



Erasmus+



Circlusion

The Artist in the Centre of Social Circus



How to make a circus performance with a social message

Methodology Description

Social Educircation seminar

October 2015 / Thessaloniki, Greece / Kids In Action



Executive Summary

In Thessaloniki Greece in mid-October 2015, the NGO Kids In Action hosted and organized the project “Circlusion. The artist at the centre of social circus” or “How to make a circus performance with a social message”. 17 participants from the local community and the 6 partners countries’ organizations of the network co-existed cooperated and co-created for 5 days a performance touching the sensitive issue of migration. The workshop itself was not one of brainstorming and rehearsing as usually the procedure goes when making a performance piece. This workshop led the artists on stage through a series of experiences that brought them one step closer not only to their circus skills but brought them awareness of their body as artists and what messages the body of a performer can carry and awareness of their own social sensitivity as human beings. The result was a 35minutes performance full of emotions and true representations of what it means to be a migrant through the eyes of Circus. Because Circus performances can be, and they are, more than entertainment.

**This working document serves both the purposes of a diary,
and that of a guide as well**

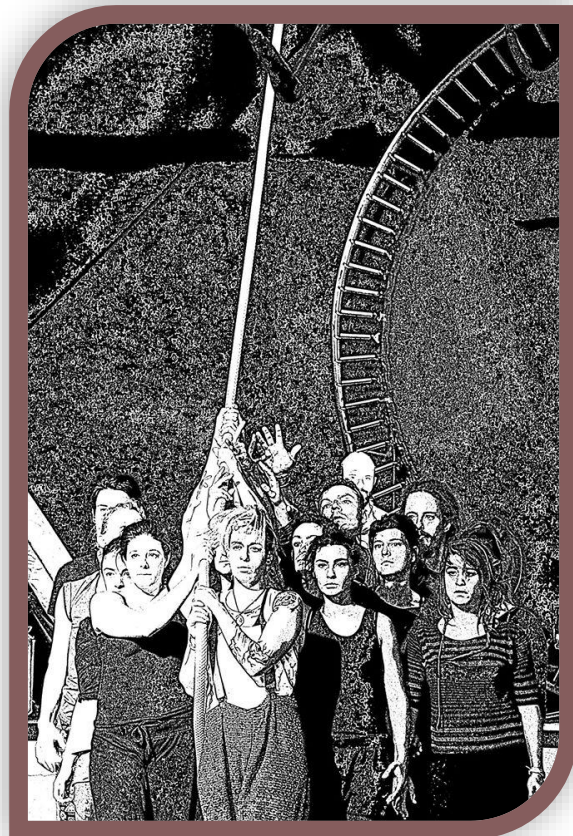
A guide addressing the mentality and the exercises used during the workshop.

This guide can be used by anyone who would like to try this with groups of artists, youth or other target groups relevant to social circus.

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The three training methods

Leading a group of artists into a presentable outcome within 5 days is a demanding task that needs a lot of preparation and care. The training team of Thessaloniki designed its work in three core sectors that were filling one another.

Sensorial Body Work

A movement technique for the awareness of the body

The Sensorial Bodywork & Movement Therapy is a pedagogical and therapeutic discipline of preventive and

curative treatment, tools which allow humans to develop perceptual, emotional and cognitive abilities through movement.. Danis Bois, professor at the modern university of Lisbon and founder of this field managed to combine practical and qualitative analysis of human movement and its objective sensory characteristics

The three basic principles of the method «Danis Bois» are: A) give movement to what is still B) make perceptible what has become unconscious c) make conscious what is not conscious.

The key to Sensorial Bodywork & Movement Therapy is slowness. This is something that is against the modern pace of life. In today's world, everything is rushed. But slowness has great power, as it is only through slowness that one can fully understand ALL the implications of a movement. Moreover, slowness enhances our ability to realise truths about ourselves, grow our perceptual ability and make us more accomplished. Through the art of dance and sensorial motion, the body learns how to be more in tune, more expressive and how to be completely present.

