

A Theory of Applied Circus Creativity and its Development Within a Bachelor of Circus Arts  
Programme in Sweden

Alisan MacNeal Funk, M.A.

Department of Integrated Studies in Education

McGill University, Montréal, Québec

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## **Abstract**

This research investigates whether, and how, students in a circus bachelor programme learned creativity during their studies, and how they use creativity in their profession. Twelve participants were interviewed, representing six different cohorts from the University of Dance and Circus (DOCH) in Stockholm, Sweden between 2008-2018 (now Stockholm University of the Arts). Constructivist grounded theory methodology (CGT) guided the analytical process of uncovering themes described by participants. Narrative vignettes were used to represent the experiences recounted by multiple participants influencing the apprenticeship of creativity and creative methods. Curriculum theory was used as a lens to understand the relationships between programmed content and the lived experiences which created the learning environment wherein these participants developed the knowledge to enter the circus field. With consideration of the individualized pressures of the realities of contemporary circus creation and performance, creativity is here theorized within a Western cultural perspective, where creative contributions are often seen through the lens of social innovation. Three themes emerged from the analysis. In “learning creativity,” participants describe learning an iterative method of the creative process with regard to the performance of their circus discipline. “Creative identity” collects definitions and beliefs about creativity. The “creative practices” theme includes participant descriptions of using the creative process in their profession to navigate challenges beyond disciplinary work, and when approaching problem identification and problem solving during the COVID pandemic. Together, these themes demonstrate that apprenticeship of domain-specific creative practices provides a methodological foundation for domain general creative approaches. I name this method of using domain-specific approaches to domain-general professional challenges in circus

“applied circus creativity.” These findings have implications for circus education, and other arts programs, which aim to preparing professional artists.

## Résumé

Cette recherche examine si et comment les étudiants d'un programme de licence en cirque ont appris la créativité au cours de leurs études, et comment ils utilisent la créativité dans leur profession. Douze participants ont été interviewés, représentant six cohortes différentes de l'Université de danse et de cirque (DOCH) de Stockholm, en Suède, entre 2008 et 2018 (aujourd'hui Université des Arts de Stockholm). La méthodologie constructiviste de la théorie ancrée (CGT) a guidé le processus analytique de découverte des thèmes décrits par les participants. Des vignettes narratives ont été utilisées pour représenter les expériences racontées par plusieurs participants influençant l'apprentissage de la créativité et des méthodes créatives. La théorie du curriculum a été utilisée comme une lentille pour comprendre les relations entre le contenu programmé et les expériences vécues qui ont créé l'environnement d'apprentissage dans lequel ces participants ont développé les connaissances nécessaires pour entrer dans le domaine du cirque. En tenant compte des pressions individualisées des réalités de la création et du spectacle de cirque contemporain, la créativité est ici théorisée dans une perspective culturelle occidentale, où les contributions créatives sont souvent vues à travers le prisme de l'innovation sociale. Trois thèmes sont ressortis de l'analyse. Dans « apprendre la créativité », les participants décrivent l'apprentissage d'une méthode itérative du processus créatif en ce qui concerne la performance de leur discipline de cirque. « Identité créative » rassemble des définitions et des croyances sur la créativité. Le thème « Pratiques créatives » comprend les descriptions des participants sur l'utilisation du processus créatif dans leur profession pour relever des défis au-delà du travail disciplinaire, et lors de l'approche de l'identification et de la résolution de problèmes pendant la pandémie de COVID. Ensemble, ces thèmes démontrent que l'apprentissage de pratiques créatives spécifiques à un domaine fournit une base méthodologique

pour les approches créatives générales du domaine. J'appelle cette méthode d'utilisation d'approches spécifiques à un domaine pour relever des défis professionnels généraux dans le domaine du cirque « créativité de cirque appliquée ». Ces résultats ont des implications pour l'éducation au cirque et d'autres programmes artistiques visant à préparer des artistes professionnels.



