Post-Secondary Circus School Graduates Perspectives of Curriculum

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Abstract

This qualitative study explores perspectives of curriculum through the lens of graduates from a collegial level circus arts program in Canada. Data were collected through participant interviews with students who had graduated within the past ten years. The overarching research question that guided this study was: How do graduates of a post-secondary circus school program perceive the design, content and delivery of the curriculum? Analysis of the data was conducted through the use of the constant comparison approach. It was through this process that multiple themes emerged from the data, which identified the characteristics of undertaking a career in circus arts. These themes included *Pushing Borders*, *Living in a State of Disequilibrium* and *Constructing Families*. Together, these three themes resulted in the fourth and overarching theme, *Embracing Circus Life*. The findings from this study suggest that applying constructivist teaching practices, fostering a community of learners, supporting the emotional development of students, having strong relationships with coaches and ensuring that the students perceive the courses as useful are essential in optimizing the students' perception of the program. This study is unique as it is one of the only studies that explore circus and academics. Whereas much of the teaching of circus arts lies in the historical trend of passing down knowledge, this study explores the present day context of circus whereby students can choose to pursue a degree in circus arts.

Keywords: Circus, Curriculum Perspectives, Performance Arts Education

Résumé

Dans la présente étude qualitative, nous explorons les perspectives d'un programme d'études collégiales en arts circassiens au Canada du point de vue des diplômés. Les données ont été recueillies dans le cadre d'entrevues avec des étudiants ayant obtenu leur diplôme au cours des dix dernières années. Une question essentielle a animé cette étude : comment les diplômés d'un programme d'études postsecondaires en arts circassiens perçoivent-ils la conception, le contenu et la mise en oeuvre du programme? Une méthode d'analyse comparative continue a été utilisée pour analyser les données. Ce processus a permis de dégager de nombreux thèmes qui ont mis en relief les caractéristiques inhérentes à la poursuite d'une carrière dans le domaine des arts circassiens. Ces thèmes sont: *Repousser les Frontières, Vivre en État de Déséquilibre et Fonder une Famille*. Ensemble, ces trois thèmes ont engendré un quatrième thème, prépondérant: *Embrasser la Vie de Cirque*. Les résultats de cette étude laissent entendre que le recours à des pratiques d'enseignement constructivistes, la promotion d'une communauté d'apprenants, l'appui au développement affectif des étudiants, l'établissement de solides relations avec les entraîneurs et la prise de conscience de l'utilité des cours par les étudiants sont d'autant d'éléments essentiels à l'optimisation de la perception du programme par les étudiants. Cette étude est unique en ce sens que c'est l'une des seules qui explorent le cirque dans un contexte d'enseignement. Alors que la tendance historique de l'enseignement des arts circassiens réside en grande partie dans la transmission du savoir aux générations suivantes, cette étude explore le contexte actuel du cirque grâce auquel les étudiants peuvent faire le choix de poursuivre des études dans le domaine des arts circassiens.

Mots-clés: Cirque, Perspectives du Programme d'Études, Enseignement des Arts de la Scène

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter One: Introduction

> The circus is mendacious, eternally opportunistic, at turns demotic and status-seeking, absurd and charming, breathtaking and predictable; prone to material catastrophe and yet driven by unparalleled physical skills and spectacular showmanship.
>
> (Stoddart, 2000, p. 1)

When people think about the circus they often imagine running away on trains, clowns and animals, and performing shows in tents. However, the world of circus has been reimagined into a contemporary art form - a world of creation where narratives are told through the body, mind, and soul. I personally believe that it has developed into an art form equivalent to that of theatre and dance. Circus arts curricular programs are vast, creative, and encompass multiple dimensions and elements. The aim of this study is to listen to the stories of people's lives that have been shaped by a circus education, and to let others into the less visible world of a circus artist today.

The circus world is continuously evolving and as such, so is the world of circus and academics. Whereas in the past circus skills tended to be passed down through families or apprenticeships, the present day context now allows people to pursue a degree in circus arts that helps them to obtain a career in the circus. As the 1970's brought forward the beginning of a new form of circus, with it began the development of schools to prepare circus artists. Educational institutions now offer formal curricular programs that prepare students for professional careers in the circus. As I personally experienced schooling and training in both circus arts and in the field of education, I became fascinated with the method of designing a curriculum that prepares students to become professional circus artists. I believe the curriculum must be designed in a way that incorporates the delicate balance of both art and sport. Further, it

must be able to help students integrate multiple art forms, while at the same time teach them to develop a physical skill set that is unique and often dangerous. As my fascination with this topic developed, I became encouraged to investigate the curriculum through the lenses of graduates of a collegial level circus school in Canada and to begin my own personal exploration of a topic that I find as "mendacious, eternally opportunistic, at turns demotic and status-seeking, absurd and charming, breathtaking and predictable, prone to material catastrophe and yet driven by unparalleled physical skills and spectacular showmanship" as the circus itself (Stoddart, 2000, p.1).

Personal Background Leading to the Study

In order to situate myself within this study, I would like to provide the reader with a sense of my background in circus arts and how it led me to explore the field of both circus and education. Chambers (1997) states that "writing and re-writing is both love and medicine, both art and healing, both remembering and forgetting and unlearning, both leaving and coming home" (p.20). Through exploring graduate perspectives on circus curriculum, I hoped to be able to both leave the circus and come home to it.

Carl Leggo (2009) wrote, "But for all my running away. I never escape" (p.51). This quote encapsulates my private experiences and feelings of entering and, subsequently, leaving the circus world. Whenever I meet someone, one of the first things that I disclose is my circus background. It is something that strongly defines who I am, yet it also reveals my failures, my regrets, and my disappointments. I had once attended the National Circus School of Montreal in hopes of becoming a great contortionist, but when an injury occurred I made the difficult decision to leave the National Circus School and instead pursue a degree in early childhood and elementary education. As my teaching career developed, I found that my circus background and

experience at the National Circus School were strongly influencing my personal and professional development and teaching style. Even though I had left the National Circus School, it became evident that it was still very much a part of life. In 2009, I had the opportunity to teach at Codarts, an arts university in the Netherlands, in their Bachelor of Circus Arts program. This experience ultimately introduced me to the grander world of circus arts and the development of circus arts curriculum across the world, which, when coupled with my past experiences at the National Circus School and in elementary education, led me to develop the questions that I have attempted to answer through this study.

Initially, my interest in the curriculum design, content, and delivery stemmed from my own experiences at the National Circus School and how the program inspired creativity, physical literacy, and deep self-reflection. While there, my mind shifted from seeking external rewards to focusing on the intrinsic benefits of the education. Subsequently, while working as a teacher in the circus arts department at Codarts Arts University, I found myself extremely interested in the changes in attitude between the technical circus classes and the academic classes I was teaching. The students seemed to experience increased anxiety about more traditional school subjects, such as health and anatomy, and about processes that involved writing, like portfolios and journaling. However, when it came to technical classes, such as handstands or acrobatics, they had an intense thirst for learning. They would often take the initiative to infuse their own style of movement and would spend countless hours practicing their basic training, including exercises such as handstands against the wall and hand balancing with blocks, during their self-study periods. In technical circus presentations they exuded creativity, spirit, and drive, but in the traditional classroom setting these attributes lessened and the students often exhibited a lack of confidence. I wondered about the ways in which these settings affected the students and how to

bring their creative skills from their circus classes into the traditional classroom. It was also during this time that I became involved in curriculum design and implementation. I was surprised by the differences in perception between the teachers, administrators, and students when designing the schedule. While I found it interesting to learn about the different viewpoints about the program, I found that there was a lack of a common vision about what would help to optimize the training program.

After working at Codarts, I returned to Montreal and began teaching elementary school. I found that my experiences as a circus teacher and as a circus student strongly influenced the way I taught and approached traditional subjects. For instance, I often integrated circus training into my teaching practice by tossing juggling balls towards the students to answer questions rather than using the conventional method of having students raise their hand. I found that by making the teaching process more hands-on and physical, the students maintained interest for longer periods of time. Also, I tried to incorporate other practices that I had learned in circus school, like closing your eyes to experience different sensations during creation. Ultimately, I found that many aspects of the circus curricular program could be successfully implemented into the traditional school setting and I became curious about the ways in which this might influence my own practice and effectiveness as an elementary school educator.

Personal Stance

My personal experiences as both a student and teacher in circus arts programs were embedded in my thinking as I started this research project. I realized early on that as a researcher it was critical that I remained aware of my presumptions and how they played a role in my study. I began this work with the idea that circus arts programs belonged amongst other arts programs offered in universities, such as dance, theatre, and music. Also, I believed that the

National Circus School offered an ideal program to prepare circus artists of today; in fact, I felt that it had one of the best programs in the world to prepare circus artists for a professional career. Ultimately, based on my own experiences and the experiences of those around me, I wanted to find out what type of improvements could be made to circus school programs around the world to make them more effective for students' transition into their professional careers and to help them find success in their careers.

I have adopted a constructivist epistemological stance, as I believe that meaning and experience are socially constructed rather than residing within the individual. Instead of focusing on the individual experiences of the participants in my study, I chose to theorize about the socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions that facilitated the experiences of the participants.

Through my study I aimed to answer the following questions. The sub-questions inform and provide answers to the broader overarching question.

How do graduates of a post-secondary circus school program in Canada perceive the design, content and delivery of the curriculum?

- How do graduates describe their experiences and feelings about the three main curricular content areas: academic, technical, and arts-based classes?
- What has been learned from the participants' experiences of attending a post-secondary circus school program?
- How did attending a post-secondary circus education contribute, or not, to the students' careers in circus arts?

Relevance of my Study

Throughout history, circus has developed and re-invented itself. Presently, companies such as the world-renowned Cirque Du Soleil have helped circuses to gain increasing popularity and recognition (Skidmore, 2002). As the field of circus arts continues to develop, there has been an increase in the emergence of post-secondary circus schools offering degrees in circus arts through three to four year programs. Currently there are 53 schools in the world that provide professional circus programs for circus artists (European Federation of Circus Arts, 2008). Since the emergence of these circus schools there have been few studies conducted to learn more about their programs. My interest in circus education led me to pursue a qualitative study that explores the perceptions of the experiences of circus school graduates in a post-secondary circus school's curriculum. By bridging the knowledge between curricular programs and the professional working world of circus artists, I hoped to learn about the underlying experiences in circus schools and strategies to improve curricular programs. Jean-Arsenault (2007), a writer for En Piste, the Circus Arts National Network in Canada, states, "the circus community is profoundly misunderstood and suffers from lack of recognition of the reality and diversity of Canadian circus arts" (p. 5). He further argues that circus is an art that is not recognized as unique and distinct by most political and decision-making bodies. I believe that the findings from this study also will help to contribute to the general field of research in circus arts, and will help raise circus arts to the professional equivalence of other art forms, which it lacks today.

Summary

In this chapter I discussed how my past experiences as both a circus student at the National Circus School and as a teacher at Codarts Arts University led me to pursue a study in the field of circus arts curriculum. Also, I described how I have come to utilize circus as a pedagogical tool

in my own teaching practice in the traditional elementary classroom. These experiences encouraged me to want to dive deeper into the exploration of circus curriculum. As research in circus is underdeveloped, I strongly believe that this study has the potential to spark questions and encourage discussion in the field of circus arts.

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter Two reviews the literature relevant to the field of circus arts education. Chapter Three addresses the methodology used throughout the study including, but not limited to, the process of data collection and the use of the constant comparison approach to analyze the data. The fourth chapter discusses the themes that emerged as a result of the analysis and the final chapter highlights the significant findings as a result of the study, as well as the implications these have for the fields of circus academics and education in general.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

> No program can be evaluated in its entirety. But we can increase our vision of whatever we are viewing through employment of as many perspectives as we can find appropriate and utilize for our purposes.
>
> (Aoki, 1978, as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2004, p. 96)

The purpose of my research was to investigate the perceptions of the circus curriculum by students who had graduated from the National Circus School of Montreal. Greene (1975) states, "curriculum, from the learner's standpoint, ordinarily represent little more than an arrangement of subjects, a structure of socially prescribed knowledge, or a complex system of meanings which may or may not fall within his grasp" (p.299). For the purpose of this study I wanted to expand this notion of curriculum by defining curriculum as "a complicated conversation" between the students and the teacher, in which the lived experiences and the planned experiences are intertwined (Pinar, 2011, p.1). In order to provide a rationale for my study, I focused on the literature that was of particular importance to this work. Exploring research relevant to my study led me to investigate literature on (a) Circus History, (b) Learning Theories, (c) Curriculum Theories, (d) Learning Communities, and (e) Performance Arts Education. The literature provides information within each of these focal areas that has been useful in conceptualizing what is known about circus arts. It provides a platform for understanding the research in the field, and across other areas that are pertinent to my study. I recognize that the theories and studies presented are a partial and selective representation of the literature across these fields.

Circus History

The curricula that exists in circus education is in place to prepare artists for the current trends in the field of circus arts. Consequently, it is important to consider the historical orientation of circus, and how its characteristics have evolved to meet the demands of the present day context.

While the historical perspective is vital to understanding the development of circus curricula, it is also limited. Much of what we know today about circus comes from oral histories, traditions, and artifacts that were passed down through generations and often embellished (Speaight, 1980; Stoddart, 2000). Stoddart (2000) speculates, "perhaps the willingness to pass on such narratives is derived from a desire for the circus itself; a recognition that the charm of such tales lies in the capturing of something essential about the circus which is that the audience may always prefer either an enchanting or alarming fiction (well presented) over bare fact" (p. 2). While this lends itself to the mystery of the circus it also makes it challenging to get an accurate rendering of the full development of the circus art form. This section is primarily a review of some of the major developments in the history of circus arts and is in no way meant to depict a thorough history of the circus. I have concentrated on are the early years and on Philip Astley, who is recognized as the individual who introduced the concept of circuses. Also, I have chosen to examine the expansion of the circus, as well as the movement towards circuses of today.

Early years. The origin of the word circus dates back to Roman times. In Latin the word circus means "circle" (Loxton, 1997, n.p.). Roman Circuses were known as open-air circular arenas where chariot racing, horse racing, and performances could be viewed. Roman Circuses did not contain the same structures as Modern Circuses, which involved marveling at the skills of trained animals and acrobats. The common feature between Roman Circuses and Modern Circuses was that both types of circuses were performed in circular arenas. The birth of the Modern Circus occurred many years later in the middle of the 18th century in England (Loxton, 1997).

The most influential years in the history of the circus occurred between the years 1768 and 1800 when circuses were just beginning to form their essential structures and characteristics

(Stoddart, 2000). The early historical years of circus were a jumbled affair, with many developments happening that were continuously modifying the field of circus as we know it today. Truzzi (1808) defined circus as "a travelling and organized display of animals and skilled performances within one or more circular stages known as "rings" before an audience encircling these activities" (as cited in Stoddart, 2000, p.3). While this may have been an all-encompassing definition at one time, it no longer describes the current characteristics and trends of all circuses.

Philip Astley. Philip Astley, known as the "father of the circus", is often believed to have realized the modern circus (Wall, 2013). He was born in 1742 in Newcastle-under-Lyme, in England (Wall, 2013). Born as the son of a cabinetmaker, Astley forged his own path by opening up a horse-riding school in London, after fighting and being discharged from the army in the Seven Year War (1756-1763). During the morning he would teach riding skills and in the afternoon he would display presentations of horsemanship. After a few seasons he developed a positive reputation for his incredible "feats of horsemanship", and began to add other dimensions to his performances, including clowning, acrobatics and a variety of other acts (Loxton, 1997, p.10). Astley did not become an influential figure in the history of circus arts because of his artistic style, but rather for his "origination of an institutional form for the organization and display of acts that had been previously characterized by their dispersed, itinerant and singular nature" (Stoddart, 2000, p. 13). He brought together the audience and entertainers in a unique performance space, characterized by a circular arena, where audience members could watch equestrian performances. Astley hurled himself into the press using advertising posters and publicly speaking about his attractions to promote the spectacles inside his circus. The development of the circus as a form of art, which has been highly commercialized since its' beginning, can be credited to Astley (Stoddart, 2000). Even though Astley is often thought of as

the innovator of the circus, it is important to note that the institutionalized notion of circus was influenced as much by his competitors and Astley's response and often imitation of these rivals (Stoddart, 2000). For instance, Astley was known to be quite jealous of his rivals, and responded to his competition by introducing dramatic elements into the performances, as well as incorporating non-equestrian acts (Stoddart, 2000, p. 15). Astley was not the first person to sell tickets for performances with horses, to combine horse riding with other forms of entertainment, to present displays in a ring, and combine multiple skills in one show, but rather, he is known as the "father of circus", because he established the institution of circus, a popular form of entertainment as we know it today (Speaight, 1980, p.31).

The circus blossomed during the late 18th century and gained increasing recognition and popularity across England. Additionally, Astley travelled to Paris to perform between 1772 and 1778 and also established temporary arenas in France (Speaight, 1980; Stoddart, 2000). During this time many Europeans began setting up permanent circus-based amphitheaters all over Europe and also developed travelling shows. John Bill Ricketts is generally recognized as being the first person to bring the European circus scene to America. He set up a circus building in Philadelphia, in 1793, after having apprenticed in London, with Charles Hughes, a former employee of Astley's who had set up a competing equestrian performance venue (Stoddart, 2000). Ricketts is also credited with being the first person to bring the circus to Canada in 1797 (Stoddart, 2000). His circus performed for crowds in English, French and German, in the cities of Montreal and Quebec, until the end of 1798 (Leroux, 2014a). Leroux (2014a) states, "for the next decade or so, theatre in Québec would integrate circus elements and contribute to draw a renewed, non-literary crowd" (p. 9).

Circus expansion. During the 1850s and 1860s, circuses were full of grand expansions in England. This brought forth tough competition from France and North America (Speaight, 1980). The circus began to be recognized as an international form of entertainment. Up until 1860, horses dominated the circus scene, and were often used in performances that were called "hippodramas". A hippodrama can be explained as "horse plays, (and) melodramas staged on horse-back" (Wall, 2013, p.14). The integration of animals in performances started to be recognized as a generic structure of circus performances. After the 1860s, other more exotic animals were introduced, and as time went on, the field of circus evolved (Stoddart, 2000). The Golden Age of circus (1871-1915) was characterized by "panoramic spectacle, self-containment and organizational efficiency on an enormous scale" (Stoddart, 2000, p. 23). Trains became a defining feature of many American circuses, which helped circuses to increase their efficiency by being able to travel during the night and performing during the day. During the Golden Age of circus, the Americans introduced the three-ring circus, in which performances would be presented in three separate rings. Additionally, they added an extra form of entertainment known as the midway, which took place outside of the tent before the performances began, and included amusements such as rides and concessions. Parades were also erected throughout towns and cities to advertise their circus's arrival. The parades became larger than ever. In one instance, in the 1880s, a circus parade lasted five hours as it travelled across New York City (Speaight, 1980, p. 139). Fierce competition occurred in America where circus staff would cover up other circus's posters and there were frequent takeovers and name changes. In contrast, European circuses had an alternative approach. They tended to present acts within a single ring so that the spectators could concentrate on individual acts. Nevertheless, by the 1920s, traffic made it more difficult for American circuses to advertise through the use of parades. The Great Depression

also greatly reduced the number of admissions. Additionally, with the emergence of new technologies, forms of entertainment shifted and circuses lost their momentum (Jean-Arsenault, 2007).

Circus today. After the Second World War, two major developments threatened to reshape the traditional characteristics of circuses. First, an increased awareness of animal welfare brought bad publicity to circuses. Second, a new excitement was generated in the 1970s in North America, Australia, France and the United Kingdom as circuses began to combine circus skills with an aesthetic component, to produce a more emotional response to performance (Stoddart, 2000). New circus can be defined as circuses that do not use animals or death defying acts and use circus as an art form to communicate a message (Skidmore, 2002). Compared to traditional circuses, these circuses integrate other performance arts such as theater and dance. They often incorporate story development and perform in theatres rather than in traditional circus tents and on circular stages. Guy (2010) expanded this notion by outlining a historical divide "between so called non-traditional creations from 1968-1995, which in France are called new circus, and from 1995 onwards, which are called contemporary circus" (as cited in Dalborg, p. 5). There is much debate in the field of circus arts as to which term should be used to describe present day circuses, therefore, I have chosen to distinguish this period as "circus today", as the definition of these terms are still shifting. Nevertheless, Stoddart (2000) states that "circus is, above all, a vehicle for the demonstration and taunting of danger and this remains the most telling and defining feature" (p.4). Whether or not circuses are traditional or a circus of today, the element of risk is at the heart of most circus performances.

During these historical developments there were also changes in how circus artists were being trained. Whereas historically artists would be trained through apprenticeships and from

other family members, presently changes are emerging in the way that artists are learning their skills. In 1927, the Soviet government opened up the first educational institution for circus arts known as the Moscow Circus School (Jacob, 2002). This school became a model for circus as it took a unique approach where the instruction focused not only on technical skills, but also on artistic language. In the three-year program, students would learn acrobatic skills combined with artistic creation. This inspired the development of other circus schools, modeled after the Soviet program, in Budapest, Berlin, Havana, and Hanoi (Jacob, 2002). In the early 1980s, Guy Caron, who had himself trained at the Budapest school, opened the first school dedicated to circus training in North America, the National Circus School in Montreal (Jacob, 2002). Presently, there are many other professional circus institutions emerging worldwide.

The history of circus provides an interesting account of the development of this art form. The past is significant in providing context to better understand the tendencies and direction of circus education today. Collective memories of circus help to apprehend the trends and development of its contemporary art form.

Learning Theories

In the following section, I will be providing an overview of the learning theories that underlie relevant aspects of this study. Behaviourist learning principles, constructivism, socio-constructivism and adult learning theories will be discussed.

Behaviourism. Learning theories are often categorized into two different schools of thought, behaviourist and constructivist theories. Behaviourists typically assume that learning occurs through conditioning. Conditioning is an approach to learning which asserts that learners observe behaviour, and then their reaction to that behaviour predicts whether or not the behaviour will be repeated (Skinner, 1938, as cited in Jordan & Orison Stack, 2008, p.24). In the

behaviourist approach, the teacher is seen as transmitting knowledge to the students. While behaviourism was once a popular learning theory, I have chosen to concentrate on constructivism, as it pertains to the present day context I am exploring. Nevertheless, it remains important to identify the principles of behaviourism, as it is useful in understanding constructivism. More importantly, I have chosen to discuss socio-constructivism as it explores the ways in which group context, environment, and culture contribute to the way learners construct meaning.

Constructivism. Constructivist learning theory posits that learners construct knowledge through their experiences. Rather than the traditional belief that a teacher is all knowledge encompassing, the constructivist-teaching model embraces the notion that students come into the classroom with a wealth of prior experiences. Constructivist teaching models advocate against the use of the traditional "chalk and talk" style of teaching (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008, p. 583). In constructivism, the learners constructs knowledge as they take an active role in their own learning (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008, p. 583). In this model the learner plays a central role in the process of acquiring knowledge. Schweitzer and Stephenson (2008) have explained that constructivist principles tend to encourage group work, peer-to-peer interaction, activities that encourage embodied learning, experiential learning, and encourage knowledge expressions through multiple forms. Additionally, they move away from assessments that provide value judgments and towards informative feedback that helps learners to reflect and develop. Moving away from the traditional style of classroom teaching encourages students to take responsibility for their learning and helps to form a collaborative relationship between teachers and their pupils. Even though the ideas presented in the constructivist model of teaching have been found to have many positive outcomes for learners, a common dilemma is that there are no prescribed

steps to put constructivist theory into practice (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008; Weiyun, 2001; Wright, Grenier & Seaman, 2014).

