis to illustrate how children can develop self-esteem, trust, taking safe risks, and trust in others through learning and practising circus skills.

**Circus Arts Therapy.** D'Amico and Lalonde (2017) conducted a study on the effectiveness of art therapy in teaching social skills to children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The article highlights that children with ASD may struggle to socialize and communicate verbally. Art therapy focuses on art-based activities as a means of expression, can benefit these children. The research demonstrated that art therapy not only enabled children with ASD to communicate but also to collaborate effectively in team settings. Furthermore, art therapy provided them with a valuable outlet for self-expression. This article is relevant to the literature review as it highlights the potential of art-based interventions, such as circus arts, in supporting the social development and communication skills of children with ASD.

Ray Bonk (2019) conducted a master's thesis focusing on the impact of circus arts within an art therapy program. Art therapy is a therapeutic technique that enables clients to express their emotions and experiences through various art forms, including dance, visual art, movement, and, in this case, circus art. Bonk utilized a case study approach as his research method to explore the effects of circus art therapy on clients.

The findings of Bonk's study demonstrate that circus art therapy provides clients with a unique opportunity to develop skills in emotion regulation, kinesthetic awareness, and coping mechanisms. Through engaging in circus arts activities within the therapeutic context, clients can

express themselves creatively, explore their emotions, and develop a deeper understanding of their physical and emotional experiences.

Bonk's case study highlights the potential benefits of circus art therapy as a powerful intervention for individuals seeking to regulate their emotions, enhance their kinesthetic awareness, and develop effective coping mechanisms. Engaging in circus arts within the therapeutic setting allows clients to experience personal growth, increased self-awareness, and improved emotional wellbeing. Including circus arts in art therapy expands the range of expressive modalities available to clients, providing a unique and dynamic medium for self-discovery and healing. Bonk's research contributes to the growing body of evidence supporting the efficacy of circus art therapy as a valuable therapeutic approach.

***Play Therapy.*** Heller and Taglialatela (2018) conducted a study in which they implemented a circus arts therapy program and a play therapy program with a group of children ranging from 4 to 17 years old. Play therapy is defined as a structured approach that uses a theoretical model to establish an interpersonal process. Trained play therapists employ the therapeutic potential of play to assist clients in preventing or resolving psychosocial difficulties and achieving optimal growth and development.

In this study, circus arts were introduced as a means of exploration and therapy for the participants. Circus arts have been increasingly utilized in various settings to provide therapeutic benefits for individuals with anxiety or special needs. Including circus arts in therapy is particularly beneficial because it can encompass multiple elements, such as movement, dance, and social interaction. These aspects align closely with the tools and techniques employed in play therapy. By incorporating circus-based techniques, clients or participants can experience significant physical and emotional benefits. The dynamic nature of circus arts facilitates

engagement in activities that promote physical expression, social interaction, and emotional exploration. These combined elements contribute to the holistic wellbeing of individuals, allowing for both physical and emotional growth. The integration of circus arts in therapy provides a unique and comprehensive approach encompassing movement, social interaction, and artistic expression. This holistic approach allows for diverse therapeutic benefits and can be particularly impactful for individuals with anxiety or special needs.

Heller and Taglialatela's study contribute to the growing body of evidence supporting the effectiveness of circus arts as a therapeutic tool. By merging the principles of play therapy and circus arts, this research sheds light on the potential of circus-based techniques to promote the wellbeing and development of individuals across various age groups.

### **Social Circus**

Social Circus is a powerful social intervention that has gained recognition and is being implemented worldwide, notably in North America, South America, and Africa. Focused case studies have been produced, notably on the impact of social circus in Ecuadorian communities (Spiegel and Choukroun, 2019). In 1995, Le Cirque du Soleil (CDS) established a division called Le Cirque du Monde, dedicated to social circus initiatives. They aimed to support Third World countries and communities facing diverse challenges, helping individuals "regain their self-confidence, change their life path, and grow both personally and socially" (Cirque du Soleil, 2013: 3). Cirque du Monde has since introduced social circus programs in numerous countries, dispatching educators to cities, countries, and communities to build and implement these initiatives with a focus on youth. In regions where necessities may be lacking, Social Circus provides participants with a sense of community and a common goal to perform at a high skill level, resulting in improved individual wellbeing (Spiegel *et al.*, 2019).

Over the past few years, Social Circus has garnered recognition for its transformative impact on youth worldwide, offering them an avenue to overcome challenges such as drug abuse, sexual assault, homelessness, and more (Spiegel, 2016). Social circuses create an environment where participants can work through life difficulties with the support of their circus community, being accepted for who they are in that setting. The positive effects of social circuses are attributed to three significant aspects: inclusion, self-acceptance, and building relationships with others.

**Cirque Hors Piste.** The current organization responsible for social circus initiatives in Canada is Cirque Hors Piste (CHP), established to address the gap left by the disassociation of Le Cirque du Monde from Cirque du Soleil. CHP, “[...] is, is the largest and most established social circus organization” (Perahia, Rivard and Leroux, 2023: 1), based in Montreal and serves as the central hub for communication and coordination of social circus activities throughout Canada. By leveraging the unique elements of circus arts, Cirque Hors Piste strives to create an environment where participants can develop new skills, build self-esteem, and cultivate resilience. Social Circus catalyzes positive change, allowing individuals to express themselves, collaborate with others, and overcome personal obstacles.

CHP also benefits from the contributions of research experts, such as Spiegel, who has conducted extensive research in Social Circus. One notable study by Spiegel, titled *Social Circus: The Cultural Politics of Embodying 'Social Transformation'* (2016), emphasizes the significance of social inclusion by examining the embodiment of self-management, self-expression, and self-identification through circus arts.

Another research she did focus explicitly on applying these techniques in Ecuador (Spiegel *et al.*, 2019). The study demonstrates that personal transformation, social inclusion, and

collective practice in social circuses are interconnected and mutually influence one another. Through circus arts, individuals experience transformative changes contributing to their wellbeing and overall health. The study provides valuable insights into how social Circus can foster positive impacts on individuals' lives. By recognizing social Circus's cultural and political dimensions, Spiegel's research sheds light on how this art form can promote social transformation and enhance social inclusion. The empowerment found in circus arts enables individuals to express themselves, cultivate essential life skills, and establish meaningful connections with others.

Spiegel's work significantly contributes to the growing body of research supporting the positive effects of social Circus as a tool for personal growth, social inclusion, and wellbeing. Her findings inspire practitioners and organizations to develop their social circus programs and initiatives further, harnessing the power of circus arts to empower individuals and facilitate positive social change.

***Social Circus in Canada.*** Social Circus is used throughout Canada to reach marginalized individuals. This evolved from youth in critical condition to any individual who struggles daily, such as Green Fools in Calgary, which reaches out to any individual who is marginalized, including the elderly ([greenfools.com](http://greenfools.com)).

Social Circus initiatives are not only present in Inuit societies but have also proven to be impactful in addressing the historical and structural challenges these communities face, stemming from the Indian Act of 1876 and the enduring effects of settler colonialism (Lavers *et al.*, 2022). By introducing social circus programs in these communities, such as the Atikamekw, youth are allowed to reconnect with their culture and actively participate in social activities

within their communities (Rivard & Mercier, 2009). These initiatives equip young individuals with valuable tools to reintegrate into society and contribute as productive members.

In Nunavik, the implementation of social Circus has yielded significant results, as it has not only fostered cultural revitalization but also led to the establishment of a professional circus company called Cirqiniq. This initiative has created employment opportunities and become a momentous cultural milestone for young Inuit individuals (Lavers *et al.*, 2022). By actively engaging in social Circus, the Inuit communities in Nunavik have embraced their cultural heritage, expressed their creativity, and celebrated their unique identities.

The presence of social Circus in Inuit societies catalyzes empowerment, cultural resilience, and community building. These initiatives provide a platform for young individuals to express themselves, reclaim their cultural heritage, and foster a sense of belonging. The positive impact of social Circus in these communities extends beyond individual wellbeing, contributing to social cohesion, pride, and cultural preservation.

### **Circus Art in Educational Curriculum**

Circus arts have found their place in educational settings worldwide albeit to a limited extent. In Canada, circus arts are integrated into the primary and secondary school curriculum as part of physical education (PE) programs. Specifically in Quebec, two schools offer circus programs within the Sport-Étude secondaire (CES or sports study) framework. These schools are L'École de cirque de Québec and The National Circus School in Montreal. Furthermore, these two schools also provide a Diplôme d'Études Collégiales (DEC) or Diplôme d'Étude Étranger (DEE) degree, which is a collegiate-level diploma (Funk, 2021).

However, when it comes to obtaining a bachelor's degree in circus arts, only a few schools outside of Canada offer such certification. The availability of bachelor's degree

programs in circus arts is still relatively limited globally. These specialized programs provide comprehensive and in-depth training in various circus disciplines, preparing students for careers in the field of circus arts.

***Circus and Primary School.*** Bolton (1999) authored an article emphasizing the importance of including circus arts in primary school settings. In his work, *Circus as Education*, Bolton argues that the integration of circus arts into the school curriculum benefits students and teachers. In his article, Bolton explains the importance of using practice-based learning “[...] suggest that it is through participation that individuals move from being fringes of a community to becoming involved in more centralized performances” (Yakhlef, 2010: 409). This process aligns with how children learn to take risks, understand their limitations, and complete tasks. Circus arts, being action-based, provide a platform for children to socialize, develop an understanding of kinesiology, study body movement, and foster emotional growth.

By engaging in circus arts, children acquire physical skills and develop important social and emotional competencies. They learn the significance of teamwork, communication, and cooperation through collaborative activities. The physical demands of circus arts promote body awareness, spatial orientation, and motor skills. Mastering new skills and overcoming challenges cultivates resilience, self-confidence, and emotional wellbeing.

He introduces the concept of calculated risk in a safe environment and highlights its importance for child development. He emphasizes that taking risks is a natural part of childhood and an essential aspect of learning, “Children must also take risks. That is what childhood is for. That is how you learn. Children need to touch people. They need to be able to physically trust themselves and other people” (Bolton, 1999: 15). Bolton suggests that children need opportunities to touch, physically trust themselves, and develop trust in others. Shielding

children from all risks can hinder their growth and learning experiences (13). Safety measures such as mats, spotting assistance, and drills are implemented in circus arts to ensure calculated risk-taking. These measures prioritize the safety and wellbeing of performers, allowing them to confidently push their limits. By combining risk and safety, circus arts create a controlled environment for participants to explore their potential and develop their skills.

In Quebec, Horizon Soleil is a primary school that embraced circus arts in its physical education curriculum and after-class program (Sechs, 2023). By incorporating circus arts, the school aims to promote perseverance, learning from mistakes, and self-expression (Plans-cadres de formation en arts du cirque, 2023). Overall, the integration of circus arts in educational settings like Horizon Soleil provides students with valuable opportunities to take calculated risks, develop trust, learn from failures, and express themselves creatively. These experiences contribute to their overall growth, wellbeing, and the development of essential life skills.

***Physical Literacy in Primary Schools.*** The CRITAC (Circus Research, Innovation, and Teaching Arts Collective) has conducted significant research on the role of circus arts in fostering physical literacy and resilience in children aged 9 to 12 in Winnipeg. In the article, *Taking the Circus to School* by Cossin (2021), the significance of physical literacy in primary school settings is explored. Physical literacy encompasses understanding the value of physical activity and building motivation and confidence to engage in physical exercises. The research findings suggest that circus arts offer a unique opportunity for children to enhance their physical literacy and resilience.

Through participation in circus arts activities, children improve their physical skills, including coordination, balance, flexibility, and strength. Circus arts provide a dynamic and engaging environment for children to cultivate physical literacy and build resilience, “[...]

bringing together two previously distinct approaches to the wellbeing of young people and confirming their relationship” (Jefferies, 2019: 5).

A similar study conducted by Tia Kiez in 2015, *The Impact of Circus Arts Instruction on the Physical Literacy of Children in Grades 4 and 5* explored the effects of circus arts on children’s physical literacy. The research aimed to examine how circus arts instruction influenced various aspects of physical literacy in children. Kiez found that participating in circus arts enhanced children’s motivation, confidence, physical attributes, kinesthetic understanding, and inclination to engage in physical activities daily.

These two studies shed light on the importance of physical literacy and its integration into education. The findings suggest that incorporating circus arts into the educational curriculum can benefit students. By engaging in circus arts activities, children can develop physical literacy, which includes skills, motivation, and understanding related to physical activity. This holistic approach to physical education can enhance students’ overall wellbeing and enhance their educational experience.

***College and Circus Arts in Quebec.*** In Langlois’ (2014) master’s research, the aim was to understand the shared experiences of students in post-secondary schooling settings. Through this study, Langlois identified four emerging themes: developing a creative process through physicality, experiencing a range of emotions, creating a sense of belonging with peers, and developing a circus identity. However, one noteworthy finding from this research was that participants did not feel a strong connection with the academic aspect of their education, as they referred to those classes as ‘sit-down classes’ (72). Despite this, participants expressed that their circus classes were precious, and they learned a great deal from them.

Langlois' research sheds light on the unique experiences of students in post-secondary circus arts education. While the academic classes may not have resonated as strongly with the participants, the circus classes played a significant role in their personal and creative development. The physicality of the circus arts allowed students to engage in a creative process, experience a range of emotions, and foster a sense of belonging among their peers. These findings highlight the importance of recognizing the impact of non-traditional educational approaches and the value circus arts can bring to students in post-secondary settings.

In *Circus Education in Québec: Balancing Academic and Kinesthetic Learning Objectives* (2021), Alisan MacNeal Funk examined the post-secondary curriculum in relation to the prioritization of various curricular elements in circus education. Her study aimed to understand participants' goals after completing their degree and to explore the extent to which teachers and students felt included in the pedagogical project. Funk's findings were significant, highlighting the importance of continuing education in circus arts. The research emphasized that circus education offers students more than just learning circus skills; it provides an alternative option outside of traditional academic pathways. Students can remain motivated, gain industry knowledge, and develop critical social skills by engaging in circus arts education. The study underscores the need for a balanced approach in circus education, where both academic and kinesthetic learning objectives are given due consideration. This balance ensures that students acquire technical circus skills and receive a comprehensive education that prepares them for their desired career paths.

Moreover, it emphasizes the importance of fostering a sense of inclusion and belonging among teachers and students within the pedagogical project. Overall, Funk's research contributes to understanding the multifaceted benefits of circus education and advocates for its continued

development and support. By providing students with opportunities to pursue their passion for circus arts, the field of circus education can empower individuals to achieve their goals, expand their knowledge, and cultivate valuable social and professional skills.

Unfortunately, while some research has been conducted on the relationship between education and circus arts, the field is still relatively new. It needs a comprehensive body of evidence to support the theory entirely. As a result, the available data on circus arts and education could be more extensive, especially when compared to more established art forms like theatre or dance. There is a significant gap in research explicitly focusing on subjects within circus arts, such as adolescence and circus performance. It is essential to acknowledge that the current scarcity of research should uphold the potential value and benefits of circus arts in education. Although there may be a lack of extensive data, many anecdotal accounts and experiences from practitioners, educators, and students highlight the positive impact of circus arts on various aspects of learning, personal development, and wellbeing.

### **Defining Adolescence and Wellbeing**

Wellbeing is a complex concept that can be challenging to define, as it varies depending on the individual and the context. Julia Coffey (2020) suggests that wellbeing encompasses a subjective evaluation of one's overall quality of life, encompassing various domains of an individual's experiences.

Coffey's study on young adults and their wellbeing examined two individuals with different life experiences. The author focused on understanding their coping mechanisms and how these strategies influenced their wellbeing. Interestingly, Coffey found that both individuals could navigate and recover from their traumatic experiences by drawing support from others, creating a supportive environment, and practising self-care.

Wellbeing is subjective and can be influenced by various factors in an individual's life. The study emphasizes the significance of support networks, the environment, and self-care in promoting wellbeing and facilitating resilience in young adults. By understanding the complex nature of wellbeing and the factors that contribute to it, efforts can be made to create environments and provide support systems that enhance individuals' overall quality of life and foster their resilience.

### **Definition of Adolescence**

During adolescence, individuals go through a complex stage of development that is crucial for transitioning into adulthood, it is a period of transition in approach to cognitive tasks from concrete to formal operations; in approach to moral issues from law-and-order ('duty') reasoning to transcendent human values; in approach to psychosocial concerns from others' expectations and directives to one's own unique organization of one's history, skills, shortcomings, and goals (Marcia, 1980).

Research on adolescence is still evolving, encompassing hormonal changes, sexual exploration, and emotional crises. There is a need for further research to understand better and support these developmental changes. Child development research has made significant strides in understanding that children cannot be treated as miniature adults but undergo distinct and vital qualitative and quantitative developmental stages (Berk, 2013). However, despite the progress made, the definition of the adolescence period still needs to be precisely determined. Various theorists and different regions have different age ranges for adolescence. For instance, Piaget categorizes adolescence as occurring between 11 and 16 years old (Ginn, 1995), while Erikson places it between 12 and 18 years old. Moreover, the age range can vary across provinces and countries. In Quebec, high school typically spans ages 12 to 17, while in British Columbia, it is

from ages 13 to 18. In the United States, high school generally covers ages 14 to 18 (usahello.org); in Switzerland, it is between ages 11 to 15 (expatica.com). This variability complicates adolescent research, as different age ranges and cultural contexts can influence developmental experiences.

***Four Identity Status.*** Erikson's theory of identity statuses provides valuable insights into the psychological challenges individuals face during adolescence as they navigate the journey of identity formation. According to Erikson, there are four identity statuses: identity achievement, foreclosure, identity diffusion, and moratoriums (Marcia, 1980). Identity achievement refers to individuals who have successfully made decisions and commitments about their personal and occupational goals. They have explored various options and have a clear sense of their identity. Foreclosure, however, describes individuals who have adopted beliefs and values without exploring different possibilities. Their parents or authority figures have influenced their moral and occupational choices.

Identity diffusion represents a state of uncertainty and lack of commitment. Individuals in this status have yet to explore their identity actively and may struggle to make decisions or commit to specific paths. Moratoriums are individuals experiencing an identity crisis. They are actively exploring different options and possibilities but have yet to make firm commitments. Erikson's theory provides a framework for understanding the unique challenges of adolescence. During this stage, adolescents are transitioning from childhood to adulthood and are faced with the task of establishing their own identity separate from their parents' influence (Kohlberg, 2004). They are untangling the values and beliefs they have internalized from their upbringing and making choices based on their evolving worldviews and personal morals.

Circus arts performance offers a platform for adolescents to explore their limits, unleash their creativity, and discover their true selves. It exposes them to role models, debates, and discussions that challenge their current ways of thinking and reasoning (Kohlberg, 2004). In the circus arts environment, adolescents are free from judgment and can engage in open and reflective discussions. The nature of circus arts, which involves taking risks and pushing boundaries, allows adolescents to explore the seemingly impossible and embark on a journey of self-discovery.

These insights shed light on the social and cognitive processes that shape adolescent development. By understanding these dynamics, educators and practitioners can create supportive environments that promote healthy decision-making, encourage perspective taking, and foster the development of autonomy and self-confidence in adolescents.

***Circus and Wellbeing.*** Seymour (2012) conducted a study titled *How Circus Training Can Enhance the wellbeing of Autistic Children and Their Families* to explore the benefits of circus arts classes for children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The study focused on how participating in circus arts can positively impact the wellbeing of these children and their families. Circus arts provide a unique opportunity for children with ASD to “[...] to achieve physical feats that they are often told are impossible for them to attain” (60). This can significantly boost their self-confidence and sense of achievement. Participating in circus arts allows these children to learn and play with others in a safe and supportive environment that promotes risk management.

By participating in circus arts, children with autism can engage in typical childhood experiences such as socializing, playing, and taking on new adventures. These experiences contribute to their overall development, including physical attributes, emotional wellbeing, and

coping skills. Through circus arts, these children can enhance their physical abilities, develop social skills, and improve their emotional regulation, which ultimately increases their overall wellbeing.

The study suggests that circus arts can be a valuable tool for promoting the wellbeing of children with autism and their families. It gives them a unique and inclusive avenue for personal growth, self-expression, and social interaction. By offering opportunities to overcome challenges, build skills, and experience success, circus arts can contribute to the overall wellbeing and quality of life for children with autism and their families.

## **Performance and Education**

“It is common to have artists working in many roles, including teachers, and managers amongst others, in order to achieve economic stability ” (Langlois, 2014: 31).

There is indeed a correlation between performance and education in the arts, which can be attributed to various factors. One such factor is the economic stability teaching can provide for artists early in their careers.

***Definition of Circus Arts and Circus Performance.*** Circus arts have evolved significantly over time, giving rise to two distinct categories: traditional Circus and contemporary Circus, also known as new Circus (Langlois, 2014). In contrast to its historical association with freak shows, contemporary Circus has transformed, embracing a hybrid art form that blends circus skills with diverse disciplines such as opera, dance, physical theatre, and various circus apparatus (Lavers et al., 2020). Contemporary Circus encompasses six main ‘families’ or disciplines within the field. These include Balancing, Floor Acrobatics, Aerial acrobatics, Juggling and Manipulation, Theatre and Movement (Plans-cadres de formation en arts du cirque, 2023) and Equestrian arts (Funk, 2021). Each family represents a distinct aspect

of circus arts with different apparatus and skills, contributing to the rich tapestry of skills and performances in the contemporary circus landscape (see Annex 4).

In the context of circus performance, there are two essential components: the practice performance with rehearsals and the actual performance. It is worth noting that every art form that includes a performance aspect follows a similar practice. Performance practice encompasses various elements such as directing, dramaturgy, playwriting, technical work, and rehearsal of the performance (Allain and Harvie, 2006). In essence, performance practice encompasses all the preparations before the actual performance, including sequencing of skills, musical choices, costume selection, technical design, and more. On the other hand, the performance refers to the culmination of the rehearsal, where the prepared act is presented to an audience (Shepherd & Wallis, 2004).

***Importance of Performance.*** Performance includes various forms of theatre games, such as improv, physical theatre, dance, and more, significantly benefiting individuals' wellbeing. It helps develop trust in oneself and others, cultivated through theatrical games and performing on stage (Opfermann, 2019). In schools, students engage in trust exercises like the "fall trust" to build bonds with their peers (Linds *et al.*, 2018). For example, the blind game, where participants guide each other with closed eyes, fosters trust and strengthens relationships. Trusting the adult responsible for their wellbeing is crucial before trusting the environment or peers. Interactive theatre processes and games in performances also contribute to building trust, developing a voice, and sharing power (Linds *et al.*, 2018). Circus arts utilize similar games to promote personal growth and skill development. These activities are vital for child development as they foster trust, enhance social and emotional skills, and create a supportive and empowering environment.

Mathilde Perahia and Jacinthe Rivard (2020) emphasize the significance of alternative circus performances in exploring marginalized topics often considered taboo or intolerable in society. They argue that through performance, artists have the opportunity to represent and address these issues that would otherwise be restricted, “La performance permettrait alors de représenter des choses qui ne seraient pas tolérables en dehors d’elle” (Perahia and Rivard, 2020: 131). By using performance as a medium, young performers can enlighten audiences and offer different perspectives, promoting acceptance of differences and disorders. The authors suggest that these performers often seek to break free from societal norms, enabling them to channel their energy into creative expression and embrace their authentic selves. They also challenge that deviating from societal norms or not fitting into societal expectations equates to failure.

### **Using Performance.**

Bolton in *Circus as Education* (1999) emphasizes integrating circus arts into curriculum school systems. He highlights, “In performance, the limits are known, and the performer will be safe. This contrasts with sport in which every action invites an equal and opposite reaction, with various attendant whammies, groins, corkies and observations of the blood rule” (16). Learning to practice high-risk activities in a safe environment allows children to take calculated risks and understand that falls or injuries are a natural part of learning. This understanding is crucial for learning, as individuals must be willing to take risks and accept the possibility of failure.

Learning about one’s physical limitations fosters self-awareness and the ability to trust one’s judgment. Circus arts performance offers the best of both worlds by providing opportunities for individuals to teach and learn from others in a supportive and collaborative environment.