Human rights Education

Experiential Exercises for the awareness of the mind

No single definition for human rights education will serve the many ways in which people young and old come to

understand, practice and value their rights and respect the rights of others. The Council of Europe's Human Rights Education Youth Program defines human rights education as: *"...Educational programs and activities that focus on promoting equality in human dignity, in conjunction with programs such as those promoting intercultural learning, participation and empowerment of minorities"*

Human Rights education is an experiential procedure providing to its acceptors the development of new values, knowledge and attitudes towards the debate on Human Rights. Using non formal education methods participants come one step closer to get familiarized with their own perceptions about human rights, discrimination and xenophobia so as to be able to use their inner stimuli for the created performance.

The implementation of this course is based on participatory, creative and interactive teaching methods in order for the active involvement of the participants to be secured. Energizers, icebreakers and team building games are used throughout the course. Through participatory approaches and techniques including presentation and discussion, working groups, case studies, problem-solving/brainstorming, simulation/role-playing and practical exercises, trainers fully involve participants in the training process and sensitise them to their own potential of contributing to the outcome and the impact of the course in a short-term and a long-term basis.

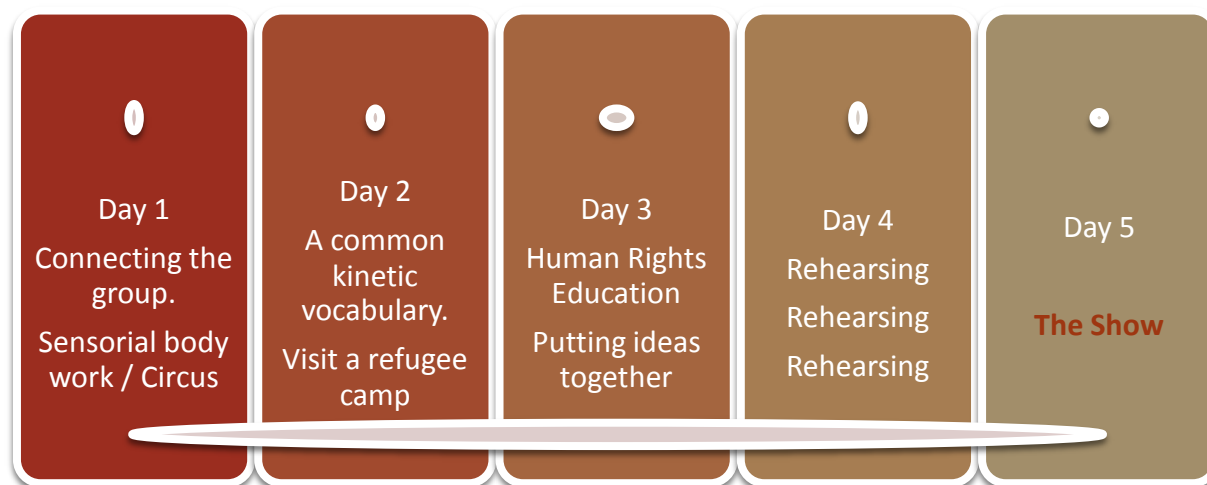
Circus Pedagogy

Using Circus Skills for teaching personal and life skills

Circus pedagogy combines performing of physical activities found in a circus and making use of artistic skills with educational

content and objectives. Circus pedagogy is by no means educating circus artists as the very name might suggest. This working method is rather about developing personality of trained individuals, teaching and helping them to master the so called key competences (such as e.g. ability to learn, effective communication, effective team work, creative problem-solving) as well as teaching them principles, rules and social values. It is also about supporting one's physical development, which is a highly important aspect in people's lives.

The Daily program. Exercises and Comments



Day 1 Connecting the group Sensorial body work / Circus

Name game of body drumming and saying one's name.

Duration: Depends on the number of the group

Each person does an individual rhythm with clapping legs knees, chest etc saying his/her name. The rest of the group repeats. Repeat the same with all names.