Chen (2001) conducted a study to investigate the implementation of constructivist-orientated teaching strategies with children learning creative dance. Even though this study was implemented with children rather than in the higher education context, it still provides concrete strategies for implementing constructivist principles within creative fields. Chen (2001) found that drawing on past experiences was vital for evoking divergent thinking. Divergent thinking involves generating multiple ideas by identifying many possible solutions to problems. Nevertheless, drawing on prior knowledge alone did not encourage critical thinking. It was through an active teaching process that teachers acted as "scaffolders, coaches and mediators in the process of guiding students in creative divergent movement responses" (Chen, 2001, p. 374). Constructivist instructional design requires an active teaching style and an active learning approach in order to create meaningful learning opportunities.

While constructivist theory in higher education has many desirable outcomes such as helping to develop independent, self-motivated professionals, Schweitzer and Stephenson (2008) warn that there are challenges with this approach to instructional design. They suggest that constructivist approaches can be "reframed to promote a more authentic student centeredness in higher education professional programs" (p.583). Schweitzer and Stephenson (2008) argue that by allowing students to engage in a constructivist classroom, they sometimes develop a misconstruction of authentic work situations. For instance, constructivist principles support the idea that the students should be allowed to follow their own interests, that they are in a mutual relationship with their professors, and that everyone assumes a collaborative nature when working in groups, all of which are not representative of the real-life working world. Instead,

Schweitzer and Stephenson (2008) argue that constructivist principles need to be implemented in a way that supports professional acculturation and empowers students in the professional world. They urge professors to take an active role in mentoring learners and state that, "embracing a variety of pedagogical strategies and choices in both curricula and courses could serve constructivist theory better than overarching in-principle prescription" (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008, p. 591). While constructivist approaches have been found to have many positive benefits for student learning, processionals need to rationalize their decision to implement constructivism rather than applying the principles blindly.

Socio-constructivism. Whereas constructivist-learning theory suggests that learners construct their own knowledge, socio-constructivism draws upon the fact that knowledge is socially constructed. Lev Vygotsky, an influential educational theorist, developed socio-constructivist learning theory that centers upon the role of culture, language, and social interactions in cognitive development (Daniels, 2001). He believed that learning takes place through interactions with the learner's social environment. Vygotsky came up with the term "the zone of proximal development", which can be explained as the difference between what learners can accomplish independently, and the potential learning tasks that they can accomplish with guidance (Daniels, 2001, p. 56). The heart of learning is believed to occur within the zone of proximal development, as the interplay between the learner and their environment are constantly influencing the learning that is taking place. One useful strategy that is associated with the zone of proximal development is "scaffolding". Scaffolding is a term used to describe the support provided to learners as they participate in a task. As the learner begins to develop the skills necessary to participate in the task, the amount of support is gradually reduced (Daniels, 2001;

Hill, 2009). Hill (2009) explains that socio-constructivism "emphasizes the interdependence of the individual learner and the context in which she/he is learning" (p. 273).

Traditionally, teaching circus arts emerged from a family setting and through apprenticeships. As apprenticeships were common in circus in the past, I became interested in exploring literature on apprenticeship learning. The defining feature of apprenticeship learning is that the participation of the learner occurs in the workplace or the community of practice (Nielsen & Pedersen, 2011). Tasks in apprenticeship learning have an increasing level of complexity, and as such, learners are required to learn a myriad of skills facilitated through increasing participation. Within apprenticeship learning, many characteristics associated with socio-constructivism are applied. For instance, scaffolding is facilitated through the learner's relationship with his/her apprentice. Additionally, as apprenticeship learning typically occurs in a natural setting, where there are opportunities to construct knowledge through the social environment. Nielsen and Pedersen (2011) explain that apprenticeships are "a social organization in which the learning resources are embedded" (p. 564). Lave and Wenger (1991) further state that this approach to learning encourages students to develop their professional identities (as cited in Tanggaard, 2006, p. 221). Tanggaard (2006) further contends, "it is not only the occupational image or position of the learner in the workplace that changes as part of learning in an ongoing transformational practice, but also his or her social, cultural, embodied and gendered participation in social practices related to the workplace" (p. 221). It is interesting that there has been a growing interest in apprenticeships as "philosophers have turned to apprenticeship as a way to learn about how tacit and bodily competences are transmitted (Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1999; Wackerhausen 1996; 1997, as cited in Nielsen & Pedersen, 2011, p. 563).

These theories have important implications in the field of circus education as they demonstrate different perspectives on how learning occurs. By understanding the way that people learn, curriculum developers and teachers can find more effective ways to meet the needs of the learners. I speculate that just as learning theories have shifted from the behaviourist to the constructivist model, present day circus education has also moved towards a more constructivist approach to teaching. As discussed in the section on circus history, skills were traditionally passed down by family members in what seemed to be a more behaviourist approach, whereas in my experience, current teaching practices in circus tend to view learners as active constructors of knowledge.

Adult learning. Adult learning has been defined in a number of ways by many researchers in the field. The ways in which adults learn and the characteristics that are unique to adult learners have been thoroughly investigated. Most researchers would agree that adult learners bring with them a wealth of past experiences and knowledge (Kerka, 2002; Lindeman, 1961; Yang, 2003). Other researchers argue that adults "capacity for critical thinking or transformative learning" is what differentiates them from younger learners (Vaske, 2001, as cited in Kerka, 2002, p. 3).

Since the 1970s, research has shifted towards examining the differences between the way that adults and children learn. Andragogy was defined by Knowles (1984) as "the art and science of helping adults learn" (as cited in Baumgartner, Lee, Birdin & Flowers, 2003, p. 6). Knowles (1980) identified many ways in which adult learners differed from children. Some characteristics he explored were, "self concept, experience, readiness to learn and an orientation to learning" (as cited in Jordan & Orison Stack, 2008, p. 131). While the work of Knowles has had a persuasive influence on research in the field of adult education, it also elicited criticism

regarding the assumptions he held about adult learners. His work was criticized as an ideology that focused solely on the individual learner and ignored the sociocultural factors that play a role in learning (Grace, 1996, as cited in Baumgartner, Lee, Birdin & Flowers, 2003). Additionally, other researchers questioned whether or not adults did in fact learn differently than children (Baumgartner, Lee, Birdin & Flowers, 2003; Kerka, 2002). Tice (1997) states that andragogy assumes a "generic" view of the adult learner (as cited in Kerka, 2002, p. 3). Rather than recognizing each adult as a unique individual with a wealth of experiences, andragogy assumes a standard interpretation of adult learners. Over time, Knowles (1980) responded to critics by revising his assumptions about adult learners, and indicating that he "doesn't see andragogy as an ideology at all, but as a system of assumptions about learners that needs to be tested out for different learners in different situations " (as cited in Baumgartner, Lee, Birdin & Flowers, 2003, p. 7). Ultimately, Knowles's discussion of andragogy encouraged others to explore how learning is unique to adults.

A particular study conducted by Bowles (2010) investigated how music teachers adjusted their approach when instructing adults. The participants in her study identified the need for flexibility and age-specific tailored lessons plans. One important finding from her research indicated that while teachers recognized the need for individualized instruction to meet the specific goals of adult learners, they were accustomed to working with younger children, and found it frustrating to differentiate their instruction. Also, as many of the instructors in the music courses were career performers, they lacked access to professional development. Bowles (2010) wrote about the need for professional development for teachers in the arts "that are relevant, action-based, responsive to expressed needs, and accessible to teachers across career types, musical styles, age groups, and experience level" (p. 58). Given that in my experience many

circus arts teachers are career performers, I speculate that there are limited professional development opportunities for those who teach circus.

Yang (2003) suggests that it is important to move beyond focusing solely on adult learning and examine the different facets of knowledge in the adult learner. He argues that adults have explicit, implicit, and emancipatory knowledge facets, which are essentially knowledge of the mind, body, and heart (Yang, 2003). Additionally, he encourages researchers to look at "the dynamic relationships among these facets" (Yang, 2003, p. 127). By examining the different types of knowledge, he encourages a more holistic exploration of learning in adults. Furthermore, Yang (2003) argues that much of the research in adult education focuses on the individual level, and that researchers also need to consider the social context of learning.

Adult learners are multifaceted and a single learning theory will not apply to all learning situations (Merriam, 2001 as cited in Baumgartner, et. al., 2003). Ross-Gordon (2002) advocates moving beyond generalizing the learning characteristics of adult learners and suggests that "choices about teaching practices should be based on numerous considerations: context, learner knowledge and characteristics, teacher beliefs and values" (p. 4, as cited in Kerka, 2002). Most researchers agree that the question of whether or not adults and children should be taught differently is difficult to answer (Kerka, 2002; Baumgartner et al., 2003). Rather, each learner is unique and the approach and methods used should cater to the particular situation.

This literature suggests that the role of coaches and teachers are central in facilitating the learning outcomes in circus school. It is essential that teaching and learning should be tailored to adults who come from different backgrounds and bring with them a wide range of experiences. Educators who acknowledge the unique life experiences of the learners in their classrooms will have a greater impact on the students' learning. Furthermore, I believe that teachers, who are

more sensitive to the personal goals of adult learners, will be more effective at teaching individuals in the circus school program. From my own experiences in education, and as an adult learner, I felt that I gained more knowledge from teachers with whom I had formed a personal relationship, and who had taken an active interest in helping me to achieve my personal goals.

Curriculum theories

In this section I discuss the literature on curriculum theory that pertains to my study. This work provides a lens for thinking about the many conceptualizations of curriculum that exist. I provide an overview of some of the works of John Dewey (1944), and his beliefs about experience and education. Also, I discuss the notion of the "lived curriculum", described in works of William Pinar (1976, 1988, 2004, 2012), Madeline Grumet (1991, 2006), Ted Aoki (1978, 1980, 2005), and Maxime Greene (1975). These theorists suggest that curriculum is not about the "curriculum materials, instructional techniques and policy directives", but rather about "lived experience…wherein the curriculum is experienced, enacted and reconstructed" (Pinar, 1994, p. 17; Pinar, 2011, p.1). The notion of the hidden curriculum is also explored because when curriculum is defined as lived experiences instead of as particular materials, it becomes apparent that teaching is implicitly embedded within the structures of the curriculum (Hines, 2013).

Active learning. John Dewey has been an influential theorist in the field of educational reform. He believed that learning is social and interactive, and that in order for meaningful learning to occur, there must be opportunities for students to interact with the curriculum and play an active role in their own learning. Curriculum must be centered upon student interests and incorporate active learning experiences. Dewey (1944) argues that "knowing must be

derived from the practice," in which learners actively engage in situations through their experiences (p.718). He further argues that learning should be "continuous with that out of school" (Dewey, 1944, p. 756). In order for knowledge to be carried outside the classroom there needs to be an interplay between what is happening in school and what is happening in the lives of the students. The moral and social quality of a school can only be upheld if the school views itself as a community, whereby the students engage in the "building up of a common experience" (Dewey, 1944, p. 755). He suggests that schools are the places where social reform is instituted and argues that there is a strong link between what is learned in school and the effects that it can have on a society. From the perspective of circus education, the idea that educational experiences need to be active and authentic, and that the students should be responsible for their own learning, would resonate well with circus artists. As circus artists do not need a degree to work in circus, they attend educational programs to learn the skills necessary to become independent professional artists.

Lived curriculum. Curriculum theory is defined by Pinar (1988) as a "complicated conversation" (p. 1). He explains that curriculum should not be defined as a set of objectives to be tested, but rather by the educational experiences of the learners (Pinar, 1988). Rather than delivering an "airtight" argument about curriculum, Aoki (2005) suggests cutting "holes" in the curriculum to allow the voices of the students to seep through (as cited in Pinar, 1988, p.1). These researchers are interested in "the curriculum as lived", or the ways in which the individuals interact and reconstruct themselves and their identities by engaging with the curriculum (Aoki, as cited in Pinar, 1988, p.2). The notion of curriculum has been expanded to include the internal conceptions of the learner. Ultimately, these curriculum theorists bring focus to the fact that a considerable amount of educational research focuses "on the public, on the

visible", placing an emphasis on the curriculum materials and instruction (Pinar, 1973, p. 16). They call for a revolution in the field of curriculum research where the focus is on a "lengthy, systematic search of our own inner experiences" (Pinar, 1973, p. 16).

Pinar (2012) reconceptualized the notion of the curriculum through the development of the term "currere", in which one "seeks to understand the contribution academic studies make to one's understanding of one's life (and vice versa) and how both are imbricated in society, politics, and culture" (p. 45). Currere is an ongoing reflective process whereby individuals engage in dialogue with themselves about what they are learning in their academic studies and how it relates to the cultural, social, and political context, as well as their own past, present, and future. It is about exploring thought processes and self-formation by reflecting upon academic experiences and relating it to our lived experiences. Rather than viewing currere as an "instructional device" in schools systems, Pinar (2012) sees it as a way for educators and students to engage in personal self-development (p. 45). Currere is a process that allows individuals to critically reflect on their own thoughts. In order to gain a deeper self-understanding, engaging in currere involves asking the question, "What does that mean to you?" (Grumet, 2006, p. 118). Ultimately, research in curriculum needs to move beyond external materials and towards facilitating deeper inquiry into the constructed realities of the students who experience it.

Aoki (1980/1981, as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2004) argues that research in curriculum studies has not permitted the "probing of the deeper meaning of what it is for persons to be human, to become more human, and to act humanly in educational situations" (p. 95). He maintains that in order for the curriculum "to come alive", there needs to be a "reciprocal invitation" (Aoki, 1987, as cited in Pinar & Irwin, 2004, p. 362). The curriculum must be

planned and implemented in a way that "stirs teachers and students to animated living" (p. 362). Research in curriculum studies must examine the human and interactive aspects of the educational experience.

Maxime Greene (1975) has argued that the curriculum is all too often a "structure of socially prescribed knowledge, or a complex system of meanings which may or may not fall within his (the learner's) grasp" (p. 299). She believed that not enough attention has been focused on the individual when theorizing about the curriculum. Greene (1975) compared the curriculum to a map, whereby she associated the cartographer with the curriculum developer. Learners use this map to search for directives and to find their place in the world. Nevertheless, Greene (1975) argued that it is important to not overlook "the background awareness" of the students and his/her "reasons for consulting the map" (p. 306).

Grumet (1991) suggests that there is another dimension of the reconceptualized term curriculum. She believes that the curriculum starts at home. In her view, schools can be seen as intermediary places, "mediating the worlds, values relationships, and languages of the private and public, of the home and workplace" (Grumet, 1991, p.86). She discusses the way that schools have often been a place where people went to when they left home, but that aspects of home life are intertwined in who people are, and what people know. She argues that the curriculum must embrace our home life, as home is the place where the personal curriculum originates. According to Grumet (1991), home is a "mediating process", whereby all of our experiences "are transformed into the culture of the family" (p. 88).

Hidden curriculum. The concept of the hidden curriculum is useful when reflecting on the curriculum. Whereas formal curriculum is explicit, composed of planned courses and objectives, the lived curriculum involves the daily experiences of the learners. In essence,

hidden curriculum is comprised of the subtle, unplanned ideas that participants internalize. This includes "the unspoken norms, values, and beliefs transmitted through tacit messages" (Hines, 2013, p.17). The hidden parts of the curriculum may actually help to reveal relationships between "what is being taught in schools and the larger contexts of the institutions that surround them" (Apple, 1990, p.49). The hidden curriculum is important because it focuses attention beyond the participant experiences, and on the messages that are sent and received in educational settings that were not purposely intended. Often, these notions have a fundamental influence on an individual's learning and experience (Margolis, 2001). Margolis (2001) discusses how the term 'hidden' frequently conjures up the idea that something has been overtly concealed, whereas "the hidden curriculum is not something that we must look behind or around in order to detect; in most cases it is plainly in sight, and functions effortlessly" (p. 23). The hidden curriculum is of a particular importance as it encourages me to attend to the trends and patterns that emerge from the data that may be overlooked.

Ultimately, the literature in curriculum studies invites educators to embrace "the nuanced complexity of educational experience" (Pinar, 2004, p. 42). These curriculum theorists bring light to the multidimensional aspects and complexities that are inherent in curriculum. This perspective helped to guide my interpretation of the experiences of the students engaged in the implementation of the various curricula at the National Circus School. Rather than attending to the external curricular structures, I planned to explore the multiple layers of experiences of the participants in my study.

Learning communities

Learning communities can be defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in these

areas by interacting on an ongoing process" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002, as cited in Hill, 2009, p. 269). Learning communities can be intentionally formed, such as those in formal classrooms or institutions. Often, these are referred to as a "directed learning community" (Hill, 2009, p. 269). Learning communities can also occur spontaneously when groups of learners decide they want to facilitate learning together. In the context of this study, the community at the National Circus School could be considered a formal learning community.

Many aspects of learning theories that I described earlier such as socio-constructivism, adult learning, and curriculum theory can be used to inform the way that learning communities function in an educational setting. The zone of proximal development, as described on page 17, can be facilitated through the variety of levels of learners and experts within the community (Hill, 2009). For instance, a more novice learner may move along the continuum in the zone of proximal development as they learn from more expert learners within the community. Moreover, a key aspect of learning communities is that "community members not only collaborate, but they also cooperate together in a variety of ways" (Hill, 2009, p. 274). Collaboration exists when participants work together towards a common goal, whereas cooperation also entails social interdependence. Social interdependence is described by Johnson and Johnson (2009) as existing when "the outcomes of individuals are affected by their own and other's actions" (as cited in Hill, 2009, p. 274). As they feel a shared sense of commitment to the group, they often work together to achieve common goals. This illustrates how learning communities have the ability to "facilitate positive social interdependence" (Hill, 2009, p. 274). By recognizing that the actions of the group of learners can have an impact on personal goals, members are able to see the positive effects of participating in the learning community. Also, self-regulated learning is central to the success of the community. Members who have higher

levels of self-efficacy seem to be able to participate more fully within social environments such as learning communities (Pajares, 1969, as cited in Hill, 2011).

In a study conducted by Gorelick, Lei, Short, Smallwood, and Wright-Porter (2011), the benefits and drawbacks of being a member in a cohort group in a college level program were examined. In this study, cohorts were distinguished as being small groups of approximately 10 to 25 students who began their educational program together and completed the program during the same time frame (Barnett & Caffarella, 1992; Barnett et al., 2000; Maher, 2005, as cited in Gorelick et al., 2011, p. 497). This is very similar to the grouping arrangements of students attending the National Circus School. Students at the National Circus School are grouped with approximately 25 other students and they begin and complete the three-year collegial level program together. The following table from Gorelick et al. (2011) provides an overview of the benefits and drawbacks of participating in a learning community in a college level program (p.500).

Table 1

Benefits and Drawbacks of Cohort Membership

Variable
• The importance of the cohort culture • A group of supportive learners with similar goals • Positive peer relationships • Positive student-faculty relationships • More cooperative learning, peer teaching, and student discussions • More collaborative voice when addressing certain issues to instructors • Instructors may be more attentive to cohorts • More likely to create study groups and research partners • Feeling of cohesiveness • Ease of navigating instructional and department policies and procedures • Availability of student mentors • Higher retention, graduation and success rates of students • More intrinsically motivated to learn new course materials • More social academic and professional networks • More readily to integrate and apply course materials to reality
Drawbacks
• Less flexibility in designing a curriculum and a course of study • Cliques develop within a cohort • Limited interaction with non-cohort members • Same group of students may stunt the growth of knowledge • Predictability in academic roles • Intellectual mismatches among cohort members • Competition rather than collaboration may develop over time • Cohorts may resemble dysfunctional families • Cohort group disbanding at the completion of formal education

This literature suggests that while learning communities present many benefits for learners, there are also issues and challenges associated with the development of learning communities (Gorelick et al, 2011; Hill, 2009). It is critical that curriculum developers acknowledge not only how learning communities can facilitate learning, but also how they may produce outcomes that may be counteractive to the learning objectives of the institution. For instance, by realizing that cliques are often formed within a cohort, institutions can work towards

improving these drawbacks by taking action such as providing many opportunities for student collaboration with different peer groups outside of their cliques. I speculate that the counteractive results may often be overshadowed by the benefits in most institutions.

Performance Arts Education

In the following section I will be providing an overview of the literature in performance arts education. These include studies in dance, music, and theatre.

There are trends in higher education curricular arts programs in the fields of dance, music, and theatre. Over the past fifteen years, studies have shown that students' interest and access to the arts have increased considerably (Bennett 2009; Brown 2007; Warburton, 2006). I speculate that the reason interest in the arts is rising is because society today tends to celebrate artists, and our exposure to art has increased considerably because of access to media. Performance arts courses in university have also been found to focus more on practical skill development, in order to prepare graduates for careers in a competitive work force, rather than on other important professional dimensions (Bennett, 2009, Johnsson & Hager, 2008). University performing arts programs require that students learn a myriad of skills in order to build long-lasting careers in the arts. As such, the multifaceted nature of performance arts requires a responsive curriculum to meet the current trends and demands of the working environment (Bennett, 2009; Johnsson & Hager, 2008). Furthermore, the relationship between performance arts programs and the labour market is essential when evaluating programs offered in higher education (Brown, 2007). In creative industries, employment opportunities are frequently unstable and uncertain. Brown (2007) synthesized literature pertaining to performance arts programs in relation to the labour market. He found that while student enrollment in performing arts programs is booming, employability opportunities are amongst the

lowest. Students tend to come into arts programs with a mindset that favours performance careers over sustainable careers (Bennett, 2009). Many artists are becoming protean careerist, in which they are losing their professional identity. It is common to have artists working in many roles, including teachers, and managers amongst others, in order to achieve economic stability (Bennett, 2009; Jacob, 2000). This is an important implication when discussing the curricula in programs, which prepare circus artists for an unpredictable employment field.

Johnsson and Hager (2008) uses Nash's (1982) term "the wilderness years" in order to describe "a time of uncertainty where the vastness of life, choices and roles bewilder actions that could be taken" (p. 526). They refer to students' years transitioning from the safety of the educational institution to the professional workforce as "wilderness years", as it is often a time of confusion and persistence. In their study, they discovered that recent graduates in the field of music indicated that their educational preparation made them focus on attaining individual goals, when they should have focused on "learning how to work with rather than against or in comparison to others" (Johnsson &Hager, 2008, p. 529). Johnsson & Hager (2008) argue that it is vital that curricula in performance arts programs develop the skills of each performer and also help them to develop a myriad of other professional qualities and commit "to a form of lifelong learning that is relationally based" (p. 526). They argue that there is a need for a "living curriculum", in which embodied and contextualized learning is favoured, and greater collaboration between education and the industry is emphasized (Johnsson & Hager, 2008, p. 527). The "wilderness years" can be "formative and often transformative" if the curriculum is structured to promote collaboration (Johnsson & Hager, 2008, p. 533).

Bracey (2004) argues that the voices of students are crucial for advancing the development of curricular programs. Through her study with university dancers, Bracey (2004)

found that higher education dance programs helped students to learn more about their personal identity. The dancers in her study felt that dance was "not a pursuit with a fixed end point, but an ongoing process that offered unique rewards" (Bracey, 200, p 7). They also viewed the field of dance as one that was in a constant state of evolution, with many different voices contributing to its development. They described how their experiences in the program " had a profound physical, mental and emotional influence on them" (Bracey, 2004, p. 19). The participant statements in Bracey's (2004) study were replete with contradictions, the most significant of which was the struggle between the need to achieve one's own goals and the need to please outside parties, including teachers, choreographers, and audiences. Also, Bracey (2004) found that her participants reached a greater understanding of their experiences as they spoke about them. This implies that speaking about personal experiences can help artists to reflect and reach a greater understanding of their sense of self.