Kinaesthetic empathy plays a significant role in the audience's experience and the benefits they derive from watching a performance. Kim (2015) defines kinaesthetic empathy as the ability to empathize with others by observing their movements and physical expressions on stage. For example, when witnessing a hand balancer struggling to maintain their balance, the audience can feel the difficulty and challenges involved. This empathetic connection allows the audience to engage emotionally and somatically with the performance, transcending cognitive judgments (Reynolds & Reason, 2012).

Kinaesthetic empathy helps elucidate the symbiotic relationship between performance and education. Performance provides individuals a platform to express themselves, connect with their bodies, and be fully present. This immersive experience enhances the audience's ability to empathize with the performers and deepen their understanding of the human experience. Similarly, in educational settings, students or participants in circus arts or other performance-based activities often seek to elicit a reaction or response from the audience, leveraging kinaesthetic empathy to create impactful and meaningful performances. Thus, kinaesthetic empathy is crucial in bridging the gap between performance and education, fostering emotional connections, and promoting more profound engagement with the arts.

Lastly, performance is also used as a research tool. Performance inquiry involves exploration, questioning, imagining, and investigating, allowing performers to constantly engage and actively participate in their creative journey (Fels, 1998). Through performance, individuals can access aspects of themselves that can only be discovered through this medium. One pedagogical approach that aligns with this concept is inquiry-based learning, which emphasizes active participation and the learner's responsibility in acquiring new knowledge (Pedaste *et al.*, 2015). In this approach, students take the lead in conducting experiments and are guided by

teachers towards finding the answers. Performance can also serve as a platform to address challenging or taboo topics, helping children gain understanding with the support of guided facilitation. Furthermore, performance fosters socialization skills and collaboration as participants learn to work together in a creative and expressive context.

### **Impact on This Study**

The research topic of circus arts and its impact on adolescence and wellbeing is vast, with numerous studies conducted in various areas. Prominent contributors to child development, such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Dewey, have explored the role of play, socialization, and hands-on approaches in development. Art therapy and play therapy using circus arts have been shown to improve individuals' wellbeing. Social Circus has been successfully implemented to support marginalized individuals reintegrating into society, including Inuit communities in Quebec. Circus arts are incorporated into physical education programs and after-school activities in Canadian schools, with only a few offerings of specialized circus studies at the high school and college levels.

The literature review also highlights the significance of performance in educational settings as a tool for communication and its positive impact on audience members. However, there needs to be more research regarding how circus performance and performance practice specifically benefit adolescence and their wellbeing. Understanding the existing research in these areas is crucial to comprehend the potential positive impact of performance on adolescence. Overall, this literature review provides an overview of the research conducted on circus arts, adolescence, social Circus, performance, and wellbeing, laying the foundation for further exploration into the specific benefits of circus performance for adolescent wellbeing.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study uses a qualitative research approach, employing various methods such as observation in a familiar environment, solicited journals, and interviews. Qualitative research focuses on understanding subjective experiences, perspectives, and meanings attributed to phenomena rather than relying on numerical measurements or statistics (Jackson *et al.*, 2077).

### **Context**

Having taught the pre-preparatory program for the past twelve years, I initially conceived the idea for my research during a show I created and directed in 2018. The young adolescents involved in the production had experienced a challenging year, and they approached me to direct a show that would provide them with a means of self-expression. The subsequent year, all of them enrolled in the same class. They expressed that the show, which we titled Page, had helped them cope with their difficulties and positively impacted their self-esteem. During that year, a pair of individuals displayed remarkable courage by openly discussing their sexual orientations with their parents. Three people decided to pursue different academic majors, showcasing their willingness to embrace change. Similarly, an individual who had initially hesitated to undergo the National Circus School audition displayed great bravery by not only doing them but also achieving acceptance.

### **Study Objective**

This study will delve into the realm of contemporary circus rehearsals and performances. More specifically, I will observe how participants involved in a circus performance will affect them, from its inception and rehearsals to the final presentation. While previous research has predominantly focused on the performance itself and its reception rather than the process and

performance, such as Perahia and Rivard (2020) in “La Performance du Cirque Alternatif Montréalais comme espaces de changement de perception de la Marginalité”, this study aims to examine both aspects as interconnected processes. It acknowledges that the outcomes may differ if participants only engage in one aspect without the other. The primary objective of the study is to explore if circus performances can have a positive impact on the lives of adolescents. It will be an opportunity to study closely what generates these benefits.

Eugenia Scabini and Galimberti Cario (1995), explaines that during adolescence, teenagers embark on their transition to adulthood by determining what is essential and pursuing those go into adulthood. They do so by exploring new ideologies and having new experiences to define their values, goals and aspirations into adulthood. In my classes at the École de Cirque de Verdun, I have witnessed participants who actively chose to remain engaged in circus arts settings, even if it does not align with their intended career paths. These individuals either return to participate in classes or take on teaching roles, indefinitely integrating circus arts into their lives. The reason for this is that circus arts offer numerous positive attributes such as concentration, cooperation, self-esteem, personal and collective development, but most importantly, “[...] a sense of belonging” (Spiegel *et al.*, 2019: 2).

This study also helps us better understand the reasons and mechanisms through which the practice of circus arts positively impacts adolescents, leading them to desire to continue the circus as a regular activity, even if they don't make a career out of it. This study also addresses a recurring question in various educational circus performance settings: Why does it offer such significant benefits to its participants? As well as trying to uncover new insights and establish a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Nelson, 2013).

In order to gather comprehensive research data, I created a threefold approach to data collection: observation, solicited journals, and interviews. Each method contributes valuable insights into the subject matter, enabling a thorough examination of the various dimensions involved in the influence of circus arts performance on adolescents' lives.

### **Research Question**

As mentioned, this study aims to understand if, how, and why circus performance and its practice have an impact on adolescent wellbeing. Part of my observation focused on the positive interactions and actions that adolescents engaged in during rehearsal. Furthermore, the study aimed to identify any underlying negative issues and examine how participants learned from those challenges. In this context, wellbeing refers to a stable state of mind, a healthy physical body (De Borja *et al.*, 2022), and strong relationships (Thomas *et al.*, 2017), ultimately leading to deep-rooted happiness. The study identifies three key elements of circus practice that may be critical for adolescent development: risky play, attachment, and social interactions.

Play or, in some situations, risky play (Kvalnes & Sandseter, 2023) in circus practice can help adolescents develop trust, self-awareness, and social skills. Embodiment refers to physically engaging in circus activities, improving self-esteem, emotional intelligence, creativity (Holland, 2010), and resilience (Van Es, *et al.*, 2019). Social interactions within the circus environment can also foster positive adolescent psychological outcomes (Kumar *et al.*, 2020).

John Bowlby, a psychologist who developed attachment theory, emphasizes the importance of a secure bond between a child and their caregiver, enabling the child to explore and experiment safely while being away from their caregiver (1988, 11). Similarly, in the context of circus art, the relationship between the coach and the student holds significant importance. Participants in circus classes willingly take emotional and physical risks, and they rely on their

coaches for guidance and a non-judgmental approach to feel safe with them and in the overall environment.

Social interaction is the essence of circus performance, encompassing relationships between artists and apparatus (Lavers *et al.*, 2020), floor and gravity (Leyton, 2021), and self and others (Lavers, Burtt and Bochud, 2022). These social interactions provide adolescents valuable opportunities to develop their communication skills, active listening abilities, and collaborative work within a group setting.

## Methods

### *Ethics*

All ethics forms, including parental approbation, are in annexes 1 and 2. In order to conduct this research, I had to get a certification on the *Panel on Research Ethics, Navigating the Ethics of Human Research*. I completed this certification on June 17, 2022. This study prioritized the wellbeing of participants and ensured that no harm was inflicted upon them, either physically or mentally. Their employment or academic commitments were not compromised during or after the research. The study's primary objective was to explore the positive impact of circus performance itself, not specifically the influence of circus coaches on the participants. The research approach was non-hierarchical; no participants were placed in uncomfortable environments. Written forms were available in English and French, but the consent form was in French. Participation in the study was voluntary, and participants were not coerced or manipulated into participating.

**Research Participants.** I include ten participants in this research, all aged between 13 and 17. These individuals were all students or employees of the ECV. Each participant and their parents or legal guardians were asked to sign a consent form. The participants and their parents

were free to withdraw from the study at any stage without facing any prejudice. Any information collected from participants who withdrew should have been kept or included in the study.

A conflict of interest could have arisen during that research, as I was or had been their coach or supervisor at the École de Cirque de Verdun. A clear statement was attached to the research proposal, stating that no child or parent should have felt obligated to participate. Furthermore, there would have been no negative impact on participants' ongoing involvement at the circus school if they had chosen not to take part in the research. Participants would have been able to communicate with my graduate supervisor and my immediate supervisor at ECV if they had any concerns or questions.

Moreover, to minimize the conflict of interest, I did not direct the performance process or the performance that was part of this study. Instead, I observed and conducted interviews. Two instructors were involved in this project, both of whom had extensive experience teaching at the ECV for several years.

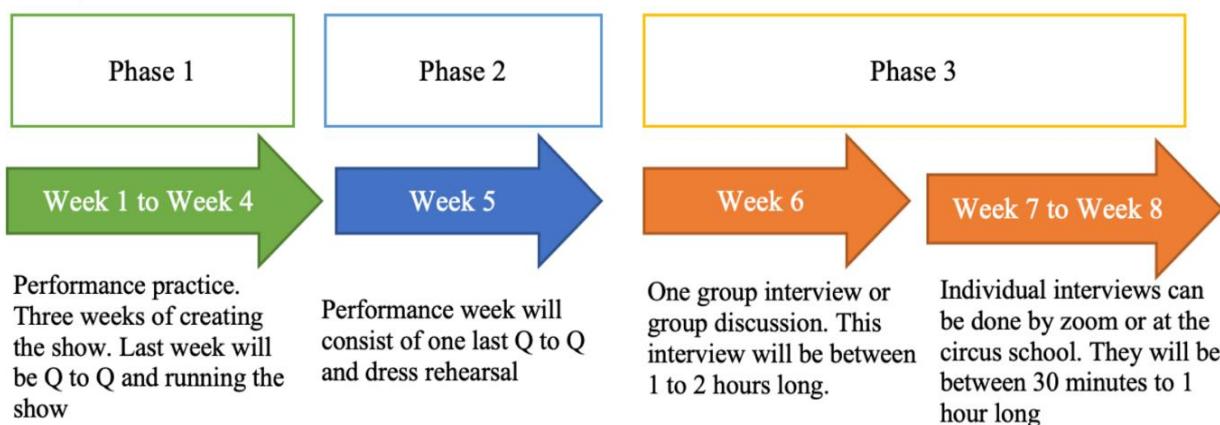
The recruitment process was conducted through convenience sampling. Each participant who fit the research criteria were directly contacted via email. Contact information for participants and parents were retrieved from the circus school database, with permission and assistance from the ECV.

**Privacy.** Privacy in the research results was of utmost importance. Although participants performed in front of a live audience, their identities in this project remained undisclosed. All audio recordings, transcriptions, journals, and video footage of the performances were securely stored on a private server with exclusive access granted only to the supervisors involved in the research. This measure ensured that confidentiality was maintained, and the privacy of the participants was protected throughout the study.

To maintain participant identity confidentiality, each individual was assigned a code name. Each received the name of a flower: Bellflower, Dahlia, Foxglove, Gladiolus, Lavender, Magnolia, Rose, Tiger Lily and Tares. The real identities of the participants are known only to the three supervisors associated with the thesis and myself. All consent forms and other private information pertaining to the participants are securely stored on the private server, ensuring their privacy and data protection.

**Data Collection.** Data collection took place over a span of two months. The initial four weeks involved students practising and creating the show. During the subsequent week, students performed their work in front of a live audience. The sixth week comprised gathering information through a focus group, which engaged all participants. This focus group aimed to discuss aspects such as socialization, trust, and risk management within the context of co-creating acrobatic circus. The last two weeks were dedicated to conducting individual interviews pertaining to topics like time management, coping mechanisms, and emotional intelligence. Data collection involved solicited journals distributed to students in Week 1 and collected in Week 8.

### Study timeline



**Figure 3:** Study timeline. Retrieved from ethics.

After doing the research, individual interviews were not possible, for the majority of the participants could not attend. Therefore, only the group interview was done.

**Consent Forms.** The parents and guardians of each participant will receive an email from the circus school, including a description of the research and the consent form. The forms can be submitted in person or through electronic signatures. A copy of this form will be kept at the circus as well as with my supervisor's locked cabinets. Oral consent will be done before each interview an audio form will be saved as well as the transcript.

**Participant Withdrawal and Data Removal.** In the consent form, there is a small paragraph that explains withdrawal and data removal. Furthermore, each phase of the research has data collection. However, with each phase, they will receive a smaller consent form to allow them to withdraw if needed. For example, solicited journals will have a consent form on the first page. Each interview will have an oral consent script. If a participant withdraws, their data will be destroyed and not be included in the analysis.

## **Research Design**

Direct observation offered a firsthand understanding of the participants' behaviours, movements, nonverbal cues, and social dynamics within the context of the circus school. It provided an opportunity to witness the authenticity and genuine expressions of the performers as they engaged in various circus arts activities. This direct observation of their actions, emotions, and interactions offered valuable insights into their wellbeing, skill development, and the overall impact of the performance process. Further, each practice and rehearsal were filmed, allowing me to review the video footage on my own time. The videos allowed me to examine and categorize the observed events, patterns, and themes that could be identified, providing a comprehensive picture of the participants' experiences and their impact on wellbeing.

This research employs *controlled observation*, wherein the researchers have the authority to determine various factors such as the timing, location, and participants involved in the observations (<https://www.simplypsychology.org>). Controlled observation allows participants to be observed within a secure and precisely defined environment, ensuring their safety, and enabling more focused data collection (Ryan *et al.*, 1995).

Performance inquiry allows the researcher to embody the research; it introduces to education research what artist knows and practice, embodying research to create, engage, express, and ask questions (Fels, 2015). It embraces performance as a space for exploration, reflection, and learning. It recognizes that engaging in performance can be a powerful means of investigating and understanding various aspects of a subject or a question.

Performance lies at the heart of this research, aiming to comprehend the reasons behind its impact on the wellbeing of adolescents and explore the mechanisms through which it brings about such improvements. Therefore, in this research, I was an active participant observer, watching individuals within their natural environment and actively recording data from these observations following methodology established by Johnson *et al.*, 2006.

## **Sample and Settings**

**Participants.** This research examines the creative process of participants aged 13–17 who are students at a circus school. These participants have varying levels of circus skills and come from diverse economic, cultural, parental, and educational backgrounds. The objective is for them to adapt the previous year's show, *Skafos*, based on their individual vision. The classes were divided into two sections: in the first section, they were given the opportunity to self-direct, while in the second section, the coaches assisted in refining the acts and developing the storyline.

First, I carefully selected a diverse group of participants that meets the age and skill criteria, ensuring representation from different backgrounds. Introduce the task, emphasizing that the focus is on their individual creativity without providing additional training in basic circus skills.

***Organization.*** I designed the observation and performance structure for the project, which required obtaining special permission from the Circus School of Verdun to use their space concurrently with other classes. The school also granted us access to their apparatuses, but I took on the responsibility of moving all the equipment, including the aerial apparatus, as well as setting up the stage equipment, such as sound and lighting. In essence, I acted as the production manager, overseeing the design and technical aspects of the research.

I took charge of designing the scenography of the performance. While I developed the structure of the original performance, including the script, material structure, and physical design, I made sure to provide the two teachers involved in the research and the participants with the freedom to create as they pleased. This collaborative approach ensured that everyone had a voice in shaping the outcome of the performance.

By taking on these responsibilities, I ensured that the project had a suitable venue and all the necessary equipment, allowing the participants to engage in the creative process while maintaining the integrity of the circus school's operations thoroughly and safely.

***Supervision.*** In this study, there were two coaches involved in facilitating the process. The first coach, David Bastien, joined the participants for a total of two classes. During his time, he warmly greeted the participants and provided an overview of how the performance would take place. David Bastien has prior experience teaching, coaching, and working with the participants.

The second coach, Jorane-Tiana Robert, took over the remaining six classes, including the final performance. Mrs. Robert played a significant role in guiding the participants

throughout the creative process. With her extensive experience and expertise, she provided instruction, coaching, and support as the participants refined their acts and prepared for the performance. Both coaches have a longstanding history with the circus school, having been involved since childhood. Furthermore, both coaches work at the circus school, bringing their expertise and knowledge to support the participants in their creative journey. The involvement of these two coaches, who deeply understand the participants' abilities and backgrounds, adds valuable insights and guidance to the project. Their presence throughout the process ensures that the participants receive the necessary mentorship and expertise to enhance their creative potential.

During the show rehearsals, the group would divide itself as needed and guide each other when working as a unified group. For example, when the three participants were practising silks and rope aerial, the remaining members would collaborate to find something suitable to support their act. However, the supervisors occasionally determined how to divide the group into smaller rehearsal units to ensure optimal learning opportunities and save time.

**Schedule.** The re-creation of a performance *Skafos* in 2022, with a new artistic team and rehearsal process spanned four weeks leading up to the final performance, with two classes per week held on Friday evenings and Saturday evenings. This scheduling arrangement was modified based on the participants' requests. Initially, the classes were planned for Wednesday and Friday evenings, but most participants expressed concerns about managing their school commitments alongside the project. As a result, the schedule was adjusted to Friday and Saturday evenings to accommodate their needs.

The duration of each class was from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m., except for the last class of the performance process. Since the performance was scheduled for 6:30 p.m., the final class was

conducted in the morning to allow ample preparation time before the performance. The participants also determined the timing for this class. Initially, the classes were intended to be held from 4:00 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. to fit within the school's free training period. However, upon understanding that some participants would struggle to arrive on time, the circus school made an exception and allowed the research time to be rescheduled. These adjustments in scheduling and timing were made to ensure that the participants could fully engage in the project without compromising their other commitments. The flexibility demonstrated by the circus school in accommodating the participant's needs contributed to a more inclusive and manageable experience for everyone involved.

***Space and its constraints.*** The research for this project was conducted at the École de cirque de Verdun on the main floor. Due to the adjusted schedule, there were other classes taking place simultaneously. The coaches had to consider this while re-creating the show, ensuring the performance did not interfere with or disrupt the ongoing classes. They had to carefully plan and organize the acts to allow for the smooth coexistence of multiple activities within the same space.

In addition to managing the class schedule, the instructors also had to ensure that enough apparatuses or props were available for the participants to use. In this research, there were 30 juggling balls, swinging poïs (rope with a weight at the end), two areal silks, one areal rope, six unicycles, one bicycle, six blocks (simple black blocks), two air tracks (long inflated acrobatic floor), four hula hoops and six juggling clubs (see Annex 5). This involved coordinating the usage of equipment and props, ensuring that each act had the necessary resources to bring their creative ideas to life.

Furthermore, music was another aspect that needed special consideration. Since other classes were playing music out loud during the same time to help artists with rhythm and timing in the rehearsal process, the teachers had to find a way to accommodate this overlap. They had to ensure that the music for rehearsing the performance was consistent with the music being used by the other classes. Careful coordination and communication were required to ensure a harmonious and seamless experience for all involved. The coaches' ability to navigate these logistical challenges, such as managing space, resources, and music, while creating a cohesive and engaging show demonstrates their adaptability and commitment to facilitating a successful project within the dynamic environment of the ECV.

***Circus apparatuses and various props.*** Before starting rehearsals, the coach implemented a restriction on access to apparatuses. The participants were asked to select objects and apparatuses previously used in the original show, *Skafos*, that they would reference in this re-creation or adaptation. Therefore, a predetermined set of apparatuses and items were made available. However, the participants were also free to incorporate different stage objects and apparatuses into their acts if they were deemed suitable for the new performance. This allowed flexibility and creativity in their choices and the possibility to explore new apparatuses and techniques. Moreover, the participants were also permitted to incorporate items typically unrelated to circus into their acts. For example, they could use cell phones or street clothes as part of their acts. This expanded their creative possibilities and encouraged them to think beyond conventional circus equipment, enabling them to incorporate personal and unique elements into their acts.

By setting these guidelines, the coach ensured a balance between using existing apparatuses from the original show and providing opportunities for participants to explore new

items and incorporate their imaginative ideas. This approach fostered a dynamic and innovative performance that integrated elements from both the original show and the participants' individual creative inputs.

**Interaction.** During the observation process, one of the key aspects was monitoring the participants' interactions. Using the observation footage, I evaluated whether social hierarchies or status dynamics were among them. Additionally, I identified potential leaders and followers within the group. I also observed the types of relationships that existed among the participants, including pre-existing or emerging friendships within the group. I examined how these relationships evolved and influenced the creative process.

By closely observing their interactions, I gained insights into the group dynamics and how participants related to one another. This included analyzing how they communicated, collaborated, supported, or challenged each other, and made decisions collectively. It was important to note that these dynamics varied based on factors like the participants' age, skill level, personal preferences, or cultural backgrounds. Through this evaluation, I gained a deeper understanding of the social dynamics within the group and how these dynamics influenced their creative process. This information was valuable in assessing the impact of diverse backgrounds, social hierarchies, and relationships on the participants' ability to collaborate, exchange ideas, and work together effectively.

I approached this observation with rigour, striving to maintain sensitivity and respect for the participants' privacy and individual experiences. I aimed to maintain an unbiased perspective and ensure that any findings would be used to enhance understanding rather than perpetuate stereotypes or prejudices. To achieve this, even though I knew all the participants from their ongoing presence at the circus school where I work, I intentionally distanced myself from the

group as much as possible. While I was involved in the production management and creation of the performance, I did not have direct contact with the participants during the research phase. I took notes based solely on what I observed during the research rather than relying on their usual behaviour in everyday classes, where I also saw them interact outside of the context of this research.

### Solicited Journals

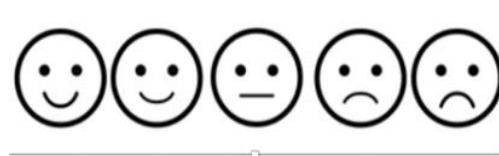
From the beginning of the research, solicited journals were implemented as a data collection method. Each participant was given the opportunity to choose a diary of their choice, which varied in colours and featured funny emoji designs with fur accents. To ensure clarity, a carefully worded paper was attached to the beginning of each journal, explaining the purpose and process of this study. The participants received verbal instructions on using the journals and the emoji face.

Bonjour,

Bienvenu à votre journal personnel. Sachez que tout ce que vous écrivez à l'intérieur est confidentiel. Personne ne pourra le voir, le lire ou savoir que c'est le vôtre.

Sachez que vous pouvez écrire comme vous le voulez sans répercussion ou risque d'être jugé.

Vous allez avoir des questions avant et après la pratique. Vous avez le droit d'écrire ce que vous voulez comme vous le voulez. Cependant, si vous n'avez pas de mot pour vous exprimer ou pas l'envie d'écrire vous pouvez tout simplement mettre un emoji (suivre celui montrer).



*Figure 4: Welcome Letter in Solicited Journals<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Hello, welcome to your personal diary. Please note that everything you write in here will be confidential. No one will be able to see this, read this or know that this belongs to you. Note that you can write anything without repercussion or risk of being judge. You will be asked questions before and after practice. You are allowed to write what you want, how you want. However, if you do not have the words to express yourself or you do not feel like writing, you can simply use an emoji (example below)

Regarding personal identification, the participants had the freedom to use their names, fake names, or no names at all. The only requirement was that they could easily recognize their journals without opening them. A bag containing the journals was brought at the beginning of each practice and stored away at the end of each session.

Before and after every rehearsal and later performance, the participants were given a dedicated time frame of two to five minutes to write in their journals. During this time, they were provided with two to three questions to answer. Participants were encouraged to respond either by using emojis or writing about their thoughts. They had the liberty to write beyond the topics related to the performance and could also express their emotional state. Participants were permitted to write about unrelated topics as well, and there were no restrictions on which language they used nor any concern for spelling or grammar.

The journals were collected, transcribed, and coded on the last performance to protect the participants' identities. The purpose of implementing these journals was to collect data and allow for active participation on the participants' part beyond their performance. It also provided a means for them to communicate aspects of themselves that they might not feel comfortable sharing face-to-face. The journals facilitated reflection on certain aspects that occurred naturally but of which the participants may have been unaware.

Analyzing the journal entries, I aimed to understand and evaluate how the participants felt before and after practice. Therefore, there were two sets of questions asked before and after practice. These are the questions before practice.