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### **Contributions to Original Knowledge**

This research advances knowledge in circus education by proposing a theory of Applied Circus Creativity. This theorizes the way in which creative processes are being learned during higher education in circus disciplines yet being applied more extensively in professional work. This example of applied creative thinking (Gube & Lajoie, 2020) marks a pathway by which creative domain specific practice becomes a domain general method to approach problems. It has implications for how creative processes can be fostered through domain-specific education, which enriches both the domain in question and the development of processes that can transcend domain towards the potentiality of solving as-yet-unknown problems.

### **Contribution of Authors**

Alisan Funk is the sole author and researcher of this work under the supervision of Dr. Mindy R. Carter (McGill University, Montreal) and committee members Dr. Lynn Butler-Kisber (McGill University, Montreal) and Dr. Louis Patrick Leroux (Concordia University, Montreal). This research was conducted with approval from the Research Ethics Board at McGill University.

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### **List of Abbreviations**

CCA	Constant Comparative Analysis
CGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory
CNAC	Centre national des arts du cirque
DCA	Directed Content Analysis
DOCH	University of Dance and Circus (Dans- och cirkushögskola)
ECQ	École de Cirque de Quebec
ENC	École Nationale de Cirque
FEDEC	International Network for Professional Circus Education <sup>1</sup>
GTM	Grounded Theory Methodology
NECCA	New England Center for Circus Arts
NI	Narrative Inquiry
SKH	Stockholm University of the Arts (Stockholms Konstnärliga Högskola)

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<sup>1</sup> In 2023 the FEDEC retained its well-known acronym derived from the French version of its first name, the European federation of circus schools, but changed its tag line to the International Network for Professional Circus Education because it better describes the purview of the organization (International Network for Professional Circus Education (FEDEC), n.d.).

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

This research investigates the relationship between learning experiences within the three-year bachelor programme in circus arts at the University of Dance and Circus (DOCH) and the applied creative thinking (Gube & Lajoie, 2020) of graduates from that programme to discover whether, and how, the curriculum(s) (Eisner, 1979/2002) contributed to their ability to navigate challenges within their professional lives – both within and beyond their domain of circus specialization. The fields of creativity, curriculum and circus guide the “what,” “how” and “where” of this inquiry.

Creativity is broadly understood as the process by which new ideas are generated, and also therefore the means by which as-yet-unknown problems will be solved (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Runco & Bahleda, 1986; Sawyer, 2012; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018). This current research ascribes to understanding “creativity” as the method by which ideas occur that are simultaneously novel and applicable to specific contexts, or which solve a particular problem (Beghetto, 2010; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). Innovations within arts and arts pedagogies are rarely in the spotlight, perhaps because the results are less tangible, or less directly connectable with existential threat (like climate change) (Sawyer 2012). Perhaps these domains are seen as always-already creative because they are artistic, where one of the most important factors determining achievement is how the artist satisfies aligning their vision with the project parameters, unlike certain engineering goals (for instance) which require function over form (Eisner, 1979/2002; Harris, 2016; Sawyer, 2012). While significant creative achievements are normally domain specific (Baer, 2015), Gube and Lajoie believe the concept of adaptive expertise – the ability to apply one’s expertise in novel situations – approaches a possible pathway whereby creative methods might become fungible – a nod to the proponents of

domain generality. Gube and Lajoie (2020) propose the term “applied creative thinking” to capture the creative process of being able to use one’s expertise within new parameters in order to develop new knowledge, processes, or products. I use curriculum theory to understand how creativity was learned – or not – through educational experiences at DOCH. Curriculum theory provides a lens to illuminate how the interplay of content and environment scaffold or restrict what students learn during their journey through the classes, spaces and people that constitute an educational programme. This conceptual framework centers the learning that occurs through the explicit and hidden curricula (Apple, 1990a; Eisner, 1979/2002) and prioritizes knowledge of the outcome (what was learned) over the intention (what was taught).