Many researchers in the field of dance education would agree that the curriculum should be designed to encompass a holistic approach to learning in creative fields (Kassing, 2010; Smith, 2007). Smith (2007) states, "dance is a creative endeavour, and all aspects of our curricula, even non-movement-based classwork can and should reflect this fact" (p.199). In her own experience teaching dance in a post-secondary institution, Smith (2007) found that the use of traditional assignments and assessment processes were often disconnected from the roots of creative practice. She argued for a more holistic approach, in which assignments would "support a student's technical training and help them develop as well-rounded, articulate intellectuals and future dance professional(s)" (Smith, 2007, p 199). She urges teachers to adopt the responsibility to develop and evaluate their own coursework, and to evaluate the impact that it has on their students' understanding of the field of dance. Kassing (2010) believes that it is vital

for learners to see the interconnection between what is being taught and how they can apply it to their careers. She argues that by engaging in authentic learning experiences, the students have the opportunity to apply what they learn directly into their practice. Moreover, she believes that "dance educators should prepare future dance professionals not only to enter a first career but, more important, to transition into a future career" (Kassing, 2010, p. 25). The curriculum in dance programs must prepare students for multiple careers in dance, including that of teachers, dancers and choreographers, in order to prepare artists for a 21st century career.

Given the nature of this study, it is useful to learn about research in performance arts educational programs. As careers in the arts tend to be characterized as relatively unstable, it is essential that curriculum designers create curricula to match the trends and patterns that are occurring across the arts. Research points towards the ways in which students in artistic programs tend to view their education as an ongoing process, and have strong emotional, physical, and mental reactions to these experiences. These studies suggest that a strong curricular design can help artists to prosper in this unstable career field by preparing them for the tendencies and situations in artistic professions. A strong curricular design entails having opportunities for authentic practice, and will help students to view the interconnectedness between what they learned, and how it will help them in their careers.

Summary

This literature provided a lens for considering the circus education context. A review of circus history allowed me to examine the historical role of this art form in its present day context. Also, I introduced literature on learning theories in order to specify different approaches for teaching and learning. While curriculum is often thought of as external material, I identified the way that curriculum can also be explained through the lived experiences of the students. I explored the

literature about learning communities and performance arts education to frame my research, and to develop a structure to better understand the results of my study. The following chapter will be used to explain the methodological design used to conduct this study. It will provide an overview of the process that I underwent to arrive at the emerging themes and conclusions derived from the research.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

> To plunge in; to choose; to disclose; to move: this is the road, it seems to me, to mastery.
>
> (Maxime Greene, 1975, p. 315)

The following chapter describes the methodology that I used to conduct my research. This includes outlining the purpose of my study, the research questions that were investigated and the design of my research. I provide a description of the research site, as well as an overview of the collection, organization, analysis, and management of the field texts. Also, I discuss the ethical considerations of this work and suggest how my research process contributes to the trustworthiness of the work.

Purpose of my Study

The purpose of my study was to investigate the lived experience of students at the National Circus School by interviewing individuals who had participated in the collegial level circus arts training program. I was interested in how a circus education affected these individuals and whether or not they shared common experiences. I wanted to focus on their understanding of the curriculum by concentrating on their personal experiences in the program, and how it affected their future careers in circus arts, rather than examining the relation between the objectives of the program and whether or not the participants achieved the desired objectives. I hoped that this study would promote efforts to include student discourse in circus curriculum planning and implementation at the National Circus School and at emerging educational circus institutions around the world.

Research Questions

In qualitative research, questions are used to help focus studies by explicitly stating what the researcher wants to learn (Maxwell, 2013). The questions in qualitative research "focus on what,

how and why" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 26). Butler-Kisber (2010) elaborates on the differences between the overarching research questions and sub-questions. She explains, "the overarching questions will ultimately be answered by what emerges in response to the sub-questions plus the overall explanation that the researcher produces" (p.27). Through my study I aimed to answer the following overarching question and the ensuing three sub-questions.

- How do graduates of a post-secondary circus school program in Canada perceive the design, content and delivery of the curriculum?
    - How do graduates describe their experiences and feelings about the three main curricular content areas: academic, technical, and arts-based classes?
    - What has been learned from the participants' experiences of attending a post-secondary circus school program?
    - How did attending a post-secondary circus education contribute, or not, to the students' careers in circus arts?

The research questions stemmed from my own experiences as a teacher in the circus arts undergraduate program at Codarts University in the Netherlands, and also from my experience as a student at the National Circus School in Montreal. Additionally, I knew that past circus knowledge was traditionally passed down through apprenticeships. I wanted to understand more about the ways in which schools were educating circus artists of today, and how these skills were transferring, or not, into the workplace.

Research Design

Site selection. The research context that I analyzed during my study was the curriculum of the National Circus School of Montreal. The National Circus School has been offering professional circus programs since 1981 (National Circus School [NCS], 2008). They currently

offer many programs including preparatory training, circus high school, collegial level studies, and teacher preparation programs (NCS, 2008). The school attracts a global student population as "just over half of its students are from Quebec, while, depending on years, 10-15% are from the US, 10-15% from France, 10-15% from other Canadian provinces, and there is a consistent representation of the world's nations, from Australia to Germany, Norway to Chile, Russia to Palestine" (Leroux, 2014b, p. 268). Presently there are approximately 150 students enrolled in their many programs. As well, their team of lecturers, teachers, and artistic consultants is comprised of more than 80 professionals (NCS, 2008). While the school has remained independent from professional circus companies, they have directly contributed to the development of many Québecois circuses including Cirque du Soleil, Cirque Eloize and the Seven Fingers (NCS, 2008).

For the purposes of this study, I chose to investigate the collegial level program in which students can obtain a diploma in circus arts. Each year the National Circus School of Montreal accepts approximately 20 to 25 students into this program. Annually, the school holds auditions in many provinces in Canada, as well as in other countries. According to the National Circus School website the aims of this program are as follows:

> The higher education program aims to produce professional circus artists, creators and performers. Upon completion, graduates are capable of creating and interpreting short circus works or numbers at a professional level. Graduates are able to dance, act and sing, actively participate in every step of a single or collective work, as well as interpret existing works. Graduates will have learned how to maintain good health, as well as manage both creative projects and their careers. (NCS, 2008)

I chose to investigate the curriculum of the National Circus School as it has been offering a professional circus program in North America for the past 33 years. Additionally, since its establishment, the institute has received worldwide attention as one of the best circus schools in the world with an average placement rate of 95% for graduates (NCS, 2008).

Access and entry. In order to access the participants for my study I went the National Circus School website which post emails of all student graduates on their website. Also, I spoke with the research department at the National Circus School prior to commencing my study and I found out that it was necessary to cosign a Memorandum of Understanding in order to begin the study. This document was signed by both the National Circus School of Montreal and McGill University and a mutual accord was realized.

Participants. I purposefully selected participants for the study by seeking individuals who fit a list of pre-established criteria. Maxwell (2013), a prominent researcher and author in the field of qualitative research, states, "In this strategy, particular settings, persons or activities are selected deliberately to provide information that is particularly relevant to your questions and goals" (p. 97). Initially, I had planned on interviewing eight candidates that had graduated within the past ten years (2003-2013), with an equal representation of female and male participants. Ideally, I wanted to interview participants who had graduated from a varied range of years. Also, I desired participants whose ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and nationality were diverse. Moreover, I felt that it was important to interview circus artists who specialized in specific circus disciplines, as I wanted to get a well-rounded overview of experiences. I planned on selecting two graduates who specialized in object manipulation, two in aerials, two in acrobatic disciplines, and two in hand balancing. The reason why I sought to interview students across multiple disciplines was that I believed that the experiences of a

juggler, who primarily works individually with objects of manipulation, might be very different than the experience of an acrobat, who may work with a partner, and with no equipment. By interviewing graduates across many disciplines, I believed that I would be able to get an overall and better idea of how they perceived their experiences. The reason why I wanted to interview graduates is because I felt that they would have a good retrospective sense of how the post-secondary circus school program influenced their careers as circus artists.

Ultimately, the participants selected for my study were past students who had graduated from the National Circus School of Montreal. I interviewed seven graduates, four male and three female, between the ages of 21 and 32 years old. All of the participant interviews were conducted in English. Table Two represents the figures of participants who participated in my study.

Table 2

Participant Figures

Measure	Representation
Age of participants	21, 23, 26, 28, 30, 33, 34
Year of graduation	2004, 2005, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2011, 2012
Sex of participants	Four male participants, Three female participants
Nationality	American, Canadian, French, German
Languages spoken	Chinese, English, French, German, Spanish
Primary circus discipline*	juggling, hand to hand, aerial hoop, dance trapeze, Chinese pole, handstands
Secondary circus discipline*	ring master, Chinese pole, hoop diving, straps, aerial silks, handstands, contortion, trampoline wall, teeterboard

Note: * The number of circus disciplines do not correlate with the number of participants as some participants specialized in more than one discipline.

Due to the high number of responses to my initial survey, which included 43 potential participants, I was able to conduct research with the list of pre-selection criteria mentioned above that I established for my study. The reason I decided to interview only seven participants, instead of the projected eight, was because there were no female circus artists that had graduated in the field of juggling in the past 10 years. Rather than choose another artist from a different discipline, or another male juggler, I chose to interview only seven participants.

Field Text Collection

The term field text is used to refer to all data that was collected for my research. I chose to use the term "field text" as it emphasizes how data is "constructed" and "not entities in and of themselves" (Butler-Kisber, 2010, p. 29). The primary source of field texts for my study was generated through the pre-selection questionnaires and by interviews with participants. First, an email was sent to all of the students who had graduated in the last 10 years inviting them to participate in my study, which is outlined in Appendix A on page 126. There were two attachments included in the email, which contained a pre-selection questionnaire, as well as the research consent form (See Appendix B and C).

The pre-selection questionnaire was comprised of three sections: personal details, professional details, and education details. It was modified from Herman's (2008) study with circus school graduates. Herman's (2008) study analyzed the key skills of young professional circus artists by asking graduates of professional circus schools to complete a survey that questioned the relevance of their experiences in circus school and compared with their experiences in the labour market. I used this study to discover demographic information so that I could more carefully structure my pre-selection questionnaire. The decision to undertake a pre-selection questionnaire was motivated by my desire to identify participants who met the

requirements for my study, and to determine which participants would be more readily available for face-to-face interviews. I emailed a total of 146 participants asking them to participate. Forty-three past students responded willing to participate, while 24 emails were returned due to inactive email accounts.

Consent forms requesting permission to participate in the study were sent to each graduate as an attachment in the email. Feldman et al. (2003, as cited in Butler-Kisber, 2011) explain, "instituted safeguards help the participants understand more clearly what a researcher is doing" (p. 16). The consent form was carefully developed and outlined the research process in language that was easily comprehensible to the participants. It described their rights if they chose to participate. Having the students sign the consent forms was not the end of this procedure, consent was an on-going process through which I constantly communicated with the participants. For instance, even after transcribing the interviews, I sent a copy of the transcriptions to each participant to verify that they felt adequately represented. Also, it was made clear that the participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

After sorting through the responses to the initial email and the participants' pre-selection questionnaires, I selected participants who met all aspects of my pre-identifying criteria (see page 38). Also, I favoured those who were present in Montreal for face-to-face interviews. I believed that face-to-face interviews would allow me to develop a stronger relationship with the participants, and to help me to read social cues such as voice, intonation, and body language. I believed, as did others, that relying on technologies such as the Internet and Skype could sometimes slow down or hinder the natural flow of conversation (Opdenakker, 2006; Seidman, 2006). While the National Circus School was the context that I investigated in my study, it was not the site where the interviews were conducted. I wanted to talk to the participants in an

atmosphere that was not associated with the school. All of the interviews were conducted at a location that was mutually agreed upon between the participant and myself. Out of the 21 interviews conducted, 16 interviews occurred in person, while five were conducted through interviews on Skype. I was able to meet with six out of the seven participants at least once face-to-face. Fifteen of the face-to-face interviews took place in coffee shops, while one interview took place in the participant's apartment which I was able to ascertain, before the interview, had no discernable drawbacks.

Herman (2008) states that "circus artists are rarely solicited to participate in research" (p. 43), therefore, I took time at the beginning of the first interview to clearly explain the interview process and to answer any questions about the research study and the approach used. The interviews were conducted three times, over a period of eight weeks, and ranged between 35 and 90 minutes long. Herman (2008) explained that during her study with circus school students, she found that "former students are likely to reflect on their entire training history and do not make a distinction between the last school that they graduated from and the earlier schools that they attended" (p.43), therefore, I divided the interviews into three separate segments. Herman (2008) also explained that the terms used throughout her survey were often too abstract for the participants. To address this issue, I used an interviewing approach developed by Irving Seidman (2006), which uses open-ended questions in order to prompt the participant to construct and explore their personal responses to the interview questions.

Irving Seidman (2006) explains that the purpose of interviewing is not to get answers to questions, but rather, "the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of others" (p. 9). Seidman (2006) developed an approach entitled "in-depth, phenomenological-based interviewing", in which the interviewer uses open-ended questions and

is encouraged to build upon the interviewee's personal responses to those questions. According to Seidman (2006), the ultimate goal of this interviewing approach is to "have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (p. 9). Seidman (1996) uses a three-series interview approach in order to establish context and to gain a better understanding of the meaning behind the participants' experiences. He argues that when researchers meet for a single interview, they often miss the context from which to understand the participants' experiences.

Each interview that I conducted was guided by Seidman's approach. Prior to conducting the interviews, I developed an interview guide with questions to help facilitate the interviewing process. This interview guide is included in Appendix D on page 132. I used these questions as a guide to stay focused throughout the interviews. Also I generated questions from what the participants had said in previous interviews. For instance, one participant often referred to her experiences working with a partner during her circus training, while the other participants that I interviewed had all worked individually. Whereas some interviews had questions that focused on their individual training, I asked this particular participant about her experiences training with a partner. Not all participants were asked exactly the same questions, but rather adhered generally to my prepared open-ended protocal.

The primary task in the first interview in the three-interview series "is to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (Seidman, 1996, p.17). During the first interview I focused on the participant's life history. This allowed me to establish the context of the participants' experience by asking them to discuss their experiences in circus arts from their childhood to the present day. Also, it allowed me to form a relationship with the participant and

to have a greater context for understanding their experiences in the next two interviews. In Seidman's (2006) approach, the purpose of the second interview "is to put the participant's experience in context by asking him or her to tell as much as possible about him or herself in light of the topic up to the present time" (p. 18). During the second interview, I asked the participants to discuss the details of their experiences at circus school. Rather than asking for their opinion about their experiences, I sought to learn more about reconstructing the details. Seidman's (1996) third interview encourages participants to reflect on the significance of their experiences by questioning, examining, and making sense of their experiences. During the third interview in my study, I encouraged the participants to examine how their experience had an effect or not, on their current employment in circus arts. By applying Seidman's (1996) approach to interviewing, I found that the participants tended to discuss their experiences in their own words and at their own pace. Also, it proved to be beneficial in forming a relationship with the participants, in developing their trust and by putting them at ease. In two instances, the participants even sent follow-up emails after the interview to clarify something that they had discussed. The relationship that I formed with the participants allowed them to feel open and comfortable with me. Please note that I have referenced this excerpt by the participant's pseudonym, the mode of communication, and the line numbers in the email.

> *One thing I just thought of after our conversation today (for which, thanks!):*
> *You had asked about the future of circus education and where it could go, or at least something like that, and I think I just shrugged and said that the basic conflicts between technical excellence and artistic independence would forever characterize the basic problem of modern circus education (or at least that's certainly the sort of thing I would be likely to say). But I just had an entirely different outlook on the problem, which was this*. (Derek/ Follow-up email/ 1-7)

In order to audio record interviews, I used two digital voice recorders. The second digital voice recorder was used in order to prepare for unforeseen problems such as battery failure or

inaudible speech. Afterwards, the files were uploaded to my computer and deleted from the digital voice recorder. The audio recording was only kept on my computer for a short period of time during the transcription process. It was then transferred to a USB device and stored in a secure personal safety box in my apartment. All identifying information was removed from the transcribed document and each participant was assigned a pseudonym. In order to audio record the interviews that took place on Skype, I placed the digital voice recorders close to the computer screen and audio recorded the interviews through the computer. The digital recorder picked up the sound directly from the computer and I did not experience any difficulties.

I wrote memos on an ongoing basis. Maxwell (2013) states that memos can be used "as a way to facilitate reflection and analytical insight" (p. 20). The following memo reveals how the interviews with participants brought up personal memories of attending the National Circus School and helped me to become more aware of how I was interpreting the conversations.

> *Other Notes: [The participant] explained how some people get injured and quit, whereas others get injured and it motivates them to want to stay in the circus. As she spoke about her own determination to persevere when faced with an injury, I started to question my own feelings about my back injury. I remember feeling helpless after getting injured. Did I ever feel like I could recover from the injury? How are my own memories of my injury impacting the way I am interpreting the participants' stories?* (Langlois/January 11th, 2014/Memo #15)

Personally, writing memos helped me to record my immediate reactions and impressions and to include details that were not explicitly stated during the interviews. Also, these memos encouraged me to question my own thought processes and assumptions that arose throughout the research project.

Field Text Management

All of the field texts for my study were collected in person or through Skype and uploaded onto my personal computer. They were securely stored and divided into files based on each data type.

They were stored using the following file names: participant interviews, transcription of interviews, participant profiles, member check conversations and personal memos. All of the field texts were collected and transcribed between the months of December 2013 and January 2014.

I transcribed all of the interviews using a program called Transcribe Wreally© which allowed me to use shortcut keys to pause, rewind, and slowdown the audio track. After I transcribed a verbatim account of 10 minutes of audio text, I would summarize the data into a few short sections and write a personal memo. These memos were comprised of follow-up questions and my own presumptions and first impressions. The following memo provides an example of my process.

> *Summary: In this interview [the participant] spoke about their background in circus and in other sports. They also spent a large part of the interview talking about their experience working as a professional circus artist after their studies at the National Circus School. While these experiences seemed meaningful and important in their story, there was little time to talk directly about their experience attending the National Circus School. This is something that I need to focus on during the next interview. Other Notes: During the interview they asked, "Am I getting sidetracked?" I wonder if I was making [the participant] feel this way. I tried to refrain from asking too many leading questions and have them continue their personal story the way that they saw it. Perhaps I can be clearer in explaining the interview process to them prior to commencing the interview. Questions for Future Interviews: You explained that the Montreal school had a reputation for being mostly technical, what was your actual experience of this? In the first interview you spoke about how you are happier about your career than the people you know that went to other circus schools, what was it about the National Circus School that made you feel this way? Try to focus the questions towards their experiences at the National Circus School.* (Langlois/ December 1st, 2013/ Memo #3)

Taking the time to write follow-up questions, summaries, and notes during the transcription process allowed me to become familiar with the transcribed texts, and to locate parts of the text more easily. Also, while transcribing, I included details that only could be attended to in the oral recording of the interview, such as overly emotional moments or tones of speech. While transcribing, I placed these additional details in brackets next to the excerpts of speech. The

brackets allowed me to differentiate between what was said, and the manner in which it was told. This allowed the transcript to reflect its original meaning as closely as possible. For instance, the following excerpt can be used to illustrate how the meaning could be changed if I did not include the fact that it was spoken in a sarcastic tone. In my first interview with Derek, referenced above, he stated, "*and they had a team of Chinese acrobats working with them, and this fellow couldn't seem to get along with the French, couldn't imagine how that could happen (sarcastic tone)"* (Derek/1/94-96). The meaning of this excerpt could have a different meaning if the detail stating that it was spoken in a sarcastic tone was not included.

While writing the transcripts, I also attended to other paralinguistic and non-verbal cues such as laughs, pauses, hand motions, and moments of silence. Rather than writing a period after each sentence, I used a comma to depict a short pause, and a period for any clearly punctuated end of a sentence or thought. As spoken speech is very different from the written word, I found it challenging to point out when a sentence started and finished. Punctuation could greatly alter the meaning of the text and I felt that it was essential that the transcribed interview would retain as much accuracy as possible in order to preserve the meaning of the participants comment. Another challenge while transcribing the interviews was that some participants integrated French words as they spoke. As I transcribed the interviews, I chose to keep the original language spoken present in the transcription in order to stay as true as possible to the original form. Also, I checked the transcriptions with the original audio file for accuracy after each couple of minutes. No identifying features remained in the transcribed text. Afterwards, I dated and numbered the lines in the transcription, which enabled me to easily retrieve and locate specific segments of verbatim speech. Afterwards, each interview was printed and placed in a binder that was securely stored in my apartment. Also, a copy of the file was stored on my personal password

protected computer as well as on an external hard drive. All excerpts from the transcribed interviews are italicized throughout this thesis. They are easily identifiable as they are indented and categorized with the pseudonym of the participant, the interview number, and the line numbers from the transcript.

The memos collected during the study were both in the form of typed-up thoughts in a word document as well as in a personal journal that I brought with me to each interview. The digital files were stored on my personal password protected computer in a file labeled personal memos and the hard-copy journals were stored in a safety box in my apartment. The memos were dated as they were conducted at various times throughout the study.

Through managing the field texts, I realized how important it was to protect to the participants in my study. The participants discussed information that they would not typically disclose to the general public. While transcribing and managing the data, I knew that I had a responsibility to protect their identities. I was extremely careful and diligent to remove any identifying criteria. This process also made me more aware of the challenges involved in preserving authenticity while transcribing an audio recording. By attending to both the verbal and non-verbal cues in the transcription, as well as by re-listening for accuracy, I felt that I was able to overcome these obstacles.

Ethical Considerations

Attention to ethical considerations was a fundamental part of my project. In order to undertake my research at the National Circus School, I wanted to be as forthcoming as I could with the institution about my project. Even though the email addresses of the participants were available on the National Circus School website, I approached the school to ask them for permission to conduct my research. As mentioned earlier, the school requested a memorandum of

understanding between McGill University and their institution, which was granted and signed by both parties on November 22nd, 2013. As required, I also submitted an application to the Research Ethics Board at McGill University. My application was accepted and the Research Ethics Board provided me with a "Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans for Research" which could be conducted between July 25th, 2013 and July 24th, 2014.

In order to protect the confidentiality of my participants, I assigned a pseudonym to each participant as mentioned earlier. Additionally, I carefully sorted through the data to ensure that any other identifying criteria were removed. Because there are only a small number of professional circus artists in the world, participants can be easily identified based on other information than their names. Also, I removed names of coaches, peers, and family members. Consent forms were also administered with the pre-selection questionnaire to the participants (See Appendix D). After the initial consent forms were signed, participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and without penalty. They were also allowed to refrain from answering questions during the interviews. However, no participants chose to do so.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and researcher reflexivity were central concerns when I designed the methodology for this study. In order to account for the assumptions and biases that I held prior to undertaking this study, and as the study progressed, I used ongoing reflection through reflective memos. In these memos I wrote about my own thought processes, general feelings, and assumptions. By reflecting and monitoring my thought processes throughout the study, I was able to attend to the ebb and flow of my reactions, particularly during the interview process. For instance, during one memo I wrote about how I felt that the participants seemed to be defending the program. This comment made me reflect on my methodology and I reviewed

some of my interview questions. I noticed that as the participants talked about their successes in the program, I found myself probing the participant to talk equally about challenging experiences. I realized that even though I was getting responses that talked about both the positive and more challenging aspects of the National Circus School program, I was always asking the questions about the more challenging aspects. I believed this may have made it seem as though I was focusing on the less pleasurable aspects of attending the school and the participants seemed to be picking up on it. The following memo reflects one incident where this occurred during my study.