The sound of my name (sensorial body work approach)

Duration: Depending on the response of the group this session can last from 45min to 90min.

Individual movement exercises. Close your eyes and rock gently back and forth, then side to side saying the first letter of your name over and over, finding the rhythm of your letter.

Leading movement from your head and use the sound to roll down to the ground and then back up. - Repeat the exercise using your full name and as little muscle power as possible. Relax. Find the movement in the sound of your name.

Spending time to really feel the movement and explore the way your body can find its pathways. - Try to open up your body. Allow the sounds to get louder, just a little bit outside your mouth. A little bit external.

- Try to stay still as you breathe in, and move as you breathe out and your sound comes out.

Standing up, see if you can move across the space and see how your sound reacts to the movement. Slowly make your movement connect to someone else's movement

One person is moving and the other puts their hand on them and tries to connect with his/her movement.

Comments on the exercise.

Working this technique with people that are not familiar neither with improvisation exercises nor with movement exercises in general can be challenging.

This exercise can trigger deeper connections with one's self, sometimes bringing in the conscious mind, images or thoughts about what one thinks of him/her. It can also release the people from over thinking about how to move or what to do and thus introduce for them new and unexpected ways of moving. This exercise is about observation of one's self. Observation with sensibility, patience and kindness. This is the core of the sensorial body work technique

Relating sensorial body work to the circus

Duration. Depending on the group. Up to 60min

Spread around the space different pieces of Circus equipment (Depending on the number of your group and the available equipment it can be from aerials to balancing props, juggling etc.

Use a 4-count beat clear music.

Inhale 4 count and stay still. Exhale 4 counts, move and interact with the circus equipment.

Only stay with each piece of circus equipment for one exhale then move on. Take it in turns to watch a group and be in the group on stage.

First people can move in their own time and then try to breathe in and out in synch with everyone else.

Comments on the exercise

Depending on the tempo of the music this exercises can bring out from clown reactions of fast movements and changes, to slow motion and sensitive movements within the circus equipment. In the beginning it might be chaos, especially in the individual approaches of the music, and then the group comes together. This exercise promotes a More grounded and focused movement, when synchronizing with the breath

Exchanging ideas and knowledge on circus disciplines

Duration: Depends on the number of the group

This is a session where circus people can actually share and exchange their ideas and knowledge not only in their field of interest but also in other disciplines that they might not be familiar with.

Amongst the main disciplines that the group seems to hold, they can be created spot of training. The group is split in smaller groups and a circular training follows where everyone tries everything.

Day 2

Building a common kinetic vocabulary

Visiting a refugee camp

Exploring slow motion and the sense of touch

(Sensorial body work approach) Duration. Up to 90min

Explore the sense of touch. Start by touching toes with one hand. Really feel the toes- first the skin then the muscles then the bones. Massage both toes. Feel them! As if it's for the first time.

Lie on your back and move very gently, slowly, feeling your back and your legs touching the ground. Feel the ground. Open your hips. Hold your feet and rock as slowly as possible. Really feel, as if for the first time. Open and closed eyes.

- A small dance combination follows where floor work in slow motion helps to go deeper into observation
- Moving very slowly with your eyes closed. Walking as slowly as possible. Doesn't matter if you lose your balance, it is important to FEEL the movement of your joints, the contact with the ground.

Comments on the exercise

This exercise is about connecting with the way we move- When we move slowly we can be present with our movements. So we are able to understand a bit about ourselves when we move very slowly.

Circus performers are good at moving fast. It is interesting when ones moves slowly, and stays connected with his/her body.

The movement is interpreted in the way in which we believe it to mean. An audience will interpret the movement how we feel.

Connect the Circus. Observing the circus way of moving

Taking this movement session onto circus equipment.

Duration: Depends on the number of the group

Once again prepare space for circus action. Introduce to the group some simple theatrical and movement improvisation.