I have chosen to locate this research in an arts university which includes first and second cycle circus degrees because I am familiar with higher education in circus through my own practice and profession as a former circus artist and current head of the circus department at the Stockholm University of the Arts, the institution into which DOCH merged in 2014 (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). Through my knowledge of circus education structures and my academic interests, including my masters research at Concordia University (Funk, 2017) and participation in circus research projects with Montreal’s Center for Circus Arts Research, Innovation and Knowledge Transfer (<https://ecolenationaledecirque.ca/en/research-centre/what-is-the-research-centre/#>), I became aware that many of the educational ‘best practices’ for teaching creativity are already present in the curricula of higher education circus programs. The specific example of contemporary circus education at DOCH, a university prioritising artistic research (Damkjaer & Robitaille, 2011) and aimed at preparing students for a notoriously rapidly evolving performing arts context (Burt & Lavers, 2017; Cordier, 2007; Cordier et al., 2019; Étienne et al., 2014; Funk, 2019; Perez-Roux et al., 2016), provides an ideal location to understand if and how

creativity is learned through the course of the education. With a view to elucidating the relationship between DOCH's circus BA curriculum(s) and the applied creative thinking of graduates from that programme (Gube & Lajoie, 2020), two primary questions guided the methods of research and analysis:

Q1: What did students learn about creativity within the circus arts profession during their studies at DOCH?

Q2: In what ways have graduates from DOCH applied creative thinking within and/or beyond situations of circus performance?

These questions open areas of inquiry through which to understand the links between what was taught, what was learned, what is used in professional practice, and the influences of personal beliefs about creativity.

### **Expanding Approaches to Creativity Research: The Case for Studying How Creativity is Learned in University Circus Education**

The intersection of these approaches to understanding the ways in which circus education fosters creative thinking provides potential pathways for applying this research in different fields. This project is further driven by the urgently present need to determine if an educational programme that ostensibly meets the majority of educational parameters for enhancing creativity (Fasko, 2001; Gajda et al., 2017; Smith & Smith, 2010) enables its graduate's better tools for approaching uncertainty within their profession and, perhaps, within other aspects of their life. The Covid-19 pandemic began after I proposed this research but before I began conducting interviews. The local and global destabilization of the Covid-19 novel coronavirus pandemic brought into stark relief the merits of resilience in the face of uncertainty (Berinato, 2020). As awareness of the pandemic grew rapidly and groups of gathered people were prohibited,



performing and teaching artists (like many others) found themselves suddenly without income. Training studios closed, performance venues shuttered, festivals and conferences cancelled, and workshops withered (Bessone, 2020; Leroux, in press). Circus professionals - along with the rest of the world - were thrown directly and unavoidably into an opportunity to respond with applied creative thinking: using their existing knowledge to develop solutions in the new global context.

The economic, social, and physical impacts of the coronavirus pandemic are intimately individual. Reports of increased domestic violence and mental health concerns, not to mention the loss of health and life, point towards the legacy that the virus will likely have (Neuman, 2020). Without minimizing the personal impacts, the reality of global uncertainty exposes methods of engagement with the future. Although unprecedented on such a global level, many of the current conditions are part and parcel of the experience most professional artists navigate: all artists have experienced finding themselves suddenly without previously planned work because of changes from venues, funders, or companies (Burt & Lavers, 2017). With large gaps in their paid performance work artists have periodically turned to other interests or abilities to pay the bills. Further, due to injury or pregnancy, many circus artists find themselves suddenly unable to perform the very tasks that comprise their identity. At the best of times contemporary circus artists are called upon to use applied creative thinking (Gube & Lajoie, 2020) in their professions when they bring their specialist knowledge of circus disciplines into the diverse contexts from re-creating an existing act with new music or costume, to participating in collective creation of new performance material, to adjacent employments such as teaching and directing.