> *Other Notes: I noticed that in the first interview Alice said all positive things about her experience at the National Circus School. She was always talking on a surface level and never really let me know more about how the program impacted her personally. Today I wanted to know more about the areas of the program that challenged her. I wanted her to open up more. A lot of the questions that I asked her stemmed from our last interview and so I focused more on the challenging experiences in circus school. I began to notice that I tended to dwell on the more turbulent aspects of the program. Today she was not as animated as she was in the first interview, and she seemed even more closed off.* (Langlois/January 11th, 2014/Memo #11)

As a result of this insight, I changed my approach in future interviews by asking questions that were neutral and without trying to direct their responses. Also, I incorporated a familiar teaching strategy that I often used while teaching elementary school, which is called "wait time". Utilizing this approach involved waiting for a couple extra seconds while the participant was silent to allow them more time to answer. Rowe (1986) states that teachers typically wait less than one second for students to respond. By waiting during the silent moments in the interviews, the participants tended to continue their thought processes and would often discuss both the positive and challenging aspects of their experiences.

To deepen the understanding of my data, I analyzed the data on an ongoing basis and actively sought informed input and discrepant evidence. To verify the findings of themes and

patterns, I had sought out member checks from the participants in my study. Member checking involves "soliciting feedback about your data and conclusions from the people you are studying" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126). I involved participants in the verification process by providing each participant with a copy of their interview transcriptions to ensure that they were adequately and appropriately transcribed. I wanted to confirm that my interpretations during the transcription process maintained the voices of my participants. The participants in my study responded that they were pleased with the way that I interpreted and transcribed the interviews, yet a few of the participants were alarmed at how frequently they used the word "like" and "um". At first, I tried to keep the interviews as verbatim as possible. However, in order to attend to the participants' feelings, whenever possible, I removed these words if this did not alter the meaning of the excerpt. Also, I made slight changes to the excerpts in order to make them flow more easily for the reader. I undertook the process of member checking as I was interested in obtaining feedback about my interpretations of the participants' statements.

Additionally, I asked a fellow researcher from McGill University to provide feedback on an ongoing basis with 15% of the data. I was granted ethical permission from the Research Ethics Board at McGill University to use this process. This individual read the data in my study to appraise the integrity of the research and to offer feedback regarding my analysis. My reasoning for using this approach was because I wanted to obtain feedback from another researcher who was also conducting qualitative analysis. My supervisor was also involved in the analysis process as she helped me to uncover themes by discussing my interpretations.

Table Three provides an overview of the field text type and participants involved in the field text collection process. It also provides contextual information about the mode of communication.

Table 3

Field Text Collection

Field text type	Source	Date	Mode of communication
Interviews with graduates	Alice	1. December 5th, 2013 2. January 11th, 2014 3. January 16th, 2014	Face-to-face Face-to-face Face-to-face
	Michael	1. November 27th, 2013 2. December 1st, 2013 3. December 5th, 2013	Face-to-face Face-to-face Face-to-face
	D.B.	1. November 27th, 2013 2. December 1st, 2013 3. December 9th, 2013	Face-to-face Face-to-face Face-to-face
	Kendall	1. November 29th, 2013 2. December 5th, 2013 3. December 8th, 201	Face-to-face Face-to-face Face-to-face
	Mila	1. November 30th, 2013 2. December 16th, 2013 3. January 6th, 2014	Face-to-face Face-to-face Face-to-face
	Derek	1. December 22nd, 2013 2. January 6th, 2014 3. January 11th, 2014	Skype Skype Skype
	Chloe	1. December 27th, 2013 2. January 13th, 2014 3. January 17th, 2014	Skype Skype Face-to-face
Follow up emails	All participants	November 25th, 2013- March 15th, 2013	Email
Personal memos	Amanda Langlois	November 25th, 2013- March 15th, 2014	Journal
Member checking	All participants	February, 2014	Email
Fellow researcher data audit	Lauren Soluk McGill University	April, 2014	Email

Data Analysis

In order to analyze the data, I used an approach called constant comparison inquiry, which emerged from the work of grounded theory (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, as cited in Butler-Kisber, 2010). Constant comparison inquiry involves a process of unitizing chunks of data, assigning descriptive codes, and writing rules of inclusion in order to specify which types of data

belong in each category (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Throughout this process, the researcher moves from using descriptive categories towards a more conceptual understanding of the data. This process involves working with the words derived from participants. Words are important in qualitative research as using the words of the participants reflect the underpinnings of the qualitative paradigm.

> Words are the way that most people come to understand their situations. We create our world with words. We explain ourselves with words. We defend and hide ourselves with words. The task of the qualitative researcher is to find patterns within those words (and actions) and to present those patterns for others to inspect while at the same time staying as close to the construction of the word as the participants originally experienced it. (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 18)

Data analysis began the moment I started interviewing. Butler-Kisber (2011) states, "analysis is going on from the outset-based on what the researcher brings with her to the inquiry, what she pays attention to, and selects out of what she is hearing, seeing and recording, and how the field texts are constructed" (p. 30). As I interviewed the participants, I wrote reflective memos and attended to the particularities of the interviews. This informal analysis also took place by personally transcribing all of the interviews. While the transcription process proved to be time consuming, it was also helpful as it informed my early analysis and provided me with a greater understanding of and familiarity with the data. In order to organize the field texts and make individual excerpts easily retrievable, I created a folder labeled with each participant's pseudonym, and included all three transcribed interviews identified with numbers one, two, or three. These numbers depicted which interview it was in the three-interview series. Within each transcribed interview, I divided the document into a three-column table, whereby I numbered the

lines in the field text, included the transcribed material, and added an extra column for coding. This allowed me to easily retrieve and locate sections of the transcribed field texts as they were organized according to the participant's name, the interview number, and the lines numbered in the interview.

The first step I took to formally analyze the field texts was to engage in many close readings. This involved reading the transcripts several times and writing notes in the margins about my initial thoughts and ideas for codes. After re-reading all of the transcribed interviews, I began by coding each chunk from the field text descriptively and assigning codes such as "finding work", "feeling stressed", "roommate support", "process of creation", and "choosing a discipline", in the extra column in the word document. The data helped me to select the code names, as they were derived directly from the statements that the participants made.

114 115 116 117 118 119	I'm trying to prepare my next step in life because, my performing has been the last 10, 8 years of my life, I still of course love performing, and I still can perform, I'm not ready yet to say I'm going to stop performing, but I know that it's happening and I'm preparing myself for that, so I guess that's	Preparing for the future

Figure 1. Coding Example (Mila/3/114-118). This figure illustrates the organization of the transcripts.

Initially, the field texts produced a list of many categories with assigned code names. I used many codes derived closely from what the participants had said, as I wanted to remain open to what was found within the data. Then I made a large list of all of the codes, and like figuring out a puzzle, I sat down and played with all of the codes until I was able to reduce them to more general descriptive codes. Afterwards, I lumped them together into manageable categories. From the original list of hundreds of codes, I was able to generate ten broad categories. During this process, I was continuously jotting down ideas and modifying, expanding, and deducing categories.

After arriving at the 10 broad categories, I assembled all of the field texts excerpts into a separate document under each category. For instance, in the document titled "Peer Relationships," I took all of the segments of transcribed texts from all seven participants that had to do with peer relationships, and assembled it into one document. In order to determine which data fit under which heading, I wrote rules of inclusion. Writing rules of inclusion was helpful as it allowed me to more clearly identify the criteria in order to place chunks of field texts into particular categories. Butler-Kisber (2011) explains, "these rules are based on what is contained in the chunk of each field text, not on some abstract idea in the mind of the researcher" (p. 31). The rules of inclusion that I established were constantly modified as I reflected and actively familiarized myself with the data. By separating all of the field texts, I started to notice repeated patterns across the texts. An example that sheds light on this process was when I read the interviews in isolation I did not notice that the theatre classes had had a major impact on any of the accounts of the participants' experiences in circus school. Nevertheless, when I grouped all of the comments about the theatre classes together, there were striking similarities in the way that the participants talked about their lack of confidence in these particular classes.

After separating and organizing the data, I looked for broader and more conceptual themes. This procedure was the most challenging step in the process of analysis, as it required constant moving back and forth between the field texts. I used visual representation in the form of concept mapping to sort through the data and I played around organizing and re-organizing the 10 broad categories. In discussing the categories with my supervisor, I began to think about the relationships between the categories and within the categories. The use of visual mapping and talking about the characteristics in each category helped me to arrive at four themes. For instance, I had originally grouped "peer relations" and "emotions" together as I understood that

peers supported the participants' emotions during circus school. However, after careful analysis, I realized that I needed to attend to the commonalities between the categories instead of looking at the ways that they interacted. Therefore, I grouped "emotions" and "transitions" together, not because transitions produced emotions, but because they shared something in common, as they were both "moments of instability."

Finding the appropriate terminology to conceptualize my themes was also challenging. For instance, initially the theme, "Embracing Circus Life" was called, "Tapping into Circus Culture." Through discussions with my supervisor, I realized that culture was not the most fitting term as it encompassed a pre-established definition. Additionally, the theme "Pushing Borders" was originally called "Forming Tools in a Box". I had to play around with the words to find the best possible combination that clearly reflected the categories within each theme.

After arriving at the four emerging themes, I ensured that there was a clear and identifiable distinction between each theme. It was through this process that I began to notice how the first three themes actually produced the fourth theme. I found that the themes "Pushing Borders", "Living in a State of Disequilibrium" and "Experiencing a Polarity of Emotions" together produced the fourth theme, "Embracing Circus Life". These themes will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Four. Afterwards, I re-read the assembled data sets to ensure that the themes made sense and answered my research questions. At the end of this process, I felt that I understood the way in which the themes told a story.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology used to conduct my research. By using a qualitative approach I felt that I was able to use the voices of my participants to answer my research questions. I engaged in ethical practices and used strategies to establish trustworthiness

and researcher reflexivity. Throughout the next chapter, I will elaborate further at how I arrived at the conceptual themes, as well as discuss the overall themes that arose from the data collected.

Chapter Four: Discussions of Findings

> If we really want to evolve in a fashion that is true to our fundamental beliefs, but which is also pertinent to the wider context in which we live, then we have to confront a certain reality. We have to be prepared to see, or hear, things that we may not necessarily agree with, or to find ourselves face to face with opinions and points of view that differ from our own. We may discover expectations of us that we were completely unaware of, and preconceived ideas that were forced outside our scope of influence.
>
> (Pascal Jacob, 2008, p. 4-5)

The following chapter discusses the themes that emerged as a result of the analysis of the field texts in my study. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings, which can be framed by the overarching research question and sub-questions that I posed at the beginning of my research. These include:

- How do graduates of a post-secondary circus school program in Canada perceive the design, content and delivery of the curriculum?
    - How do graduates describe their experiences and feelings about the three main curricular content areas: academic, technical, and arts-based classes?
    - What has been learned from the participants' experiences of attending a post-secondary circus school program?
    - How did attending a post-secondary circus education contribute, or not, to the students' careers in circus arts?

Introduction

After a systematic exploration of the field texts using a constant comparison approach (Chapter Three), four conceptual themes emerged which provide insights about the research questions posed. These included: 1) Pushing Borders; 2) Living in a State of Disequilibrium; 3) Constructing Families; and 4) Embracing Circus Life. While visually mapping the four themes, I realized that the first three themes together resulted in the fourth theme. The first three themes

are essentially characteristics of the lifestyle of professional circus artists. By adopting these three characteristics, the participants began to fully embrace circus life.

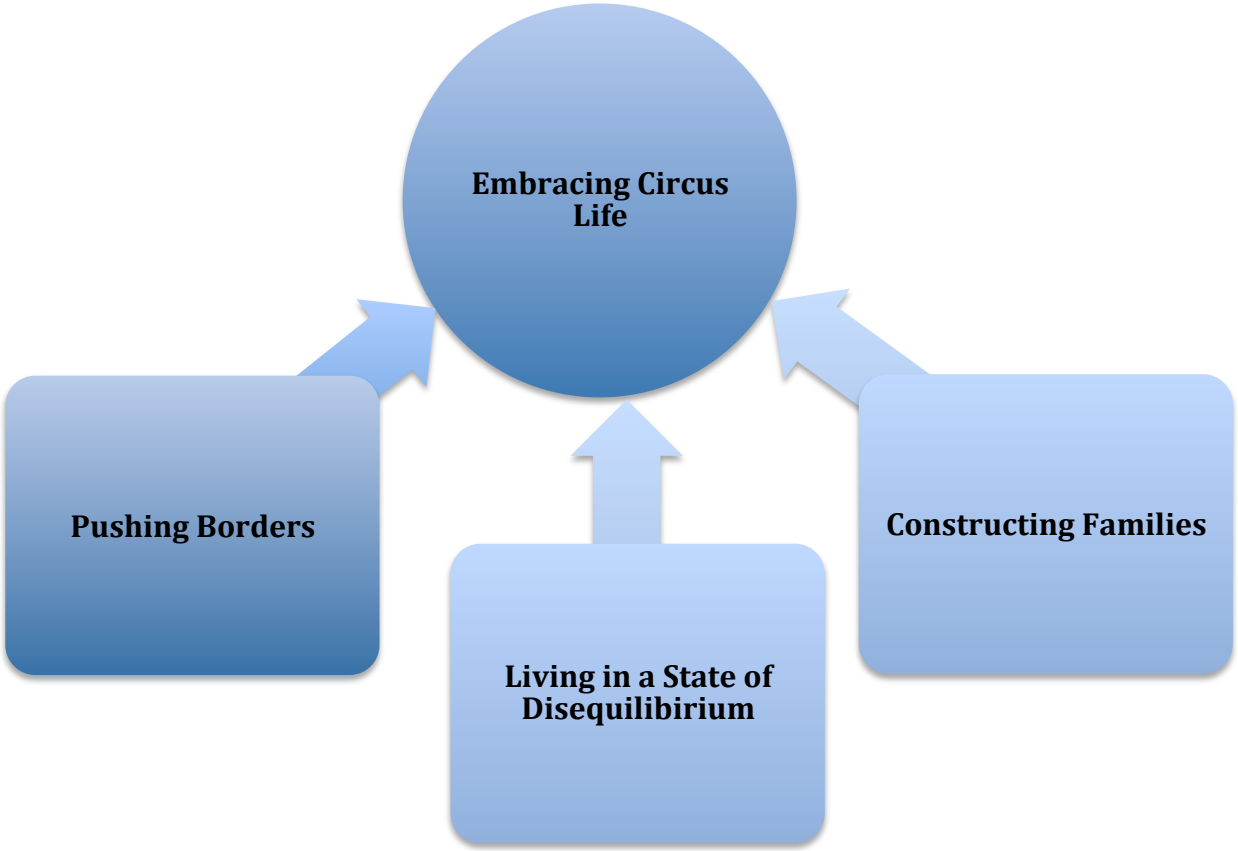

Figure 2. Embracing Circus Life. This figure illustrates how 1) Pushing Borders; 2) Living in a State of Disequilibrium; and 3) Constructing Families, together all contributed to 4) Embracing Circus Life.

At first I intended to link my research questions with each given theme, but after careful consideration, I realized that most of my research questions were in part answered by all four themes. Ultimately, these four themes describe the experiences and feelings of students who attended a post-secondary circus school program, their perceptions about the program, and how they were able to apply skills learned in school into their careers as circus artists.

Arriving at the Themes

The themes emerged from the 21 interviews that were conducted with participants, and from my own reflective memos throughout the study. After close reading, coding, collapsing, and expanding categories, as well as looking for broader themes, I was able to separate all of the field text excerpts into 10 descriptive categories. These categories included labels such as "developing physicality" and "desiring to perform". Afterwards, I carefully selected particular descriptive categories, and grouped them into four categories. I began to move from a descriptive outlook to a more conceptual understanding of the data. It is important to acknowledge that I arrived at the conceptual themes by playing an active role as a researcher, and by categorizing the data from the descriptive categories into groups that seemed to belong together. I engaged in a process of coding without trying to fit the data into pre-existing coding structures. Nevertheless, the coding system was still driven by my own pre-conceptions. By asking questions such as "What is going on between the lines?" and "What are the participants' experiences saying about the overall program and circus arts in general?" I was able to examine the data in a broader sense and arrived at a more profound understanding of the ways that the participants experienced the curriculum.

Table Four presents an overview of the themes, the categories that make up the themes, and the rules of inclusion which articulate the criteria used to specify which data excerpts belong in each category.

Table 4

Themes, Patterns and Rules of Inclusion

Category	Rule of inclusion	Theme
Discovering the creative process	…refers to all excerpts about the artistic process individually or with a coach.	Pushing borders
Developing physicality	…refers to all chunks of data about physical training and physical changes as a result of the training.	
Engaging in the core curriculum	…refers to all examples, feelings and insights about the courses offered, the curricular organization and the teaching approach.	
Constant transitioning	…refers to all chunks of data that discuss a transition in the participants lives, both in and out of circus school.	Living in a state of disequilibrium
Experiencing a polarity of emotions	…refers to all excerpts of data with references to emotions.	
Forming peer relationships	…refers to all chunks of data that refer to the participant's relationship with their peers.	Constructing families
Navigating professional relationships	…refers to all excerpts of field texts with references to relationships to the greater circus community, including coaches, administration, employers and directors.	
Abiding by unspoken rules	…refers to all excerpts that described rules that were followed that were not part of the official program.	Embracing circus life
Desiring to perform	…refers to all chunks of data that have to do with performance.	
Developing a circus identity	…refers to all excerpts that specify the differences between circus and other art forms. Additionally, it includes all references to data characterizing the differences between traditional circuses and circuses of today.	

Theme One: Pushing Borders

One of the first themes to emerge from the data was *Pushing Borders*. The categories that surfaced in the field texts have to do with the ways that the participants talked about the creative process, developing their physicality, and their experiences in the circus classes. The theme developed from a statement that one of the participants made while they were describing the program, whereby she stated:

> *You know, we are doing art, and the school is sometimes like that, [makes a box with hands] and you can't go past that, but sometimes you need a teacher to push this and maybe have everybody run naked through the school*. (Alice/3/147-148)

This study affirms the notion that borders provide structure in both circus arts and in the formal circus school program. These structures refer to explicit arrangements, such as schedules, rules, and formal processes. As is common in many artistic fields, innovative ideas often arise when these borders or limitations are challenged. The participants expressed their desire to confront these structures by provoking change. Nevertheless, the participants also warned that these limitations should not be challenged too abruptly, or severely, because abrupt changes can have a negative impact on the structure of the overall program. Refer back to Table Four on page 61 for an overview of the categories and rules of inclusion that make up the theme *Pushing Borders*.

Discovering the creative process. Through reading the field texts, it became apparent that the creative process in school unveiled many insights about the participants' lived experiences while undertaking the program. Originally, I had thought that the theatre and dance classes were something that the participants would deem as part of the creative process. However, the participants referred to the creative process as the creation of an act. This is comprised of structuring a complete circus number, including selecting the music, costume, and

concept that they wished to convey. Creating a complete circus act is developed with guidance from an artistic counselor at the National Circus School. There is time in the program set aside for students to work with an advisor, who helps them to develop an artistic concept for the act that they plan to perform at graduation. This was separate from what they were learning in their technical classes, as this time was specified in the curriculum for focusing on the artistic components involved in creation. In fact, one of the primary objectives of the curriculum at the National Circus School of Montreal is for its graduates to be able to create an artistic circus act. Many of the participants expressed this as one of their primary reasons for attending the National Circus School.

> *Well one of the reasons I actually went to Montreal was cause' in Montreal you graduate with an act… So I liked the idea of really spending the time on one specific six minutes and just refine, refine, and refine*. (Michael/2/535-54)

> *For me the French school is more about making people want to build a company, so graduate with a big group of people, and follow up with making a show, whereas ENC is more about preparing people to make an act, which is more like, a five or seven minute intense act on only one discipline, and I think it made me more specific in my work by only focusing in one direction*. (Alice/2/9-15)

My analysis revealed that the creative process was integrated into the curriculum in a manner that greatly encouraged individualism and experimentation. The program offered opportunities for students to integrate their backgrounds in other fields into their creative research, as well it offered many different points of entry to delve into this process. Through this approach, the participants pushed their own artistic borders to come up with an idea for their final circus act.

> *In creation it was me and my instrument. I played on it by finding what I really liked to do… It was my original idea. I really wanted to do something with those things together [instrument and circus], because that is what I really like to do*. (Chloe/2/222-223, 227-228)

> *I worked with [an artistic counselor in the school] and what we worked on was basically adapting music with my circus discipline. It was definitely one of my favourite moments in school. I liked getting to do a presentation because we formed a band and I got to use my circus skills and make music at the same time. (*Derek/2/660-664)

> *I think it's interesting to have diversity in creation and to be able to switch into a totally different character…the diversity of artistic classes brings you tools so you are able to express different things that sometimes you don't even know that you can express, but that by experimenting, it helps bring you in new directions, you just do things differently.* (Alice/2/88-89, 94-97)

It is interesting to note also that this was a common trend in the participants' professional careers. The participants were often asked to incorporate their personal talents and backgrounds, in fields such as dance and music, into shows. For example, one participant stated, *"I got to do this creation on point shoes…Because I used to dance point when I was a kid and the director knew that"* (Mila/ 2/74-76).

While the creative process encouraged uniqueness and artistic investigation, the participants also expressed how there was a slow transition that took place in arriving at a point where they that felt they had a deeper understanding of what it meant to create art. The participants articulated their gradual understanding of the creative process while studying at the National Circus School. They went from thinking that creating an act was an external process, whereby they had to choose a song, an idea, and a costume, to beginning to internalize the creative process as they identified the meaning behind their creative choices.

> *I remember my first hour with the artistic counselor in school (laughs). I was just talking to her and so she was like, "What do you want to express?" I didn't really get it. I would just put music on and would move. I would just feel without knowing necessarily what it is, and I was not really getting it in the beginning. I learned slowly through my three years, what it means so you can actually express and transform something, that has more meaning than "oh I'm just a butterfly".* (Michael/2/245-255)

> *I didn't get it for a long time so I did it, sort of, to please my teacher, but not really with the intent of thinking, this actually helping me, and there wasn't a moment when it just clicked, it was just a slow thing of, well it actually kind of makes sense in ways.* (Mila/1/443-446)

Throughout the program, the participants explained how they learned to push the borders of their own creative limits by questioning their creative decisions, and looking internally rather than trying to please others.

The participants in the study tried to find ways to maintain their past identities, but at the same time embrace their new identity as circus artists. They wanted to use their backgrounds in gymnastics and dance, amongst others, to help them in their circus careers, but they did not want their backgrounds to define their present state of being. For instance, they wanted to be identified as a circus performer, rather than a gymnast, or a dancer who was doing circus.

> *I didn't want to be cheesy at all. That's not at all what I wanted. I wanted to have a good vocabulary, raw and kind of cool, so through school I kept my background of a dancer being very important to me, but I didn't want anyone to be like, "Oh, there's a dancer on the [apparatus]", I wanted to be a circus performer. (*Kendall/ 2/ 15-19)

> *One of the hardest moments for me was the switch from sports to circus. It's not a world, it's another, well you know circus, it's not even a sport, it's an art and a passion that you have to do*. (Chloe/1/278-280)

Even though the participants talked positively about the creative process in the first two years of the program, as the demands of graduation fell upon them, they started to feel pressure from the institution. They felt that the school was trying to influence them to create something with a specific aesthetic. Many participants explained that the greatest challenge that they faced at circus school was the paradox of being an artist and engaging in artistic exploration, while at the same time fulfilling the requirements that are part of an institutionalized structure. One participant stated, "*You know, I think the school tries to guide people in artistic directions that they think are right for them, but sometimes the school totally gets it wrong what's right for a particular person"* (Mila/3/ 262-264). Others tended to agree with this statement.