1. How did your day go?
2. Why do circus
3. Would I do a professional show

4. What caused me to stress this week
5. How do you react to change?
6. How did your week go?
7. The show is in 2 weeks; how do you feel?
8. Is show stress and life stress the same?
9. How was your day?
10. What stresses me out the most?
11. Do I see myself hanging out with everyone?
12. What do I like about creation
13. Were you ever bullied? Here?
14. What do you think about embarrassment?
15. What do you think is going to happen during the show?
16. What do you think of the coaches vs. your teachers?

These questions were asked after classes. At times, I had to adjust the questions based on how they felt or what they talked about during the practice.

1. What do you think of the group?
2. What do you want to change about the group?
3. What did I learn in circus that I apply in my life?
4. If do not like the coach or participant, would I stop circus?
5. Did you want to say something in class and did not?
6. Best and worst moments of today's practice
7. Are you still stressed about the show?
8. What am I proud of today and this week?

9. How do you feel tonight?
10. Do I have friends at the circus?
11. How do you feel about the show?

However, a few limitations were associated with using journals as a data collection method.

Firstly, some participants frequently used emojis as answers, limiting the information provided, especially for more complex questions. The handwriting and expressions used by some participants were unfamiliar to the researcher, making it challenging to decipher their intended meanings. For the individuals whose handwriting was too hard to decipher, I asked them to write it on a Word document during my data collecting of the research project and after the performance.

## **Interviews**

Initially, the plan was to conduct individual and group interviews as part of the research process. However, after using journals and group interviews, it was clear that individual interviews would take too long due to participants' constraints. Scheduling individual interviews for each participant would have been a lengthy process, considering their various commitments. As a result, it was decided to conduct a single one-hour group interview instead.

Due to scheduling constraints, two participants were unable to attend the final group interview. The group interview was nonetheless conducted approximately one month after the performance. This time gap allowed the participants to detach themselves from the project and provided insights into whether their wellbeing effects were short-term or long-term.

The group interview took place in January 2023 at the ECV. I conducted a semi-structured interview that included a round-table discussion with simple questions. The intention was to allow the participants to lead the conversation and explore topics as they saw fit. Given that

circus is a social art form, it was interesting to observe how the participants interacted with each other outside of the performance setting and how they experienced various stages of the process, including the dress rehearsal and actual performance. The objective of the interview was to encourage participants to discuss different topics related to their experiences, fostering open and engaging dialogue among the group. The following questions were the original questions planned for the interview.

1. What is the difference between performance and performance practice?
2. Do you like performance practice or before better?
3. Is it your first time doing a performance where people pay?
4. In your everyday life, do you feel that there is a difference when you have performance practice and when you do not?
5. What does wellbeing mean?
6. Is circus a part of your life?
7. Did you learn something from the performance regarding relationships with friends, parents or romantic?
8. Is failing positive in circus performance?
9. Do you think circus performance is dangerous?
10. If you did not have circus arts in your life, would you be more stressed?

As the interview went on, participants naturally changed the subject. Therefore, I had to adjust to them and ask additional questions. A total of seven additional questions were asked. During the interviews, the participants entered the room with happiness and laughter. They were thrilled to be reunited and eager to engage in conversations with each other. Unfortunately, the transcription fails to capture their genuine joy and laughter. Even when discussing more serious

topics like risk-taking, they found ways to interject small jokes, maintaining a light-hearted atmosphere.

## Data Collection

I came to every practice performance, rehearsals, and the performance as an observer. I recorded videos of the sessions to review them later for further analysis. During the observation process, I focused primarily on the participants' interactions and communication, paying close attention to signs of boredom, instances of participants not engaging in conversation, and other notable moments that caught my attention or erupted in confusion. It also allowed me to observe the videos with a different observational goal (Ryan *et al.*, 1995). My main objective was to identify instances of social interaction, play, and risk-taking. Upon reviewing the videos, I had the chance to shift my focus from the original goal and notice other events unfolding.

Taking notes during the observation proved to be a challenge, as multiple things often happened simultaneously, making it difficult to determine where to direct my attention. However, I tried to jot down important, interesting, or confusing moments as they occurred. As will be explained in Chapter 4, *The Pedagogy of the École de Cirque de Verdun*, play, socializing and taking calculated risks in a safe environment are key elements that promote participant safety, trust, and rapid learning ability.

Play is a quintessential childhood activity that serves as both a need and a right for children, and it plays a central role in their overall wellbeing (Evans *et al.*, 2016). Socializing improves children's cognitive abilities, enhances their social interactions, and aids in their overall development (Murphy, 2022). Engaging in risk-taking or risky play allows children to develop their physical limitations, decision-making skills, and harm-avoidance abilities, which are valuable attributes that can benefit them into adulthood (Kvalnes and Sandseter, 2023).

To aid in organizing and making sense of the observed behaviours, I drew on the ECV's own pedagogical methods which will be described in the next chapter. This approach was crucial because the participants had been taking classes at the ECV for several years, which naturally influenced their way of approaching circus practice. By aligning with the pedagogical approach of the ECV, I could better understand and interpret their actions and behaviours within the context of their circus training. I created a chart that served as a valuable tool to understand if their behaviour was influenced by play, taking risks or socializing. Any event or behaviour contributing to a participant's actions would be recorded and classified accordingly.

For instance, if a participant chose to sit while others were standing and moving around, that event would be noted, explained, and then categorized as under, socializing, or risk. The result box is a small explanation that provides information on what occurred after an event and how it influenced the participants' wellbeing. It summarizes the outcomes or consequences of the event and highlights the impact it had on the individuals' overall state of wellbeing. Any subsequent change in behaviour, such as the participant standing up or altering their actions, would also be documented.

Direct observation was highly beneficial in understanding the participants' behaviours and interactions. It allowed me to witness their development and evolution firsthand, in real time, with non-verbal elements to consider and group dynamics within the larger space, which would have been more challenging to perceive solely through video recordings. Nonetheless, reviewing the recorded videos was crucial to ensure that every event and behaviour was accurately recorded and to minimize potential biases. It also provided an opportunity to mitigate the limitations of the human eye, which tends to be naturally drawn to areas of movement and activity.

**Chart 1:** Organization Chart

Action	Play	Social	Risk	Result
Dandelion put themselves on the side and is not participating. Rose can up to them and brought them to the group.		X	X	For the rest of the class, Dandelion participated the entire class.

## Transcription

**Journals.** I transcribed the journals and documented them in a word-processing format.

This enabled me to read, search, tag, and reference the participants' trajectories more effectively.

Converting the journal content into a digital format facilitated a more accessible data analysis.

The transcriptions allowed for efficient searching, organization, and extraction of relevant information from the journals, contributing to a more streamlined and comprehensive analysis process. Furthermore, the digital format allowed for seamless integration of the journal entries into the broader research documentation and analysis.

**Interview.** Two different methods were employed to collect data during the interviews.

The first method involved audio recording the interviews. This was crucial for transcribing the content and capturing the nuances of participants' tones of voice. Participants often expressed their thoughts and feelings using varying tones that conveyed additional meaning beyond the words themselves. Sarcasm was frequently employed to describe emotions or events, and the audio recordings captured these subtle vocal cues, providing a more complete understanding of their responses.

The second method utilized was transcription, which aimed to capture the participants' spoken words as accurately as possible. The transcriptions sought to faithfully represent the participants' speech patterns and choice of words. It was observed that participants sometimes incorporated English words to describe their emotions or state of being. Interruptions and

instances where participants cut each other off while speaking were also transcribed, capturing the dynamic nature of the conversations as closely as possible.

A comprehensive dataset was obtained by combining audio recordings and transcriptions, allowing for a thorough analysis of the interviews while preserving the unique characteristics of participants' voices, expressions, and linguistic choices.

#### Ethical Considerations

***Authentication.*** To maintain authenticity and truthfulness, all practices, performances, journals, and other relevant documents are securely stored on a private server. My supervisory team was invited to observe practice sessions at any time, ensuring that trust is maintained, and the safety of participants is upheld. They also have access to transcriptions, which help ensure accurate translation of any recorded information. This comprehensive approach contributes to the integrity and accuracy of the work conducted.

***Wellbeing and benefit for the participants.*** Each participant in the research project gained several benefits from learning how to create a circus performance. Some individuals had previous circus training but lacked the opportunity to perform in front of a proper audience, so this experience provided them with that opportunity. Others expanded their skill set and techniques by learning disciplines they had not previously explored, such as aerial, bicycle, hand-to-hand, and more. Their wellbeing improved as they socialized and collaborated with a group on a meaningful project, giving them a sense of belonging beyond their regular school curriculum.

## Limitations

It is not easy to see a pattern of wellbeing when participants miss classes. Also, I used students who were already a part of the ECV; the results might differ from a group that was not taught there. Participants' shyness due to being observed by the other students who were taking classes at the school and their subsequent need for a comfortable environment took time to overcome. Furthermore, external commitments posed limitations, with some participants consistently arriving late or missing a few classes. This inconsistency makes it challenging to identify clear patterns, especially when individuals missed only 2 out of 8 classes.

Names	Attendance								
	November 18	November 19	November 25	November 26	December 2	December 3	December 9	December 10	
Bellflower	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Dahlia	X	A	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Daffodil	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Foxglove	X	X	A	X	X	X	X	X	
Gladiolus	A	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Lavender	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Magnolia	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Rose	30 mins late	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Tiger Lily	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Tares	A	X	X	A	X	X	X	X	

**Chart 2:** Attendance Sheet

In conclusion, this methodology chapter outlined the approach taken to observe and analyze the participants' experiences in the circus performance project. A comprehensive understanding of the group's dynamics, interactions, and learning processes was achieved by employing a mixed-method approach that included participant observation, journal analysis, and transcriptions. The use of pedagogical methods specific to the École de cirque of Verdun helped capture the unique influences of the circus environment on the participants' behaviours and development. Drawing on this background and experiences, I observed how participants

interacted with each other and understood how it affected their wellbeing. The data collection and analysis approach ensured the preservation of privacy and respect for individual experiences. Using observation, solicited journals and a group interview, I could fully comprehend how their wellbeing is being impacted while preparing for their performance and performing it. Overall, this methodology provides a solid foundation for further exploration of the participants' journey and the impact of the circus performance project on their personal growth and development.

## Chapter 4: The Pedagogy of the École de Cirque de Verdun

**History.** In 1988, three talented young circus artists came together to establish the École de Cirque de Verdun (ECV) in the heart of Verdun, a multilingual working-class borough of Montreal. In 1991, the circus school officially obtained non-profit organization status. Its mission is to provide access to circus arts for families, individuals of all ages, and various social groups while fostering a sense of community. Initially operating from a primary school gymnasium, the ECV gradually expanded its reach and relocated to the Guy-Gagnon Arena, a former ice rink. In 2016, through a magnificent renovation, the old arena was transformed into a stunning facility that offers enhanced possibilities for circus training and performances. Over the years, the school has played a pivotal role in shaping the careers of numerous circus artists. Some have gone to professional schools in Québec, such as the École Nation de Cirque (ENC) and the École de cirque du Québec (ECQ). Others have gone on to join prestigious companies such as Cirque Éloize, Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Alfonse, The 7 Fingers, Cavalia, and more.



**Figure 5:** The Pre-preparatory 2018, *Page*. Picture: Benoit Leroux

**The Circus School.** Today, the ECV welcomes more than 5,000 participants annually. Although the circus school's mission has remained steadfast over the past 35 years, its values and services have evolved and adapted. The establishment emphasizes creativity, cooperation, mental and physical growth, and social engagement; the circus provides a secure, inclusive, respectful, and enjoyable environment for all. With an unwavering commitment to progress, the school continuously strives to expand its reach and impact, reaching out to as many individuals as possible. The focus extends beyond imparting circus arts skills, as the welfare and wellbeing of each participant are paramount in the school's endeavours.

**Types of Classes.** The ECV provides a diverse range of six programs each year to cater to various age groups and interests. These include school workshops, summer camps, children's courses (for ages 12 months to 17 years old), adults' courses (for ages 18 to 49), courses for participants aged fifty and above, as well as a paraprofessional course specifically designed to prepare individuals for entry into esteemed circus schools like the École de Cirque de Québec and the National Circus School in Montréal.

In addition to these programs, the ECV occasionally organizes courses that cater to specific social communities and may offer subsidies or financial assistance to ensure accessibility for all.

### **The Circus School Pedagogy**

Over the years, the ECV has embraced various pedagogical approaches to teach its participants effectively. A significant turning point occurred in 2016 with the inauguration of the newly renovated school, prompting the introduction of new courses. These three additional

courses were specifically designed to assist children aged 12 months to four years in enhancing their developmental stages through the use of circus apparatus.

This development led the pedagogy department to reevaluate and improve their teaching methods and the dynamics between coaches and students, as well as fostering stronger connections among the students themselves. To achieve this, the ECV placed particular emphasis on three essential aspects that contribute to participant growth and progress: socialization, play, and risk management. By promoting social interaction, providing opportunities for play, and effectively managing risks, the ECV aimed to create an optimal learning environment that encourages personal development, behavioural self-management, and appropriate modes of communication (Owen-DeSchryver *et al.*, 2008).

**Socialization.** Theorists and researchers widely recognize socialization as a vital aspect of proper child development. Numerous studies and experts in child psychology and education have emphasized the significance of social interaction and its impact on various domains of a child's growth. After assuming the coordinator role at the circus school in 2017, I embarked on creating documentation that aligned with the values of École de Cirque based on what I learned at university (Annex 8). Socialization holds paramount importance within the school; it helps children develop essential social skills, such as communication, cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution (Ioannidou & Konstantikaki, 2008). According to Lev Vygotsky, a “[...] child receives the knowledge initially through the contacts and interactions with people, and then assimilates this knowledge adding the personal values in it” (Topçiu & Myftiu, 2015: 104). Children learn through observation and imitation of others. This process allows them to grasp various aspects, such as boundaries, cultural norms, social etiquette, and everyday tasks. By

observing and imitating the behaviours and actions of those around them, children acquire essential skills and knowledge.

Socialization and interaction play crucial roles in children's learning and development. Through socialization, they engage with others, exchange ideas, and learn from different perspectives. By interacting with their peers and adults, children have the opportunity to learn, adapt, and incorporate new information into their own understanding of the world. Moreover, through these social interactions, children can reinvent and reproduce what they have learned. They can experiment, practice, and refine their skills and behaviours, building upon their previous knowledge and experiences. This iterative process of learning through socialization and interaction supports their cognitive, social, and emotional development.

***Socialization and Circus.*** Circus arts, and particularly circus performance, heavily rely on socialization. It forms the essence of circus and acts as the binding force within the circus community. The collaborative nature of circus arts emphasizes the importance of social interaction and working together. Many circus skills involve partnerships or group performances, such as hand-to-hand acrobatics, Russian bars, and passing juggling, among others. These skills require coordination, trust, and communication between performers (Cadwell, 2018). By working together, circus artists create awe-inspiring acts that showcase their collective talent and dedication.

Circus is not only an individual pursuit but also a deeply social activity and art form. It revolves around the idea of collective embodied creation, where performers come together to create something greater than the sum of its parts. This collaborative process fosters a sense of belonging, camaraderie, and shared accomplishment within the circus community. Moreover, engaging in circus arts has positive impacts on wellbeing. The physical activity, creative

expression, and social connections involved in circus performance contribute to improved mental and physical health. Circus also offers opportunities for individuals to engage in larger social and collective activities, fostering a sense of community and promoting social cohesion (Spiegel *et al.*, 2019).

Socialization and trust are paramount in circus arts, especially considering the potential risks involved. In acts like hand-to-hand or partner acrobatics, where performers rely on each other's strength and precision, the trust and communication between the flyer and porter are crucial. The flyer, who is elevated or performing intricate movements, must maintain proper body alignment and balance to avoid falling. Simultaneously, the porter must have the skill and strength to support and catch the flyer, ensuring their safety. If a mistake occurs and the flyer starts to fall, it is crucial for the flyer to trust that their partners will be there to catch them, minimizing the risk of injury.



**Figure 6:** The Pre-preparatory 2019, *En Attendants le Train*. Picture: Benoit Leroux

This level of trust and coordination can only be achieved through socialization and building strong relationships among the performers. By spending time together, understanding each other's strengths and limitations, and practising extensively, the performers develop a deep sense of trust and reliance on each other.

Moreover, respect is a fundamental aspect of this social dynamic. Each performer respects the role and responsibilities of the others and understands the importance of their contribution to the skill. This mutual respect and understanding further strengthen the bonds between performers and enhance the overall safety and performance quality. In other words, in circus arts, socialization is vital as it fosters trust, communication, and respect among performers. This social connection is crucial in mitigating risks, ensuring the safety of performers, and creating captivating and seamless performances (Faltus & Richard, 2022).

**Play.** Play is a multifaceted concept that can vary based on individuals, cultures, and environments. It is important to note that the understanding and expression of play can differ across cultures and individual preferences. Different societies and cultural contexts may have their unique perspectives on play, influenced by factors such as traditions, values, and social norms. While it can be challenging to provide a definitive definition of play, certain common aspects are often associated with it. One of the fundamental characteristics of play is its spontaneous nature. Play is typically voluntary and arises naturally from the individual's own inclination or desire. It is an activity that individuals engage in willingly, driven by their own interests, curiosity, and enjoyment.

Play is also often associated with leisure. It is an activity that is pursued for its own sake rather than for any external goals or obligations. Play is an inherently enjoyable and pleasurable experience, providing individuals with a sense of freedom, fun, and relaxation (Lund *et al.*,

2023). Play can take on various forms and can be observed across different domains, such as physical, imaginative, social, and cognitive. It can involve creative exploration, problem-solving, pretend or symbolic play, physical movements and interactions, and much more.

Play is a universal human desire that transcends age and can serve various purposes. It can be utilized for different objectives, including developmental, leisure, therapeutic, and educational purposes. Evidently, there are also distinct types of play that individuals engage in. They are categories of play such as, common plays are solitary (alone), parallel (playing alongside other children), cooperative (playing with others), imaginative, physical, and constructive (Pellegrini, 2009). There are different types of play, but they can also be used in different ways: developmentally, leisurely, therapy, and educationally. These are just a few examples of the diverse types of play that individuals engage in. Each type of play serves different purposes and offers unique benefits for individuals of all ages, contributing to their overall development, wellbeing, and enjoyment.

Play holds immense importance for children and plays a significant role in their development. It provides the perfect context for children to learn because it is free and open-ended. Children have control over their play, whether alone or with others. They decide what to use and control their environment with their creativity. Play occurs naturally for children, so it is understandable that they learn from it (Ahmad *et al.*, 2016). It offers a rich learning environment where children have agency, freedom, and opportunities for exploration, creativity, and social interaction. Through play, children acquire many skills, knowledge, and experiences that contribute to their holistic development.

***Circus and play.*** Circus incorporates play in multiple ways, both as a teaching and learning tool and as an essential skill. During circus classes, participants engage in theatre classes

that are specifically adapted for circus arts. In French, these classes are referred to as “jeu,” which literally translates into “play” in English, but in theatre schools would be referred to as “acting” class.” The objective of “jeu” is to explore the stage and all its facets while developing the ability to embody a character. These classes aim to teach comfort and ease when performing on stage.

Coaches use various techniques, such as physical play, to achieve these goals. This includes activities that enhance eye-hand coordination, navigating and climbing in the performance space, and utilizing gymnastic equipment. By incorporating physical play, participants develop their motor skills, body awareness, and coordination, allowing them to become more comfortable and adept on stage. Coaches incorporate physical play techniques, such as eye-hand coordination exercises and interactions with gymnastic equipment, to enhance participants’ stage presence and overall performance abilities (Bjorklund and Brown, 1998). This approach enables participants to grasp the physical relationship between their bodies, the stage, and the space they perform in. Play is also employed to explore and comprehend various emotions (Verenikina *et al.*, 2003). Play is also a way to explore individuals’ creativity, enabling them to access various types of emotions and express themselves through their bodies.

In teaching circus, play is employed for safety purposes and skill acquisition. When moving around the circus school, coaches utilize songs or instruct participants to mimic rabbits, forming a line and following them (see Annex 9). Safety rules are often presented in a light-hearted manner, with coaches using humour to engage participants. For instance, they may jokingly pretend to fall off a trampoline, prompting the participants to catch them. They are challenging drills and skills taught through playful methods, such as conducting races on silks, aiming to jump as high as possible, or attempting to squat as many people as possible.

The process of learning new skills, familiarizing oneself with circus techniques, and creating a performance is indeed predominantly achieved through play. By incorporating playful elements, participants can approach these activities with enthusiasm, curiosity, and a sense of enjoyment. Playful approaches not only enhance the learning experience but also promote engagement, creativity, and a deeper understanding of the circus arts.

**Risk.** Children naturally engage in risk-taking behaviours as part of their learning and development process. However, in order for children to learn how to manage risk effectively, it is essential for them first to understand the concept of risk itself. Risk-taking is subjective and varies from person to person, as it involves individual perceptions and evaluations of the probability and perceived immediacy of potential danger. Each child assesses risk differently based on their experiences, knowledge, and personal judgment (Sandseter, 2009). When children are learning to walk, they are often not initially aware of potential dangers. They eagerly push themselves forward, often resulting in falls that lead to landing on their bottoms or the floor.

These experiences allow them to learn about their own limitations and understand the associated risks involved. In a developmental setting, “Parents and others involved in a child’s life, recognizing risk is ever present, try their best to provide growth opportunities and prevent major mishaps along the way” (Harper, 2017: 1). Teaching children about risk is essential for their development. Children naturally encounter various risks when they engage in play, explore, and learn new skills. Instead of limiting those risk factors, it is important to help children learn how to manage and navigate them effectively.

By enabling children to take risks within a controlled and supervised environment, they learn about their physical limitations and develop a sense of self-monitoring. They gain firsthand experience in assessing situations, making decisions, and understanding the consequences of

their actions. This process helps them build resilience, problem-solving skills, and self-confidence. The concept of “jeu” or play allows participants to take risks within a secure environment: “Popular theatre provides students with opportunities for risk-taking in safe and productive contexts” (Conrad, 2005: 38).

When discussing risky play, parents often envision physical risks that could result in injuries. In certain instances, such as circus arts practice, evaluating physical risks is crucial. It should be assured that engaging in such activities is ultimately advantageous for the child, and in the unfortunate event of an injury, those inherent risks should be deemed acceptable, “The focus of risks in play is mainly on thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve an ‘acceptable risk’ of physical injury. The risks should also imply a ‘benefit’ for the child and are being viewed as risky by the child” (Lavrysen *et al.*, 2017: 1). While some risks can be beneficial for children’s development, there are instances where certain risks may not be worth taking. For example, if the potential for injury outweighs the potential benefits, it is wise to reconsider the level of risk involved. Furthermore, it’s important to recognize that not all children may be physically or mentally ready to engage in certain activities or learn new skills. Each child develops at their own pace, and it’s crucial to take their individual abilities and readiness into account when assessing the appropriateness of a particular risk.

There is also an element of risky play involving mental challenges, such as facing others, socializing, or performing in front of an audience. Children require a comfortable environment to thrive and minimize these risks. For instance, if students lack trust in their instructor, they may not dare to be on stage or attempt a challenging skill.

***Risk and Circus.*** Risk is inevitable in circus arts and can occur at any time. Circus arts provide an environment full of discussion, reflection, and reasoning because artists are exposed

to potentially risky equipment. Taking risks helps develop trust, self-awareness, and social interactions. Research in behavioural studies exploring performance on tasks such as inhibitory control, processing speed, prospective memory, working memory, decision-making, and risk-taking continually advance during adolescence (Choudhury *et al.*, 2006). In child development, taking risks is highly beneficial as it allows children to develop a sense of self-trust and trust in others (Bolton, 1999).

In circus, the concept of taking risks solely for the sake of the thrill is not prevalent, although it could be argued that the circus population tend to take more risk than others. Importantly, every risk is calculated, and extensive safety measures are implemented. At the École de Cirque de Verdun (ECV), for example, individuals are taught that falls are inevitable, and the focus is on learning how to fall properly rather than avoiding falls altogether. This approach to calculated risk-taking in the circus provides a valuable framework for exploring the interconnected emotional, cognitive, social, and physical benefits that come with participating in challenging activities (Hargreaves and Davies, 1996). It helps to explain why these benefits are both universally applicable and highly individualized.