Even in circus not all people are prepared to orient towards solutions in times of instability. Our education systems have not been designed to nourish this approach, relying instead on reinforcing existing knowledge patterns and restricting problem-finding/solution-

experimenting behaviours (Beghetto, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 2014; Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). Some people react to uncertainty by seeking to replicate the past, a known pattern; change is experienced as destruction. These people are most comfortable applying patterns of knowledge within known contexts but are less adept when either of those changes. Another response is the imagining of possibilities, futures, and patterns that do not look like the past. These people are able to draw on their knowledge and experience while still incorporating new information and remaining attentive to solutions they have never before seen. This second response is generative and functionally creative. People who adapt their expertise to new situations are better able to create new structures and solutions in their art, their lives, and ultimately the world (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986; Stinson, 2016). If educators can demonstrate specific educational strategies that prime a person's ability to choose creative methods when faced with problems or new contexts, the likelihood of constructive adaptations to environmental and social shifts increases.

### **Situating Self**

It is difficult to disentangle the reasons I am intellectually and emotionally drawn to the topic of curriculum in university circus education programs. A list of approximately linear events would provide a map tracking my path to the present but would poorly describe how my interests and thinking have been challenged over time, developed through encounters with people, ideas, structures, cultures, frustrations, and revelations. My experiences include discovery of, and transition into, circus arts from dance practices; learning experiences in different types of formal and informal training institutions; performing my own aerial work and that of others professionally; creating/choreographing and directing other circus artists; teaching students of all ages in a variety of formal and informal contexts; working within circus institutions as teacher,

teacher educator, summer camp director and researcher; participating in several pilot projects bringing circus to communities with limited interest in, or knowledge of, circus arts, and sitting on funding juries and managing boards for circus organizations. Circus has led me to many different roles and relationships, often multiple roles at the same institutions including student, teacher, creator and/or other leadership roles. Organizations that I have repeatedly worked with include the New England Center for Circus Arts (NECCA), San Francisco's Circus Center, the École de cirque de Québec (ECQ), Circus Smirkus, Cirque du Soleil, Montreal's École nationale de cirque (ENC) and Complètement Cirque festival, and Concordia University, and the International Network for Professional Circus Education (FEDEC). A linear representation would not show how many times I returned to my ideas about circus education through these roles and places to see how they would hold up against newly revealed challenges, contradictory experiences, and the demands of intellectual rigor. From my current perspective as head of the Bachelor of Circus and head of the Circus Arts subject at SKH, I can see several themes that have consistently driven me to improve my understanding of how circus education can, and could, function.

The single richest pathway to tempering the steel of my ideas about circus education has been learning and working in many circus educational programmes. Through the course of being educated in circus, performing circus, teaching circus, teaching circus instructors, and researching circus education I have had the privilege of witnessing common challenges leading to common frustrations within circus educational structures. No amount of theoretical research about circus education could have prepared me for perceiving realities of the tensions and solutions lived out by students, staff, and administrators in circus educational programmes. A topographical map does not provide shortness of breath on the ascent, nor wobbly knees while

tracing a downward slope, despite the knowledge that those experiences are real. Seeking the source of identifiable and repeated tensions within circus education programmes became one broad goal for my research and has become a guiding star for my current practice<sup>2</sup> as head of a Bachelor of Circus programme. One key source of tension seems to be fitting the rhythms of training different circus disciplines into temporo-spatial schedule that also meets standardized credit-hours and syllabus requirements. And this is my second theme – seeking to better understand the *what* and *why* of university circus education because a) from the first time I found out about it I had a sense that there was some kind of exceptional opportunity to be had in this marriage, and b) from working in and researching circus schools (Funk 2017, 2018, 2019, 2022), I am convinced that we (both circus and university communities) have not yet maximised the full potential of studying to become a professional circus artist within a university setting. I care deeply about circus education and educating circus artists. I became curious about what these artists are learning through university programs that is concretely different from what they might learn in a non-accredited programme that aims to prepare artists for the circus profession.