Always keep in mind the body and action awareness. Observe and deeply feel the movement. Use different emotions as your guide for improvisation and the group can improvise under the following suggestions.

- Using the circus equipment like you really love it!!! Gives you joy, love, happiness, and is the best thing in your life. Let it grow.

Everyone can freely move around all equipment, use all the space, and maybe interact with each other.

- Then you are sad. The equipment is your home and you are being forced to leave it for the last time. You will never see it again. You are going to a world where circus does not exist. How does it make you feel?

Then introduce again the 8counts exercise of moving and stillness. In 8-counts move in an extreme emotion, 8 counts of stillness freezing in the final position. Use grotesque extreme movements of happy, sad, anger, scared, disappointed etc.

As variations the group can walk normally in 8 counts and freeze 8counts having an extreme grotesque mask and body posture.

- Split into two groups and perform/ observe the different states.
- React to other artists on stage. If someone bumps you, you can react.
- Finale 30 seconds to come to the middle and come together to find a group finale pose.
- One group uses “positive” in extreme. One uses “negative” in extreme. 8-count move, 8-count freeze, then quicker in a 4-4, then 2-2, then 1-1. Change, change, change.

Powerful images. Very real feelings.

Experiential procedure of solidarity...and more
Visiting a Refugee Camp in the Greek – Macedonian borders



Already on the second day the group took a visit on a UNHCR refugee camp set on the Greek-Macedonian borders almost 1.5 hour from Thessaloniki. This strong experience for all participants (Greeks and European participants) can best be described from the participants themselves.

Here attached is the report of the research developer for this project Marada Manussen (British Participant of the Invisible Circus)

When we arrived at the camp there was no-one there aside from the workers, including policemen, Doctors without Borders, UN employees, and other helpers. Our German colleague has gone into detail about this as he interviewed many people who were working in the camp and also some of the refugees. My report will focus on my experience.

Not long afterwards, a bus full of people arrived. As we had only just arrived ourselves and were still awaiting instruction on what we were to do, and where we were allowed to go, I couldn't help feeling vaguely like an actor in a bad-taste movie. I had all the curiosity of a tourist, and all the guilt of a human being who wanted to help but didn't know what to do.

What is one supposed to feel in that situation? Guilty? Sad? Depressed? Embarrassed? Angry? Helpless? Curious? Nosey? Unsure- of where to look or what to say? Well, I felt all of that and more. I wanted to know everything, to ask questions, to know straight from the people not the press what has been happening to them, what made them run, made them pack the few belongings they could put on their backs along with their

children, and flee. But I didn't ask, I just smiled and said As Salaam Alaikum, and they repeated it back and smiled in thanks to hear me greet them in Arabic.

When people arrive they are given water, food, clean clothes, and medical assistance, whatever they need. I believe they are then given a number and told to wait in groups of 50 in one of the big white tents set up by the UN. They wait here until they're number is called and they are processed to go over the Macedonian border. I believe there is another refugee camp not far across the border into Macedonia, where the border control officers were not happy to allow our guys to cross into.

We then went and got our circus props and took them into one of the holding tents which was by now full of children and adults. What followed was a very touching and humbling experience. I went into automatic workshop mode, and treated it as I would any other circus workshop with children, with sensitivity and kindness. It was easier for me to do this than think too much about where I was and the plight of the people we were in contact with. If I had thought about it too deeply, I would have burst into tears.

When I arrived in the tent with the suitcase full of props, my colleagues and I decided that it would be nice to play some music, so I went back to the bus to get my minirig (portable speaker). When I returned the workshop was in full swing with children happily playing with hula hoops, juggling clubs, hats, spinning plates, the lot. I put some music on and grabbed the juggling scarves out of the suitcase, which weren't yet being used.