The nature of calculated risk taking in the circus allows individuals to explore their boundaries and discover their own unique potential. While the benefits may be universal, each person's experience and growth are highly individualized, shaped by their own goals, strengths, and areas for improvement (Funk, 2021). In circus classes, participants have the responsibility to prioritize safety by ensuring the proper setup of each apparatus, such as placing safety mats and ensuring the area is clear of other individuals and are encouraged to engage in a thorough warm-up routine to minimize the risk of injuries. Lastly, participants must practice the proper drills related to the skills they are learning. These three aspects, as well as learning how to fall, ensure

minimal risk-taking when attempting dangerous skills. By combining these three elements, circus participants can significantly mitigate the risks associated with attempting dangerous skills. This comprehensive approach fosters an environment where individuals can challenge themselves while maintaining a strong focus on safety, enabling them to push their boundaries in a controlled and secure manner.

In its 35 years of existence, the École de cirque of Verdun has not only nurtured students who have excelled in professional schools but has also played a pivotal role in establishing significant circus companies or their employment. As the circus school evolved, its pedagogical approach evolved as well. Drawing from research conducted in education and the circus field, the school highlights the significance of sociability, risk-taking, and play to enhance students' learning potential. These principles impart valuable life values of trust, respect, and inclusion to the students. As we continue, it is intriguing to delve into the research conducted within the circus realm and grasp the inspirations that have shaped the school's pedagogy.



**Figure 7:** The Pre-preparatory 2023, *Papillon*. Picture: L'École de cirque de Verdun

## Chapter 5: Results

### Video

The live performance of *Skafos 2.0* was produced by the ECV and its recording was put on the circus website, <https://www.e-cirqueverdun.com/evenements/videos/>

### Demographics

During the course of the study, it should be noted that not all participants had the opportunity to answer every question in their journals. Some participants were unable to attend every class or interview session. This group was formed with participants from diverse backgrounds who were all students at the École de cirque de Verdun. The research focused on performance rather than teaching skills; thus, each participant had already taken classes at the circus school.

***Student distribution.*** The participants ranged in age from 13 to 17. 40% of participants were pursuing their studies in a collegial program, and 60% were in high school. There was an almost equal distribution of genders, with six female and four male participants. Regarding parental status, approximately half of the participants had parents raising them together through marriage or de facto partnership. In contrast, the remaining participants came from various family structures, such as single-parent households, blended families, and divorced families with shared custody.

**Chart 3:** Student Demographics

Parental country of origin	France, Senegal, Canada, Ireland
Participant's country of origin	Canada
Ages	13,14,15,16,17
Years of training in circus	1 year to 12 years
Lowest degree	Secondary 2
Highest degree	College (DEC, Diploma of College Studies)
Gender	4 males, 6 females
Parental status	5 together, 3 single, 1 blended, 2 divorced
Language spoken	French and English

**Coaches' Demographics for Study.** Two coaches participated in the study, both born in Canada with parents from different backgrounds. They had higher education levels beyond secondary schooling and were bilingual. One coach had been associated with the École de cirque de Verdun since the age of three, while the other joined at the age of 16.

**Chart 4:** Coach Demographics

Parental country of origin	Lebanon, France, Madagascar, Canada
Coach country of origin	Canada
Ages	22, 23
Years of training at the ECV	6 to 20 years
Years of teaching at the ECV	5 to 10 years.
Lowest degree	DEC
Highest degree	BA
Gender	1 male, 1 female
Working elsewhere	Yes
Language spoken	French and English

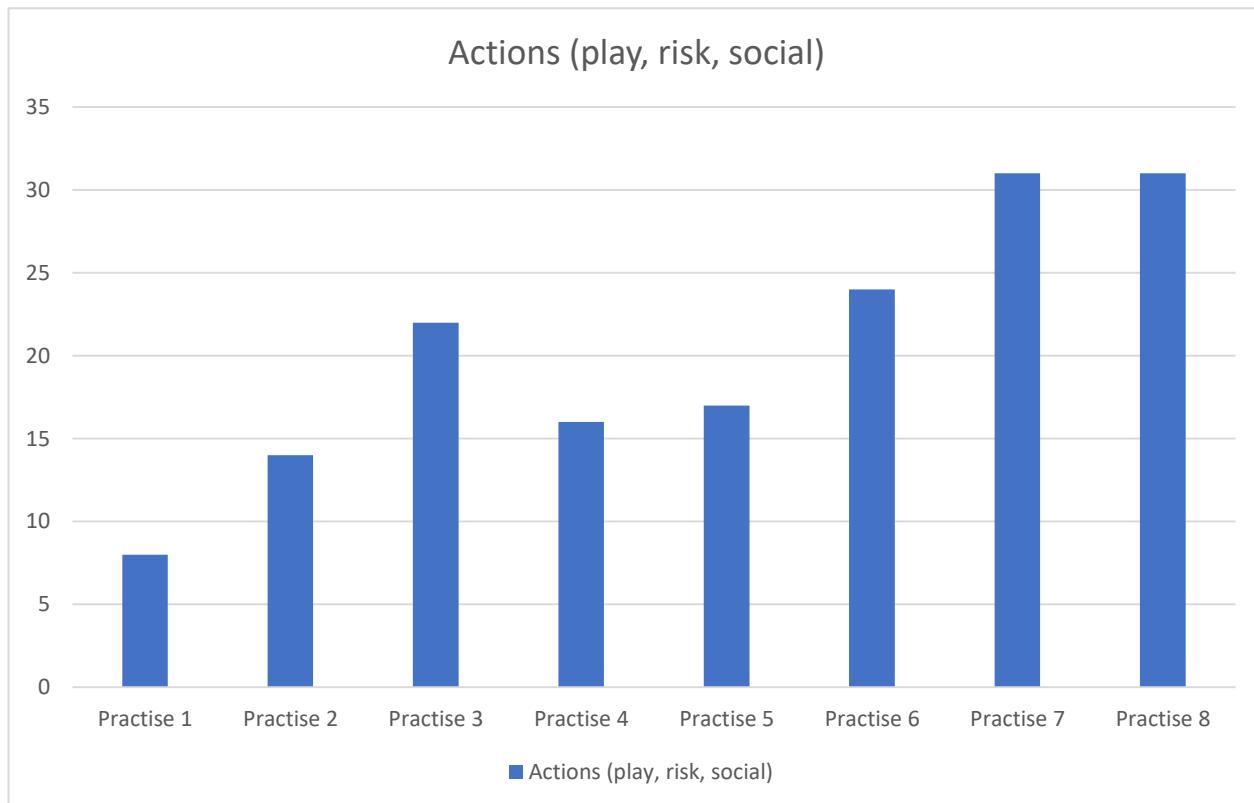
## Results

The data collection for the study involved three methods: observation, solicited journals, and interviews.

### Observation

During the observation period, each individual action and interaction within the group was carefully documented, as seen in the graph. These actions were then sorted into three main categories: play, risk-taking, and socializing, as indicated in the graph. To explain, a participant briefly left the group to yell in the bathroom during a juggling practice. This action was recorded, described, and later categorized into one of the three groups mentioned. In this instance, removing oneself from group work while everyone is watching you was considered an act of risk-taking, as the participant demonstrated courage by showing vulnerability to their peers. Following that example, a different participant followed the student who left, assisting them in smoothly rejoining the group. This action was labelled as socializing. The observations

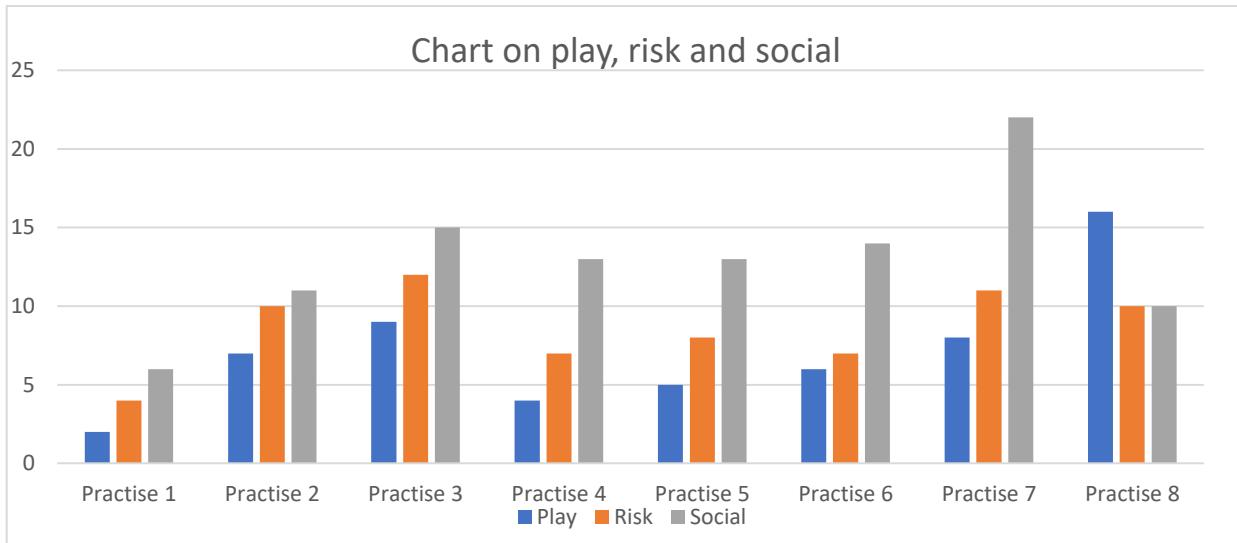
consistently revealed that socializing was the most frequently observed category, followed by risk-taking, while play was the least common category.



**Graph 1:** Actions (play, risk, social)

It is important to note that some actions could fall into multiple categories. For example, one student would get on the bike and fall; this would be reported as play and risk. Risk-taking is closely aligned with socializing; play was the least common category. There is a gradual increase in socializing from rehearsal 4 to rehearsal 6, with a significant increase in rehearsal 7. Lastly, there is an increase in action between rehearsal 1 and rehearsal 8 (performance). This demonstrates that participants undertook more actions, indicating higher levels of participation. This graph helps us notice the increased engagement of participants in risk-taking, socializing, and play positively impact their wellbeing.

**Graph 2:** Chart on play, risk and social



### Solicited journals

Participants' responses in the solicited journals were categorized as positive or negative.

The questions aimed to assess whether participants' positive behaviour improved after classes

and if their everyday lives were affected by circus performance.

### Chart 5: Rehearsal 1, Journal Questions

How did your day go?			Why do circus			What do you think of the group?			What do you want to change about the group?		
18-Nov	Not good	Negative	18-Nov	1	Love circus and people are amazing.	Positive	1	Good but we are shy.	Positive	1	Be more guided
	Good	Positive		2	Because I love it	Positive	2	Different possibilities for the show and good dynamic	Positive	2	Wanted class to last longer
	Boring	Negative		3	Destress and see people	Positive	3	Good group but shy	Positive	3	Want to participate more and give more acro feedback.
	Very good	Positive		4	Not competitive and people are nice.	Positive	4	Very inclusive	Positive	4	Neutral
	Not good	Negative		5	To stay	Positive	5	I was expecting more.	Negative	5	Love the group but the teacher treated me like a baby.
	Fine	Neutral		6	Motivation to wake up in the morning	Positive	6	Good	Positive	6	Wanted to try more things
	Exhausting	Negative		7	It is fun and nice to do after school.	Positive	7	Different levels but good group	Positive	7	I want to be told what to do.
	Very good	Positive		8	Makes me feel good	Positive	8	Good group	Positive	8	I feel like I am not good enough.
	Good	Positive		9	Recentre me and makes my body feel good.	Positive	9	Very good group	Positive	9	I arrived late, I would change that.

**Rehearsal 1.** Questions 1 and 2 were asked before classes started. Results showed that

40% of the participants were in a good mood, while 40% were in a bad mood and only 10% felt

neutral. However, when asked why they participated in circus, all participants mentioned doing it because of its positive effects on them.

For Questions 3 and 4, which focused on group dynamics, it was observed that some participants were meeting each other for the first time. The majority of participants (90%) had a positive first impression of the group, while only a small percentage (10%) was unsure. Interestingly, when asked if there were aspects of each other they wanted to change, almost the entire group (80%) expressed a desire to change something, while 10% would not change anything.

**Rehearsal 2.** The questions were centred on participants' personal lives and how their experiences in circus arts translated into their everyday lives. These questions were also designed to assess if circus performance caused stress in their lives.

**Chart 6:** Rehearsal 2, Journal Questions

Would I do a professional show			What caused me stress this week			What did I learn in circus that I apply in my life?			Do not like the coach or participant, would I stop		
1	19-Nov	Yes, but not as a career	Positive	1	19-Nov	School, science project, lunch with friends	Negative	1	Being well surrounded, nothing bad can happen.	Positive	1
2		Yes	Positive	2		French and English oral	Negative	2	Communication, respect, life discipline and life rigours	Positive	2
3		Yes	Positive	3		Math Exam	Negative	3	Conscious of others, physical health, team spirit, friendship	Positive	3
4		Yes	Positive	4		Parents, psychologist meeting, boyfriends and no sleep	Negative	4	Not to be shy about physical contact	Positive	4
5		Yes	Positive	5		Nothing much	Neutral	5	Suffer in silence	Positive	5
6		Yes	Positive	6		School	Negative	6	Improvisation, state your ideas, speak out loud.	Positive	6
7		Yes	Positive	7		School and lack of time	Negative	7	:)	Neutral	7
8		Yes but not CDS	Positive	8		Everything	Negative	8	Be less shy, don't be afraid to be weird, better self-	Positive	8
9		Yes	Positive	9		Chemistry exam	Negative	9			9

The results indicated that when participants were asked if they would like to perform in a professional circus show, the entire group responded positively, expressing their willingness to

do so. However, one student explicitly said they would not want to perform in the Cirque du Soleil (CDS).

When participants were asked about the sources of stress in their lives, the majority (80%) mentioned that school was the primary cause of their stress. It is worth noting that one student mentioned that nothing was stressing them.

Regarding the question about learning from circus arts performance and applying it in their everyday lives, 8 out of 9 participants answered that they had learned something novel and applied it in their lives. One participant had a neutral response.

School-related stress emerged as a common concern among the majority of participants. Furthermore, the participants recognized the valuable lessons they learned from circus arts performance and their application in various aspects of their daily lives.

**Rehearsal 3.** The questions focused on participants' personalities, how they handle confrontations, and their likes or dislikes about practice performance.

**Chart 7:** Rehearsal 3, Journal Questions

How do you react to change?			How did your week go?			Did you want to say something in class and did not?			Best and worst moment of today's practice		
1	25-Nov	I love it	Positive	1	25-Nov	Well, but very tired	Positive	1	I hurt my toe and didn't want to say it	Negative	1
2		Not a fan but OK with it	Positive and negative	2		Meh, happy it is done.	Negative	2	Please tell me what you want exactly and I will do it	Negative	2
3		:)	Positive	3		Math Exam	Negative	3	We had more time to explore.	Negative	3
4		Well, if it comes from me, bad from others.	Positive and negative	4		Good	Positive	4	People are saying annoying things today.	Negative	4
5		Very well	Positive	5		Bad	Negative	5	Not for me	Positive	5
6		Not well to big changes, small yes	Positive and negative	6		Long and stressful	Negative	6	Yes, I have ideas and don't always share them.	Negative	6
7		It is hard.	Negative	7		:)	Positive	7	Some but I feel like people have more experience so I should not say anything.	Negative	7
8		Stressful	Negative	8		Badly as expected	Negative	8	Not really	Neutral	8
9		Gives me anxiety.	Negative	9		Badly	Negative	9	I usually say what I think	Positive	9

The results indicate the participants' responses to questions regarding how they handle change, their weekly experiences, and their communication in class. The first question in rehearsal 3 was about how they handle change; the responses revealed that out of the nine participants, three (30%) handle changes well, three (30%) handle it poorly, and three (30%) handle it both positively and negatively.

**Question 2:** Participants were asked about how their week went. Only 30% reported having a good week, while the majority (60%) indicated their week was bad.

**Question 3:** This question focused on whether participants always speak their minds in class. The majority (60%) admitted that they do not always express their thoughts, 20% stated that they do, and 10% were unsure.

**Question 4:** Participants were also asked about their best and worst moments during rehearsal. The majority (50%) responded with positive and negative moments, 20% had only negative things to say, and 10% had only positive experiences.

These results shed light on how participants perceive and handle change, their overall weekly experiences, their willingness to speak their minds in class, and their mixed experiences during rehearsal.

***Rehearsal 4.*** This rehearsal marked half of the rehearsals; the focus was on evaluating participants' stress levels and observing their association between performance stress and life stress.

**Chart 8:** Rehearsal 4, Journal Questions

Show is in 2 weeks, how do you feel?			Is show stress and life stress the same?			Are you still stressed about the show?			What am I proud of today and this week?		
1	26-Nov	Nervous but it's a normal process.	Positive	1	26-Nov	Not the same at all	Positive	1	26-Nov	Less than before practice	Positive
2		Ouf, not expecting much	Negative	2		Not the same at all, show is exciting and school is stressful.	Positive	2		Less than before practice	Positive
3		I think we won't finish but will see.	Neutral	3		Show is fun, school is about failing.	Positive	3		Not really anymore	Positive
4		We don't have much we need to hurry.	Positive	4		Not the same at all	Positive	4		More than before practice	Negative
5		Not ready!	Negative	5		Show is a positive stress.	Positive	5		We will have a show but it might be a basic show.	Positive
6		I cannot wait!	Positive	6		No, school is anxiety.	Positive	6		We got this.	Positive
7		I am not sure, first time doing this.	Positive	7		Not the same at all, show is exciting and school is stressful.	Positive	7		A little but we got this.	Positive
8				8		No but school is stressful.	Positive	8		I am excited.	Positive
9				9				9			

Before rehearsal, when asked about their thoughts regarding the performance being four classes away, 20% had negative thoughts, 40% had positive thoughts, and 10% felt neutral about it. Participants unanimously agreed that life stress and performance stress are entirely different experiences.

After rehearsal, participants were asked the same questions. Regarding their stress levels about performance, 70% of participants reported not feeling stressed, while 10% still felt stressed. The last question inquired about participants' feelings of pride during that week and on that day. The majority (70%) expressed feeling proud of themselves, while only 10% experienced a mixture of pride and disappointment.

These findings highlight the participants' varied thoughts and emotions surrounding the upcoming performance, their recognition of the distinction between life stress and performance stress, their reduced stress levels after the rehearsal, and the majority's sense of pride in themselves during the week and on that specific day.

**Rehearsal 5.** These questions were designed to examine the effect of participants' behaviour before and after rehearsal. These questions aimed to understand better how their behaviour and emotions changed throughout the rehearsal sessions.

**Chart 9:** Rehearsal 5, Journal Questions

How was your day?			What stresses me out the most?			How do you feel tonight?			Do I have friends at the circus?		
1	02-Dec	Tired	Negative	1	02-Dec	My love life	Negative	1	Disconnected from my problems	Positive	1
2		Very good	Positive	2		Exams	Negative	2	Same but good class	Positive and negative	2
3		Bad	Negative	3		My life	Negative	3	My foot hurts and I smell	Negative	3
4		Good because I did not have school.	Positive	4		Math Exam	Negative	4	:)	Positive	4
5		Not ready!	Negative	5		Show is a positive stress.	Positive	5	We will have a show but it might be a basic show.	Positive	5
6		Eh, chemistry was bad.	Negative	6		Chemistry exam	Negative	6	Good!	Positive	6
7		Very good	Positive	7		The show is my first and I want to be good.	Negative	7	Good!	Positive	7
										Yes, I have very close friends here.	Positive

Participants were asked about their day, and the results showed that 50% had bad days, while only 20% had a good day. When asked what stressed them about their day, all participants mentioned school as the primary source of stress.

After rehearsal, they were asked about their current emotions. The responses revealed that 50% felt content or satisfied, 10% were still feeling low or unhappy, and 10% experienced a mixture of positive and negative emotions. Participants were asked if they had friends at the ECV, to which all participants responded affirmatively, indicating that they had friends at the circus school.

These findings suggest that participants generally had challenging days before the rehearsal, with school being a significant source of stress. However, their emotions improved after the rehearsal, with 50% feeling good. The presence of friends at the ECV also played a positive role in their overall experience.

**Rehearsal 6.** During the last class, it was established that all participants had friends within the research group. To gain a better understanding of their relationships, the first question asked whether they would hang out with the group outside of the circus environment. Surprisingly, the majority (60%) agreed, indicating their willingness to spend time together beyond the research context. Only one person responded with a neutral answer, expressing uncertainty about hanging out with the group outside the circus environment.

Given that the participants willingly signed up for performance research, it was expected that they enjoyed performing. To explore their perspectives further, they were asked if they all liked the same thing about performance. To the researcher's surprise, each participant had different answers, highlighting their individual experiences and preferences related to performance.

Participants were also asked about their stress levels regarding their performance. This was the first time the question was posed, and the responses revealed that 60% felt good about the performance, while 10% had a neutral stance towards it. These findings indicate the participants' willingness to socialize outside the research setting, their diverse perspectives on performance, and the positive sentiments expressed regarding the stress level associated with the performance.

Do I see myself hanging out with everyone?			What do I like about creation				How do you feel about the show?			
03-Dec	1	Yes	Positive	1	When we start practising with music.	Positive	1	Enthusiastic!	Positive	
	2	Not sure, I like everyone but not sure.	Neutral	2	I like perfecting	Positive	2	Ready and not	Neutral	
	3	:)	Positive	3	Final result	Positive	3	:)	Positive	
	4	Yes	Positive	4	When it is simple	Positive	4	Fine	Positive	
	5	Sure but not the younger ones	Positive	5	See the group evolution	Positive	5	OK	Positive	
	6	Yes	Positive	6	Narration	Positive	6	Good	Positive	
	7	I already do	Positive	7	Putting it together	Positive	7	Good	Positive	

**Chart 10:** Rehearsal 6, Journal Questions

**Rehearsal 7.** In the last rehearsal before the performance, participants were asked questions regarding their stress levels, experiences with embarrassment, bullying, and relationships.

**Chart 11:** Rehearsal 7, Journal Questions

Were you ever bullied? Here?			What do you think about embarrassment?			Stress levels, 1 to 10.			How do you fix your arguments with friends and family?		
1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
09-Dec	Yes but not the circus	Positive and negative	1	:/	Neutral	1	6	Neutral	1	Communication	Positive
	Yes but not the circus	Positive and negative	2	Its horrible	Negative	2	4	Positive	2	Parents: time and friends I talk with them.	Positive
	Never	Positive	3	It's dumb but can have an effect.	Positive and negative	3	No stress but the show is bad so far.	Neutral	3	Don't remember any	Positive
	No	Positive	4	Other people's issues	Positive	4	2	Positive	4	:(	Negative
	Yes	Negative	5	It's funny	Positive	5	1	Positive	5	I wait because I have too much pride.	Negative
	No	Positive	6	:/	Neutral	6	5 but good stress	Positive	6	Communication	Positive
	Not really	Neutral	7	I admire those who do not, I feel it	Negative	7	7, because I forgot some skills	Negative	7	I do not fight	Positive
	No	Positive	8	It is relative.	Neutral	8	6, not sure	Neutral	8	Badly	Negative
	Never	Positive	9			9	2, I am excited	Positive	9	With I statements	Positive

When asked if they had ever been bullied, 30% of participants responded affirmatively, with 20% specifying that the bullying did not occur at the ECV. The majority (50%) reported not being bullied, and 10% were unsure about their experiences.

Regarding their feelings toward embarrassment, the responses varied. 30% expressed worry or negativity associated with embarrassment, 30% felt neutral towards it, and a smaller group (20%) believed that embarrassment could have positive and negative aspects or did not care about it.

Participants were also asked about their conflict resolution skills and how they handle confrontations. 60% indicated having a sound system for handling conflicts, while the remaining 30% stated that they did not have an effective system.

These results shed light on participants' experiences with bullying, their emotions surrounding embarrassment, and their approaches to handling conflicts. By exploring these

aspects, a deeper understanding of their stress levels, interpersonal dynamics, and self-perception can be gained.

## The Performance

The performance was the last class; participants were asked questions regarding their anticipation of the performance and their feelings toward their coaches.