In alignment with my pragmatist stance described in Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods, I try to ask the simplest question that can provide me with an actionable answer. There are several I have found that guide me in my research of circus education programmes, and for understanding the (sometimes contradictory) explicit and implicit curricula which guide the lives of the students, teachers, and administrators. At the risk of seeming teleological by asking questions the answers to which we in circus should already collectively agree upon, the question that sets the stage for this specific research (and which also guides my professional practice as an

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<sup>2</sup> Practice: because, due to the individual nature of circus education, the work will never be completed; rather like any other type of art, it requires showing up and doing the work while leaving the door open for inspiration (Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 2014; Sawyer, 2018; Stinson, 2016b).

educator in, and administrator of, a university circus programme) is: What is the purpose of a circus education programme? The answer would seem apparent: to develop a professional circus artist (Burt & Lavers, 2017; Cordier, 2007; Cordier et al., 2019; Étienne et al., 2014; Funk, 2019; Perez-Roux et al., 2016). This continues to be done as it has for centuries, without a university diploma and outside of a university programme. It is done in training centres dedicated to circus professionalization, through apprenticeship and communities of practice, and sometimes still within family contexts (Burt & Lavers, 2017; Carmeli, 2012; Festival Mondial de Cirque de Demain, 1987; Lave & Wenger, 1991). This is entirely reasonable to attain professional ability in certain areas of the circus field (Carmeli, 2012); to require a diploma to perform circus is to apply the process of degree-inflation to a career which can be done without formal education. Requiring formal accreditation would also deprive the circus field of one of its most valuable and consistent assets: the passionate (read near-obsessive) dedication of physically gifted individuals who pursue and develop disciplinary and performative techniques through dogged persistence, overcoming discomfort, and while sacrificing many of the standard comforts of 9-5 society.

But so many different pathways into the circus profession provoke a more complicated question: Is there a separate purpose for a circus education programme in a university setting, as opposed to a strictly professional one? In discussion and dialogue with circus artists, students, coaches, teachers, administrators, through the course of my master's research (Funk, 2017, 2019) and in social contexts, no significant differentiation is made between the type of professionalizing programme offered in a non-academically accredited training studio and that offered within a university. And because the outcome is assumed to be the same – to develop a professional circus artist – the trappings that come with university are often found to be

excessive, oppressive, and tolerated only in exchange for the long-term, existential benefits that are offered: protections for students (visas, networks, recognition of student status), financial benefit to the programme (either partially or entirely funded through taxes), recognition of circus as an art form because a degree can be conferred, and ameliorated options in the possibility of career-change necessitating a BA degree.

All of these are true and are excellent foundational reasons that circus arts should be included within university settings, but they do nothing towards understanding what should or could be different about a circus education programme within a university from that offered in a training studio. A degree offers viability and respectability to the sceptical parents whose children are begging to complete their education within circus – said one participant in this study “*both of my parents are doctors. They were a bit excited about me going to a university*” (T8, p. 9). While the courses are clearly labelled with approved syllabi, in the lived world, we find inconsistent and insubstantial educational practices rampant when speaking directly with students (Funk, 2019). While several participants raved about the management classes taught for their cohort, another described the negative end of the spectrum: “*Management was in the syllabus, so they had to give us a management class, so they looked it up online and gave us a useless class, only because it was already written down*” (T1, p. 5). The participant’s perception of the problem is that the university requires a syllabus where things must be written down before the students and teacher meet, and therefore courses can be offered with no regard to the needs of the students. This participant could think of no positive effects from integration with a university other than funding, believing student time would be better spent working on developing technique in a discipline. It is a large leap, it seems to me, from one poorly conducted course to the conclusion that all academic requirements are superficially imposed and

definitionally irrelevant. And yet it also reveals the precarious position that institutionalized circus education holds in the circus zeitgeist – and a low standard for what could be expected from a university-supported circus education.

This example shines out to me – still following that star – as a quintessential example of where we circus educators have failed to understand and communicate the potential offered by circus-in-university. I experience the constraints of university as constraints solved through creative re-imaginings of our context. I see within the structure of university requirements a value-added version of circus professionalization. I see a provocation to applying our own rhetoric to ourselves – to take all our beautiful speeches about how circus can increase creativity, can increase inclusion, can be a place where people find themselves through pushing their own boundaries and apply them to envisioning circus curricula that benefit from universities; to creating a circus education which prepares both professional artists and knowledge of an artistic field; curricula in which students and staff experience the connections between physical, aesthetic, theoretical and practical content. This doctoral research is itself situated within my larger life-project of manifesting this type of circus education. It is the practice of this – of defining and refining my understanding of *what* is possible within circus education, and the discovering *how* it might be achieved – that has entangled itself with my PhD research. Each informs the other and each has nourished the other during the process of research, analysis, and professional practice.