> *By the time I was in third year they were telling me, "Yea, so create something", but if you do something a little bit in a direction that they're not sure of they're like, "Why are*

> *you doing this?" you know, and so you are like, "Ok, I'll bring it back down", and you'll try to refine, but what you're really doing is stifling your creativity, and trying to please them.* (D.B./1/404-408)

> *I could have stopped and started a whole new concept in third year because a lot of people do that. In second year it's nice, you can explore whatever you want and you don't have the pressure to do something good.* (Chloe/2/277-280)

> *One thing that really blew my mind about the nature of the school was that I didn't see one person, not one single person, no matter how strong a personality they had, or how unique of a life experience they had when they came into that place, or how clear they were about who they were and what they wanted, I didn't see one person make it all the way through the third year and not come out a total confused basket case, who had no idea what they liked, no idea who they wanted to be, and no idea what was really important to them, and that's just what, institutional school formation does.* (Derek/ 1/470-476)

This duality, the tension between creating art and fulfilling the expectations of the institution, tended to expand into the professional world of circus arts. For instance, the participants felt that they often had to sacrifice their own artistic choices while working with specific directors and companies. In professional circus work, artists often felt that they had to alter their artistic vision to adhere to the pressures and realities of the commercial world of circus arts, by making their acts marketable instead of as creative as they desired.

> *Because now being on the market, I see and I know that I created an act for completely different reasons… At school you create an act for yourself, you do what you like to do, which is good in the end, but also, many acts are not sellable after all.* (Chloe/ 2/366-37)

> *Sometimes we do a contract because they are really well paid in a short period of time so you make a good amount of money even if it's not really you and what you really want to do, and sometimes it's because the artistic contract is really interesting for you.* (Alice/1/ 547-550)

The participants seemed to want to push their artistic borders, but had to make decisions about how far they were willing to adapt their acts to satisfy the school or their employers.

The data illustrates how there are many similarities between the way that the school structured the process of learning to create, and the ways in which realities in commercial circus

also placed demands upon the artists. The school placed pressure and restrictions on the students as they created their circus acts that were similar to the demands of professional companies and directors. The data revealed that there are tensions involved in creating art within an institutionalized setting. There was a tension between striving for potential and possibility while preparing students for successful careers in the workforce. I wonder to what extent students should go, in order to push the boundaries of their own creative limits, and assert their ideas within the institutional framework. Also, I am curious about how much this institutional barrier might actually promote growth by providing a structure and a vision. Additionally, the data illustrated how the participants tended to focus on attaining personal goals while in the program, and did not always consider the constraints in the professional field. It is this duality that seems to weigh heavily on the curricular structure and the experiences of the participants in the study.

Developing physicality. When people think about the circus, they often imagine the great physical acts and death-defying stunts that are executed every day. By pushing the boundaries of their own bodies, circus artists are encouraged to discover their capabilities. Prior to conducting this study, I was curious about the structure of the programming and how it allowed for these types of physical achievements. While analyzing the data, I was extremely surprised that very few participants talked about the physical feats and challenges involved in training to become a circus artist. Many of my interview questions were directed towards the physicality involved in training, but the artists seemed to talk much more about their emotional journey throughout circus school, rather than their physical development. The participants were passionate and expressive during their interviews, and perhaps they spoke more about their emotional journey because they did not consider themselves to be just circus performers, they were circus artists. Every skill that they performed was connected to a personal experience,

story or a feeling that they wanted to convey. Nevertheless, in the limited number of statements that participants made, a few patterns emerged. The first pattern that emerged was that the participants described an immediate physical change as a result of the training routine. For instance, one participant stated, *"In the beginning, I felt that four hours a week was hard, because my hands hurt so bad, they weren't used to it yet, but by third year I craved as many hours as I could get, because my body was used to it"* (Kendall/1/506-509). Another participant explained,

> *There was another kind of critical threshold that has passed, and that was, my first year was totally characterized by being injured all the time, like all the time, cause' my body just couldn't take it. It took a while to basically to just put enough meat on my bones to stand up to what the training would take out of me*. (Derek/2/445-448)

They pushed their physical capabilities, and saw physical changes as a result of the training, which helped them to prepare for such physical careers.

While I anticipated that injuries would be a common topic throughout my research, I was surprised at how little the participants had to say about injuries. Michael stated, *"I've been pretty lucky so far. I've had smaller shoulder problems, and of course like tendonitis, and all those things, you know, general stuff happens"* (Michael/1/510-511). Another participant explained,

> *In school I did have one big injury but it didn't really affect my choices or how I was seeing circus at this time… In a way I am glad I was hurt at the very beginning of the program there, because in general everything goes so fast. If you are injured, you totally miss a lot of things, and for a long time you are just running to catch everything up, but for me it was ok*. (Chloe/Follow-up email/1-2, 5-9)

At first I was surprised by the realization that injuries did not seem to be a prominent topic throughout my interviews, nevertheless, I had a moment of clarity when one participant explained it this way,

> *I think there are two directions when you get hurt, and it happens all the time. You get hurt, and one side is going to be like, they get depressed, they don't want to work, they want to change, or there are people that are wanting to work, and be even stronger. I wanted to finish school even more, and I wanted to be back in shape, so I was good. (*Alice/2/560-564)

It made me realize that injuries in circus arts are not always seen as a setback, but they can also be seen as a challenge that needs to be overcome. They can sometimes even motivate the students to want to grow as an artist.

Because circuses are known to have artists who are physically in shape, I was surprised that out of the seven participants in my study, only one of them expressed issues with her body image.

> *I think it was a timing thing. I was still young and I was always worried about my body being fit, and slim, and working to the bone… It was my pressure. I always wanted someone to tell me that I needed to lose weight, because I wanted the pressure, but being a soloist, no, you can be your own weight (laughs). No, it was my own pressure, no one ever told me to lose weight.* (Mila/ 3/184-185,189-191)

In such a physical artistic field, it was important to investigate what this meant in my study. The physical aspects of the program seemed to be almost assumed by the participants. I speculate that the physical training was so engrained in their daily routine that injuries became a familiar part of their circus training. The students seemed to learn that injuries were part of the profession, therefore, rather than trying to avoid injuries, they learned to accept and to adapt their practice. Compared to sports, where injuries might prevent an athlete from being the best, circus is an art form, which accepts adaptations. For instance, circus artists are not always expected to perform the same tricks every single show. They are often allowed to adapt or change their tricks depending on their personal health and well-being. Also, I noticed that the participants spoke about experiencing an increased number of injuries during their first year of the program. Their bodies seemed to be adapting to the intense training program at that National Circus

School. Perhaps, as they progressed in their circus training, they also were more physically equipped to overcome and work with their injuries.

Engaging in the core curriculum. A large majority of the field texts reflected the participants' feelings and opinions about the three main curricular content areas: academic, artistic and technical, and the organizational framework of the school curriculum. The participants tended to talk about the organizational structure of the program and how they felt that it was the optimal training program to become a great circus artist. Nevertheless, they also spoke about how the structure could sometimes regulate their development a bit too narrowly.

> *They do offer a very good program. It's very complete. You get to work with people that you wouldn't, that it would take, it would take maybe ten years to work with in a professional setting, you know, amazing directors and stuff that will come in, that, and you know, we were actually important to these people, and you're getting really crazy hands-on experience and stuff, but now it's at a price, because now they have like this structure and everything, but because of that, that's their limiting thing you know.* (D.B./1/234-240)

> *I think ENC is pretty one of a kind, especially around here, because you can't, it's just such specialized and intense training for what we want to do, and anywhere else you can't do such intense training, and to get professional, to get where we wanna' be, you need intense training. You need all this stuff that makes the three years at ENC so hard but we need that, it's necessary, so I think it's an amazing school. I'm really really thankful for it, but then again, there are some things that are, there's politics and there's the administrative thing that's not so fun to work with, and sometimes not easy to talk to, but at the same time, it's a school and every school has that.* (Kendall/3/37-45)

The technical classes, which included the fundamental skill classes necessary to become a circus artist, included classes such as handstands, acrobatics, and trampoline, amongst others. Generally, the field texts reflected a very positive experience in these courses. Many of the participant statements that reflected positively upon the technical courses had to do with their perceived usefulness and a need for those skills in the professional working world of circus arts. If a course was deemed practical for their careers, then they tended to see it more favourably than a course in which they had difficulty seeing the connection between what was being taught, and

how they were going to use those skills in a circus profession. Chloe explained, "*I know that in the moment I hate it but also it feels so good because you need it, you need it for your discipline, you really need it* (Chloe/299-300). Michael also illustrated how he liked classes that he could apply in his own practice,

> *I liked the classes like handstands and trampoline and acrobatics and musculation, which were geared specifically towards what I wanted to do… They taught me the vocabulary and then I just sort of created, sort of my own little routines out of it that I felt worked for me*. (Michael/3-2/145,424-426)

The participants in my study tended to value practical knowledge, but I would suggest that it is important to consider the benefits of the theoretical knowledge as well. By only appreciating the classes that had practical implications on their training it could be well that the students were missing out on theoretical knowledge that might challenge and advance their thinking. I am curious if there is a better way to bridge the gap between the theoretical and the practical knowledge in order to further the circus artist's development.

Additionally, in their technical classes, the participants tended to see immediate outcomes and skill development as a result of the training. Even though the participants still described challenges in these courses, they were able to overcome the challenges when they could foresee development as a result of their effort. Alice stated, *"It is so satisfying to get to a better level when you know it's going to help your major" (*Alice/2/465-466). Mila provided an example when she specified,

> *I never thought I would be able to do that stuff. I was starting twisting back step outs and I was doing aerial walkovers into an aerial into a back step out with no hands... The school really set my standard high and because of that I'm an expert at what I do, and because of the hardcore training, I'm always able to do it, like cold, but I wouldn't, I know I need to warm up, but, the confidence that I have mentally, because you go through a lot of spatial orientation learning, mental training, ripping and burning, nothing hurts anymore, you are like yes, I'm ripped again, so they got me at a really good level*. (Mila/ 3/170-176)

Also, I began to realize that the data reflected an association between the courses and the teachers. The teachers in the technical classes usually had past experience in the professional working world of circus, therefore they tended to relate better to the students and vice versa. One participant explained, *"You know all of the teachers that I got the most out of, and felt that I learned the most from, that really ended up mattering later in my circus career, they themselves had had circus careers"* (D.B./3/320-32).

The data about the technical courses fit into the theme *Pushing Borders,* as it revealed how these classes, as well as instruction from their coaches, helped the students to expand their technical circus repertoire and to achieve physical feats that they never thought were possible. By having teachers who were familiar with the circus field, and courses that taught skills that were directly related to their personal goals, the students surmounted the difficulties in their technical classes in order to challenge their personal physical capabilities.

The academic classes, which refer to any classes that occurred in a traditional academic classroom setting, were often referred to in the data as "the night classes" or "the sit down classes". The general feelings about these classes were that the students did not take them seriously.

> *Like all of the night classes that we took were just, they were just this deranged blur. It was mostly just sitting there in class being completely shell shocked and being like "This is a joke", and by and large it was.* (Derek/1/71-72)

> *Yeah they were kind of a joke as far as classes go, like, yeah it's kind of a joke. I don't really know anybody who takes it seriously even if you try to, it's really hard to take seriously.* (D.B. /2/ 557-559)

Again, there seemed to be a large divide between theory and practice. The participants seemed to have difficulty applying what they had learned in their "sit down classes" to their practical classes, and seeing the importance in learning this knowledge.

The analysis showed that the reason the students had trouble taking these classes seriously was because of the high demands of the other curricular areas. They seemed to focus their personal energy during the daytime in the physical classes and the timing of the evening classes then made it difficult for them to concentrate.

> *People at ENC, 80 to 90 percent of their focus is on, of their studying is not on academics, it's on the physical stuff, or creative or whatever, so not necessarily their fault [the schools]… After 20 minutes on a Wednesday night from six to nine p.m., you tune, your brain can't take any more you know*. (D.B./2/261-262)

> *It sucks because it's six to eight, six to nine, you're tired and the last thing you wanna' do is go study some French… We get to those classes and the teachers, ha, they hate us, because we're, we just did a full day of circus, we're tired and so all we do is like talk and fool around, so it's like, I feel bad*. (Kendall/1/678-679, 682-685)

> *And in academics we were all incapable to sit for three hours. We did nothing. Everybody's moving all around and we needed to do something else. I enjoy learning, but it was never really that good. (*Chloe/2/306-308)

Unlike the technical training classes, the participants also found that they had a hard time transferring the learning from the academic classes to the physical classes, and seeing the usefulness of these courses in their careers.

> *The classes are good in a way but it doesn't bring you to the real fact, like who you should send your c.v. to, or how you should send it. I don't know if it's that useful, like even a website, even if it's the nicest one but nobody has access to it because they don't have the link, nobody will ever look at it or whatever*. (Chloe/2/410-415)

> *I'm not 100 percent sure how efficient those classes actually were with helping me in life after school… we had health and anatomy, which was kind of interesting, but it's not like I really followed the diet, or what's going on*. (Michael/1/195-196, 210-211)

In the academic classes, it seemed as though the borders were not being pushed enough. Even though the participants talked unfavorably about the academic classes, and stated reasons such as timing and exhaustion, I wondered if changing the classroom practices to include more authentic connections to their physical training practice would influence the participants'

experiences in these classes. At one point, a participant talked about a powerful and insightful experience in an academic class whereby she stated,

> *So the biggest class that helped me, this is going to be really weird, in everything, with my mind, was philosophy…that's the class that opened my eyes to a whole new world…and the teacher just questioned me a lot, in ways that other teachers have never questioned me before, but I guess it is philosophy. He would make me answer things instead of just saying I don't know. He made me feel like nothing was stupid, any question was worth asking, and I wish I had that mentality going through high school, because I was like hunched over and hiding in the bathroom because I was too scared to read in public, but just, he taught me about things and relationships. It was all about introducing us to new journeys, and to go and research things on our own outside. I feel that philosophy, gave me the confidence as an artist that I needed.* (Mila/3/196-198, 217-225)

This made me question whether or not exhaustion and timing were the true reasons for the participants' lack of positive experiences in the academic classes, or if their physical nature and inability to sit actually masked their lack of confidence in traditional academic settings. Nevertheless, other participants stated that the academic courses were not challenging enough for them. One participant expressed, *"I felt pretty starved for intellectual stimulation in general"* (Derek/1/96), while another believed that it was too easy because of the cultural differences between North America and Europe, "*Because in Europe, I think the high school academic level is stronger, so it was really boring and easy" (Alice/2/246-247).* This made me wonder whether or not the academic instructors considered the different academic backgrounds, culture, and approaches to learning when designing and implementing their programs.

The participants suggested that the academic courses were somewhat interesting, but that they had difficulty implementing what they learned in a way that furthered their professional career. In an informal conversation after one of the interviews, I wrote a reflective memo in which I stated,

> *After the interview, while finishing our tea, Alice looked up at me and stated, "You know, the academic classes don't matter really. It is a circus school, so we are just there*

> *for the artistic classes and the technical training. They are just a requirement for the school to be able to give diplomas and get money." (Langlois/January 11th, 2014/Memo #13)*

Upon reflecting on the theme *Pushing Borders*, it made me realize that the borders in the academic courses were not being pushed enough. The students seemed content to attend the classes just to "*slump in a corner and drool and stare at the ceiling while the teachers told you to sit down and do that"* (Derek/1/76-77). It seemed as though the structure was in place, but there was little attempt to revolutionize, to create, and to inspire the learners, as in their other courses. The students seemed to have the impression that the academic courses were a mere formality mandated by the school, and were not essential to their development as professional circus artists.

The artistic courses were not grouped together, but were spoken about in the data as either "theatre classes" or "dance classes". Ultimately, by examining the field texts, it became apparent that there were very strong negative feelings about the theatre class, particularly centered on the notion of confidence. *"Theatre was really hard for me. Theatre was like my weak spot. I was really nervous about theatre"* (Kendall/1/615-616), Kendall expressed. Others described their experiences as,

> *For me all of the artistic things in school have to be fun. You have to build confidence on stage instead of feeling like you are not good enough. I think in theatre a lot of the stuff we felt like we were not good enough, or we felt that we were not actors enough. (*Alice/2/65-68)

> *Sometimes theatre teachers get really frustrated with circus people because they are used to people who listen, stay silent, and they're ultra analytical, cerebral, like a different breed from circus people. Normally an acrobat is going to be fidgety and bouncing around. (*D.B./3/389-392)

> *I mean if you go through this process and totally get your sense of self-destroyed, and then you manage to grow a new sense of self, that's a very robust sense of self, but not everyone does, and it depends a lot on your luck of what happens after school, and if you manage to have experiences to regenerate your sense of self or not…I didn't feel like*

> *I deserved to stand on a stage, and for years afterwards, I kind of felt the same, until things started to change*. (Derek/2/542-546,562-563)

I noticed that some of the participants attributed the difficulties in theatre classes to their own development and insecurities, whereas others seemed to place the responsibility on the teacher. Even though commonalities in the data arose about the negative feelings regarding their development in theatre, I was surprised that many participants referred to their theatre training as adequate and essential for their working environment.

> *For me personally, it has been being well rounded that has been the key to my success in my opinion. The fact that I am able to dance and to act, and you know, like the* general education. (Kendall/3/198-201)

> *My coach said something really wise that really changed my perspective, which was, "If you learn to do the things that you do not like, you can walk out on stage, and never do any of those things, but you are going to carry something with you out on stage that the entire audience will be able to see even if you yourself can never really see it". I definitely felt that my theater and dance experience changed the way that I was on stage. (Derek/2/267-273)*

Some participants actually talked about how their theatre development tended to continue as they entered the workforce, and that gaining work experience furthered their confidence levels.

> *I learned how to do things with your eyes closed, and to feel the texture. It's not for sure things that I wouldn't think of, but I think I advanced more artistically when I joined a professional circus company, the director really advanced me more artistically*. (Mila/3/177-179)

Although few comments were made about the dance classes, most participants felt that teachers strongly influenced the quality of the dance classes, despite the variety of the teaching styles utilized over three years. They also spoke about the ways in which the classes were differentiated to meet the levels of all of the students. One participant spoke about the way that the dance teacher would adapt her lessons for him, *"She'd know things were easier for me, so she would ask me to do doubles, or go twice as fast"* (Kendall/1/609-610).

Additionally, one dance class on movement in particular stood out as being extremely memorable in their experiences at circus school. The participants spoke very highly of the class stating, "*It was incredible, it was amazing*" (D.B./2/488), and "*[The teacher] was pushing us in directions we never took*" (Alice/2/468). In this particular class, the participants explained how they were challenged to step outside of their comfort zones and expose their vulnerabilities. By pushing the limits of their own borders, they felt that they progressed as circus artists. From what I gathered from the interviews, it seemed as though the students perceived courses more positively when they were allowed more freedom and exploration. Also it seemed as though the teacher had a strong impact on the participants' feelings and opinions about the courses.

There were strong differences in the students' experiences between the three curricular content areas. Multiple patterns arose which indicated which methods and strategies helped to support students in pushing their personal borders, and what types of situations tended to stifle their growth. In general, the perceived usefulness of the skills being taught had a great impact on the students' perceived value and effort in the course. Additionally, the teacher also had an impact on the students' perception of the courses. What was surprising, while analyzing the data, was that there was little overlap between participant statements about the three curricular content areas. The students separated each learning experience into "neat little boxes" just as the curriculum schedule was structured. For instance, they rarely talked about cross-curricular learning, such as integrating dance or theatre, into their technical circus classes. For instance, one participant explained his daily routine as follows,

> *Warming up before the first class, and then having, probably four hours of handstands, acro, flex and trampoline, having lunch, and then maybe having music and rhythmic for maybe two hours, and then maybe having musculation and juggling or something, and then I would have dinner, probably then a night class, an academic class, or stay and train.* (Michael/2/316-32)

Michael and all the other participants in the study, seemed to explain their daily routine, and talk about their courses, as very separate entities. Whereas circus is believed to be unique as it integrates multiple art forms, the participants tended to experience these subjects areas in isolation. In reflecting upon the curricular structure, and the theme *Pushing Borders*, I wonder how melding some of the borders by allowing more connection between curricular content areas might help the students to see their perceived usefulness.

Ultimately, within the theme *Pushing Borders*, the participants expressed how the structure of the program at the National Circus School offered them stability and direction. Nevertheless, the participants felt that the direction of the program was not always aligned with their personal goals and career interests. Also, in the participants' view, the value of each course for their future was not always clear. These borders, the structure of the curriculum, are in place to help individuals benefit from an optimal training program to become professional circus artists. However, the courses offered, the people influencing and teaching the program, and the structures of formalized institutions tended to create limitations on the potential growth of the students. The borders underpinning the curriculum optimized the training program in certain courses, and with particular teachers, but the organization of the program also limited other opportunities. While the theme *Pushing Borders* expressed how participants pushed their personal limits through the curricular structure, the next theme, *Living in a State of Disequilibrium*, conveys the way in which the field of circus arts is characterized by moments of instability.

Theme Two: Living in a State of Disequilibrium

By analyzing the field texts, I came to realize that the life of a circus performer is characterized by constant transitions. The participants in my study described a continuous state of undergoing

major changes in their lives. These included, but were not limited to, their acceptance and integration into the rigorous curricular program at the National Circus School, their transitions across the three years of the program, the challenges involved in finding work immediately after they graduated, the unpredictability involved in finding circus employment, and the transition from being a performer to establishing another profession because circus careers are generally short lived. Furthermore, the participants tended to experience a wide range of emotions, as the physical and artistic aspects of circus training often had a strong impact on their emotional state. While initially I expected the participants to talk about their physical and artistic development, I found that the emotional repercussions of the physical and artistic training tended to have a stronger presence in their interviews. I came to realize that the participants were trying to balance their emotions as they navigated through the challenges involved in training and working as a circus artist. It was through this realization that the second theme, *Living in a State of Disequilibrium*, emerged. Refer back to Table Four on page 61 for an overview of this theme.

Constant transitioning. The participants discussed constantly moving from one experience to another. Initially, I had focused my research on the transition from graduating from the National Circus School to working as a professional circus performer and had ignored the many other transitions that were dispersed throughout their stories. As I looked more closely, it became apparent that there were three major transitions that the participants focused on. These included transitioning from second to third year in the National Circus School program, transitioning from being a student to being a professional, and transitioning from their circus careers to retirement as they aged. Interestingly, across all of these moments of transition, pressure seemed to be the overwhelming feeling that the participants experienced.

The data illustrated how the transition from second to third year was paramount, as it was a time that many participants started to feel an increased amount of pressure from their peers, and from the institution. Whereas second year was still explorative, it seemed as though the anticipation of graduating and beginning their professional careers tended to put an expiration date on their freedom to explore. Rather than focus on the process, they started to feel pressured to produce an act for graduation.

> *[Second year is] is mainly about having a second discipline and more hours for your discipline, and you start also having hours for the directeur artistique, to see where you want to go, but it's only one hour by week, but still, asking you where you want to go and your personal development of creation of the act… In third year you have time with someone that really guides you through the act, and the process of creating an act, and the music and the concept, and you build something out of this, because, all the other things that you did, now you see it's for something bigger… but it's true that third year gets more stressful and everybody is in their own project and life. Third year was hard for me because everybody was a bit too stressed and the school puts a lot of pressure on you. You feel more and more pressure and it's bigger, but it is also because you are going to graduate soon and get into the professional life but yea, it changed a lot, it changed me.* (Chloe/1/256-269, 263-266, 284-289)

When the participants graduated from the National Circus School program, the first year afterwards was a significant experience that all of the participants talked about. Three out of the seven participants had contracts before they even graduated; nevertheless, they were still faced with challenges that were new to them.