What do you think is going to happen during the show?				What do you think of the coaches vs. your teachers?			How do you feel now the show is over?			Would you perform again?	
1	10-Dec	I know it will be fun	Positive	1	I feel safer with my coaches	Positive	1	Very good, I loved it	Positive	1	Yes
2		It will be good but I am nervous.	Positive	2	Depends on the teacher but here they are better.	Positive	2	I feel great!	Positive	2	Yes
3		It will go well	Positive	3	Coaches are more personal.	Positive	3	Went well!	Positive	3	Yes
4		No expectation	Neutral	4	Coaches are cool compared to teachers.	Positive	4	Very well!	Positive	4	Yes
5		Good and bad	Positive	5	I love my coaches	Positive	5	Good! But did not go amazing for me because of my broken toes.	Positive	5	Yes, of course
6		I think I might forget stuff	Negative	6	Very good but my teachers are boring.	Positive	6	Happy!	Positive	6	:)
7		Not much	Negative	7	school teachers are more controlling	Negative	7	Good! It was fun.	Positive	7	Yes
8		Show will be good, 7/10	Positive	8	School teachers push less than at the ECV like it here better.	Positive	8	:)	Positive	8	:)
9		Chaotic but good	Positive	9	Coaches are more open	Positive	9	I landed my front flip!	Positive	9	Obviously
10		It will work out	Positive	10	I like them better, they help with my anxiety.	Positive	10	It was amazing.	Positive	10	Yes

**Chart 12:** Rehearsal 8, Journal Questions

Participants were asked about their thoughts and expectations regarding the upcoming performance. The responses varied, with 70% expressing positive thoughts, 20% expressing negative thoughts, and 10% unsure what to expect. Regarding their relationships with their teachers, participants were asked about their preferences between their schoolteachers and their coaches at the circus. The majority (90%) expressed a preference for their relationship with the coaches at the circus, while one participant (10%) mentioned a preference for the controlling methods used by schoolteachers.

After the performance, participants were asked about their overall experience. The majority (90%) reported feeling happy and surprised by their performance, indicating satisfaction and positive emotions. One participant expressed feelings of happiness and sadness, being happy about the performance but disappointed due to an injury and feeling that it was not their best performance.

Lastly, participants were asked if they would perform again if given the opportunity. All participants agreed that they would choose to perform again, demonstrating their enjoyment and willingness to engage in future performances.

These results provide insights into participants' thoughts and expectations regarding the performance, their preference for the coaches at the circus, their emotional reactions after the performance, and their willingness to participate in future performances.

## **Interviews**

During the interviews, participants were given the freedom to express themselves and share their thoughts without restrictions. Initially, there were ten planned questions for the interviews. However, as the conversations progressed, participants naturally delved into various topics beyond the initial questions.

***Question 1.*** What is the difference between performance and rehearsal?

In the initial conversation, everyone agreed that in order to perform, one needed to practice. However, as the conversation progressed, they realized they held different views on the distinction between the two concepts listed in Table 14.

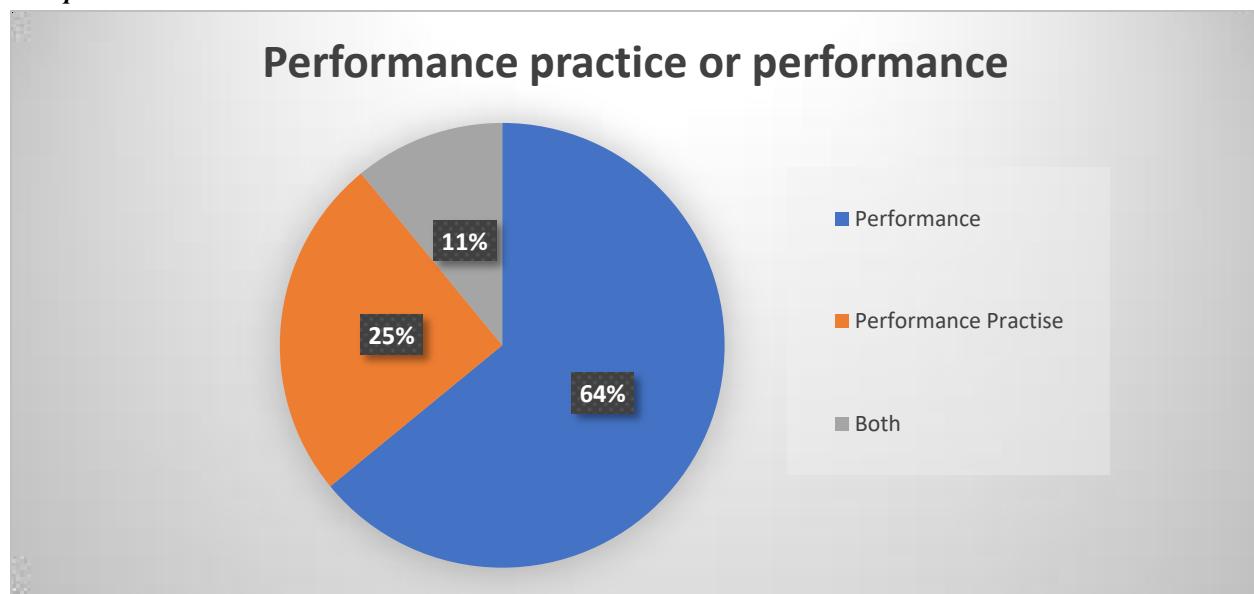
**Chart 13:** Question 1: What is the difference between performance and rehearsal?

Practise to be able to perform	20%
You cannot perform without practice	30%
Without performance there is no performance practice	10%
Performance set's objective for rehearsal	20%

**Question 2.** Do you like performance practice or performance better?

Participants initially agreed that performance was their preferred aspect, but after further discussion, their views diverged. By the end of the conversation, the majority (60%) enjoyed the actual performance more, while 20% preferred the process of performance practice. A small group (10%) appreciated both equally.

**Graph 3:** Performance Practice or Performance



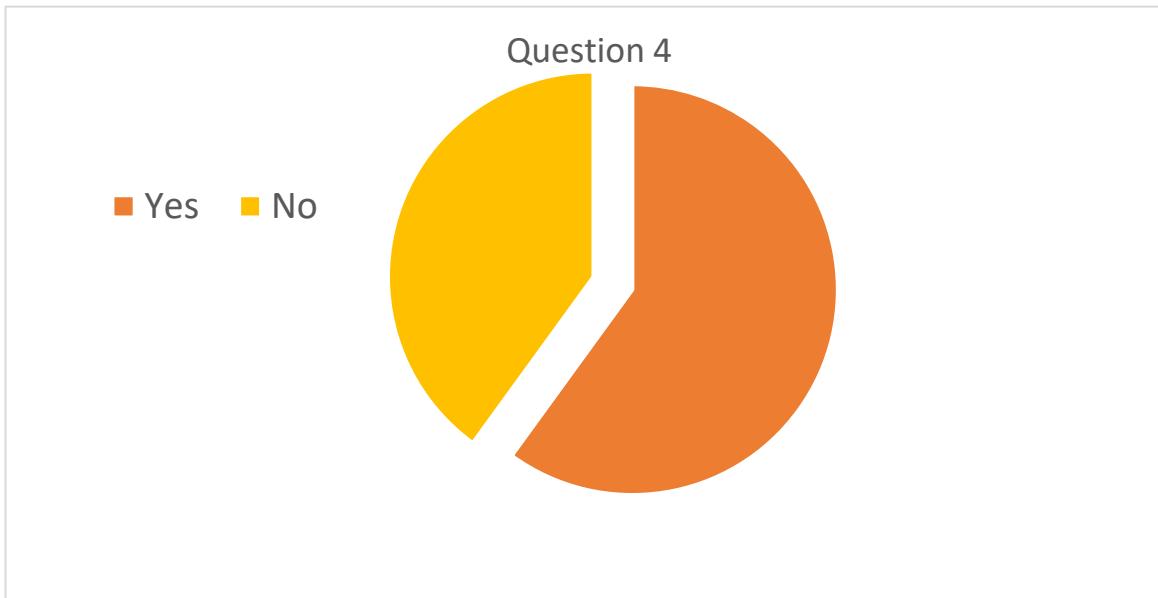
**Question 3.** Would you prefer four weeks of rehearsal, one performance or one day of rehearsal and four weeks of performance?

The participants diverged from the question and decided to engage in four weeks of rehearsal followed by a year of performances rather than practising for four weeks and presenting only once.

**Question 4.** Is it your first time doing a performance where people paid?

Participants held differing opinions on what constituted payment in this context. Some believed that paying for classes in order to perform qualified as a form of payment, while others felt that payment should only be considered when the audience pays to watch the performance. Some believed that payment should only be counted if the artists themselves received payment for their participation. In the end, the participants agreed that payment for performance should be linked to the audience paying to watch the performance regardless of if the artists were paid.

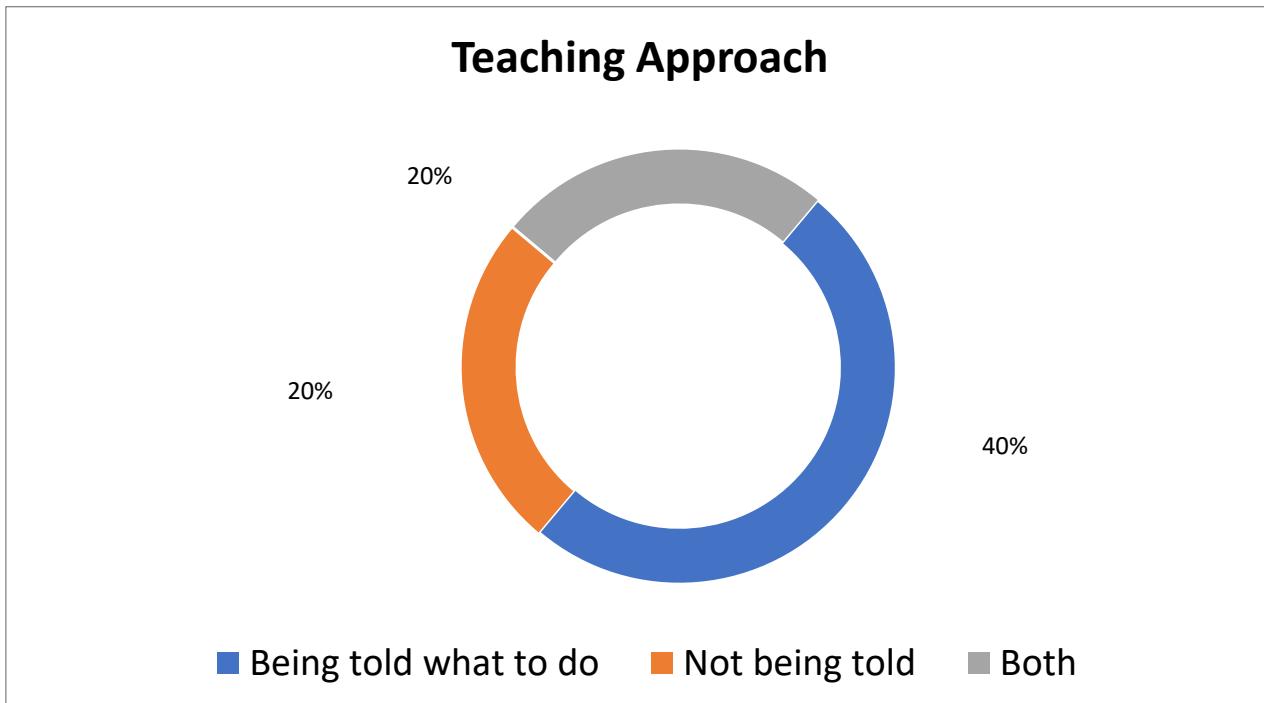
**Graph 4:** Question 4, Is it your first time doing a performance where people paid?



**Question 5.** Do you like being told what to do during the performance process, or do you prefer to create freely?

This question arose from their desire for a more creative teaching approach in the solicited journals. Responses varied, with some participants favouring clear instructions while others preferred the freedom to explore their artistic expression.

**Graph 5:** Teaching Approach



**Question 6.** In your everyday life, do you feel that there is a difference between when you have performance rehearsal and when you do not?

The responses to this question were broadly consistent among the participants. The majority felt their days were incomplete or empty if they did not come to the ECV.

**Chart 14:** Question 6, In your everyday life, do you feel that there is a difference between when you have performance rehearsal and when you do not?

It makes me feel like my day is empty when I do not come to circus	60%
No, it feels like projects that come in and out of your life.	10%
I anticipated my next class when the class was over	10%

**Question 7.** What does wellbeing mean?

Participants provided diverse definitions of wellbeing, highlighting its multifaceted nature.

Their descriptions encompassed four distinct aspects:

1. They emphasized that wellbeing arises when their needs are fulfilled, underscoring the importance of meeting basic necessities.

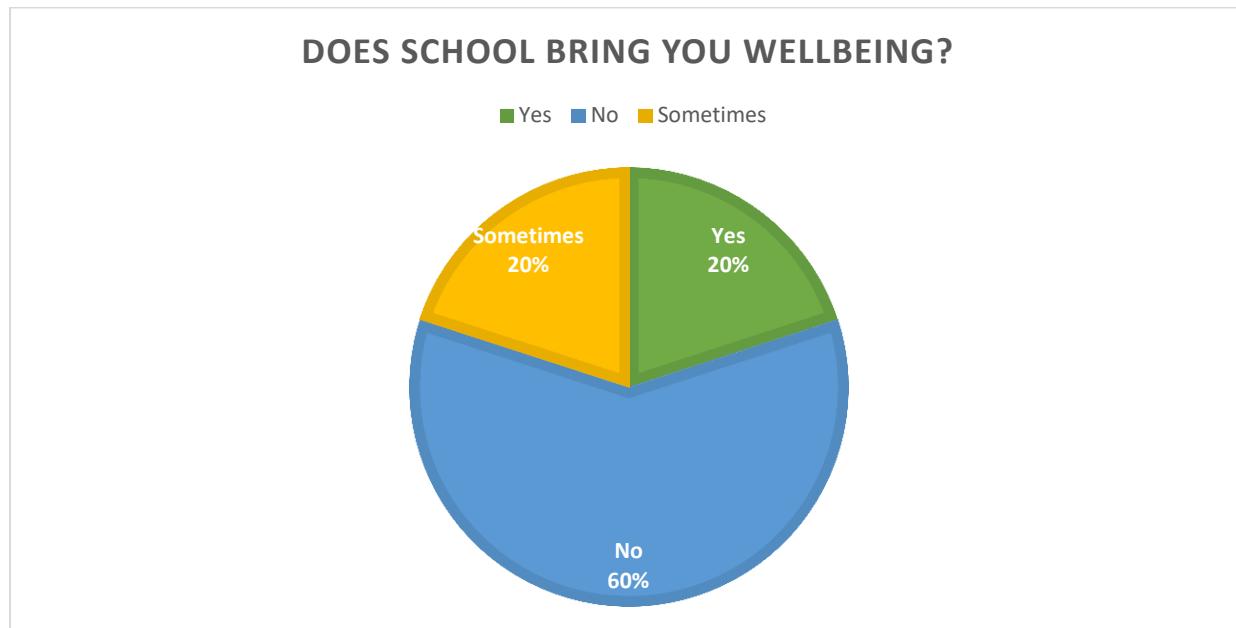
2. They recognized the significance of feeling safe, both physically and emotionally, for overall wellbeing.
3. They highlighted the role of relationships, emphasizing the value of social connections and support networks.
4. Participants identified the pursuit and achievement of goals as integral to wellbeing, indicating that a sense of purpose and accomplishment contribute to overall wellbeing.

These varied perspectives shed light on wellbeing's complex and subjective nature, showcasing its diverse dimensions and individual experiences.

**Question 8.** Does going to school bring you wellbeing?

The question was asked in response to the participants' expressions of stress related to regular academic school in their solicited journals. This question was about academic school and not circus school.

**Graph 6:** Does School Bring You Wellbeing?



**Question 9.** Is friendship or relation with others important?

The participants raised the question of whether friendship or relationships with others are important. They unanimously agreed that such relationships hold significance in their lives.

**Question 10.** Is circus a part of your life?

While all participants agreed that circus is a part of their lives, their individual experiences and how circus is integrated into their lives varied.

**Question 11.** Did you learn something from performance regarding relationship with friends, parents or romantic?

The participants also brought up this question. However, instead of directly answering the question, they explained why they felt closer to people at the circus school (ECV) compared to their teachers or friends.

**Chart 15:** Question 11, did you learn something from performance regarding relationship with friends, parents or romantic?

Relationship with teachers	Students and teachers are not equal. At the ECV yes.
They are fewer participants in circus classes	Therefore, much closer to people in circus classes than at school
Performance creates stronger bonds with circus group	That we do not share in other friendships.

**Question 12.** Did circus teach you life lessons?

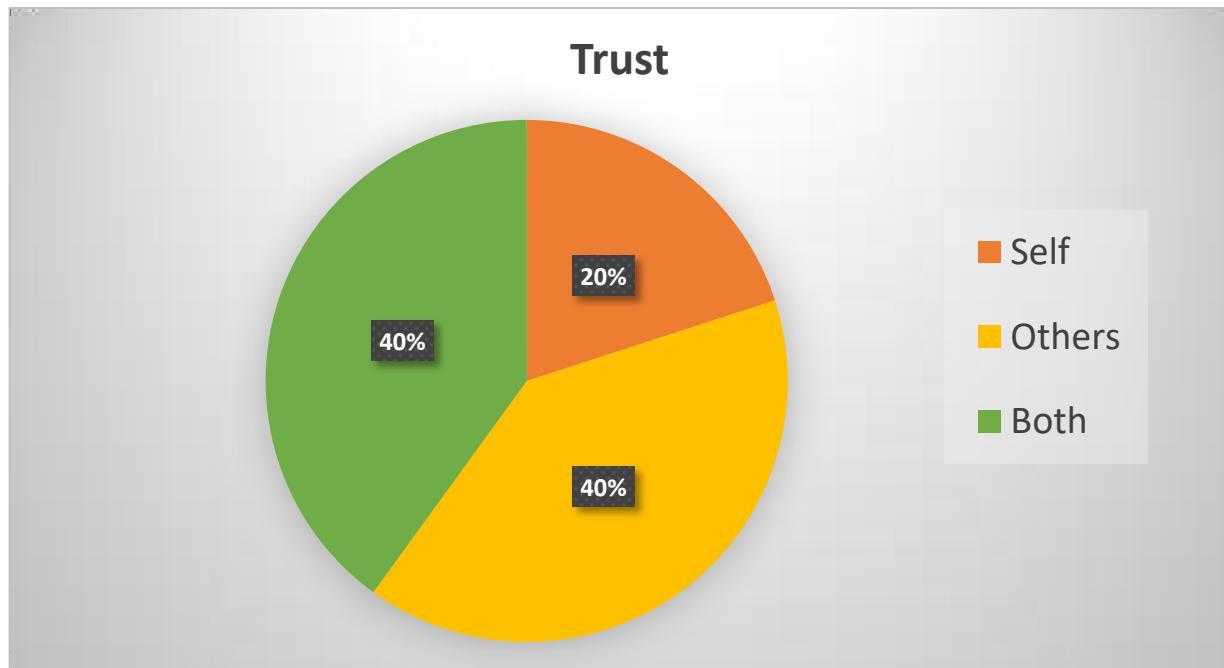
This question was also posed in their solicited journals. It was asked again during the interviews to compare the consistency of their responses. Overall, the answers remained the same, with some participants even providing identical responses. However, new concepts and insights were introduced during the interviews, indicating that participants expanded on their previous answers and potentially gained further understanding or perspectives on the life lessons learned through circus.

1. I do not think about circus every day, but it is a big part of my life.
2. I include circus in my life, I teach my friends, or do a two-man high to grab something.
3. Build a relationship with parents by sharing skills learned
4. How to maintain a relationship with people
5. Do not judge people by their cover

**Question 13.** Do you trust yourself or others in circus performance?

This was a follow-up to the previous question on life lessons learned through circus. Some participants mentioned that the circus taught them valuable life lessons, such as trusting others. This suggests that through their experiences in circus performance, participants developed a sense of trust in their fellow performers, recognizing the importance of collaboration and reliance on others in achieving successful performances.

**Graph 7:** Trust



**Question 14.** Is failing positive in circus performance?

Participants agreed that mistakes are a valuable learning experience in circus, emphasizing that school often only allows for the same opportunity.

**Question 15.** Do you think circus performance is dangerous?

Participants unanimously agreed that circus involves a calculated risk. However, they held varying beliefs regarding the specific reasons or factors that contribute to this perception of risk

**Chart 16:** Question 15, Do you think circus performance is dangerous?

Yes, and it makes it fun	10%
They safety rules in place	50%
It teaches you about danger	20%

Through further discussion, participants reached a consensus that the more they practice, the less dangerous learning circus skills become.

**Question 16.** If you did not have circus arts in your life, would you be more stressed?

Instead of directly answering the question, participants shared their reflections on what circus performance brought into their lives.

1. I would be less meticulous
2. Less empathetic
3. Circus brings solution to my everyday life
4. I am more utilitarian
5. I can be less structured
6. Learn to accept the unpredictable
7. Learn to control your anxiety

**Question 17.** Do you think you will keep circus in your life?

Participants unanimously agreed that circus would be a part of their lives, indicating a shared commitment to continuing their involvement in circus. However, there was a debate within the group regarding the specific nature or form that their engagement with circus would take.

**Chart 17:** Question 17, Do you think you will keep circus in your life?

Yes, if my body allows it	50%
Yes, but it might change from circus and being physically active	50%

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

Upon starting that research, I initially assumed that the participants had felt a sense of wellbeing from their involvement in circus arts based on their continued participation and desire to perform more. I had expected a uniform understanding of wellbeing among all the participants. However, as the research progressed, it became apparent that wellbeing had been a subjective concept for adolescents and adults alike. The participants had expressed different perspectives and had emphasized various aspects of wellbeing that had been meaningful to them individually.

Furthermore, two additional results that had not been initially foreseen emerged during the research. Firstly, the importance of peer relationships had been more prominent than anticipated. Through several actions, their relationships with fellow performers had highlighted the support, camaraderie, and sense of belonging that those connections had provided. The positive impact of those peer relationships on their overall wellbeing had been more significant than initially expected, even within the relatively limited period they had spent together. Secondly, the role of coaches in the adolescents' wellbeing and the overall environment had proven to be more influential than anticipated.

### **Wellbeing**

The definition of wellbeing is subjective and can vary among individuals. Factors such as culture, ethnicity, economic status, educational background, and personal experiences shape one's understanding and perception of wellbeing. In the article *Constructing a definition: Adolescent wellbeing from the Perspective of the Child and Expert*, wellbeing is characterized as flourishing, encompassing both physical and mental health, happiness, and the positive influence

of real-life experiences on one's overall wellbeing (Gennings *et al.*, 2021). It is important to note that the concept of wellbeing is dynamic and progressive, aiming to enhance the quality of life and promote positive outcomes in various aspects of an individual's life (Simons & Baldwin, 2021).

### ***Wellbeing Definition from the Participants***

There was a certain delight in witnessing the journey of those young adolescents. On their initial day, they exhibited shyness and uncertainty. Using Graph 1 as an example, participants took more actions as classes progressed. In the first class, the participants only took ten actions, while in the last class, they took thirty. For many, it was their first encounter with performing, and some were unfamiliar with their fellow group members. However, they fearlessly embraced the experience without doubting their presence. As their journey unfolded, they chronicled their daily lives in their journals. Notably, I intentionally refrained from explicitly mentioning the concept of wellbeing. I intended to prevent them from altering their behaviour to please me or help me with my research question. Instead, I relied on observation to address my question.

### **Does Circus performance impact their wellbeing?**

The participants offered diverse definitions of wellbeing, encompassing multiple dimensions. They articulated four distinct aspects of wellbeing. Firstly, they emphasized that wellbeing is experienced when their needs were met, underscoring the significance of fulfilling their fundamental necessities. Secondly, they highlighted the importance of feeling safe, both physically and emotionally. Thirdly, they underscored the role of relationships in wellbeing, emphasizing the value of social connections and supportive networks. Lastly, they identified the pursuit and attainment of goals as integral to wellbeing, suggesting that a sense of purpose and

achievement contributed to overall wellbeing. These varied perspectives illuminated wellbeing's intricate and multidimensional nature, demonstrating that it can be understood and experienced in diverse ways.