### **Organization of Dissertation**

This research is presented in seven chapters. In this introductory chapter, I have described the research question, research aims, and situated myself as a circus thinker and researcher. The second chapter traces key aspects of the transmission of circus knowledge practices. Educational

structures and cultural expectations within which circus practices are transmitted has changed rapidly since the 1970s, and institutionalized circus education is a relatively new phenomenon (Maleval, 2010; Salaméro & Haschar-Noé, 2012; Sizorn, 2014). The transmission practices are nevertheless part of an extensive genealogy of educations and apprenticeships. Educators and administrators of our current circus programs have very few degrees of separation from classical knowledge transmission models, if any separation at all. These apprenticeship-style practices have evolved and adapted but are not far below the surface. Situating current circus teaching and learning within the broader history enables a perspective of circus schools, and specifically DOCH, that is embedded within and a result of the changing cultural practices regarding education and circus performance itself.

In the third chapter I review key literature describing curriculum studies as an approach to understanding how teaching and learning are constructed and experienced. This chapter also explores the history of creativity studies and brings forth concepts and history situating how an evolving concept of creativity has influenced how it is identified and taught. Although the BA programme that is the subject of this research is located in Sweden, I have focused on North American curriculum theory for several reasons. First, there are close links between curriculum and concepts of teaching and learning creativity in a North American understanding of both concepts. Because I am using North American creativity theorists to understand creativity in this research, it seems relevant to focus on curriculum concepts situated in the same traditions and arising from the same theoretical movements. Furthermore, the international research dialogue about creativity connects with, or resists, North American creativity research standards, justifying its importance as a foundational body of literature. Second, though in Sweden, the DOCH BA in circus was heavily influenced by North American programme heads. Walter



Ferrero, an artist and educator from the United States, became head of the programme in 2008, and would eventually become head of the circus department. Marie-Andree Robitaille, a Québécoise circus performer, creator, and educator, became head of the artistic courses in 2011. The BA programme became more interconnected to circus communities and flourished into an international reputation for innovative approaches to highly skilled circus performance (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013)<sup>3</sup>. Third, curriculum studies as a field has arrived relatively recently in the Swedish context and is, in turn, situated in a North American understanding of curriculum (Lundgren, 2015; see also Krogh et al., 2021). For these reasons, understanding the development of curriculum studies in North America provides an entirely adequate lens for investigating whether and how creativity is learned in a Swedish circus BA programme.

My epistemology as a constructivist following in the pragmatic philosophical tradition and a description of qualitative methodologies undergirding my choice of constructivist grounded theory (CGT) (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007) for these research questions are described in Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods. Following 12 interviews with circus artists who graduated from DOCH's circus BA programme between 2008-2018, I describe the analytical methods of constant comparative analysis (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), and narrative analysis (Butler-Kisber, 2018; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2007). These methods were used to more accurately represent alignment and discrepancies between the experiences recounted by participants. From the analysis, three themes emerged which, in turn, led to my creation of a theory of applied circus creativity.

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<sup>3</sup> This information has also been obtained by living and working in Sweden and hearing discussions about the history and impact of this programme and the people who have worked with it.

In the fifth chapter I report on the results, answering the research questions of what students learned about creativity within the BA programme and how they are using creativity in and beyond their circus profession. The results categories are grouped together into headings under the three themes: 1) learning creativity, 2) creative identity, and 3) creative practices. Results show that all participants learned creative process tools which they continue to use in their professional work, however not all participants believed their creativity was enhanced through DOCH's BA programme. Participants also expressed resistance to the institutionalization of circus practices and positive experiences of having their voice and knowledge valued in the delivery of the circus education. Significantly, the results show that while learning the creative process within a domain, all participants expanded the process method to other domains beyond that within which they learned the practices, indicating applied creative thinking is fostered by DOCH's educational programme (Gube & Lajoie, 2020).