> *I didn't have any problem getting a contract after school. It's the opposite. We've tried to have some vacation cause' I didn't have a lot, but it's, it's also a lot of work, there is a lot of work.* (Chloe/2/663-665)

> *I got a contract with a company right out of school and then I had a dream company asking me to quit my contract to go with them. I had my very first job that I got on my own, and I felt wrong if I cancelled my contracts, and I also didn't want to be known as someone who cancels contracts for the better one, and unfortunately I said no to them [dream company] for the professional reason of breaching my contract. I didn't want to do that but later on, [dream company] told me they respected me even more for doing that.* (Mila/2/47-54)

The other four participants who did not find contracts immediately after graduation tended to take approximately one year before they felt that they had achieved a more stable economic position in their careers. They described this experience as a period of unrest, in which they were unclear about their identity, and position within the professional circus community. They felt pressured to find economic stability after pursuing the three-year program at the National Circus School, which was designed to prepare them to work in circus employment. Nevertheless, patterns in the field texts tended to reveal a common sense of inner strength and perseverance, as they grappled with this moment of instability.

> *It actually took a good ten months before I kind of found my place, because I decided to stay in Montreal after school without really having, the specific work offers… That was the first year, the first year wasn't an easy year after school… I was kind of like, "Ok I don't know what I'm doing next week, I will just train for now".* (Michael/1/609-610, 670-672)

> *I had a really traumatic time at the end of the year, mostly watching pretty much every single person in my class get job offers, pretty much except for me, from, you know, as a result of the end of the year show. I hadn't graduated with an act that I was particularly proud of.* (Derek/1/520-522)

> *I think I'm still figuring it out, because, after school I was, well I got, I didn't think it was easy, no. It didn't fall in my place at all, yea, nothing, that feels like that's it. No work fell into my lap, I really had to go out and find it.* (Kendall/1/730-733)

Another common transition described by participants was retiring from performing. It is generally assumed that a career in circus arts is short lived, due to the physicality of the profession. Even I had presumed this when I identified the criteria for the participants for my study. Through analyzing the data, there were some interesting patterns that emerged about this moment of disequilibrium. Through the interviews with participants, I learned that all of the participants were still performing, and that six out of the seven participants planned to pursue circus-related careers once they were physically unable to perform. The age of the participant seemed to have an effect on their predicted age of retirement for their circus arts performing

career. The participants who were under 25 years old predicted that they would still be able to perform until their 30s. One participant stated, *"I think I might stop performing maybe at age 30, that scares me a little bit, but I mean you look at people like [performer name] who's 30 something and he's kill-, he's still kicking butt so"* (Kendall/3/21-23). Another participant explained:

> *It's physically maybe 30 to 35 and then you can see what you want to do. Probably something else also in the same area so it can be performing or teaching or being a director or something…I work with a lot of older people that's the thing, 30 and more, and it's a lot of acting in the 30s and 40s, but you can still perform. I think I will be in my 30s or more. I'm happy if I can do my act and I hope I can do my splits until I'm seventy or something*. (Chloe/2/471-473, Chloe/ 3/26-39)

It was interesting that the participants in my study who were over 25 years old tended to predict that they would stop performing at an even older age.

> *I feel young (laughs), even if I am in my 30's now. I would want to perform at least five, five years…I'm not ready to stop performing yet. I'll see, and even if I stop performing, I think I can do a lot of other things, like, I have been teaching circus a little bit already*. (Alice/1/591-592, 593-595)

> *I feel that it takes long to warm-up. It's taking longer and I have to work harder on flexibility than I needed to four years ago, and it just takes more effort now. But I'm still giving myself, I always say for some reason until 40, I want to perform until I am 40*. (Michael/1/841-844)

I speculate that as the circus performers got older, they seemed surprised that they were still capable of performing. As was evident in the statement by Michael, even though he needed more time to prepare his body for the work, he had adapted his training practice to meet these demands. It was interesting that another pattern emerged whereby the participants that I interviewed who were older have already started to plan for this anticipated transition. They seemed to feel pressure from their own physical limits and they began to actively make decisions about their future while they were still working. Throughout the theme, *Constant Transitions,* I realized, perhaps not surprisingly, that the excerpts from the participants illustrated that as they

gained more experience working in circus, they were better able to anticipate and plan for these transitions. One participant described the different roles that he was beginning to pursue while he was still working as a performer. He stated, *"I am opening the doors of artistic coordinator, or working on acts, or teaching, those kinds of things. I don't think I will go back to university once I am done performing"* (Michael/1/849-851). Another participant described her decision to start preparing for the future as follows,

> *I'm trying to prepare myself for my next step in life because my performing has been the last 10 years of my life. I still of course love performing and I still can perform. I'm not ready yet to say that I'm going to stop performing, but I know that it's happening and I'm preparing for that.* (Mila/3/87-91)

Upon analyzing these moments of transitions, I found that "pressure" seemed to be the common factor across all three transitions described in the interviews. The participants seemed to be constantly battling the pressure that stemmed from the uncertainty of the future. In the transition between the second and third year of the program at the National Circus School, the participants felt the pressure to define themselves in an artistic manner. Upon graduating from the National Circus School, they felt the pressure to find employment. Moreover, in reflecting upon their retirement from a performance career, they felt pressured from the realization that their physicality would not enable them to continue in their chosen profession. A career in circus arts is characterized by uncertainty, and the participants in the study identified the common feeling of pressure that they experienced, as they navigated through these moments of disequilibrium. Nevertheless, this pressure was not always perceived negatively. The pressure tended to provoke the participants to anticipate the transitions, and to prepare for them.

Experiencing a polarity of emotions. Emotions were a central subject across all of the interviews. Almost every question that I asked led the participants to talk about an experience, opinion, or reflection that encompassed some kind of emotional element. The most common

emotions that were identified throughout the interviews were stress, fear, confusion, frustration, doubt, and pride. The emotional journey at the National Circus School was one of the most central issues across all of the interviews. The participants felt inclined to talk about these experiences, and described their emotional journey throughout school as living in a state of disequilibrium, whereby they often experienced a wide range of emotions.

The participants' interviews were characterized by a polarity of emotions. They had strong and often extreme emotional reactions to their experiences.

> *I mean school was just a rollercoaster. It was an extreme rollercoaster and the amplitude of the rollercoaster, like the highs of the highs and the lows of the lows just got wider and wider and more extreme as time went on. I think I spent most of third year either hiding under the stairs and crying, or cackling and running through the street, you know with plans to, for total world domination. (*Derek /2/55-60)

> *There were, very, at least three moments where I remember saying, "Ok I need to pee", and I locked myself in the bathroom crying, for like five to six minutes, and then washing my face and leaving as if nothing happened and continuing my class… There were definitely moments where exactly at one point you go like, "Oh wow I can actually hold this trick", or "Oh wow this positions actually works", so you have those little moments of success, and you feel really good about it.* (Michael/2/176-178,274-278)

It was interesting that one of the participants explained how his emotional reactions often manifested themselves in a physical way. His emotional state had a very strong impact on his ability to physically participate in the National Circus School program.

> *When I realized I couldn't, I didn't have any joy for what I was doing, and, for me, it presents itself in a very physical way, in that when I'm really happy, and I like what I'm doing, and I'm motivated, I'm like invincible in a way. I can withstand pain, and cold, and fatigue and whatever, for a really really really long time, like longer than what is normal, and I realized that at certain point in school, that everything was painful, everything was hurting, everything was difficult, and it didn't make sense and I felt like, I guess, I lost my power in a way.* (D.B./102-110)

The participants repeatedly spoke about feelings of stress, fear and pressure and grappled throughout their interviews about whether or not these feelings stemmed from within themselves,

or from the institution. It was interesting that they could not seem to determine the point from which these feelings originated.

> *Just the stress they kind of put on students is a little too much sometimes, like the craziness of epreuve synthese [end of the year exam], and maybe it's not even their fault, maybe it's us who, we do it to ourselves.* (Kendall/1/801-803)

> *The pressure itself is more about performance and what you want to do when you're out, but it's also pressure that you put on yourself … The pressure doesn't come from the school itself I would say, like the school pressure was more about if your act was good and if you had a good performance for the end of the year show, but around you feel it, from the teachers, because the teachers are closer to the students.* (Chloe/1/311-312, 314-317)

> *I was really scared to get kicked out, but never once did they talk to me about getting kicked out... But, it's a daily audition people, I was just stressing myself out that maybe they will kick me out because I'm sick all the time, but I never missed a class either.* (Mila/1/349-352)

Doubt and confusion were part of a category, within the theme *Living in a State of Disequilibrium*, which I called "experiencing a polarity of emotions". The participants seemed to be constantly questioning their personal choices while training at the National Circus School. It seemed as though they struggled with finding their identity as circus performers within the three-year program.

> *I did not like the act that I created in school, whereas, I mean it was ok, it just wasn't particularly special. You know, a lot of that had to do with the kind of confusion that people get in school of like, who am I, and what do I actually like. By the time the school was done there was stuff that I thought of in my mind of the stuff I wanted to do, but it was not the kind of material that is best suited to me.* (Derek/2/726-731)

> *It was a fear of needing to define myself so certainly so soon, which for me didn't really make any sense. I was like, I'm just touching on who I am and what my capacities are as a performer and as a human being, so these are really intense questions. It wasn't even any questions, it was just the demands were funny because in a certain way the material was presented like grow, and learn, and be yourself, and find yourself, and I'm like hell yea, that's exactly what I was trying to do, but it wasn't exactly all that.* (D.B./2/159-187)

> There *were lots of moments where I was not so sure if this was actually what I wanted to do. There wasn't one moment where I went, "Oh this is really what I want to do". I*

> *think it was a process of, I liked, I really enjoyed everything the school had to offer, and I kind of knew that this was what I wanted to do*. (Michael/2/159-162)

I speculate that these feelings arose from wanting to define themselves as professional circus performers from the moment they graduated, just as many people do upon completion of educational programs. Rather than allowing themselves time to grow and evolve, they seemed to want to know who they were, and where they wanted to go, once they finished the program. One participant framed it beautifully when he stated, *"The act at the end of your third year is not the end for you, it's really the beginning."* (Derek/2/734-735)

Even though the participants had these strong and often unwanted emotions, it was these emotions that seemed to help them to learn, and to grow, from their experiences at the National Circus School. As they navigated through this disequilibrium of emotions, they managed to find the answers to their questions. Perhaps this means that these strong feelings of emotional turbulence actually assisted them in exploring their full physical and artistic potential. During the interview process, all of the participants reflected on their experience at the National Circus School in a new way. Through time, they seemed to be able to gain perspective on this experience.

> *You know, I hugely, hugely struggled with, do you have enough discipline to do this? Do you have enough courage to be able to follow through when it's time, that hard time you know? It's easy to be yourself and be good when everything is going perfect you know. The true test is if you pull through when everything is shitty and everything's against you. I proved that to myself by completion of the school, and I feel pretty proud about that*. (D.B./1/519-524)

> *I never had an experience that I loved so much, and that I, you know, hated at the same time quite as much. As time goes on and whatever wounds have healed, I am more and more inclined to look back on it, and, you know, in a more, more dwell on the ways in which it was wonderful, not because I forgot the ways that it was bad, but because it takes a certain amount of time and distance and perspective to realize how much I got out of it, which was not always obvious at the time. I mean it was, I was at the school for three years and they were hands down three of the best years of my entire life. They were also three years that I spent hiding and crying a lot of the time*. (Derek/3/61-80)

Ultimately, the data suggested that graduates of the post-secondary circus school program perceived the program to be full of emotional turbulence. This turbulence seemed to help the students to grow, develop, and define themselves. Given the frequency and importance that emotional unrest played in the participants' interviews, it would be interesting to explore further the impact that additional or heightened support mechanisms might have. The students perceived the program to be replete with feelings of fear, stress, pressure, confusion and doubt. I wonder about other approaches that could be used to facilitate learning that does not produce such a tempestuous emotional journey. It would be interesting to consider how far from a state of equilibrium the students' emotions should sway.

The theme, *Living in a State of Disequilibrium,* revealed a topic that was extremely meaningful to the participants in my interviews, yet is not explicitly stated in the external curriculum at the National Circus School. This finding suggests that attention needs to be paid to the lived curriculum (Pinar, 2011), by focusing not only on explicit curriculum materials, but also by attending to the ways in which the students experience the curriculum. Rather than uncovering a smooth road in the students' development, the data revealed that instability and change were constant characteristics in their lives as circus artists. The data showed that the curriculum at the National Circus School was described by the students as being full of transitions and emotional turbulence. These are important implications when reflecting upon the curricular programs in post-secondary circus schools, because they identify an area of the curriculum that requires greater attention.

This study suggests that a circus performer's lifestyle is characterized by moments of instability and constant transitions, and causes a strong emotional response in the participants. This is important as it identifies a significant characteristic of a career in circus arts, and

encourages curriculum developers to look more closely at their ability to prepare students for transitions both during their circus training and during their careers. The next theme, *Constructing Families,* identified another pattern that emerged from the data, by outlining how groups are formed within the circus community.

Theme Three: Constructing Families

The third theme to materialize from the analysis was what I called *Constructing Families*. The categories in this theme are comprised of data that reflect how the participants found their sense of belonging with certain peers and coaches. The reason why I used the term family in this theme, rather than using the word friendship, is because the participants described experiences in which they shared more than just traditional notions of friendship. They had strong emotional closeness, physical contact, and continued these relationships well into their careers. There were also multiple numbers of references to the word *family* in the data, which the participants used to describe their experiences at the National Circus School and during their professional careers. The term *constructing* was used because compared to the historical trend in which families would often teach their circus skills across multiple generations of families, the participants in my study did not have any traditional familial ties to the circus. Conversely, they chose to pursue a career in circus arts and tended to form their own circus families made up of peers and coaches. Refer back to Table Four on page 61 for an overview of the categories and rules of inclusion that make up the theme *Constructing Families*.

Forming peer relationships. The analysis of the field texts revealed that a significant source of support while attending the National Circus School Program came from their peers who were also in the program. The participants talked about immediate and empowering feelings of fitting in. When they arrived at the circus school, they experienced an immediate

sense of belonging with their peer group. One participant articulated, *"I feel like family, it's like, the first time I stepped into that school, I felt like, for the first time, I finally fit in in life"* (Mila/3/150-151), whereas another stated, *"It's kind of like Hogwarts, the first time you walk into the school, like whoa, or kinda' like x-men university or some shit, you know what I mean, I'm home, I'm home"*(D.B/1/112-114). Other participants indicated,

> *I mean it was really like, you know, the Charles Xavier institute for gifted youngsters, but it's like, the same model. It's this insane facility that nobody in the world knows exists, and crazy things are happening every day and everyone has got their own super power, and in that particular context it's like, "Oh you're the one who walks through walls, oh you're the one who turns into a squid, you know, with the lasers beams, always the laser beams you know".* (Derek/1/11-16*)*

> *A lot of people are from overseas so they don't have any friends or any family around. We are the first people that they have and for us too, it's very important. I wasn't living with my family so these are the people that you get really close to, they become family.* (Chloe/2/93-95)

I began to question the importance of peer groups in circus, and why they were significant in the participants' personal accounts. I wondered why the field of circus arts tended to produce this familial type of experience. The data suggested that the physical intimacy of circus arts, and the personal emotional journey in school, tended to increase the participants openness to their peers, and allowed for a unique type of relationship beyond those characterized in typical friendships. Moreover, the fact that the participants were sharing in this unique adventure, made them have a deeper understanding of what each other was experiencing.

> *It's a really close friendship, like a family. Everybody is so close to each other, yes, because it's physically engaged. You have to be close in all these stretching classes, you have to touch each other… Because what we do is physical, you feel even more, and you cry and then everybody sees you, and so in this way, you get really close to each other.* (Chloe/2/84-87, 88-9)

> *Having seen everyone in really uncomfortable positions, you really get to know people, and because you are touching them constantly, like you have to spot them and stretch them, and all those types of classes, you start to have a really really close connection.* (Michael/1/746-748)

> *Your peers are the ones who get you through an experience like that, and learning how to be there for other people, and you know, just navigating the roller coaster of life at school or life on tour, things like that. You really learn how to help one another out, to both get and receive support in that way, it's nice, you know, it's always a pleasure after all these years running into people and really realizing that wow, we shared a real series of experiences that most people don't get to share*. (Derek/2/848-853)

One of the participants in my study worked with a partner while attending the National Circus School and described how profound these relationships can range.

> *I have a lot of respect for that person, a lot of open minded, a lot of love for sure, a lot of friendship, I mean, it's like being in a couple relationship. It's totally like that except there is not the side of sex and fun on that side, but it's totally like that when I compare it between my relationship with [my circus partner] and my relationship with my boyfriend*. (Alice/2/140-145)

These comments made me reflect on the differences between relationships with families and relationships with others. Within the safety of our families, we often expose our most intense emotional states, whereas the persona that we put on in public is often a refined version of ourselves. As the circus training at the National Circus School is physically and mentally exhausting, the students witnessed a fuller range of emotional states among their peers with whom they took classes. Additionally, the participants described the intimate nature of circus, as they constantly had to physically touch each other's bodies in their classes. This can be compared to a family type relationship, as families are often physically close with each other.

It is generally assumed that in an artistic and sport-centered university program, competition would be at the forefront. In proposing this research project to my advisor, I began by explaining that I believed that circus schools are very competitive in nature. However, after conducting the interviews, I was particularly surprised that the participants often described it as "*very competitive",* yet also stated, *"I find it surprisingly not competitive at all*" (Michael,1/348-476). The data exposed many contradictions within and across the interviews about

collaborating versus competing among peers. One participant posited, *"There's lots of competition and lots of drama in school, so sometimes that's not the easiest thing" (Kendall/1/149-150),* while another stated, *"I never felt in competition. I never questioned it, and I never felt it. For sure you can't really compare to others because you are advanced on certain things and they are advanced on certain things" (Alice/2/228-230).*

One participant described how he was struggling to remain at the same level as his peers, while at the same time his peers were supporting him, by coaching him after school and during their breaks to help him remain in the program.

> *I kind of felt like when I was there, a lot of time, I was in two circus schools at once. There was the official ENC program where I was dog paddling to keep afloat and then especially by the time I really hit my stride in second year, I was sort of like, there was this whole shadow circus school that I constructed by myself with my friends.* (Derek/2/132-136)

I began to question whether or not these competitive feelings towards each other arose as a result of competition for jobs. As I explored deeper, it seemed as though the students did not feel that they were in competition with each other for employment. In fact, almost all of their jobs after graduation were gained through their peers, who informed them of contracts when they knew that some of the acts of their peers from school were well suited for specific jobs. The networks of people at the circus school were some of the most influential contacts in their opportunities for work after they graduated.

> *It's one of the things that's really significant about the school, and really about any kind of school…The school has two faces, one of the faces is the face of technique that you learn and the other face is the community that you become a part of, the network that you develop because of that, and for sure I barely ever got a job that was not because of somebody from school. (*Derek/2/766-771)

> *Montreal understood that networking and making your friends work instead of having another artist do that job, because now there's a lot more, like just with Facebook nowadays. It's so much easier to communicate and see, oh someone is looking for*

> *something specific and I went to school with someone who does that*. (Michael/1/716-720)

The community at the National Circus School created this family of circus artists who actually appeared to be helping each other in their professional careers. Even though they tended to be helping each other, I wondered about the students who were training in the same discipline, and questioned whether or not they felt a greater sense of competition among themselves than those who performed different types of acts. For instance, I wondered whether or not two people who specialized in trapeze would be competing directly for employment opportunities. After searching throughout the field texts, a pattern emerged in which the sense of individuality overrode the sense of competition. The individuals tended to perceive themselves as unique in a way that was not replicable, and therefore, they found that they were not competing for the same opportunities.

> *There were three people doing [the same discipline] in my year. I was sort of the tall guy, then we had the small bulky guy, then we had a girl, and we would do such different things that we would not compete for the same jobs, because we would be so different. It was actually more helpful to have people doing the same thing [same discipline] because you would push each other, up to a certain levels, so it's not competitive in a way*. (Michael/1/482-487)

> *It's funny in a way but even if you are in more competition with each other because you do the same discipline, you feel closer, like in the end you won't look for the same jobs. I don't know how to say it but in the end we were three in my year to do [discipline] but we had a very different style and different approach*. (Chloe/2/106-109)

This inquiry made me wonder where the sense of competition was coming from, especially since they did not seem to be competing for employment opportunities. Through examining the data, there was a common thread in which the participants felt a pressure to rise to the level of their peers. They seemed to want to achieve a certain level of skill in order to be accepted into the circus community. They wanted to be performing at a high enough technical level to succeed in the eyes of eyes of the school, their peers and themselves.

> *I personally had a hard time with my girlfriend at the time, and we weren't even doing the same thing [discipline]… She was a very big favourite of the school, like even from the beginning they were a favourite, and I had a hard time dealing with it because I was jealous. We weren't even in that much direct competition, I mean, we weren't even doing the same thing, so it's kind of silly, and I see that now, but in the school you are just striving to be the best all the time and if one person is getting noticed more than the other it's like damn.* (Kendall/2/203-204,207-212)

> *The pressure itself is more about performance and what you want to do when you're out of the school, but it's also the pressure that you put on yourself for sure, I mean you want to be good when you are done.* (Chloe/1/311-315)

A pivotal factor in supporting their journeys throughout the National Circus School was the relationships that the participants formed with their peers. By constructing their own families within the circus school, the participants were able to lean on each other for support, and create a long-lasting network of relations that would help them in finding work after they graduated. The National Circus School offers a curriculum that fosters a sense of social belonging and unites the students well into their careers.

Navigating professional relationships. Families at the National Circus School were also constructed with coaches, teachers, and other professionals. Patterns arose in the field texts whereby relationships were central in helping the participants in their physical, emotional, and creative development. Nevertheless, there were also relationships with some professionals that were excluded from their circus school families.

A pattern in the field text illustrated that technical coaches and artistic advisors tended to have very strong, familial type relationships with the participants. Many of these relationships were unique, taking on more than just a traditional teacher-student type relationship. Most of these types of familial relationships were developed with the coaches who were teaching them their specific discipline or with teachers who were advising them in their creation of an act. For instance, if a student was majoring in trampoline, then their trampoline coach tended to be

perceived as part of the participant's circus family. Also, the person who was assigned to help them with the artistic choices in creating their final act was also likely to be considered part of their circus family.

> *My artistic teacher and my coach were always there for me. You start to feel really open, like we didn't even need to talk to each other to know how I am feeling, they understood and I feel like you can be really close to them.* (Chloe/2/162-165)

> *Like most of the circus coaches, I would really feel like they were moms and dads for me, we were connected on a personal level, emotional level I would* even *say.* (Alice/2/326-327)

> *I mean my coach was really my best friend in school, which has its advantages and its disadvantages, and its advantage was really the emotional support and the disadvantage was really, I mean if there was one, was mostly just, he, yeah, yeah, he let me, you know, he really kind of let me walk all over him.* (Derek/2/305-308)

It was interesting that one of the participants talked about taking advantage of his/her coach by exploiting their personal relationship. It made me wonder about the benefits and drawbacks of having a close relationship with a coach, one that is similar to a relationship with a very close friend or family member. I would be curious to explore further the role of coaching at the National Circus School, and how coaches can strike a balance effectively between being a coach, and being a friend.