### ***Wellbeing Is Achieved When Your Needs Are Met***

During the interview Gladiolus mentioned that when your needs were met, they could enjoy life, “C'est quand tes besoins sont accomplis, c'est quelqu'un à la plage avec un verre”<sup>2</sup>. Studies showed that children cannot learn or develop properly if their needs are not met, such as sleep, nutrition, and shelter (Dubowitz *et al.*, 2002). It was demonstrated that children who attend school hungry or tired struggled to learn effectively. Their focus is sporadic, and their concentration ability varies immensely (Dubowitz *et al.*, 2002).

Arguably, a child's needs extended beyond physical requirements and encompassed their mental and emotional wellbeing. The presence of constant and unconditional love was crucial for their healthy development. A compelling example, learned in my first year in BA, illustrates an experiment conducted by King Frederik II in which infants were deprived of touch and social interaction. Tragically, the outcome of that experiment resulted in the infants' demise (Gibson, 2021). His experiment had served as a poignant reminder of the essential role of love, touch, and emotional connections in a child's growth and overall development. These factors are considered fundamental needs children require to thrive and flourish.

### **Safety**

The feeling of safety played a vital role in establishing a conducive learning environment where individuals “[...] are not fearing criticism, retribution, or embarrassment” (Turner and Harder, 2018:49). His environment was characterized by inclusivity, kindness, and

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<sup>2</sup> It is when your needs are accomplished, it is someone on the beach with a glass

understanding among all students, instructors, and staff members<sup>3</sup> (Tares, journals). Safety nurtured emotional vulnerability, allowing participants to share their experiences and express their emotions freely, “These processes involve interdependency; risk of harm and loss and connection, through our relations to others; emotional expressions; power; and recognition” (Corlette *et al.*, 2021:4). Creating a safe and supportive environment enabled individuals to express and process their emotions within a secure space authentically.

Safety encompassed mental wellbeing and environmental considerations, such as establishing rules for space usage in a learning environment. As Bolton (2004) stated, circus arts helped individuals learn and embrace essential rules, teaching them that nothing is impossible and encouraging them to transform doubt and fear into positive action. Not only is a secure environment established, but the process of facing fears and fostering self-positivity is facilitated by ensuring safety. Through implementing safety measures and providing guidance, participants in circus arts confronted their fears and surpass their limits within a supportive setting. This transformative experience promoted personal growth, resilience, and self-confidence.



**Figure 8:** Pre-Preparatory Performance. *En Attendans le Train* 2019. Picture: Benoit Leroux

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<sup>3</sup> Ils sont très inclusifs et gentil. Ils sont compréhensifs.

## **Relationships**

Creating healthy relationships played a crucial role in fostering various aspects of development among participants, including autonomy (Deci *et al.*, 2006), receiving support (Furman & Rose, 2015), and enhancing social development (Molden and Dweck, 2006). During the interviews, participants expressed the significance of relationships in their lives, particularly friendships and connections with authority figures. Graham *et al.* (2022) noted that relationships with peers were perceived as essential for feeling safe and well at school.

On the other hand, the bonds formed through shared experiences, trust, and overcoming fears establish a unique relationship between coaches and students. Participants expressed that their coaches were significantly different from other authority figures, “Mes coaches ont été vraiment cool comparé à mes profs, je me suis plus amusée”<sup>4</sup> (Tares, journals). Vulnerability was crucial for both parties fostering healthy and strong relationships between coaches and students, “The coaches seem more personal” (Magnolia, Journals). Both the student and the coach needed to be open to sharing and connecting on a deeper level. This vulnerability created an atmosphere of trust and allowed for meaningful connections to develop. Such relationships contributed significantly to the overall wellbeing and positive experiences of the participants in the context of circus arts.

### ***Goal***

Setting goals or objectives contributed to the development of resilience. When participants embarked on a journey of learning new skills and achieved specific objectives, they faced challenges and work hard to overcome them. This process of striving towards goals built resilience and fosters perseverance. It is important to recognize that the outcomes of their efforts

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<sup>4</sup> My coaches were really cool compared to my teachers, I had more fun.

extended beyond skill acquisition. One participant mentioned that feeling good and experiencing personal satisfaction was a meaningful result of their endeavours (Dahlia, Interviews).

Setting realistic and attainable goals positively impacted their self-esteem and overall wellbeing. Research indicated that individuals' belief in their ability to achieve goals influenced motivation and persistence (Casier *et al.*, 2013). Striking a balance between challenging and achievable goals was crucial to avoid demoralization. By setting goals and working towards them, participants enhanced their fulfillment and wellbeing within the context of circus arts.



**Figure 9:** Pre-Preparatory Performance. *Papillon* (2023). Picture ECV.

### Finding Wellbeing in Circus Arts Performance

The participants in the study identified four key aspects that contributed to their wellbeing: meeting their needs, experiencing safety, cultivating relationships, and achieving goals. Remarkably, these aspects closely aligned with the elements found in circus performance.

This demonstrated how circus performance encompasses these crucial aspects that positively impacted the wellbeing of adolescents. It highlighted the potential of circus performance to promote happiness, fulfillment, and overall wellbeing among participants.

### ***Having Your Needs Met in Circus Performance***

Circus performances in Quebec prioritize the wellbeing of artists by providing payment, housing, and food. Since circus art is physically and mentally demanding, circus companies ensure that the artist or participants stay healthy. It also focuses on reaching their full artistic potential in a safe environment. This support enables artists to remain part of the circus and perform at their best. However, it's essential to acknowledge that not all circus performances or situations guarantee these provisions in today's modern circus. In circus schools and performances in Quebec, while there may not be a guarantee of food, water, shelter, and rest, the safety and wellbeing of participants are prioritized. Measures are taken to provide accessibility to food and water during classes or performances. For instance, institutions like the National Circus School of Montreal or the École de Cirque de Québec have cafeterias and vending machines available.

Circus schools like ECV prioritize the safety and wellbeing of participants by providing a physical space that caters to their needs. Amenities such as sleeping couches, showers, kitchens, bathrooms, and study desks are available to ensure participants have access to essential facilities. This creates an environment where participants can care for themselves and feel secure. These amenities demonstrate the commitment of circus schools to create a supportive and nurturing environment for their students.

In addition to physical safety, connections and love play a significant role in the lives of young circus artists. Circus schools become their home and a family, reflecting the long-standing tradition of belonging to circus arts. This sense of belonging “[...] include their instructors in the circus family they construct during their school years” (Funk, 2017:25). It drives their growth and success in the circus school, satisfying their emotional needs and nurturing their development.

### **Safety in Circus Performance**

Safety is paramount for circus artists due to the inherent risks involved in their performances. This involved managing their weight, understanding their own body and their partners' bodies, manipulating objects, and navigating the relationship between the floor and the force of gravity (Leyton, 2021). Paradoxically, they must also learn to accept, and control falls to ensure their safety, as falling is inevitable in their practice. Repetition of skills enhanced performance and reduced the risk of injuries<sup>5</sup> (Dahlia, Interviews). Interestingly, falling in acrobatics can “[...] develop resilience, life skills, self-efficacy, and self-esteem” (Blanco-García *et al.*, 2021:2).

Safety in circus arts encompassed both mental and physical aspects. It involved trusting the teaching methods, respecting rules, and ensuring physical security using safety equipment. A dangerous environment can have a detrimental impact on wellbeing<sup>6</sup> (Gladiolus, journals). Extra safety equipment was available to ensure the wellbeing of participants. These measures included

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<sup>5</sup> Le double front est plus dangereux mais par rapport à quand tu le pratiquais, t'as ta perception du danger, comme de plus en plus petite jusqu'à la fin, c'est comme il y a quand même ce risque là, mais il y a comme une chance sur un milliard que ça arrive. Probablement parce que ça, c'est juste comme à force de pratiquer le mouvement t'as juste de moins en moins de chance de le rater.

<sup>6</sup> Le cirque est basé sur la confiance de l'enseignement et le respect/ l'amour mutuel pour un autre. Un environnement dangereux et nocif pour le bien-être.

the use of safety mats, spotters, and protective gear, depending on the specific apparatus and the level of skill involved (Lavender, interviews)<sup>7</sup>. However, safety goes beyond rules and security measures. It also involved the careful progression of skills, creating a bond of trust between coaches and students. In the creative performance process, participants must feel safe to be vulnerable and trust the environment and their fellow students, “With the other students in my circus program, I feel supported and safe” (Agans *et al.*, 2019:115). This supportive and safe environment allowed for the creation of impactful performances.

In circus arts, trust is essential, especially in partnerships like flyers and bases. The flyer relies on the base to catch and support them, while the base trusts the flyer’s balance and coordination. This trust goes beyond vulnerability and is crucial for the safety and success of acrobatic maneuvers. Using a direct example from the observation, Lavender, initially fearful of performing a two-man high, continuous practising and trust building with her partner, allowed her to overcome her fear and perform the skill confidently. This transformation demonstrated the power of trust in enhancing performers’ wellbeing and enabling them to push past their limitations (Observation, 2023).

Circus practice brought forth a surge of adrenaline<sup>8</sup>, a thrilling rush of danger, and an opportunity to learn how to conquer fear (Tares, Journal). While various tools are employed to ensure safety, they all remained ineffective unless participants master the art of managing their adrenaline and fear. Throughout my observations, I witnessed participants encouraging themselves to practice skills that scared them. In class 8, Daffodil was to deliver a line while walking on a set of towering blocks. Right before the performance, he, unfortunately, stumbled

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<sup>7</sup> Il y a des règles de sécurité qui fait en sorte que quand je fais du tissu il y a un matelas en dessous.

<sup>8</sup> plein d’adrenaline et du bon stress

off; as he fell, he adeptly handled his fear, quickly assessed the ground, regained his footing, and delivered his line punctually.

Circus arts fostered deep connections and reliance among participants, creating a sense of unity and camaraderie. Feeling safe went beyond physical protection and encompasses trust, respect, and support within their circus community. This supportive environment empowered individuals to take risks, achieve their full potential, and experienced personal growth both on and off the stage.

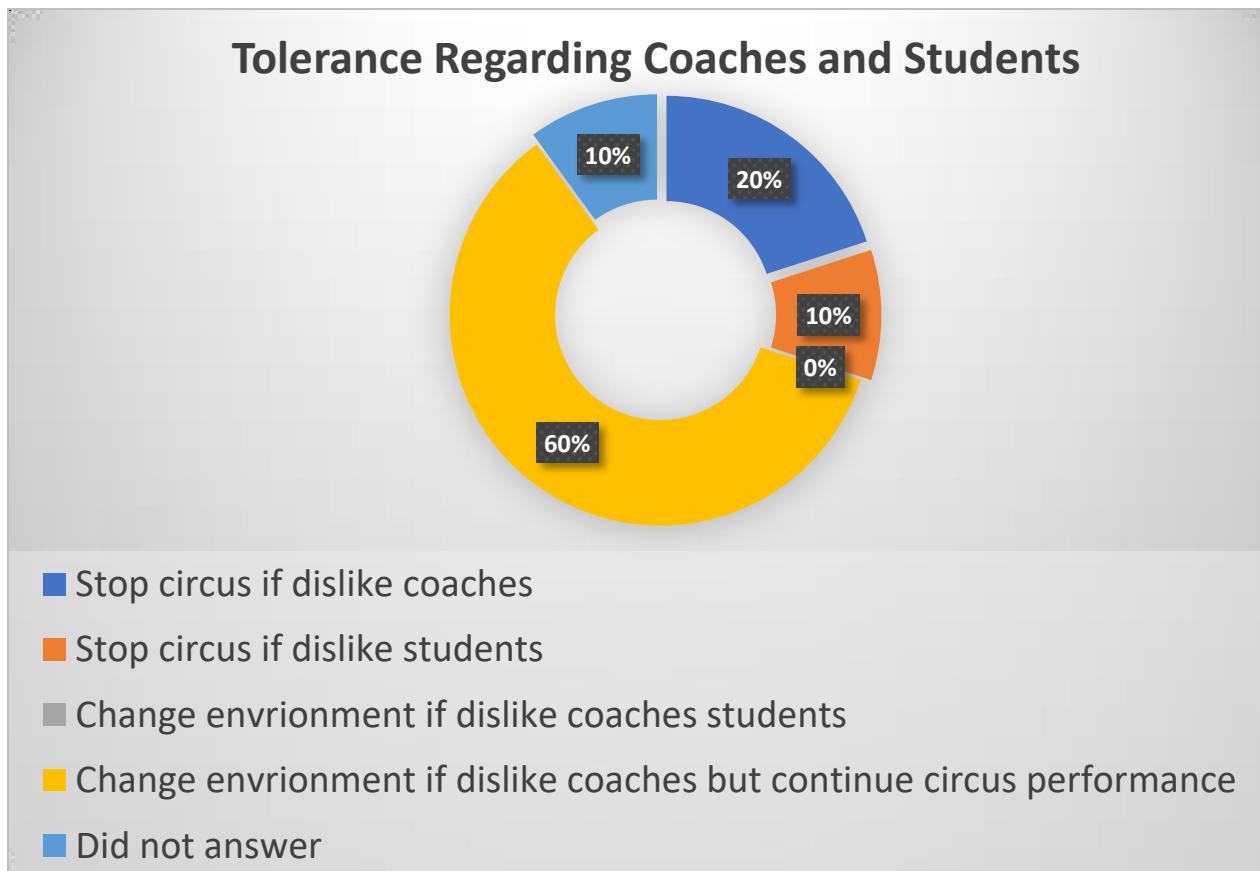
## **Relationships in Circus Performance**

Despite individual variations in relationships, most participants expressed a desire to socialize with their circus group outside of classes, highlighting the strong bonds and sense of belonging within the community. Not all participants will find their fit within a circus performance group. Instead, they create relationships in classes by developing team spirit (Daffodil, Journals), connections (Magnolia, Journals), and mutual respect (Gladiolus, Journals). Circus arts require performers to trust and rely on each other, creating a unique bond that allows them to push boundaries and deliver extraordinary performances. The phenomenon of individuals placing their lives in the hands of others and learning to trust themselves, their peers, and their teachers is a fundamental aspect of circus arts. It allowed them to navigate challenges, embrace failure, and achieve great success without the need for competition (Cadwell, 2018).

The relationship between the coach and the student was vital in the practice. While the coach fulfilled their responsibilities with other students, they also hold an authoritative role. This relationship provided support and a listening ear for students, as their coach valued their input and helped improve their self-esteem (Agans *et al.*, 2019). In the participants' journals, it was

evident that a positive relationship with the coach and fellow participants was crucial. Most participants expressed their commitment to continue circus arts or performance, even if they needed to find a better environment to nurture their passion.

**Graph 8:** Tolerance Regarding Coaches Students



According to the results (see graph 8), 60% of participants would change their learning environment if they did not have a positive relationship with their coach but continued to perform. Only 10% would stop circus altogether if they disliked the other participants. 20% of the participants would completely stop circus if they did not like their coaches, and 10% did not answer.

This emphasized the significance of a supportive and respectful bond between the coach and students, enhancing their overall experience and commitment to circus arts.

## **Goal in circus performance**

Performance goals are not only individuals but also collective in nature. While students may have specific skills they aim to showcase, the main focus of performance goals is the overall outcome of the performance itself. In performance, “An important implication of this proposition is that adaptive self-regulation of unattainable goals depends on the availability of alternative goals toward which people can direct their efforts” (Wrosch *et al.*, 2003:1495). Having goals fosters resilience and problem-solving skills as students navigate challenges, adapt, and persist to achieve desired outcomes, enhancing their self-efficacy (Cadwell, 2018).

Achieving their goals in a performance not only brings rewards but also boosts self-belief (Wrosch *et al.*, 2003), allowing participants to define success on their own terms and fostering a sense of autonomy, distinct from external expectations, positively impacting their wellbeing.

## ***Circus performance and wellbeing***

Circus performance encompassed several positive attributes that contributed to adolescent wellbeing. As demonstrated by the participants’ understanding of wellbeing, these four aspects (meeting needs, safety, relationships, and goal achievement) are presented in performance. Therefore, when individuals engage in circus performance, it had a positive impact on their overall wellbeing.

## **Other Discoveries during Research Project**

### **First Result, Peer Relationships**

Based on the charted interactions, socializing emerged as the most frequent and strongest category closely connected to risk-taking, while play was the least common. The chart did not include the interviews and journals because participants answered these questions directly in an interview setting. However, the observation environment fostered natural and enhanced social

creativity among participants. The analysis highlights the importance of socializing in circus performance, with participants relying on each other for wellbeing and seeking guidance from authority figures despite their independence.

### **Relying on other participants (Socializing)**

Risk-taking was inherent in circus performance practice, with variations in the types and degrees of risk individuals take. Whether calculated or miscalculated, risk plays a crucial role in learning, as they offer opportunities for failure and subsequent growth. Embracing failure in circus performance fostered personal development, skill advancement, and the cultivation of resilience and adaptability, “La façon d’apprendre est que tu échoues et tu apprends de tes erreurs” (Lavender, Interviews)<sup>9</sup>. The collaborative nature of circus performance often required high trust and interdependence among the participants.

The research revealed that participants were more inclined to take risks when they had the support and presence of their peers. This was exemplified by Bellflower, who expressed his fear of performing a challenging skill independently but felt more willing to take the risk when supported by his teammates<sup>10</sup> (Bellflower, Interview). To investigate if this pattern was consistent among participants, a thorough review of video footage and notes was conducted to gain deeper insights into the recurring nature of group risk-taking behaviours.

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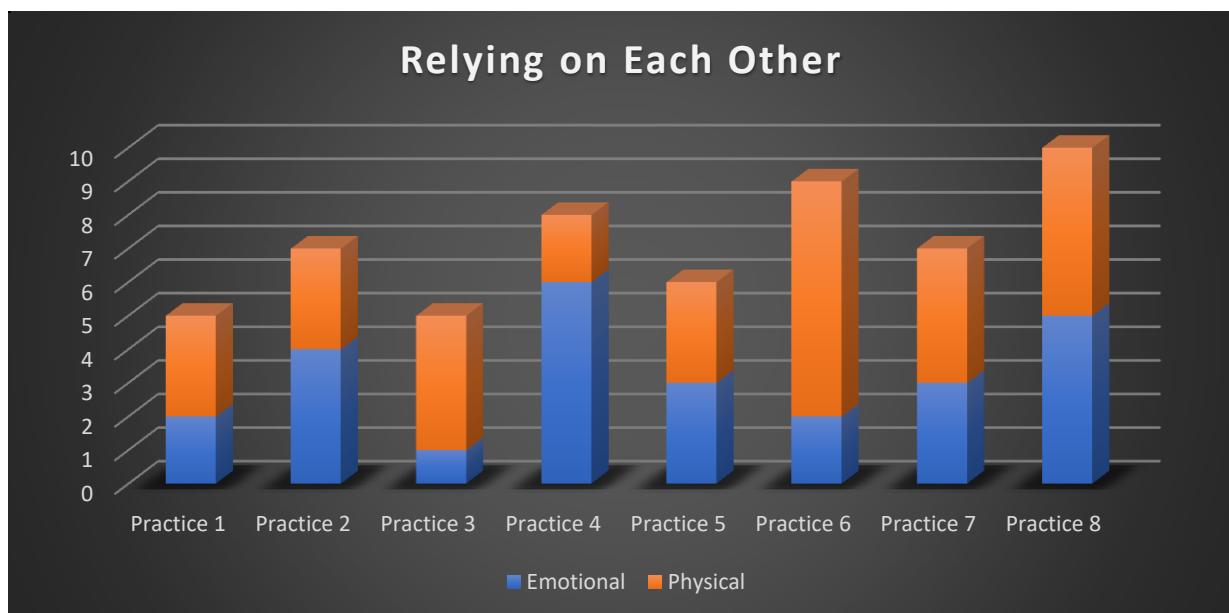
<sup>9</sup> The way to learn is to fail and learn from your mistakes

<sup>10</sup> Je n’ai pas confiance en moi, les gens sont capables de me projeter dans une banque pour faire un front, super, moi non.

### ***Relying on Each Other Emotionally and Physically***

Emotionally, adolescents perceive friendship as highly significant, providing them with emotional support and socializing opportunities. Beyond these benefits, friendships also contribute to their self-esteem, positively impacting their sense of self-worth and identity (Hojjat & Moyer, 2017). In circus performances, the connection between participants was often a noticeable evolution. In their performances, participants in circus arts formed a cohesive unit, supporting and relying on one another. For example, during rehearsal two, Magnolia, Tiger Lily, and Dahlia attempted a challenging maneuver, and despite a fall, they trusted and caught each other, embracing vulnerability and learning from their mistakes. Their resilience and determination to persist highlight the strong bonds. The skill practice is on Annex 5.

**Graph 9:** Relying on Each Other



Participants learned to trust one another as they rely on their peers for support and assistance, even in challenging moments. These patterns gave them the opportunity to become resilient (Van Es *et al.*, 2019). The presence and support of others in circus arts motivated

individuals to persevere and succeed, even when they feel like giving up, “Aussi la persévérence, pas abandonner”<sup>11</sup> (Rose, transcription, 16). The friendships formed in circus arts tend to be stronger and more enduring than those formed in school, “Je trouve que ça fait des amitiés un peu plus fortes. Dans le sens qu’elles vont durer plus longtemps”<sup>12</sup> (Rose, transcription, 15).

Anxiety has a significant impact on many participants in the project. One student shared that their anxiety worsened after the pandemic. However, attending circus practice proved beneficial in alleviating their social anxiety. She found that the skills and tools learned in the circus helped them effectively manage anxiety in their everyday lives (Rose, transcription, 23). The ability to be authentic and express emotions is rooted in the trust they have developed with their fellow participants. During the observation, there was a noticeable tendency for participants to attentively observe and support one another, creating a supportive and nurturing environment within the group.

During rehearsal, Tiger Lily often withdrew herself from the group, possibly due to fatigue or boredom, using it to re-centre. However, this prolonged withdrawal had adverse effects. Initially, Daffodil noticed Tiger Lily’s behaviour and consistently made efforts and engaged with her, providing physical comfort or humour. As time passed, other group members followed suit, intuitively understanding Tiger Lily’s needs and offering support. Although there had been no explicit discussions, the observation had revealed the group’s instinctive recognition and response to support Tiger Lily, helping her reconnect with the group more quickly. This organic and empathetic response exemplified the trust and bond they share, fostering an

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<sup>11</sup> Also, perseverance, to not give up

<sup>12</sup> I think it creates friendship that are a bit stronger and last longer than the ones at school.

environment where individuals could seek and receive the necessary assistance to participate and contribute to the group's collective efforts fully.



**Figure 10:** Pre-preparatory performance. *Papillon* 2023. Picture ECV

### **How is this Helping their Development?**

Adolescence is a complex and challenging time of personal and social transition; it “[...] is a time of change, a period of personal and social transition [...]” (Livazović, 2017:186). Socializing with peers is crucial for children's development, fostering self-respect, self-determination, and self-perception (Blažević, 2016). In the context of circus performance, participants rely on each other for support, even if they are not friends outside of practice. This reliance involves physical trust, as seen in the example of Tares trusting Foxglove to catch her during a challenging maneuver, a split on shoulder Foxglove (see Annex 5). Through such

interactions, participants quickly learn to trust the right individuals despite only knowing each other for five classes; this helps their development of trust (Linds *et al.*, 2018).

By relying on one another, participants develop greater emotional awareness and regulation. For instance, when Tiger Lily withdrew from the group, the support of others helped her become more conscious of her behaviour, gradually reducing the duration of her withdrawal. This reliance on peers allowed them to share burdens, promoting improved adolescent development and overall wellbeing, including emotional regulation (Westrupp *et al.*, 2020).

### **How does it improve their wellbeing?**

The adolescence period is confusing; need their parents' support but also value their independence. Friendship is incredibly important, yet the fear of reaching out to others often holds them back. Nonetheless, having the chance or the ability to rely on others is invaluable. Even when ever-present parents and family members support adolescents, they can feel alone and isolated since “[...] adolescents never want to be alone because they assume that others are never alone” (Laursen and Harlt, 2013:6). This situation can indeed create confusion and miscommunication when attempting to connect with them. Therefore, during moments of crisis, such as experiencing bullying, failing exams, or questioning one's sexual orientation, these challenges can significantly impact a teenager's wellbeing. The feeling of isolation can “[...] disrupt a person's mental, physical, and social wellbeing” (Liu *et al.*, 2014:1421).