Chapter Six: Discussion presents the above results with relationship to the theoretical fields of curriculum studies and creativity research. The theory of applied circus creativity is proposed, and each theme is described with relationship to how it supports the emergent theory, and how the theme itself includes implications for practice. In the final concluding chapter, I summarize the research study and the implications for practice. Limitations of this study and areas for future research are addressed, and I thank the reader for joining me in this journey.

### **Summary of Introduction**

This dissertation uses the fields of circus studies, creativity studies and curriculum theory to query whether and how circus artists who have graduated from a bachelor's in circus arts learned creativity. To articulate this research question, constructivist grounded theory (CGT) has been used as the methodology to find resonant themes from 12 participants who discussed their

experiences of DOCH's circus programme, and if and how they use creativity in their professional practices. Constant comparative analysis (CCA) and directed content analysis (DCA) were used to work with the data and uncover both global themes and to situate complex experiences in their context and within the existing literature. More broadly, this dissertation is the result of more than 20 years of my own professional practice in circus arts. My sustained interest in circus education and my professional work in a circus bachelor programme drive my desire to understand more about circus education programs and what they offer to circus artists, the circus field, and what circus offers to the structures of the schools themselves. This current research finds that students learned creative methods which they use in their professional practice in many ways beyond the narrow field of apprenticeship and proposes a theory of applied circus creativity that describes the implications of the journey from domain specificity to domain generality in circus education and practice.

## **Chapter Two: Circus and Circus Education Literature Review**

### **Histories of Knowledge Transmission in Circus**

Most contemporary circus artists have attended some form of institutionalized circus education programme. This is a radical change from how most practices that appear in the circus ring have been learned for hundreds of years. Before the 2000s, the majority of knowledge transmission in circus was primarily through apprenticeship models of teaching and learning. Those who became circus performers were frequently born into circus families and apprenticed within those same families (or sometimes with other families) (Carmeli, 2012; Maleval, 2004; St. Leon, 2000). Alternately, some people joined the circus from outside those families. Sometimes young children were adopted or apprenticed to circus families (Hammarstrom, 1983; St. Leon, 2000). In other cases, adults with relevant skills and perseverance sought training with active or retired circus performers (Stroud, 1999). Occasional training schools in history are the exception that proves the rule. These occur primarily in China which had a different cultural relationship to acrobatic activities prior to the arrival of circus (Fu, 1985; Mauclair, 2002).

In many countries today, students interested in circus have access to accredited secondary education, pre-professional schools, and/or higher education certificates of study or degrees. Development of circus education programs cannot be disentangled from the aesthetic and epistemological changes in circus that have occurred since the first circus schools appeared in the West in 1974; contemporary circus and the institutionalization of circus education have been co-constructive. When the circus field needed rejuvenation, schools were created to develop circus expertise. In turn, circus schools have provided incubation for innovations in disciplinary techniques, pedagogy, performance and safety equipment, and circus dramaturgies. These

developments themselves drive reinvention of the circus field in a cycle that has radically changed circus performance over the last fifty years.

To fully understand the circus education environment in DOCH, it is essential to understand how it is situated within classical and contemporary circus education traditions, and where it has resisted those same traditions. Even a brief history of circus knowledge transmission, such as follows, also demonstrates how the globally interconnected nature of circus education and performance transcends local and national education cultures. This chapter presents the global history of circus through the lens of knowledge transmission practices. I begin with highlights from different countries documenting disciplines that are commonly found in classical and contemporary circus and the evolving definition(s) of circus. This is followed by a broad timeline tracing significant global moments in the creation of institutionalized circus education. The third section describes the Moscow Circus School and its influence on the curricula of French and Canadian circus education because these schools have been global educational leaders in circus since the 1980s. In the last section I describe the specific context and origins of DOCH's circus BA in relationship to contemporary circus, global circus education trends, and the institutional artistic research environment. Coning down from the global/historical to the pinpoint of DOCH's local/present contributes to understanding the explicit, hidden, and null curricula of Sweden's circus BA, as well as the expectations of students and faculty regarding the rhythms and aims of contemporary, institutional, accredited circus training.