I noticed a family of 3 small children standing shyly in the corner- an older girl about 7 years old, a boy of about 5, and a very small girl I estimate to be around 2-3. I started throwing the scarves into the air as they looked at me with nervous wonder. Then she smiles started playing out on their lips, and pretty soon they were all catching and throwing the scarves to me, and also each other while the parents looked on. Soon I ran out of ideas of things to show them, and wanted to take them closer to the other children and get some other props out of the suitcase. So, I asked the parents if I could take the children and they nodded in ascent and encouraged their children to join me, which they did with little encouragement. We continued playing with the children for a couple of happy hours, which passed very quickly.

Half of our team had gone to help sort through the donations just down the railway tracks from the camp, and a couple of the people from that group came to swap places with a few of us. I was happy to swap, and as I left I again saw the children of the first family I had played with. The eldest girl came running over and gave me a big cuddle goodbye. And the parents smiled with deep gratitude and sadness.

In the donation house, office rooms at the railway station down the road from the camp, donations are coming in by the container-load. It is heart-warming to see the generosity of some people- food, bedding, and clothes by the tonne. We sorted clothes into Winter and Summer piles, and I found it a little tricky as all the labelling was in Greek. We were not there long until it was time to leave.

Back on the bus on the return journey, it was a solemn mood. People spoke of their experiences, and I processed my own feelings. Hard but beautiful, haunting but real, a need and want to do more, we only scraped the surface of this very real human crisis.

Another interesting report about this visit, that contains a series of interviews as well, was conducted by the German Participant of Cabuwazi, Gotz Martiny and can be found here.

<http://www.educirculation.eu/documentation>

Day 3

Human Rights Education

Getting deeper into the theme of the show

The morning session of the 3rd day was once again a powerful experience triggered by a role play game of the UNHCR called “**Passages**”



This role play game simulates a refugee travel.

For half a day the venue of the workshop was transformed into an area where participants took full actions of what it means to be a refugee. Getting deep into their roles as Refugee families, they had to split with each other under the sounds of bombing only to find themselves again in their seeking for a temporal shelter. Border crossing and asking for asylum were also parts of this procedure, having participants for almost 3 hours “*only touching on the possible real feelings that must arise when one is actually going through this horrific scenario, with no knowledge of the future and belief you will never set foot in your homeland again. No way forward and no way back.*”

I think it was a useful tool in helping us identify with the emotions needed to create the show we were about to work on”. Marada Manussen

Putting it all together

Brainstorm in discussion groups to come up with concrete ideas images for the show

Duration: Up to 3 hours

Getting into groups to come up with ideas of scenes relating to the topic of migration, and how the ideas could portray with circus skills.

Lots of interesting ideas! These are some that our group came up with:

- changing rhythms / changing emotions
- walking in lines/ stopping/ waiting
- be in the present/ calmness
- anxious, scared, a team- team work/ solidarity
- split up/ herded together
- idea of falling- dropping things/ everyone falling at the same time
- leaving home in contrast with a new life
- creating joy in a senseless situation/ the circus coming to town
- juggling family/ stilt family/ aerial family
- give time to walking; sad, deflated, long walk/ slowly people become individual- walking backwards, falling over, walking on hands

We spoke about everyone's ideas at length in the group, and other ideas came up in the brainstorming. Then the Trainers/directors spent a few hours after this piecing together a storyline by detecting the common points of the presented ideas, identifying the look alikeness and narrowing down the main-basic concepts.

Comments on this session

As it came out from participant's evaluations this is a session that can and is needed to last more so that groups have time to thoroughly not only brainstorm but also try and practice some of their ideas to see if they work

Day 4 Rehearsing

A whole day dedicated for rehearsing, putting together and finalizing the show.

Within this all day ongoing procedure the group put in action the core ideas that came up to be the story line for the performance. For this to happen the group as whole agreed on the storyline and were then split into smaller groups for rehearsing some of the scenes and

*How Does Everyone feels? Does it work for everyone?
Small feedback session as part of the procedure*

worked as whole as well for the bigger scenes. During all this the trainers/directors were there to constantly monitor the group.