The data revealed that the participants' technical coaches often took on a central role supporting them emotionally. In the theme, *Living in a State of Disequilibrium*, I identified how the participants tended to have strong feelings of emotional turbulence while in school. It was interesting that the people that they tended to lean on for emotional support were their coaches. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that some of the students did not feel that they had a close relationship with their coaches. I wondered where students were getting emotional support, if they did not have a close relationship with their coaches while in school, and how this could have had an impact on their personal development in circus arts.

> *Some people have a strong relationship with their coach, and that's a person that helps them get through…I didn't have a coach who was motivated to make things go forward, he was just like, "Yea, I'm going to do this", I don't know, he didn't really have much to say at all about coaching and so in the first year it wasn't a problem because everything is new, and you just got in, and then when you start to get to the stuff that's more difficult and you are like, "Shit what happened!" and they don't say anything. I started feeling like, "Ok I'm coaching myself right now", and on top of that, he wasn't motivating. I was able to lean on my artistic counselor a little bit emotionally, and that was great, but I don't know, that's an interesting question, you could say it's not their job to be a psychoanalyst you know, it's their job to give you comments on your act, so it's interesting, it's really touchy.* (D.B./2/234-24)

This participant explained how he was unclear whether or not coaches are responsible for supporting his emotional development in school. He seemed to have difficulty finding the emotional support at school but he did not know whose role it was to help him with these problems, or even if it was the school's responsibility to help him. It makes me wonder about the roles and responsibilities of coaches in professional programs, and to what extent they should be involved in student training. I am curious whether or not coaches should be the persons responsible for helping students to overcome emotional obstacles while undergoing the program, and if not, who, or what unit in circus school should be. Also, it encourages me to question if the school is ultimately responsible, or not, for supporting the students' emotional journey.

The field texts suggest that the technical teachers most prevalently took on the role of emotional supporters. Using the analogy of a family, most of the participants would lean on their technical coaches as mothers and fathers. I speculate that they leaned on their technical coaches because they felt that they could develop relationships with their coaches, who understood them as circus artists, and who had often already worked in circus arts themselves.

As the participants described how they constructed families with their peers and coaches, I wondered who was being excluded from this familial model. The dance, theatre, and academic teachers did not appear in any excerpts that talked about family. Perhaps this was because some

of these teachers taught classes that were scheduled late at night when the students were tired, or because they had limited time with the participants in the weekly agenda. Another relationship that seemed to be omitted from the familial model and was brought up often during the interviews was the participants' relationship with the administration at the National Circus School. The participants seemed to feel that it was difficult to talk to, and approach the administration, when they had comments or questions about the curriculum. Nevertheless, upon graduating and leaving the school, they seemed to gain a sense of perspective. One participant concluded, *"It took me a while to realize, like for example, that the administration was not my enemy" (*Derek/ 2/377-378), whereas others explained it using more details,

> *I felt like I could sort of do what I wanted to do, and being not always 100 percent supported, but sometimes understanding why they wouldn't support this certain idea, like at one point in first year I was like, "I wanna' do [discipline]" and they were like, "Are you kidding me?"… and now looking back I think that would have never ever worked out (laughs).* (Michael/1/556-559)

> *I wish that they didn't put on such a front that it made us nervous to talk to them. I understand that they need to be stern, and that their jobs are very demanding, but we get afraid to talk to them, and how are we supposed to do that if they are in charge of the school, how are we supposed to talk to them about things when we get nervous when they come up and talk to us?* (Kendall/ 2/155-160)

While reading the participant interviews, I was also surprised by the way that the participants spoke about the relationship between students attending the National Circus School, and between other circus schools in North America and in Europe. There tended to be an overwhelming sense of rivalry between the National Circus School and other circus schools. Initially, these became outliers in the analysis of the field texts, as I had a hard time fitting this information in when organizing the data into patterns and themes. However, while reflecting upon the theme *Constructing Families*, I had a moment of insight. There seems to be a family constructed within the walls of the school that makes it seem exclusive from outsiders. It

seemed as though the people who were excluded from this family at the National Circus School felt threatened by the Montreal Circus community.

> *It was weird when I first came in because for sure I was proud to be there and be accepted. For sure I was like, "Ok, I'm gonna' do it!" When I would first meet people from [name of other circus school], I would be like, "Yeah what's up?" like just another school something awesome, they were like, "Woah! National Circus School, you think you're all better than us!" just because that was the general vibe of everything, and it took me like a few times to catch on, like "Oh there's a beef between these two communities*." (D.B./1/422-427)

> *It's hilarious because it's a bit jaded feelings towards ENC and [other circus school] because a lot of people go from [other circus school] come to ENC and they feel like ENC is bourgeoisie, or why would they need to go to Montreal when you could be there, because they don't, I don't think they want to understand either. Bitter, bitter, bitter*. (Kendall/1/385-389)

It would be easy to assume that everyone in the National Circus School is one huge family, however, there were also exclusions within the school as well. The students seemed to be selective in constructing the network that made up their circus families.

> *For me it was more of a question of not really being ready to show everybody a certain vulnerability, or level of it, but to some people I was very open, like crash and everything's fine, but you don't feel that with everybody in your class*. (Michael/2/199-201)

While it is interesting to think about the ways that the circus performers found their "families" while at the National Circus School, this theme did not surprise me as families are engrained in the history of circus arts. Many students described immediate feelings of fitting in, or of coming home, and this made me wonder how much of the historical family aspect drew individuals towards this profession. I was curious as to whether or not they were seeking familial type relationships. This theme, *Constructing Families,* reveals that the community at the National Circus School was central in the participants' lived experiences at school. The curriculum was designed in a way that encouraged unique friendships, through courses that had physical contact, a program that encouraged expression, and by having coaches who were mostly

willing to guide the students emotionally in their journey throughout school. Ultimately, many elements of the program at the National Circus School encouraged these types of familial relationships to flourish, which helped the participants well into their careers as circus artists.

This theme suggests that students at the National Circus School sought out relationships within their community that took on a familial role. The next theme, *Embracing Circus Life*, illustrates how the National Circus School program encouraged the participants to live life the circus way. By pushing borders, living in a state of disequilibrium and constructing families, the circus school students assumed the profile of a professional circus artist.

Theme Four: Embracing Circus Life

The fourth theme to transpire from the field texts was *Embracing Circus Life*. While this theme brings forward new patterns from the field text analysis, it also produces the three other themes. *Pushing Borders*, *Constructing Families,* and *Living in a State of Disequilibrium* are all characteristics of *Embracing Circus Life*. Refer back to Figure Two on page 58, which illustrates how the first three themes produce the fourth theme. Members who engage in all three practices tend to embrace the circus way of life. This theme arose from the unique way that circus artists tend to have their own rules, needs, and identity. Throughout the field texts, patterns emerged which illustrated that there were unspoken rules that tended to guide the circus way of being, needs that the participants desired, and an identity that circus artists adopted. All of these aspects governed the circus way of being, both while attending the National Circus School, and in their careers as circus artists. Refer back to Table Four on page 61 which shows the three categories, and rules used to organize the data excerpts which make up the theme *Embracing Circus Life*.

Abiding by unspoken rules. Part of the curriculum at the National Circus School is explicitly stated through the intentional instructional agenda. This includes aspects such as the courses offered, and the organization of these courses, as well as the course objectives, and assessment processes. The other part of the curriculum is the hidden curriculum, that which revolves around the daily routines and is often unintended (Marjolis, 2001). Part of embracing the circus way of being is realizing and abiding by the unspoken rules that govern circus practices. Across the data, many hidden aspects of the curriculum were uncovered. These also seemed to apply in the participants' careers as professional circus artists.

One unspoken rule that governs circus life is the understood respect that each artist must have for each other. Physically touching other people's bodies, and working with others in a vulnerable way taught the participants about respect. Also, in order to arrive at a finished circus act, the participants described the process of experimentation as very much central in their development. Learning to respect other artists when they asked for input and feedback was vital in embracing the circus way of being.

> *We learn to respect other people and other people's work and other people's bodies. We are constantly physically touching, we're spotting, we're throwing, we're catching. It's constantly like you're physically involved with other people, so I think that you learn a certain respect… People express themselves, and you have to be respective in whatever creative process or mind they're sort of in, and try not to judge. I think that's one of the most important, trying not to judge others in any possible way.* (Michael/2/393-396,399-401)

Another interesting pattern about the hidden rules and practices that were learned at the National Circus School had the do with the physical looks of the circus artists. An unspoken rule, which the participants described as being very important in working as a professional circus artist, was physical appearance. The participants tended to find that almost everyone who was in circus was physically good looking. In the field of circus arts, they felt that people who were

better looking were favoured and employed more often. For instance, Mila contended, "*The school only accepts good looking people, like they look at your features because they want all of their graduates to be, you know, good looking"* (Mila/2/318-319). Others agreed with her understanding as they stated,

> *It don't matter how big your technique is, if you're gonna' work in Germany and stuff like that, you need to be pretty... The most successful circus artist I know, and it's not that she does boring stuff, she does really cool and interesting things, but she's gorgeous, she's blonde, and she's sexy, and like, that is a perfect recipe for jobs you know, especially in Europe. (Kendall/2/697-698, 700-703)*

> *I remember just kind of listening to this one particular brace of teachers talking about everyone that they were seeing and then suddenly realizing because of all the language they were using had to do with art, like you know, you know all that emotional content, like "Ah oui! Il a quelque chose vraiment!" or, "Ça me touche énormement ça!" and just listening to it and it was just like wait, all you care about is that fact that he's hot. Anytime they are super hot and sexy, you know, you talk about how, "Il a quelque chose vraiment!" and anytime you are looking at some girl and she's spinning around and she's actually drop dead gorgeous then suddenly it's like, "Ça me touche enormement!" but if you have someone that's doing something really really cool but he's not like drop-dead, oh my god-gorgeous, it's really like, "Ça manque un certain dimension" (laughing).* (Derek/3/388-399)

This part of the hidden curriculum may have implications on a person's ability to become a successful circus artist. If people that have a certain look are employed more often, it can have a significant impact on the choices and actions of the students attending the program.

The topic of favouritism also arose multiple times throughout the interviews. It seemed that an unspoken rule at the National Circus School was that if one designed one's act to match the preferred style of the school, then one would have the opportunity to perform more often.

> *You learn a bit at school that if you do a good act, then the school will choose you more to perform for the public. Sometimes you do something that they want to see then they choose you for projects. (*Chloe/3/239-241)

> *I learned very quickly that anytime somebody tells you that they don't want you to be trapped in your style, and they want you to do any style, it means they want you to do their style, (laughs) specifically THEIR style. That's kind of, you know, you see the*

> *evidence, the homogenization of the esthetic that you see coming out of there.* (Derek/3/368-371*)*

> *As much as they preach the necessity of creation, revolutionizing ideas, and coming up with something new, this is always great in practice. What is really the undertone is that success will be had by following the status quo, by going through the ranks, by licking the right asses, by making friends with the right people. This will get you further than actually pushing, and asking questions, because when it gets down to it, the people that push and ask questions are ostracized, and the people that are going through the correct channels might be far less inspired, but will get the benefits of the huge, huge palette of resources that the school can offer* them. (D. B./2/322-330)

The participants felt that sometimes they had to sacrifice their personal style in order to please their teachers and gain more opportunities for performing. This was also common in the participants' experiences working as circus artists. One participant explained, *"I was basically willing to do anything right there just to be working at that point, including taking a gig as an aerialist when not only do I have no aerial skills, but I'm also morbidly afraid of heights"* (Derek/1/525-528). Another participant used an example from an experience working in a show, described that she felt that, "*[Show title] was very hard, it was more hard to do the same show over and over because you are bored, because [show title] had less freedom, and you couldn't do what you wanted artistically"* (Alice/1/423-425).

The participants suggested often that there were competing tensions between what they desired to do and the implications of those actions on their opportunities for employment. In order to work more, or perform more often, they tended to believe that they would have to sacrifice some of their personal ideas to increase their chances of performing and working. While this may be common in the professional working world of circus, it is interesting as it makes me wonder how much these pressures unconsciously altered their artistic choices during school. Perhaps having opportunities to discuss their artistic choices with many different people

with differing perspectives might allow them to surpass these obstacles and engaged in more critical thinking about their own artistic process.

Another interesting issue that arose in one participant's interview had to do with the role that gender played on his ability to find work, and on his identity as a performer. While it only applied to his particular circumstance, I wondered about the ways that gender played a role in the others' lives as circus artists. If I were to conduct the interviews again, this would also be an area that I might explore further with the participants.

> *I never knew doing aerials was a gay thing until I moved here… I think the male aerialist thing is still new so what people are used to is a pretty girl doing the splits, and that is beautiful, and sometimes sexy, so that's nice. It's simple, and it's nice, but when you have a guy, and he moves really well, and maybe like pushes things differently, you know. I've actually lost jobs because they needed girls and didn't want a guy, so maybe in my situation it is that people look at it as gay.* (Kendall/2/707-708,675-680)

Through the analysis of the field texts, common rules were revealed that were engrained in the lifestyle at circus school. It was interesting that these rules also mirrored similar experiences in the working field of circus arts. Through abiding by these unspoken rules, the participants tended to embrace circus life. As I reflect about these aspects, I question how much these practices limit performers potential and creativity and how artists can challenge these norms and contribute more positively to embrace a new way of circus being.

Desiring to perform. The driving force in embracing circus life was performing. The participants constantly spoke about their hunger to be on stage. Rather than pursue circus arts solely for economic gains, they wanted to pursue this career because of their passion for performing and inspiring people through their performance.

> *The most important thing for me was definitely not for money. I think, I think because there's nothing better than being paid to do something I love, to be able to follow my dreams, to flip, and to perform for people.* (Mila/ 3/437-439)

While this performance aspect was central in their needs, the participants commonly reported the struggles that they faced while attending the National Circus School. During school, they tended to have many opportunities to create, and present their creations, but their presentations were mostly in front of their peers that they trained with. While this was helpful by allowing them to practice performing, it missed the authenticity of a true performance. All seven of the participants in the study discussed this conflict, in which they did understand why the National Circus School did not want them to present unfinished work to the public, while at the same time, the participants were missing out on performance opportunities. The lack of authentic performing opportunities in the curriculum presented a barrier for the participants in their ability to fully embrace the circus way of life.

> *They try to prepare us as much as they could, and again, through the dance presentations and the acting presentations, but it's vague, because the people you are presenting to, they know you… It's mainly also about dealing with the stress of an actual performance, because in school, at one point, everybody has seen your act 50 times, and heard your music, and we can't stand the music anymore, and everybody knows exactly what people are doing. It's not a real, it's not a stressful situation anymore. Yes you might care if you fall or not, but the stress of an actual performance is different from even in rehearsal, or just in school, it's not the same thing.* (Michael/2-3/565-667,102-107)

> *That's the dilemma, that's one of my biggest critiques of the school. They make performing really, really scary because we don't perform ever! We're there, we are at school to perform, and we can't.* (Kendall/2/263-265)

> *Performing is the only way to figure out what it is that you actually want to do as an artist. It is to find out what audiences actually respond to, and what an audience's response actually means. Most circus students imagine that the reactions of audience members to their material will consist of either one of two things: that the audience will either like it or not like it. However, 'liking' or 'not-liking' are not really responses at all. They are judgments, and judgments are things that are made afterwards and upon reflection. They are intellectual operations, in other words, and have nothing to do with the way that audiences actually respond in real life. In real life, audiences respond not by thinking, but by feeling, and by expressing those feelings in the movements of their bodies. These movements can include gasping, stiffening, relaxing, screaming, laughing, stomping their feet, clapping their hands, and so on, and it is by gauging the total audience-wide tone of bodily movements that a performing artist comes to understand the*

> *actual effects that their material have (or fails to have) on the public. As most circus students, if asked who they would wish to please most, would probably reply, "the public who come to circus shows" as opposed to say, "my teachers and administrators at school" then it is worth pointing out that the only way to really even start the long, complex task of learning how to please audiences, is by finding out what happens when you try material out in front of those audiences in the first place. Also I realize that while much of the function of the school is to produce quality circus artists, another no less significant priority for the school is in the production and maintenance of the image of what its students' caliber can be expected to be. Allowing for a bunch of, so-so works in progress before a discerning public with too great a frequency cannot but inevitably risk tarnishing the schools fiercely guarded reputation as an exclusive purveyor of top-notch excellence. (Derek/April 5th/Follow-up email/10-33)*

Even though the participants struggled with this tension while attending the National Circus School, none of the participants attributed any difficulties in their professional careers to the lack of performance opportunities at school.

The desire to perform is at the heart of a performer's existence. While the curriculum at the National Circus School provides the students with tools to help them learn how to perform, it seems to have a shortage of opportunities for authentic performance. I wonder how the school can increase opportunities for performance while at the same time preserving their reputation for high caliber circus acts. Perhaps it would be beneficial to present works in progress more often, or invite guests to offer feedback during school performances.

Developing a Circus identity. By attending the post-secondary circus school program, the participants in my study cultivated a new identity as circus artists. As they gradually embraced circus life, their identity tended to transform and evolve. The participants in the study perceived circus as a distinct field that was distinguished from other art forms. Many people compare circus artists to other artistic disciplines, such as theatre, and dance, but the participants in my study differentiated themselves as "contemporary circus artists". They perceived circus to be unique, dangerous, and creatively freeing.

> *Lots of people are chasing their dreams, like really hardcore, which is important. That's similar between circus and dance, but I think circus school is much different in a way just because it's circus, and it's so intense, and really dangerous sometimes, and it's not risks like that in dance, there's not physical risks, which is one of the reasons why I, why I love circus, it's really beautiful I feel, the stuff that's dangerous*. (Kendall/3/302-307)

> *You have more tricks than a dancer, more tricks than an actor, and you have tricks that are going to impress people much faster than an actor or a dancer…That's what's really rich with circus, there are no rules. I mean there are ways to do it, but in a way you don't have to do it that way, you can do it differently, there is a lot of freedom in circus, a lot of creativity and freedom so you can really do what you want. (Alice/2/276-277, 286-290)*

It is important to note that the participants made a clear distinction between "traditional circus" and "contemporary circus". All of the performers in my study defined themselves as "contemporary circus artists".

> *What really makes contemporary circus contemporary circus is that it is a social class, like contemporary circus is a population of contemporary circus performers, who mostly come from middle or upper middle class backgrounds, get a circus education, and then go on to perform for audiences that are made up exclusively of upper to middle class patrons*. (Derek/3/439-445)

> *I feel traditional circus, they don't feel, they're not at all shy of the fact that it's purely entertainment value that they are going for, and contemporary circus, a lot of it is based around, this is an art form, and self-expression that doesn't need to be understood by everybody you know, it's me, expressing myself via art form*. (D.B./2/290-294)

Part of the participants' identity also stemmed from the fact that they were a Montreal National Circus School graduate. They discussed how they were able to watch circus performances and could distinguish which artists were graduates of the National Circus School program.

> *You can tell if this is an act that comes from Montreal, just the way of writing the act, or constructing the act and music. It has a very particular, I don't really know how to describe the style, but it definitely has a signature to it where you can see that this is Montreal*. (Michael/ 1/879-891)

> *I mean one thing would be just having to do with certain qualities, certain qualities like dance, or movement style. I feel like I can see an ENC trained dancer, acro-dance*

> *trained acrobat, dancing from miles away, but I think part of it also has to do with a particular emotional tone, because correct me if I'm wrong, but it certainly seems like in my day, everybody had acts that were sad acts, there were all these melancholic and sad acts*. (Derek/3/167-172)

This is important as it reveals that the curriculum at the National Circus School has a strong distinctiveness that differentiates it from other schools. The curriculum cultivates circus artists who have a unique style. The participants were proud of their identity as graduates of the National Circus School, but they were also fearful that this identity might change. They were protective about the unique experience that they had, and what it gave them as circus artists.

> *I'm scared that the school in ten years is going to be a little less special than it is now, and what you are doing now, like interviewing people, is really good I bet, because I bet people that graduated a while back think that the school is a little bit less special than it was back then you know… When I found out about ENC I was like "Oh my gosh this is the school to go to, and this is amazing, and this is so hard to get in!" and now, since they are accepting so many people, I feel like it's turning into, oh the school that you'll go to if you do circus, which makes it less special in my mind, less exclusive*. (Kendall/2/106-109,122-126)

> *Before it was a huge creative cauldron of people. They would propose their ideas, the way that they view the world, the way they view everything, and that would get mixed in, like people wanting to push it technically, and you had a really awesome mix of everything. By the time I was there, to the time that I left, this started fizzling out hugely, and you saw more new people were accepted, too many people, and the same sort of demographic, and the same sort of ideas and stuff, because maybe the school thought it was easier to mold them into like a factory you know. I'm scared it doesn't have the same richness as it did before*. (D.B./1/179-186)

The theme, *Embracing Circus Life*, illustrates how the participants defined their art form. They tended to differentiate circus arts from other artistic disciplines as they explained their own species of artist. When they had initially entered the circus school program, the participants defined themselves as "gymnasts" and "dancers", amongst others. By completing the program at the National Circus School, they shifted their identity towards one of a circus artist. The curricular program tended to teach the participants what it meant to be a circus artist, and how to embrace the circus way of being.

In conclusion, the theme *Embracing Circus Life,* demonstrates how the curriculum at the National Circus School initiates the students' journeys into fully assuming their identities as circus performers. The curriculum provides them with the community, education, language, and culture that came to define who they are, what they desired, and how they lived. The theme revealed the lasting imprint that the institution had on their lives, and on their identity. *Pushing Borders*, *Living in a State of Disequilibrium*, and *Constructing Families* were all part of *Embracing Circus Life*.

Summary

To summarize, this study revealed four themes across the field texts. Thematic analysis of the verbatim interviews allowed me to get an important sense of the predominant themes. These themes included, *Pushing Borders*, *Living in a State of Disequilibrium*, *Constructing Families,* and *Embracing Circus Life*. Together these four themes illustrate important elements about the experiences of the participants who attended the National Circus School program.

In the next chapter, I will describe the conclusions that were drawn from these four themes, the limitations of this study, implications for future research, and recommendations for circus curriculum developers and educational practitioners.

Chapter Five: Conclusions, Implications, Limitations and Recommendations

All my wandering was only a circle leading me at last to here. My quest had always been to find what I could not leave.

(Patrick Lane, 2004, as cited in Hasbe-Ludt, Chambers & Leggo, 2000, p. 97)

This chapter outlines the conclusions that I arrived at from this study. It also reviews the limitations of the research as well as recommendations for future research. Significant findings and pedagogical implications are included to guide the development of curriculum for circus arts programs based on the results of my study. Also, I have included recommendations for general educational practitioners, which is motivated by my own desire to apply this research into my daily teaching practice as an elementary school teacher.

Each chapter in this thesis outlined the processes involved in arriving at these conclusions. In Chapter One, I introduced my research topic, and described how it stemmed from my personal background and experiences in circus arts, and in education. I examined my stance as I began the research process and considered the significance of the findings of this study. In Chapter Two, I specified the literature that established a conceptual framework for my topic, and identified studies that provided a context for the research. By providing an overview of the historical context of circus arts, I tried to help reader's better understand tendencies across the field. Curriculum theory, approaches to learning, and literature on learning communities were presented in order to better understand the relationship between curriculum, learning, and the social aspects of schooling. Furthermore, studies in performance arts education helped to conceptualize tendencies across the field of other curricular programs in the arts. In Chapter Three, I provided an overview of the methodology used to conduct this study. I outlined the criteria and procedures and described how a thematic analysis, namely constant comparison

approach was applied. The themes that emerged from the field texts were described thoroughly in Chapter Four. This final chapter is used to conclude the findings of this qualitative study.