The performance practice provided adolescents with a space to build trust and rely on each other, fostering a sense of security and enhancing their wellbeing. Members of the group automatically stepped in to offer support without needing to be asked, creating a safe and supportive environment. In turn, offering help to their peers contributed to their own wellbeing and learning. Children often learn more effectively when they can apply what they have by doing

it, or in other words, they need to be “hands-on” (Dewey, 1938). In this very physicalized case, they practiced with and learn from others. Participants understood the importance of being there for each other, whether catching them during performances or simply being supportive. This empathetic and supportive environment ensured the participants’ safety and overall wellbeing.

### **Second Result, Coach and Student Relationship**

Throughout my teaching experience, I noticed that students often talked about their parents, expressing a desire for more independence and confidence in their own abilities. They felt they were almost adults and wanted to be treated accordingly. However, when I reviewed the journals of the study participants, I was astonished to find that all ten of them mentioned the importance of the coach being more involved and offering better guidance.

### **My Reaction to These Results**

I noticed that participants often wrote, “Dis-moi quoi faire and I’ll do it”<sup>13</sup> (Daffodil, Journal). I noticed that the participants often approached the coach privately to ask questions, with a majority seeking reassurance rather than guidance. During rehearsal 2, for example, the coach allocated ten minutes for juggling exploration, but some students interrupted their own practice to seek validation from the coach.

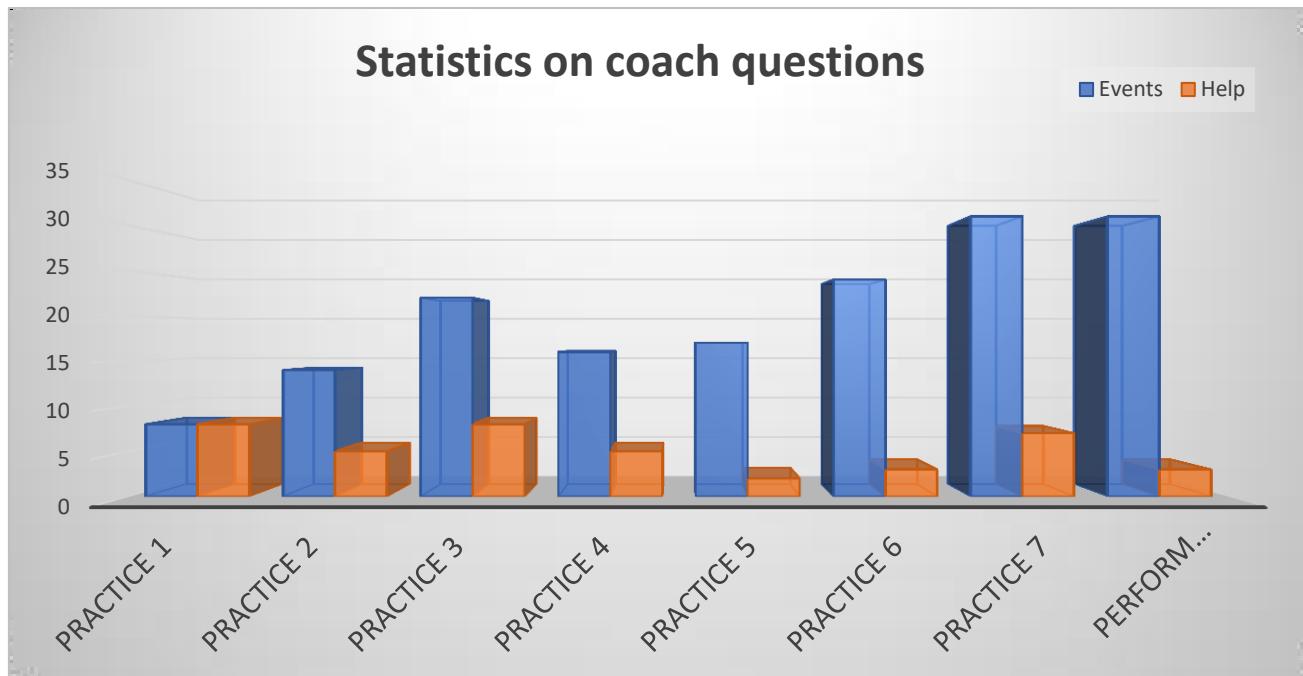
After several similar instances, the coach adjusted his approach to provide different guidance. I used an observation sheet to track the frequency of their questions to the coach to gather more information. It’s important to acknowledge that the data may not be completely accurate due to factors such as camera angles and occasional difficulty hearing the conversations.

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<sup>13</sup> Tell me what to do, and I’ll do it

Nevertheless, the collected data allowed me to distinguish the number of rehearsals from the instances where students sought assistance from the coach.

**Graph 10:** Statistic on Coach Questions



According to the table, the frequency of students asking questions or seeking reassurance decreased compared to the number of times they engaged in play, took risks, or socialized during rehearsal. This indicated that the students gained more confidence as the rehearsal progressed and relied less on the coach's advice. However, it is essential to note that although their need for help diminished, the participants still required the coach's assistance, even during performances when the coach was not physically on stage with them.

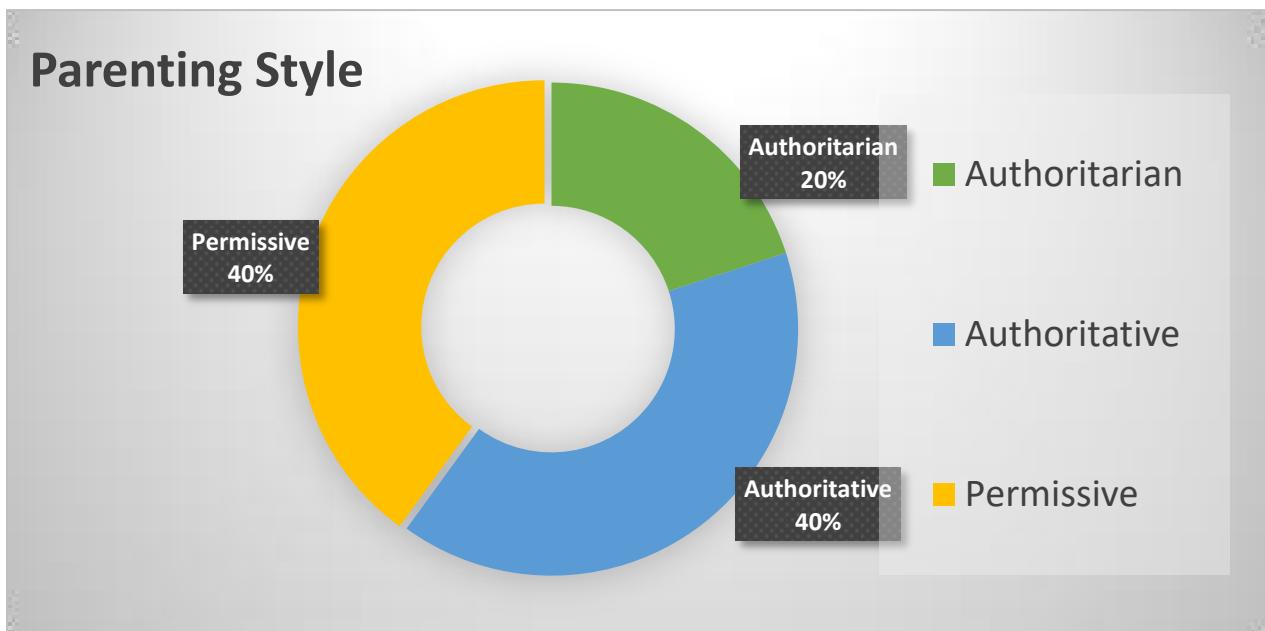
### **Having a Parental Guide**

To understand the participants' intentions when seeking help from a responsible adult, I categorized their needs for guidance into three distinct categories based on different parenting styles observed in my studies: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. The authoritarian

parenting style involved providing a structured environment in which children are expected to adhere to rules and boundaries without much room for deviation, “[...] to shape, control, and evaluate their children’s behaviour based on the absolute set of standards” (Kuppens and Ceulemans, 2019:169). Authoritative parenting combined structure and autonomy, promoting open communication and a balanced approach to rules and independence (Jadon & Tripathi, 2017).

Permissive parenting allowed for a high degree of freedom and independence, blurring the lines between parent and friend in the parent-child relationship (Sanvictores and Mendez, 2022). Based on graph 13, I have created a new graph illustrating the teaching approaches categorized by parenting style.

**Graph 11:** Parenting Style



Among the participants, twenty percent preferred a more authoritarian approach, seeking explicit instructions from the coaches on what to do, how to do it, and when. For instance, during the juggling routine, these participants would have appreciated clear directives to enhance their

enjoyment of the process. On the other hand, participants with an authoritative approach sought a structured environment that allowed for exploration. Using the juggling example, this group would prefer being given a framework, such as using four balls and then having the freedom to explore within that structure.

Regarding the permissive approach, participants enjoyed the freedom to explore performance concepts on their own, but they also desired the coach's availability when needed. In the context of juggling, this might involve being given the task of creating a juggling routine and receiving feedback from the coach on whether the performance was successful or not. One consensus among the participants was clear: regardless of whether they required a rigid structure or not, they consistently relied on their coaches. The difference lay in the teaching approach employed rather than the participants' dependence on their coaches.

### **Benefits to Student Development**

Circus performance shares similarities with everyday life in various aspects. Children or students were taught skills and were expected to apply what they learned during their performances. Just as in life, having the ability to rely on a parent or coach for guidance is essential in circus performance. By establishing an emotional connection between the student and coach, a symbiotic relationship started to develop, fostering mutual support and collaboration. Both the coach and student produced behaviours that aimed at the wellbeing of each other (Poczwarczowski *et al.*, 2002). Both the coach and the student recognized the necessity of being in good health to attain their goals. The coach's role involved offering the student support, guidance, and instruction.

However, if the coach is unwell or not in their best state, it can impede their capacity to help the students to the fullest. This underscores how the coach's wellbeing significantly affects

their ability to assist the students effectively. Therefore, adolescents who show more concern for and better understand others' emotions experience higher-quality relationships with their parents and peers (Boele *et al.*, 2019).

In the observation, it was evident that participants asked for help and expressed concern for their coaches' wellbeing. In rehearsal 7, a situation arose where Tiger Lily noticed a problem with the pulley system while the coach was already overwhelmed, taking care of the other nine students. Tiger Lily took the initiative to ask for help and suggested a way to assist the coach. Their symbiotic relationship and Tiger Lily's empathetic realization allowed them to handle the problem smoothly and efficiently. The opportunity to rely on their coach ensured their safety and enabled them to develop their ability to empathize and understand beyond their own problems.

Lastly, according to *Autonomy Support and Need Satisfaction in the Motivation and Wellbeing of Gymnasts*, a strong correlation existed between the student's self-esteem and the coach. Marylène Gagné *et al.* (2003) stated that in this case, "Gymnasts who perceived that coaches were highly involved in their training had more stable self-esteem than those who perceived coaches as uninvolved" (375). In other words, students who believed their coaches cared about their class participation experienced higher self-esteem.

## **Performance Effects on Wellbeing**

As mentioned, participants sought assistance to validate their existing knowledge or better understand unfamiliar concepts. This enabled them to recognize their mistakes and make necessary adjustments. Dahlia emphasized in the interview that failure is an essential part of the learning process, as it deepens their understanding and mastery of skills<sup>14</sup>. Seeking guidance

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<sup>14</sup> Ben plus souvent échouer parce que c'est tu vas rater un mouvement plus que tu vas le réussir avant de le maîtriser

from their coach after a failure allows them to receive corrections and move closer to success. This iterative process boosts their self-esteem and enhances their understanding of the skill from a kinesiological perspective. The guidance provided by a coach in performance allows students to experience a sense of support and validation, leading to improved self-esteem (Eime *et al.*, 2013) and increased empathy (Rusu, 2017), ultimately enhancing their overall wellbeing (Griffith *et al.*, 2018).

### **Wellbeing in Circus Performance**

The participants developed a strong bond with both their fellow participants and coaches, relying on them for guidance throughout their performances. During the performances, the coach-participant relationship transformed, focusing on achieving collective results, while training emphasized individual growth. Circus performance combined physical skill development, artistic expression, teamwork, and the exhilaration of live performance, creating a distinctive and rewarding experience for all involved.

Athletes can develop self-confidence, determination, and resilience in gymnastics and other competitive sports. However, the extent to which these positive attributes are nurtured can vary depending on the athlete's performance and level of competitive success, yet "regardless of these positive forces, sport can be stressful because of high self-expectations, pressure from others, competition outcomes, and injury" (White and Bennie, 2015:380). Art emphasized the artist's ability to effectively communicate their message through their work and how well their ideas are expressed through artistic expression (Daykin *et al.*, 2008). Circus performance offers a unique combination of skill execution and effective message communication on stage. As a result, the guidance and support required by students from their coach can vary, as circus performance incorporates elements of both sport and art.

## **Stress and Performance**

Based on my years of experience, I assumed that the performance period would be highly stressful for the participants. Students would often become restless and forgetful, frequently expressing their fear of public speaking, or giving presentations in class (Magnolia, Journal). In this research project, the participants had less time to prepare for their show. Consequently, I anticipated their stress levels would be higher due to the pressure of producing a result, particularly in this research context. Regardless of whether the participants felt fully prepared, tickets were sold, and an audience was eager to watch them. Interestingly, the participants unanimously responded when asked about the stress caused by performing.

Mel: C'est un bon stress, vous avez écrit que c'est un bon stress. Si vous ne faisiez pas de performance en cirque dans votre vie de tous les jours, pensez-vous que vous seriez plus stressé dans votre vie ? <sup>15</sup>

Gladiolus : Je serais moins méthodique et logique. Maintenant je fais ça comme si c'était un accomplissement, j'ai un calendrier, j'ai un agenda où je fais mes choses. Quand quelqu'un me parle de problème, qu'il a dans sa vie, j'aurais plus de compassion, je vais dire, toutes les solutions. <sup>16</sup>

Mel: Tu trouves que le cirque t'apporte des solutions à des problèmes tous les jours ? <sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> If it (performance) is a good stress, you wrote that it was a good stress. If you did not have circus performance in your everyday life, do you think that your life would be more stressful?

<sup>16</sup> I would be less methodical and logical. Now, I do this as if it was an accomplishment, I have a calendar, I have a journal where I do my things. When someone talks to me about their problems, that they have in their lives, I will have more compassion, I mean, I will have all the solutions.

<sup>17</sup> You find that circus gives you solution for your everyday problems.

Foxglove: Oui.<sup>18</sup>

Rose : Le cirque m'aide à réduire mon anxiété.<sup>19</sup>

Performance not only helped the artists and individuals manage their stress levels but also enabled them to find solutions to their problems. Gladiolus explained during the interviews that circus performance helped him better organize his life. Similarly, Rose was able to reduce her anxiety by performing. Based on these results, it appeared that participants do not experience stress before or after performing because the positive outcomes outweigh any stress they may feel. Performing enhanced participants' self-image, interpersonal skills, and confidence. Most importantly, it provided them with freedom of expression and fosters a positive sense of self (Snow *et al.*, 2003). Consequently, it was reasonable to assume that stress was alleviated during performances.

**A possible career.** The research participants were all enrolled in Circus School of Verdun classes. However, four out of the ten participants had never performed before. In their solicited journals, the final question asked whether they would ever perform again or if they aspired to perform professionally. Interestingly, all ten participants expressed their desire to perform again. However, during the interviews, when asked if they wanted to pursue a professional career in the circus, only a small number responded with a 'maybe.' While performing brought them a sense of wellbeing, it appeared that they do not necessarily have a strong inclination to pursue extensive training in circus.

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<sup>18</sup> Yes

<sup>19</sup> The circus helps me reduce my anxiety.

**Sport vs. Circus.** The final interesting discovery pertained to movement and sports.

Physical literacy encompassed four key aspects: motivation and confidence, physical competence, knowledge and understanding, and engagement in physical activities (<https://physicalliteracy.ca/>). In essence, it involved being motivated to participate in physical activities while developing skills and comprehending the benefits of incorporating physical activity into one's daily life. This concept is taught early in physical education (PE) within scholarly curricula.

During the interviews, participants were asked about the reasons why they started doing circus. Interestingly, some participants shared that they began their circus journey because their parents encouraged them to find a physical activity to engage in. Many of the students associated physical activity solely with traditional gym classes. As a result, students who did not enjoy physical education often concluded that they did not like sports in general.

Dahlia: L'activité physique est associée au cours d'éducation physique. Et on m'avait collé une étiquette de fille pas bonne en éduc donc dans ma tête, je n'étais pas bonne dans tous les sports.

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Lavender: Je détestais les cours de sport donc je détestais le sport. Maintenant, j'aime le sport en général. J'ai décidé que le sport n'était pas juste les cours de gym.<sup>21</sup>

It was unanimous among the participants that how physical education (PE) is presented in school significantly impacts their perception of physical activity in their daily lives. However,

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<sup>20</sup> Physical activity is associated with physical education. And we labelled me as the girl not good in PE and in my head, I was not good in Sports.

<sup>21</sup> I hated gym classes and therefore I hated sports. Now, I love sports in general. I decided that Sports was not just gym class.

upon discovering circus arts, they realized that movement and engaging in physical activity extended beyond the confines of PE classes. Even though not all of them aspired to become circus artists, they discovered that circus arts allowed them to develop a newfound appreciation for sports and incorporate physical activity into their lives (Bellflower, Interview).

## **Limitations**

**Participants.** One of the challenges encountered in this study was participant availability. Although we could find a time block that suited most participants, some still had to miss a few rehearsals. While the overall performance was successful, the data collection process posed difficulties due to these absences. As a result, there were solicited journal questions that certain participants did not answer.

**Instructors.** Similar to the participants, the leading coach for the performance was not available for all of the rehearsals. As a result, I had to find a replacement coach to fill in during those times. Although the substitute coach was an employee of the ECV and followed the same pedagogical approach, there were slight differences in their teaching methods.

**Participant's connection to the researcher.** While observing their rehearsal, some participants occasionally turned to me for guidance or assistance. In the initial rehearsal, I had to remind them that I was there as an observer and not to interact with me directly. They quickly adjusted and refrained from addressing me. It is worth noting that if all the participants were individuals whom I did not know personally, their behaviour during the rehearsal might have been different.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

**Demographic.** As established in Chapter 2, the literature review on the adolescent period lacks clarity and consensus. Different educational psychologists and theorists have varying

perspectives on this developmental stage. It would be intriguing to conduct similar research based on the different adolescent periods proposed by developmental theorists such as Piaget, Erickson, or Dewey and examine if the results align.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that some of the participants were already enrolled in college (CEGEP), and no participants were in secondary 1 (Grade 7). It would be interesting to investigate whether the results remain consistent across all adolescents; it would be intriguing to replicate the study exclusively with secondary school students. Since they are still in high school, it would be valuable to explore if their level of maturity influences the study outcomes.

Lastly, in terms of demographics, the participants in this study were already students at the ECV. While this decision was essential as the study focused on performance practice and circus training, conducting the same study with individuals who have never engaged in circus arts or performed would be crucial. This would allow for an evaluation of whether any adolescent can benefit from circus performance or if the observed benefits are specific to those with experience in circus arts.

***Circus Pedagogy.*** The École de Cirque de Verdun has a distinct pedagogy for teaching circus skills and performances. While circus schools generally share similar approaches, such as avoiding a competitive environment (Schorr, 2021), promoting inclusivity (Spiegel *et al.*, 2019), and emphasizing the importance of self-care (Meilman, 2018), each school may have its unique teaching methods. Conducting the same study in a different circus school setting and examining the results would confirm whether circus performance enhances adolescent wellbeing universally or if the approach used at the Circus School of Verdun yields these positive effects.

***Coaches.*** Due to the study's limitations, two different coaches were involved in the research process. For future research, it would be intriguing to explore two potential approaches,

either having a different coach for each rehearsal or maintaining the same coach consistently throughout the entire study. This would enable us to examine whether the coach's individual approach has a more significant impact on the participants' wellbeing than the circus school's pedagogical approach. Understanding the influence of different coaching styles could provide valuable insights for optimizing the positive outcomes of circus performance on adolescent wellbeing.



**Figures 11 and 12.** Pre-Preparatory Performance. En Attendant le Train 2019. Picture Benoit Leroux

## **Chapter 7: Conclusion**

Circus performances facilitate individual development, a phenomenon that captured my attention during the last fifteen years I have taught adolescents and preprofessional young adults at the École de Cirque de Verdun. It became clear that children who are confronted with anxiety, heightened stress levels, and various diagnoses exhibited improved self-esteem following their engagement in circus performances. These benefits also extended to all children as they improved on their socialization and has a positive impact on their daily lives. Over the years I consistently observed this recurring outcome and therefore needed to conduct this research to understand the underlying reasons and mechanisms of this impact on the wellbeing of adolescents.

This research journey provided valuable insights into how adolescents do, in fact, benefit from circus performance. By closely observing research participants as they crafted performances, examining their solicited journals, and conducting interviews, it became evident that circus performance not only enhanced their wellbeing but also exerted a positive influence on various aspects of their lives. As I worked through the data, I sought to address the three central questions asked in the introduction:

1. What does wellbeing mean to adolescents?
2. What is the impact of circus performance on adolescent wellbeing?

In this research, adolescents have eloquently expressed their understanding of wellbeing as having their fundamental needs met, having a sense of security, cultivating nurturing relationships, and pursuing both substantial and minor objectives. Notably, the participants highlighted that engagement in circus performance bestowed upon them a newfound appreciation for physical activity, facilitating the exploration and uninhibited expression of their

creative impulses. Furthermore, the participants believed that the experience imparted valuable life skills, enabling them to balance living in the present while strategically planning for their future.

As we have seen, the practice of circus culminating with a performance intricately weaves together components of trust cultivation, the honing of social adeptness, and the elevation of self-esteem. Interestingly, the very definition of wellbeing derived by the participants resonates harmoniously with their experiences in the realm of circus arts performance. Nevertheless, its influence extends far beyond the array of positive attributes unearthed throughout this thesis. It catalyzes a transformation in adolescents' personalities and fundamentally shifts their comprehension of the world around them. They embark on this metamorphic journey with heavy hearts, entering an intimidatingly vulnerable process of performance, to emerge with lighter hearts. This equips them with the capacity to embrace the events that unfold in their environment and foster an innate trust in their instincts. Cumulatively, these insights accentuate the lasting imprint of circus arts performance on the comprehensive wellbeing of the participants.

It's important to note that this research was narrowly focused on circus performance and not circus arts practice. Although performance is contingent upon practice, the creative process is not fully encompassed within the practice phase, "La pratique c'est essentiel à la performance, la performance n'est pas essentielle à la pratique" (Tiger Lily, Interview).<sup>22</sup>

While performance inherently relies on an ease of rehearsal, the entirety of the creative journey extends beyond that rehearsal and creation phase alone. This research was strategically designed to delve into the influence of creativity, self-expression, and collaborative pursuit of

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<sup>22</sup> Practising skills is essential to the performance but the performance is not essential to practicing skills.

shared objectives on the participants' wellbeing. Particularly, these dynamics could be fully appreciated and explored within the context of performance rather than circus practice. The purpose of this research was to also observe how creativity, self-expression and working together for a common goal affected their wellbeing. This could only be found in performance rather than skill practice.

### **Significance of the Findings**

This research introduces an innovative approach to fostering the development of adolescents within their daily routines, simultaneously equipping them with effective emotional coping strategies. While art therapy enjoys widespread recognition, the potential value of circus arts practice and performance as tools for individual transformation are often forgotten outside of art therapy frameworks. Through this study, I have not only shed light on the ways in which circus performance contribute to the wellbeing of adolescents but have also reinforced the pedagogical principles that I have shared with my students throughout my fifteen years of teaching.

On a personal level, observing and comprehending the impact of performance on these young individuals has facilitated my evolution in pedagogical methods with my students. I have gained insight into how to nurture their creativity without apprehension of pushing them beyond their limits. This opportunity has allowed me to adapt more easily, evolving my communication to help the participants not only comprehend each skill but also to feel valued. I also fully understood the importance of their collaboration in learning how to communicate and teach, enabling them to better appreciate their own skills and bodies. The most significant lesson I've learned is the necessity of ensuring their commitment to the training decisions the students make

by ensuring that they effectively manage their time, respecting their sleep, schoolwork, and maintaining healthy relationships.