Participants were left the initiates of bringing life into the written scenario as they felt like.

During the day, local musicians joint the group and brought the soundscape needed for the show. A guitar player, two African djembe players, a didgeridoo player and a female singer singing traditional Greek songs about migration proved to be a good choice for this performance.

Having live music for a show immediately brings life to the scenes and deeper feelings for both artists and the audience.

Day 5 The show

The final day show was performed twice. In the morning the show did its premier for a group of 80 primary school children. Lots of

clapping at the end but also concerned faces of children during the show revealed that the result had touched the children in both ways, in terms of a good circus show but also as a performance carrying images of a refugee life and its difficulties.

The evening show hosted almost 300 people. Reactions of this audience as well revealed the



success of the show. Excessive clapping and many comments varying from shedding tears to having chills during the show gave some reassurance to the group that a nice show was brought into life.

A music / dance / drinking party followed where all participants enjoyed.

The next day evaluation session took place that its results and conclusion can be found here

<http://www.educircation.eu/workshops/item/120-social-message-in-circus>

The storyline of the show

(As written by Marada Manusson)

Individual circus families doing their thing- aerialists on the silks, jugglers entering and playing with their toys- hats, clubs, hula hoops, etc, acrobats balancing on one another. A human pyramid is formed. Everybody cheers. A bomb blast and everyone is knocked to the ground.

Mood lighting, and one "little girl" character from the juggling family is seen picking herself up off the ground and trying desperately to drag an adult body, which is dead. The "soul" of the refugee, accompanied by Lena singing and the band playing, climbs slowly slowly up the silks, leaving the body. Very slowly the soul goes up, and then gently slides back down to the ground. The dead bodies roll over one another towards the back of the stage. Voices start calling to their loved ones in the dark, trying to find each other. The voices get more and more frantic and desperate. Finally all of the cast slowly stand up together CB stage.



The whole cast very slowly start moving forwards, using our walking exercise in one of the earlier weekly workshops. Each part of the foot is articulated as it touches the ground, feeling the ground as if for the first time. Walking forward through the corde lisse rope we take the rope with us, walking as one, slowly grabbing the rope and letting it slide through our fingers as we walked forward until we finally came to the end of the

rope. Trying not to let go, we stop- and then we fall away from it, having to leave behind our last final love.

Slow walking. An acrobat is seen coming onto stage and collecting all the equipment in



his suitcase to take with him, with a heavy heart.

Everyone is slowly moving around the stage. Two acrobats perform a heart-wrenching duet with the flyer blind-folded, blinded by the bombings. A group of refugees climb through the aerial hoop as if it is a secret pathway to the border.

Enter the police on stilts, music changes, we all start running. Herded together as one, made to stand in line. One by one, in different languages, each refugee tries to plead their case to the border police who are not listening. Slowly the people try to climb higher so they

are standing on shoulders, and thus at eye level with the police. A fight breaks out. The refugee on shoulders is pushed off shoulders and caught from behind by the group. Shouting, running, trying to break free, pleading with the audience members to help- need water, food, please, my baby is sick, help me!

Finally the police succeed in making the group sit down in a bundle of heavily breathing bodies. The breath becomes more obvious- breathe in for 8, out for 8, fill your lungs, your body, the movement grows, and the group unfolds to reveal a solo artist hula hooping



accompanied by the stunning voice of Lena and the band yet again.

The rest of the group slowly stands, swaying gently, into a circle that is facing outwards. This is the point where I start crying. Everyone in the room is crying by now, and some

were crying much earlier on. It is an emotional journey for all. And the tears were real, and heartfelt.

Running begins, spiraling in, and then spiraling out, a continuous line that changes the energy on stage- it is a new beginning, we must find the way to continue with life, a new life, somewhere else. The aerialists find the silks and the hoop, and climb up- finding a new way to play again. The jugglers are reunited, and the acrobats are balancing again. The lights go out with the action on stage still taking place to symbolize that life goes on...



The End...