Within all of the four themes, *Pushing Borders*, *Living in a State of Disequilibrium*, *Constructing Families,* and *Embracing Circus Life,* there were significant findings that surfaced that can be used to help professionals in developing and teaching programs in post-secondary circus schools. While these themes present the overarching patterns, and identify the characteristics of participants who underwent academic circus training, the following section draws upon the findings from this study, and presents the pedagogical implications of this research. Many of the theories presented in Chapter Two can be helpful in considering the findings of this study.

Significant Findings and Pedagogical Implications

This study raises questions about the curriculum and the approaches that circus schools use to prepare students to become professional circus artists. The context analyzed was a three-year program in North America, which was aimed at educating students to pursue a career in circus arts. These findings provide a lens for thinking about the curriculum in circus schools, and can also be used to reflect upon other university curricular arts programs, such as those in dance, music, and in theatre. Moreover, they have implications in the general field of education and curriculum design.

This study revealed that the students perceived courses more favourably if they were aligned with the constructivist model of instruction. When the students had more responsibility for their own learning, and engaged in active learning experiences, they tended to perceive the courses more positively. The literature corroborates the finding that has shown that constructivist-teaching practices have had many useful implications in the field of teaching and

learning. My research also revealed that the students' perceived usefulness of the courses, were significant in how they perceived the curricular content, design and delivery. When the students could see how learning had a direct impact on their profession as circus artists, then they had more pleasure and motivation in participating in these courses. The literature in performance arts education supports this finding as it advocates for interconnectedness between what is taught in arts-based university programs, and how it relates to the professional world. The pedagogical implications of these findings suggest that curriculum designers and teaching professionals should ensure that the perceived usefulness of each course is evident to the learners. They should also consider ways to bridge the gap between theory and practice in order to help the students understand and appreciate the value in learning theoretical knowledge. Additionally, they should promote the integration of socio-constructivist based teaching approaches to facilitate student learning in artistic, technical and academic classes.

Through this study, I discovered that the participants' experiences in circus school were characterized by strong opposing emotions and constant states of transitions. Perhaps in a field where there is so much passion, the emotional highs, lows, and the moments of instability are necessary to foster optimal conditions for creating art. While the participants often discussed how the program supported their physical, and artistic development, they felt that the emotional turbulence that they experienced was sometimes overlooked. The "lived experience" of the curriculum, as identified by Pinar (2011), was characterized by strong emotional reactions to their experiences (p.1). While in the program, the students had many questions about who they were, and where they were headed. The emotional implications of the program were extreme and seemed to have lasting effects on the participants. This finding suggests that professionals in the field of circus arts education, and in other university performance arts programs, should ask

themselves if they are balancing the physical, and the artistic development of the students, in a way that recognizes, and supports the emotional impact of those experiences. It is crucial to consider the individual journey of the learners and the structures that are in place to offer support.

Whereas the literature in performing arts discusses the difficulty characterized by constant transitions in artistic fields, the participants in my study tended to persevere, and even anticipate, and plan for these moments of transition. The most difficult transition that the students experienced was moving from focusing on the process of creating an act, to having to make decisions as they prepared their final circus act for graduation. The combined pressure of revolutionizing an idea, and pleasing the school, while at the same time defining themselves early on in their careers, produced turbulent emotional feelings. I would urge professionals in the field of circus education, and in other artistic fields, to examine this transition, and install more structures to support this shift. Also, this finding has implications for general education practitioners, as it suggests that teachers need to reflect upon how that transition affects the emotional development of learners.

Another conclusion derived from this study was that the participants' technical coaches took on a critical role in supporting their overall development while attending the National Circus School. Although I did not find it surprising that the participants tended to rely on their coaches for physical and emotional support, I was concerned that not all had positive relationships with their coaches. This finding has important implications because it suggests that curriculum developers and teaching professionals should reflect upon the roles of coaches and teachers and determine what role they should play in their student's development. Moreover, it should encourage professionals to look at the support structures that are in place to help students

outside of those relationships. Even if the student is not able to create a type of family bond with their coaches, every student should still have access to this type of relationship with someone at the school.

The National Circus School managed to create an institution that fostered a collaborative learning environment. Rather than perceiving their classmates as competitors in the professional world, even those training in the same circus discipline, the students found solace through their peers. The participants viewed themselves as having unique skills, and distinctive identities that were not replicable by other performers. Therefore, other performers were not viewed as competition. They helped each other to endure the intensive training program and even to find jobs once they entered the workforce. The circus school managed to create a community of learners that all educational institutions strive to achieve, one that truly fosters collaboration. Nevertheless, it was interesting that the participants also repeatedly spoke about feelings of competition in their interviews. My analysis suggested that the pressure that they experienced seemed to be directed towards maintaining their membership within this community. The participants seemed to want to maintain their technical and artistic level in circus arts, in relation to their peers, in order to be viewed as a respectable circus artist. I have suggested that this is related to the history of circus arts as historically circus performers were continuously adapting their acts and their shows to appeal to more audiences. The circus spectacle has never been characterized by a fixed set of rules, and this allowed opportunities for all members to define themselves in their own way. The pedagogical implication of this finding is significant, as it shows how embracing individuality can foster cooperation and positively contribute to the learning community within an institution. These findings also suggest that establishing and

supporting the development of a community within the educational institution is central to the success of graduates.

From a broader standpoint, this study revealed that the experiences of students who attended a post-secondary circus school program were replete with contradictions. The participants felt that the program was competitive, yet they also found it to be collaborative. They often felt pressured, yet their experiences were also characterized by a feeling of being free. They desired flexibility in the program, yet they also wanted structure. Emotional highs and lows were consistently experienced throughout the program. The participants identified their experiences at the National Circus School as being both the best time of their lives and the most challenging. Perhaps it is because the participants in this particular study did not choose circus solely as a career, but they had chosen it as a way of life. Becoming a circus performer was their dream and they were fully committed to fulfilling this dream. They were willing to forgo traditional relationships, and lifestyles, to fully commit to embracing circus life. This finding was consistent with the findings from Bracey's (2004) interpretive study on university dancers', which also found many contradictions throughout her data. Perhaps the root of these contradictions stems from the lack of stability in circus and the unpredictability of circus careers. As they tried to create a stable career in an unpredictable employment field, the participants experienced extreme reactions.

In this section, I identified the significant findings resulting from my study and their implications for curriculum developers and teachers in the fields of circus, performance arts, and in education. In the following section I will review the limitations of this study.

Limitations

This section addresses the limitations of this study. It includes having limited perspectives, the characteristics of the participant sample, and my personal biases.

Limited perspectives. During the third and final interview with one participant, I asked if he had anything else to add that we had not talked about. He stated,

> *Just everything that I said is purely based on my opinion of stuff. I don't really have facts, so it's mostly just my perception on it, doesn't make it right or wrong, some things might be right, some things might be grossly wrong cause' also I don't see all the sides and all the factors*. (D.B/3/497-500)

I want to be forthcoming in restating that all of the themes and data that come from the interviews are based on only the students' perceptions of their experiences and my perceptions of the field texts. One of the greatest limitations of this study is that it does not paint a full picture of the other perspectives involved in the circus academic program. There is a strong need for more research to be conducted in the field of circus arts and in the field of circus curriculum. By conducting complementary studies, which examine other members' perspectives of the National Circus School program, such as teachers, and administrators, a more thorough understanding of the field could emerge. One strategy that I implemented in order to account for having limited perspectives was to establish pre-selection criteria in order to have depth within the sample. The participants in my study came from varied years of the program, disciplines and nationalities, which I believe added richness to my data and findings.

Participant sample. As described in Chapter Three, the participants in my study were selected through the use of a pre-selection questionnaire that was sent to graduates of the National Circus School program. The only participants who were able to participate in my study were those who responded to my email and who were willing to participate. As 24 emails were

returned due to inactive email accounts, a limitation of this approach was that participants who had outdated emails were excluded from being able to participate. Other exclusions were participants who were not able to conduct interviews face-to-face. While this could have been perceived as a weakness in my research, I believe that having the ability to talk with the participants face-to-face actually enhanced my relationship with the participants, and allowed the conversations to flow more naturally. However, since the circus community is quite exclusive, already I had had an affiliation with almost all of the participants who volunteered to participate in the study. This was beneficial as it helped me to retrieve a large sample of possible participants, but it was also limiting as it might have impacted on the way that they talked about the program. For instance, the participants may have excluded details about their experiences because they knew that I had also attended the National Circus School and might assume that I was already familiar with certain aspects of the program.

Another important limitation concerning the participant sample was that the participants had graduated within the past ten years. The National Circus School seemed to be very proactive in refining its curriculum, as many participants described curricular changes even within their three years at the school. There have likely been many changes on the curricular front throughout the past ten years of administering the program. As the participant statements are reflective of different years of the program, some of the findings of this study may have already been improved, or altered, and may not be reflective of the current program. If I were to conduct this study again, I would like to interview all graduates who began and completed the circus arts program together. This would allow me to learn more about the patterns in their professional careers across a graduating class as well as to identify perspectives of participants who experienced the same curriculum in a similar time and context.

Personal biases. Another limitation is centered on my own stance as a researcher entering this study. My own experiences at the National Circus School, and as a teacher at Codarts, the circus school in the Netherlands, were engrained in my mindset as I began this study. In Chapter One, I outlined how my own background was situated in the field of circus arts, as well as how my experiences had shaped my understanding and beliefs about circus curriculum. Several processes such as member checks and having fellow researchers audit the data were outlined in Chapter Three to address these limitations. Also, I used reflective memos to critically examine my thought processes throughout the study. These strategies were applied to help account for my biases and to illustrate how my interpretations were justified. While my personal experiences led me to hold presumptions, and opinions about circus education, I believe also that they allowed me to form a trusting relationship with the participants. Because I understood the context of their experiences and was familiar with the learning environment, I believe that it made it easier for the participants to talk to me about the curriculum and possibly for me to understand.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study raises many more questions, specifically aimed at the various stakeholders in circus education, such as teachers and administrators. I believe that in order to obtain a more rounded and complete view of the experience of attending a professional circus school it is critical to learn about the curriculum from multiple perspectives and to more fully contextualize the circus school experience. I suggest following up on this study by examining the perspectives of others involved in circus education. How do teachers view the current circus curriculum? How do administrators perceive their involvement in student's education and training? What are the unique roles of coaches in circus arts? I also recommend future research investigate the

experiences of an entire graduating class who engaged with the same curriculum, as it would allow researchers to examine the views and opinions of those who are in the same curricular program and to identify the various career paths that graduates pursue. This could also be achieved by examining the explicit curriculum materials and through classroom and professional observation.

Another suggestion for future research includes an exploration into the similarities and differences between circus school curriculum, and curriculum across other artistic disciplines such as dance, theatre, and music, and high performance athletic programs. Comparisons between these programs would help professionals learn more about the distinct features of collegial level art programs and would also provide a greater understanding of the professional circus context. Circus arts combines both art and athletics, therefore a more thorough understanding of these two fields of study could help to optimize the curriculum of circus arts programs.

Lastly, through my study I discovered that there is an interesting circus culture that is specific to Québec and that Québec played a very prominent role in the history of circus arts and the development of circuses of today. Examining the culture of professional circus schools around the world could be worth investigating. Additionally, I believe that a comparison of those programs and cultures to the ones in Québec could provide interesting insights.

I discovered through my own research and review that there is limited research in the field of circus arts. I believe this means that there are many different paths to explore and to expand upon. With the lack of perspectives and opinions of key players in circus education, little comparison to other arts and athletic programs, and a small amount of information on programs

and circus cultures from other countries available, I believe the possibilities in circus arts research are endless.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the curriculum at a post-secondary circus school in Canada by interviewing graduates who had attended the program and are currently working as professional circus artists. Circus schools have a fundamental responsibility to prepare students for successful careers in circus arts; this study demonstrated that curriculum developers need to consider more than the explicit materials when designing the curriculum, and that it is necessary to examine the ways in which the curriculum is being implemented in schools. Just as a circus act is not merely made up of tricks, dance sequences, and music, the curriculum is more than the courses, teachers and objectives. The richness and depth of the learning described by the participants in my study was derived from the intersections between the curriculum structures. The preparation for professional careers came from participants pushing their physical, creative, and emotional limits, developing close-knit family-like relationships and communities at school, persevering through instable emotional moments and constant transitions, and ultimately, adopting the social rules and norms that are part of fully embracing a circus lifestyle. This study demonstrates that while the circus school program tends to effectively prepare circus artists for their professional careers, and shapes all experiences after that, patterns emerge such as feelings of intense pressure and a lack of alignment between the theoretical and practical knowledge learned which also merit critical attention. Furthermore, this study exposed some gaps within the curriculum and helped to develop topics for further consideration, which have the potential to enhance future curricular programs in the field of circus arts, and beyond.

At the beginning of this study, I spoke about the ways in which this research was "both love and medicine", and that by engaging in this research, I hoped to be able to both leave the circus, and come home to it (Chambers, 1997, p. 20). Through this study, I have fallen in love with circus all over again. By interviewing the participants in my study, I recognized that we shared a unique experience together. Nevertheless, it was only through the process of analysis that I began to recognize patterns that provided answers to my own questions about why I decided to leave the circus school after my injury. By completing this research, I stopped holding onto my old identity as a circus artist, and embraced a new one as a circus researcher. I left the circus, came home to it, and this home is full of doors, nooks and crannies, waiting to be discovered.

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Appendix A: Email Inviting Students to Participate in my Study

Subject: Participate in a Research Study on Circus Arts

Researcher: Amanda Langlois, **Supervisor: Dr. Butler-Kisber; Tel: 514-398-2252**
Department: Integrated Studies in Education, Curriculum Studies, McGill University
Contact Information: Tel: 514-972-3886, Email: Amanda.langlois@mail.mcgill.ca

Dear Graduate of the National Circus School Program,

Would you like to talk to someone about your circus career? Would you like to contribute to research in circus arts? I would like to invite you to participate in a research study about professional circus schools. This is an exciting opportunity to discuss your circus experiences with others and help contribute to the development of research in circus arts. Please see the enclosed documents, which contain a pre-selection questionnaire, as well as a consent form outlining the details of the study. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. Thank you for your help in progressing the field of circus arts research.

Warm regards,
Amanda Langlois

Appendix B: Pre-Selection Questionnaire

QUESTIONNAIRE OF YOUNG PROFESSIONAL CIRCUS ARTISTS

Pre-Selection Questionnaire

Part 1 – Personal Details

Surname:		Given Name:	

Age:		Sex:		Mother Tongue:	

Other Spoken Languages:	

Nationality:		Phone Number:	

Email Address:	

Part 2- Professional Details

- What is your main occupation (your main source of income)?
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____

- Do you currently have a secondary occupation?
  ☐ Yes ☐No
  If yes, which?
  _____

- What is your current job-market status?
  ☐ Full time employment
  ☐ Part-time employment
  ☐ Artistic Contract
  ☐Self-Employment
  ☐Unemployed
  ☐ Other: _____

- Are you specialized in a specific circus discipline?
  ☐ Yes ☐No
  If yes, please describe your primary and secondary circus disciplines.
  _____
  _____

_____
_____
_____
_____

Part 3- Education Details

- Between what years did you attend the National Circus School?
  _____
- What was your primary specialization(s) in the National Circus School?
  _____
- What was your secondary specialization(s) in the National Circus School?
  _____

Part 4- Availability

- Please describe your work schedule between September 2013 and February 2014. For instance, please describe the time periods that you may be in Montreal to meet for a potential interview.
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
  _____
- Do you currently have Skype?
  ☐ Yes ☐No
  If yes, would you be willing to conduct interviews over Skype?_____

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire.

Appendix C: Interview Questioning Guide

Interview 1: Focused Life History

Can you please tell me about all of your experiences with circus from your childhood experiences, leading up to circus school, during circus school and your experiences up until this present day?

Interview 2: Details of Experience

-Can you describe what your experiences were like as a child?

- *How did you feel in school?*
- *What type of school did you attend?*
- *What kinds of extracurricular activities did you pursue?)*

-What kind of experiences left you to be interested in circus?

- *Was there a family influence?*

-How did you hear about the National Circus School?

- *Why did you decide to attend the National Circus School?*
- *Why did you decide to pursue a structured curriculum instead of private teachers?*
- *How did you prepare before going to circus school, once you knew you were accepted?*

-Were you working as a circus artist before attending school?

- *What was your artistic vision leading up to circus school?*

-Can you reconstruct what a regular day was like at circus school from the moment you woke up to the moment you went to sleep?

-Can you describe your relationships with other students? Teachers? Mentors? Administrators?

-What are some of the experiences that stand out in your memories of circus school?

-Can you describe your classes at the National Circus School? Can you reconstruct these experiences?

- *Can you describe what your technical training classes were like? Can you reconstruct this experience?*
- *Can you describe what your artistic training classes were like? Can you reconstruct this experience?*
- *Can you describe what your academic classes were like? Can you reconstruct this experience?*
- *Can you describe how artistic elements were incorporated in technical classes?*
- *Can you describe an enjoyable class?*
- *Can you describe a class that was not enjoyable?*
- *What was your relationship like with your teachers? Was there a difference between your technical, artistic, and academic teachers?*

-What are some of the experiences that stand out in your memories of working the circus profession?

-Can you describe the differences between your first, second and third year in the program?

-Can you describe your experiences with the following areas: playing an instrument,

dramaturgy, dance, public speaking, keeping fit, creation of an act, safety of a working environment, contextualizing performance, communication with audience, foreign languages, digital video, working as a team, history and aesthetics of circus arts, self-reflection, financial and legal work context, creation of promotional material, dealing with injuries, knowledge of the circus work field, management of professional development, ability to teach, interpreting performance, using circus vocabulary, rigging, lighting and coordinating production.

-Can you describe how you were assessed during circus school? How did you feel about this?

-Can you describe the opportunities for performance while at the National Circus School?

-Can you describe your experience with language while attending the National Circus School?

-Can you describe your extracurricular activities outside of the school? Can you reconstruct what you did on a typical day after school? On the weekend?

-Can you describe your experiences looking for work after the National Circus School?

-Can you describe your professional experience after circus school? Can you reconstruct a typical workweek for me?

-Can you describe what it is like to work as a circus artist?

-Can you describe your current relationship with the National Circus School?

-Can you describe your current relationships with people from the National Circus School including peers and teachers?

Interview 3: Reflection on Meaning

Many questions in this interview were developed based on the transcriptions from previous interviews. For instance, the question might be formed as "Given what you have said before about… how do you understand… in your life?"

-Given what you have said in past interviews, where do you see your future in circus arts?

-Given what you have talked about in past interviews, how do you feel about the program at the National Circus School? What sense does it make to you?

-Given what you have talked about in past interviews, how do you feel about your relationships with your teachers, peers and administration?

-What does it mean to be a circus artist?

-Reflecting on your experiences talked about in previous interviews, do you feel you evolved as a circus artist?

-Given what you have discussed in past interviews, which classes do you think helped you most in your career as a circus artist? Which classes helped you the least? Are there any other classes or focus that you wish you would have had?

-What does the term academic mean to you when applied to circus arts?

-Can you compare studying circus at the national circus school compared to other experiences learning circus?

-How did you feel before the school day? How did you feel at the end of the school day? -How did you feel at the beginning of a semester? How did you feel at the end of a semester? How did you feel when you graduated?

-Did you feel supported at the National Circus School? Did you feel supported after you

graduated?
-How aligned was your vision with the schools vision?
-How has your vision evolved since attending the National Circus School?
-What were some of the most valuable lessons learned at the National Circus School? ---
-How has the circus school shaped your circus practice?
-Did you feel that you needed to pursue additional training after the program at the National Circus School?
-If you were to design your own program to prepare you for your experiences, what would be most important? Least important?

Appendix D: Consent Form

Consent Form for Participant Selection Survey

Title of Research: *Exploring Circus School Graduates Perspectives of Post-secondary Circus Arts Professional Programs*

Researcher: Amanda Langlois, Supervisor: Dr. Butler-Kisber; Tel: 514-398-2252
Department: Integrated Studies in Education, Curriculum Studies, McGill University
Contact Information: Tel: 514-972-3886, Email: Amanda.langlois@mail.mcgill.ca

Dear Participant,

My name is Amanda Langlois and I am currently a student in the MA program in the integrated studies in Education department at McGill University. I am conducting a study on circus education in post-secondary schools to gain a better understanding of the experiences of circus school students and how the circus school program contributed to their professional careers. I hope to work with graduates from the National Circus School of Montreal as part of the study. I need your help and support as this project could help provide insight into the approaches for enhancing the development of post-secondary circus schools. As a participant in this study you will also be helping to contribute to the development of research in the field of circus arts.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. There are no foreseeable risks or discomfort to participants as a result of participating in this study. Participation is entirely voluntary and you also have the right to withdraw from the study at any time during or after the data have been collected without any reservations or negative consequences. There are no consequences for choosing not to participate in this study. You also have the right to ask questions at any given time and you may decline to answer any questions if you wish.

During the study you will be asked to respond to questions about your professional circus career, your educational upbringing, and your experiences at the National Circus School. A pre-questionnaire will be used to select participants from a wide range of circus disciplines for my study. Selected participants will be contacted for an interview. Selected participants will be interviewed 3 times over the course of a year for a 60-minute interview at a setting and time that is convenient for the participant. Interviews may also take place over Skype due to the nature of travel in the field of circus arts. Shortly after the interview has been completed, I will send you a copy of the transcription to give you an opportunity to confirm the accuracy of our conversation and to add or clarify anything that you wish. I will also need your permission to record your interview via audiotape for accuracy. Interview tapes will be erased after careful transcription and your identity will not be associated with the interview transcripts. You will always have the right to withdraw at any time and you do not have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with. In order to protect your privacy, the data will be kept confidential and all reporting will be anonymous. You will not be asked to identify your real names. All participants will be assigned pseudonyms, a name that you assume for the purpose of this study and any other identifying information will be removed. Data collected during this study will be retained in password-protected files on a personal computer. I, as the primary researcher, my

supervisor, Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber and transcribers who may be employed, will have access to the data.

I am happy to share my findings with the participants, and the results of the research may be disseminated in professional journals, at conferences and presentations and in a thesis. Additionally, the data from this study may be used in future studies. Your name and other identifying details will not appear in any thesis or report resulting from this study.

Thank you for considering this request. I greatly appreciate your cooperation in this endeavor. If you have any questions regarding this study, or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation please contact me at 514-972-3886 or by email at Amanda.langlois@mail.mcgill.ca. You can also contact my supervisor, **Professor Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber** at 514-398-2252 or by email at **lynn.butlerkisber@mcgill.ca**. Additionally, you may contact either of us at any time during the research you have any questions or concerns.

___The study has been explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

___ I agree that observations notes may be made of interviews I attend related to this research.

___I agree that I will fill out the survey sheet.

___I agree that I may be contacted for an interview.

___ I agree to be audiotaped and transcribed if I am contacted for an interview.

___I, therefore, freely consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

By clicking on the link to the pre-selection questionnaire you are acknowledging that you agree to the terms stated above. If you are selected for the interviews, please fill out the consent form and bring it to the first interview. Thank you.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights or welfare as a participant in this research study, please contact the McGill Ethics Officer at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca.

I very much look forward to speaking with you and thank you in advance for your assistance in this project.

Sincerely,

Amanda Langlois
Student Researcher
McGill University

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN INTERVIEWS

By signing this consent form, you are not waiving your legal rights or releasing the investigator(s) or involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities. As a participant, you will be provided a copy of this consent form for your own records.

I consent to participate in this study.

I agree to have my interview audio recorded.

- YES
- NO

I agree that the data retrieved during this study may be used in future studies:

- YES
- NO

Date: _____

Participant Name: _____ (Please print)

Participant Signature: _____