This journey has also provided me with the opportunity to cultivate deep connections with the students, nurturing a special rapport while also contributing to my personal growth. It has taught me how to be a role model for these individuals as I confront my own human flaws.

Consequently, I've learned to manage my emotions, enhance my communication skills, and develop greater patience. The most significant lesson I've gained is that we cannot control every circumstance, and it's important to accept things as they come.

As someone whose life was transformed by circus arts during childhood, witnessing its comparable impact on others brings me joy but also a clearer understanding as to why circus helped me so. I am also hoping that this research is going to reach as many people as possible who will gain from what we learned here.

### **Future Research**

There are several reasons as to why I chose this demographic for this research: an easier access since I work at a circus school where they train, a deep need to understand how additional emotional support during adolescence can manifest itself in circus practice, and the opportunity I had to facilitate and independent circus performance within the safe confines of a circus school. However, it's important to note that the benefits of performance in circus arts aren't confined solely to older participants. Future research specifically exploring the impact on younger children could provide valuable insights into the potential advantages at different developmental stages.

In designing my studies, I deliberately separated the rehearsal, creative design and performance components. This separation allowed me to specifically assess how the actual

performance influences participants. Yet, it would be equally impactful to investigate how circus rehearsal aside from performance, affects individuals. Comparing the results between practice and performance could yield intriguing differences, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of circus arts engagement across various contexts and aspects of participation.

### **Impact on Future Research**

Circus arts are a captivating fusion of physical prowess and artistic expression, engaging audiences through a unique blend of athleticism, creativity, and performance. Despite their proximity to gymnastics and the skills that are often homed in other sports, circus arts are fundamentally artistic. Within the circus community, there's a prevailing belief that contemporary circus constitutes its own distinct realm—an amalgamation of art, sport, and traditional circus techniques. Relentlessly, professional schools have endeavored to present their case to Québec's Minister of Education to further support circus pedagogy, yet due to a lack of understanding about circus arts among educational professionals, their requests of accepting circus arts into its own educational category has consistently been denied. Consequently, the community has taken matters into their own hands by creating documents to educate other circus establishments about the available tools (Plan cadre du développement de la filière de formation loisir et préparatoire, 2023).

Through this research, I intend to illuminate the many reasons as to how the circus arts can have a transformative impact adolescents and young adults. I hope to have provided non-circus specialists with insights into how circus serves as a potent tool for aiding individuals in need. Moreover, this research seeks to elucidate how practising circus skills can effectively enhance children's sensory and gross motor systems. I hope to have communicated what I, along

with countless others, have experienced over the years—that the circus arts can have a significant and tangible impact on many youths' wellbeing.

### We Are Family

“We wanted to be able to live in a larger group, in an extended family of some kind, and with hindsight that’s exactly what a traditional circus is like” (Jürgens and Hildbrand, 2022:224).

Circus arts have traditionally been seen as a close-knit family, with an environment that outsiders find difficult to penetrate. It is a community of individuals who come together to perform and survive in a world that may not fully understand or accommodate them. However, this is not solely about creating a family-like atmosphere, for some individuals, it is a means to “stay alive” and to find purpose in life (Tiger Lily, Journal).

One could argue that there are already numerous forms of live arts, such as theatre or dance, that could yield similar well-being outcomes for adolescents. As previously explained, circus art combines the physical demands of gymnastics with the expressive qualities of theater, offering a unique fusion. What truly sets circus apart is its capacity to embrace individuality. Unlike ballet, which often requires specific physical attributes like height and body proportions, or gymnastics, which favors petite frames and strong cores, circus, particularly at the École de Cirque de Verdun, caters to diverse body types and looks at building capacity and exploring possibilities. This inclusivity fosters a sense of achievement and pride among participants. People who were never perceived as conventionally fit or strong can engage in circus arts and proudly execute a five-minute aerial performance solely using their arm strength, exemplifying their accomplishments.

Dahlia : Ahh non, mais attends, mais j'aime ça bouger finalement là j'aurais le goût d'être meilleur. J'aurais le goût de m'entraîner pour ça, pour être capable de faire mon inversion en tissu pas en sautant du sol avec les jambes tout plier, les pieds en cornichon.<sup>23</sup> (Interviews, 2023)

Circus performance not only impacts the wellbeing of adolescents, but it also provides them with a sense of purpose and accomplishment. Through their involvement in circus arts, they discover their personal values, develop their identity, and gain insights about themselves. Most importantly, by performing in circus, they become the best version of themselves, showcasing their unique talents and abilities. Circus arts offer a transformative experience, empowering adolescents to embrace their strengths and thrive in their personal growth.



**Figure 13.** En Attendant le Train, 2019. Picture Benoit Leroux

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<sup>23</sup> Oh, but wait, I do love moving after all and now I want to be better. I would like to train for it, to be able to reverse on the silk without jumping, having straight legs and not pickled legs

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## Annex 1: Certification

PANEL ON  
RESEARCH ETHICS  
*Navigating the ethics of human research*

TCPS 2: CORE 2022



### *Certificate of Completion*

*This document certifies that*

**Melanie-Beby Robert**

*successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on  
the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research  
Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)*

Certificate # 0000825793      17 June, 2022

## Annex 2: Consent Forms



### FORMULAIRE DE CONSENTEMENT RELATIF AUX PHOTOS, AUX VIDÉOS ET AUX DOCUMENTS AUDIOS

Vous participez à une activité au cours de laquelle l'*École de cirque de Verdun* prendra des photographies, ou produira des vidéos ou des documents audio. Ceux-ci seront utilisés par l'*École de cirque de Verdun* dans le cadre de ses activités et manifestations à titre de matériel promotionnel – soit en format papier ou électronique, et seront notamment affichés sur Internet, soit sur le site Web de l'*École de cirque de Verdun* ou sur les sites Web de différents médias sociaux.

Le présent formulaire vise à vous demander votre autorisation pour la diffusion de photos, vidéos ou enregistrements sonores sur lesquels il est possible de vous reconnaître si l'*École de cirque de Verdun* décidait d'utiliser de les utiliser dans son matériel promotionnel, soit en format imprimé ou électronique, et notamment sur Internet.

Pour toute question au sujet du présent avis de demande de consentement, veuillez communiquer avec Camille Andriamamonjy, agente aux communications, au 514-768-5812 ou à [communication@ecolecirqueverdun.com](mailto:communication@ecolecirqueverdun.com)

#### CONSENTEMENT DU/DE LA PARTICIPANT(E)

**JE COMPRENDS** que des photos, vidéos ou enregistrements sonores de moi pourront être diffusés à grande échelle, et que s'ils sont affichés sur le site de l'*École de cirque de Verdun* ou sur d'autres sites Web, ils deviendront accessibles au public. Je comprends également que l'*École de cirque de Verdun* n'a pas le contrôle de l'utilisation du matériel figurant sur son site Web – y compris des photos, vidéos et enregistrements sonores de moi – et n'est pas responsable du mauvais usage pouvant en être fait.

**POUR LES MOTIFS SUSMENTIONNÉS, JE CONSENS** à ce que l'*École de cirque de Verdun* me photographie, ou réalise une vidéo ou un enregistrement audio sur lesquels je figure.

**J'AUTORISE** l'*École de cirque de Verdun* à utiliser, reproduire, publier, transmettre, distribuer, diffuser et afficher des photos, vidéos ou enregistrements audio sur lesquels j'apparaîs ou sur lesquels on entend ma voix – éventuellement avec mon nom – dans toute publication, production multimédia, vidéo, ou publicité de l'*École de cirque de Verdun*, ou encore sur le site Web de l'*École de cirque de Verdun* ou sur les sites de médias sociaux, et ce, sans avis supplémentaire et sans que j'aie à approuver la version finale des photos, des vidéos et des enregistrements audio.

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Signature du/de la participant(e)

Nom et date en caractères d'imprimerie

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Signature du parent ou du tuteur légal  
(si le/la participant(e) a moins de 18 ans)

Nom et date en caractères d'imprimerie

Date :

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## Annex 3: The École de Cirque permission



Montréal, 20 juillet 2022

Objet : Résidence Projet de maîtrise Mélanie-Béby Robert

Par la présente, j'atteste que Madame Mélanie-Béby Robert a toutes les autorisations pour réaliser son projet de maîtrise au sein de l'École de cirque de Verdun. Ces autorisations couvrent les étapes de recherche et de création avec les élèves expérimentés.es et collaborateurs.rices de l'École de même que l'utilisation de tous les équipements de cirque nécessaire à ce travail.

N'hésitez pas à me contacter pour toutes questions

Johanne Pelletier  
Directrice des programmes de formation

dir.formation@e-cirqueverdun.com | 514) 768-5812 poste 201 | 5190, boul. LaSalle, Verdun (Qc) H4H 1N8

## Annex 4: Apparatus

**Table 6 Circus arts discipline subgroup classification**

Circus arts discipline subgroups	Definition	Examples
Aerial acrobatics	Circus discipline in which the artist is often suspended from an apparatus by various body parts and commonly uses pulling movements, for example, to invert on or climb the apparatus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Silks (or tissue, fabric).</li> <li>▶ Rope (or corde lisse), Spanish web.</li> <li>▶ Trapeze (static, dance, flying).</li> <li>▶ Aerial hoop (or Lyra).</li> <li>▶ Cloud swing/sling/hammock.</li> <li>▶ Straps/loop straps.</li> <li>▶ Rings (Russian or gymnastic).</li> <li>▶ Chains.</li> <li>▶ Hair hanging.</li> <li>▶ Air cradle.</li> <li>▶ Aerial pole.</li> <li>▶ Russian cradle (flyer).</li> <li>▶ Iron jaw.</li> </ul>
Aerial acrobatics (with ground elements)	A subset of aerial acrobatics that often include impact and/or pushing movements in contact with the floor or apparatus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Chinese pole/lollipop/pole dance.</li> <li>▶ Russian cradle (base).</li> <li>▶ High bar.</li> </ul>
Ground acrobatics (human propulsion)	Discipline that involves repetitive skills such as jumping, diving, rotational or other gymnastics-type movements where height from the ground is the result of human propulsion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Tumbling/parkour.</li> <li>▶ Jump rope.</li> <li>▶ Icarian games.</li> <li>▶ Hoop diving.</li> <li>▶ Cyr/German wheel.</li> <li>▶ Dance.</li> <li>▶ Banquine.</li> </ul>
Ground acrobatics (apparatus propulsion)	Similar to the above, except that repetitive movements are performed on an apparatus or with a device that imparts an acceleration of the artists' movement, often resulting in landing from a significant height.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Teeterboard (Korean plank and Hungarian).</li> <li>▶ Russian swing.</li> <li>▶ Trampoline/tramp wall.</li> <li>▶ Wheel of death.</li> <li>▶ Trick riding (bicycle, motorcycle).</li> <li>▶ Bungee/harness.</li> </ul>
Ground acrobatics (balance/control)	Includes disciplines where the artist is typically weight-bearing on a stable or unstable surface (apparatus or human), focusing on creating postures or shapes with control and balance. It may involve some impact transitioning into and out of postures or on and off the base or apparatus.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Contortion.</li> <li>▶ Handbalancing.</li> <li>▶ Hand to hand/adagio/acrodance.</li> <li>▶ Human stacking/pyramid.</li> <li>▶ Acrobatic chair/chair stacking.</li> <li>▶ Ladder.</li> <li>▶ Rola bola/rolling globe.</li> <li>▶ Wire (tight, slack, high).</li> <li>▶ Stilts.</li> <li>▶ Trick riding (unicycle/horse).</li> <li>▶ Perch.</li> </ul>
Manipulation	This discipline involves the artist creating repetitive movements with an object, often requiring significant coordination and fine motor skills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Juggling.</li> <li>▶ Diabolo/poi.</li> <li>▶ Foot juggling/antipodium.</li> <li>▶ Contact juggling.</li> <li>▶ Flowerstick.</li> <li>▶ Hooping.</li> <li>▶ Fire.</li> <li>▶ Knife throwing.</li> <li>▶ Plate spinning.</li> <li>▶ Bullwhip.</li> <li>▶ Baton twirling.</li> </ul>
Character	Discipline that often includes significant acting and theatrics. It may also include some acrobatic skills but typically with low physical demand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Clown.</li> <li>▶ Ringmaster.</li> <li>▶ Mime.</li> </ul>
Music	Discipline that involves singing or playing a musical instrument.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Vocals.</li> <li>▶ Instrumentalists.</li> </ul>

## Annex 5: Hand to hand Skill



## Annex 6: The École de Cirque de Verdun values



### VALEURS

- Créativité
- Coopération
- Dépassement et satisfaction
- Engagement social et communautaire
- Dans un environnement sécuritaire, inclusif, respectueux et agréable

### VISION

Être un leader dans l'apprentissage des arts du cirque grâce à un programme de formation de qualité, intégré, complet, diversifié, inclusif et adapté aux besoins de chacun.

### SERVICES

Lieu propice d'épanouissement et de perfectionnement, l'École offre, dans un contexte récréatif et professionnel, des cours de base, des cours spécialisés, des ateliers d'initiation, des camps de jour durant l'été et des spectacles. Les techniques de cirque développées à l'École portent sur : l'acrobatie, la manipulation, l'aérien, les équilibres sur objets et le trampoline. Toutes les activités se déroulent sur une piste entièrement aménagée et adaptée aux participants de tous âges.



## Annex 7: Apparatus Safety Rules

**Je porte mes souliers d'intérieur**



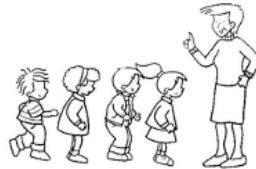
**Je me tiens seulement à la barre quand j'en ai besoin**

**Je demande la permission de sortir un objet à l'extérieur de la « cage»**



**Je fais attention aux autres sur les appareils**

**J'attends mon tour en ligne et je respecte le rang**



**J'écoute les explications afin d'être au courant des exercices que je peux pratiquer**

**Je demande de l'aide si j'en ai besoin**



**Je porte des bas**



**Je regarde attentivement les démonstrations et écoute les consignes**

**J'attends mon tour**



**Je reste debout sur le côté du trampoline quand j'attends mon tour**



**Je suis attentif aux corrections données**



**Je descends du trampoline en m'assoyant sur le bord avant de descendre au sol**

## Annex 8: Child Approach based on Age



### Comportement selon l'âge

Gestion : Action ou manière de gérer, d'administrer, de diriger, d'organiser quelque chose; période pendant laquelle quelqu'un gère une affaire.

Classes : Groupe, ensemble de choses, de personnes, etc., obtenus en réunissant celles qui ont des traits communs ; catégorie

Gestion: Règlements

- Sécurité
- Pédagogie
- But des cours

Classe:

- Le groupe d'enfant
- L'âge
- Le type de cour

	12 à 24 mois (Bébécool)	
Son Corps	Ne sait pas contrôler son corps Apprends à marcher	Peut ramper Tiens les objets avec la paume de leur main
Façon de penser	Courte notion du temps Peut faire une chose à la fois	Attention de courte durée
Émotions	Besoin d'être encadré Ne s'est pas comment penser aux autres	Besoin d'être ramené
En groupe	Veut être premier Préfère travailler un à un plutôt qu'en grand groupe (apprendre à partager)	Difficulté à partager
Capacités physiques	Saute à deux pieds Tiens des objets avec le pouce et l'index Monter et descendre les escaliers	Commence à courir Ne s'est pas encore lancé et attraper
Activités	Ne comprends pas les règlements, MAIS peut apprendre à les suivre Préfère les activités de courte durée Dois être plus physique que mental	Aime la variété

<b>2 à 3 ans (Minicirque)</b>		
Son Corps	Apprends à contrôler son corps Grande endurance physique N'a pas la notion du danger	Besoin d'être en mouvement Flexible
Façon de penser	Courte notion du temps Peut faire une chose à la fois	Attention de courte durée
Émotions	Besoin d'être encadré Ne s'est pas comment penser aux autres	Besoin d'être ramené
En groupe	Veut être premier Préfère travailler un à un, mais commence à vouloir travailler avec l'autre	Difficulté à partager
Capacités physiques	Saute à deux pieds Tiens des objets avec le pouce et l'index	Commence à courir Ne s'est pas encore lancé et attraper
Activités	Ne comprends pas les règlements, MAIS peut apprendre à les suivre Préfère les activités de courte durée Dois être plus physique que mental	Aime la variété
<b>3 à 4 ans (Moyencirque/Parent Enfant)</b>		
Son Corps	Faible contrôle musculaire Grande endurance physique pour une petite période de temps Utilise beaucoup plus ses mains Aime jouer	Toujours en mouvement Imite les mouvements
Façon de penser	Courte notion du temps Peut faire deux choses à la fois	Attention de courte durée
Émotions	Besoin d'être rassuré N'a pas encore la compréhension de ce qu'il peut et ne peut pas faire, il faut lui expliquer.	Difficile au début d'être séparé de son parent
En groupe	Veut être premier Aime être avec les autres, mais ne sais pas comment jouer en groupe (besoin d'être guidé)	Commence à vouloir partager
Capacités physiques	Peut garder l'équilibre sur un pied Lancer et attraper à deux mains et une main	Sauter à deux jambes et faire un demi-tour
Activités	Commence à comprendre les règlements des activités Préfère les activités courtes durées	Aime la variété

<b>5 à 6 ans (Grandcirque)</b>		
Son Corps	Début de compréhension dans la coordination des mouvements, mais ne sait pas encore décortiquer Position gainage possible (avec bras vers le bas), mais ne peut pas garder cette position longtemps Courte endurance physique, mais éclatée d'énergie. À besoin de voir les mouvements pour les comprendre	Plus fort dans les jambes que dans les bras Aime jouer
Façon de penser	Comprends mieux quand les choses sont mises en exemple par rapport à lui-même Intuitif	Comprends ce qu'il voit
Émotions	Pas de censure Leurs valeurs viennent de leur parent, copient les commentaires des parents Comprends bien les propos positifs et négatifs	Vie les émotions de manière amplifiée Ment pour ne pas se faire gronder
En groupe	Rendre l'adulte compétent est plus important que les élèves Préfère le groupe que l'individuel À besoin de structure (surtout en jeu) Intimider par les grands groupes	Les autres participant vont devenir des modèles. Veut être numéro un dans tout Veut être le centre d'attention
Capacités physiques	N'a pas encore la notion de l'espace corps. Va trop forcer (à la mauvaise place) pour réussir un mouvement	Ne comprends pas comment engager les muscles dans leur
Activités	Comprendre les règlements des activités et peu les respecter Aime la variété	Préfère les activités de courte durée

<b>7 à 8 ans (Circa/ Aérien, Acrovoltige, Équimanu)</b>				
Son Corps	Meilleur contrôle musculaire Début de motivation intrinsèque Début de compréhension de connexion entre sol et corps	Ne comprends pas où est son corps dans l'espace quand la tête est en bas	N'a pas besoin d'être toujours en mouvement Plus habile à utiliser ses mains et bras	
Façon de penser	Attentif Compréhension de la notion du temps Plus grande compréhension de connexion entre sol et corps	Demande toujours pourquoi Sentiment de compétence	Créativité Reconnaissance des autres participants Chercher l'approbation	Gauche et droite acquis
Émotions	Veut avoir une relation avec les autres Commence à censurer Agis de façon différente à la maison et à l'extérieur	Sentiment de compétence	Commence à savoir ce qu'il aime et n'aime pas Sait partager ses émotions Sentiment de culpabilité	
En groupe	À besoin de jouer avec les autres N'aime pas le désaccord		Accepte la défaite À besoin de se sentir important	

Capacités physiques	Commence à comprendre comment décortiquer les mouvements	Gainage bras dans les air
Activités	Début compréhension notion de règlements Aime la variété	Préfère les activités de courte durée

9 à 10 ans (Circum/Circus)		
Son Corps	Bonne endurance physique Veut s'améliorer Capacité à dissocier les actions ( jongler sur une boule)	Réaction plus rapide dans ses mouvements Aime les défis Aime les activités avec de la précision
Façon de penser	Notion du temps Aime partager ses activités de la semaine Commence à prendre la notion d'entraide	Plus grande concentration pendant les activités Veut partager son opinion
Émotions	Ne connaît pas ses limites Motivation intrinsèque Sait que mentir n'est pas bien	Partage moins ses émotions Se compare négativement envers les autres La notion d'équité est importante, car ils remarquent quand les choses sont injustes
En groupe	Accepte qu'il ne puisse pas toujours gagner Aime jouer en équipe	Reconnais sa compétence et celle des autres N'est plus intimidé par les grands groupes
Capacités physiques	À cet âge l'enfant peut théoriquement tout faire. Il faut faire attention à la posture du participant. Ex : Si son dos est arqué en position push up, ça veut dire qu'il n'est pas prêt à faire des push up.	

**Rôle de l'assistant** - L'assistant est là pour apprendre pour qu'il puisse un jour devenir formateur. Cependant, vous n'êtes pas là pour lui enseigner comment être formateur, il est là pour vous voir enseigner.

1. Faire les exemples
2. Avoir une vision sur le groupe complet
  - a. Un enfant s'éloigne, allez le chercher (s'il y a une intervention à faire, le dire au formateur)
3. Besoin d'aller aux toilettes
4. Aider le formateur à placer les activités
5. Donner des conseils aux enfants
- a. Pieds pointés
- b. Jambes droites
- c. Wow, tu as réussi ton mouvement, BRAVO !
6. Parer un mouvement acquis, mais à travailler
  - a. Tomber en pont, l'enfant sait le faire, mais 1/3 il plie les coudes
  - b. Aider dans les roulades avant

#### Déplacement sur la piste

1. Moyen cirque
  - Toujours avec la corde
2. Grand cirque
  - Deux par deux
3. Circa
  - Assurez-vous que vous ne marchez pas dos aux élèves, mais face à eux
4. Circum
  - En groupe serré, ça ne dérange pas qu'il ne soit pas en ligne, MAIS ils doivent vous suivre de près.
  - Marcher face aux élèves
5. Circus
  - Ils sont grands, vous pouvez leur faire confiance, MAIS
    - ne pas courir
    - Marcher proche de vous
    - Ne pas aller sur les autres activités

#### Vision périphérique

Vision : Perception du monde extérieur par la vue ville.	Périphérique : Les quartiers éloignés du centre d'une ville
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Comme mentionné plusieurs fois, à chaque fois que vous donnez un cours, vous devez vous positionner dans les bonnes positions pour voir TOUS les élèves. SI, vous ne voyez pas bien tous les élèves vous avez deux options :

1. Vous déplacer
2. Déplacer votre groupe ou l'enfant que vous aidez

### Politique de déplacement

Pendant les déplacements, faire un jeu ; une chanson, des trains qui se suis ou autre chose vue dans les formations.

#### Parc : Moniteur et assistant

Rôle du moniteur : S'assurer que les enfants soient toujours en sécurité pendant les déplacements.

- Se mettre en tête de rang
- Les enfants en ligne (ou deux par deux)
- Garder un contact visuel avec eux
- S'assurer que chaque enfant suit le groupe
- Marcher le plus possible sur le gazon
- Prendre une corde au besoin

Rôle de l'assistant : Ne jamais faire un déplacement avec un groupe sans moniteur

- Se mettre à la fin du rang
- Garder un contact visuel avec eux
- Dépêcher les enfants qui ne suivent pas

Pour les moins de 8 ans, demander aux enfants de se mettre deux par deux et de se tenir par la main pendant les déplacements.

Piscine : Le coordonnateur va créer les groupes de marche (les plus jeunes avec les plus vieux)

1. Deux par deux
2. Un moniteur en tête et à chaque groupe de dix
3. Coordinateur à la fin du groupe
4. Un walkie-talkie avec le moniteur en tête, un du milieu et le coordonnateur à la fin
5. Un coup de sifflet veut dire ralentir, et deux de s'arrêter complètement
6. Tout déplacement se fait sur le gazon et non sur la piste cyclable

\*La politique de l'École de cirque est que chaque moniteur est responsable de chaque enfant. Ils doivent savoir où sont les enfants sont en tout temps, en plus de faire une vérification de présence toutes les vingt à trente minutes et à chaque déplacement.