## **Knowledge Transmission Before Circus Schools: Culturally Situated, Context Dependant**

### ***Four Eras of Circus Performance***

Part of understanding circus education is understanding what ‘circus’ means within a cultural context and era. This section ‘defines’ circus because to learn the thing, we must understand what we mean by the thing itself. More simply said than done; definitions of circus tend to call into question the very nature of what is being defined (Jacob, 2002, 2008; Mauclair, 2002; Maleval, 2010). Despite generally accepted differences in circus performance styles between Traditional/Classic, New/Nouveau, and Contemporary circus performances, it can be difficult to draw firm borders around an individual performance, artist, or circus experience. In this text, I use four broad categories of circus activity beginning with the ‘pre-circus’ era and followed by the generally accepted terminology for three differentiable eras of circus performance: Classical/Traditional Circus, Cirque Nouveau/New Circus, and Contemporary Circus. These categories mark differentiable cultural moments of performance codes and expectations by artists and audiences alike.

British soldier and horsemanship expert Philip Astley is commonly and pervasively credited with concretizing the performance style that would quickly become known as circus in 1768 (Jacob, 2002). From its ‘innovation’ even to the present day, this Classical/Traditional style is marked by the inclusion of multiple, distinct acts in different disciplines and a 13-meter ring within which most performance happens, and around which the audience are seated. All of the disciplines that were part of circus at that time came from knowledge transmission pathways older than circus, including animal presentations, juggling, clowning, and ropewalking (Jacob, 2002; Mauclair, 2002; Purovaara et al., 2012; Ziethen & Serena, 2003). Furthermore, many of the practices that would be developed within circus also have origins outside of the ring,

including trapeze (Tait, 2005) and the Indian Mallakhamb practices of rope and pole climbing (Burt, 2010). Exploring the knowledge transmission methods of those practices provides the opportunity to name inherited expectations that might otherwise escape attention in contemporary circus education.

As the Classical circus developed through the industrial age and into the globalization of the early twentieth century, the form became more spectacularized. Each performer was normally responsible for their own equipment, costume, music, and other elements to highlight the differences between each act. The glamour and stylized escapism of Classical circus was rejected by the artists who developed Cirque Nouveau/New Circus, which arose from the Western cultural revolutions in the late 60s and immersed circus more directly within political action (Albrecht, 1995; Lavers et al., 2019; Maleval, 2010). While typically retaining the same distinct and disciplinarily diverse act-based dramaturgical structure, these performances are marked by provocative (sometimes threatening) engagement with audiences, politically motivated premises, and unified theatrical codes: all artists were part of a broader theme that included costuming, music, lighting, and character work. Renowned circuses frequently named in this category include the French company Archaos, Canadian company Cirque du Soleil, the Pickle Family Circus in the United States, and Australia's Circus Oz (Albrecht 1995; Lavers et al., 2019; Maleval, 2010).

While street performers and artists in the 1960s acquired circus knowledge in their drive to question high art through the integration popular forms and political action (Albrecht 1995; Maleval, 2010), Classical circus was struggling to retain audience interest. The dwindling pool of circus artists in turn stagnated the education of new artists (Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987; Maleval, 2004). From the subsequent development of circus schools emerged

circus education programs aimed at developing professional circus artists. Recreational circus clubs had existed in many countries for many years – notably in Russia, Spain, China, and the USA (Fu, 1985; Funk, 2021; Lavers, 2020; Mauclair, 2002) – but these were the first programs in the West whose students were being prepared for circus careers. Contemporary Circus is the descriptor used to catch all of the diverse circus performance dramaturgies, aesthetics, intentions, and engagements that have emerged and continue to evolve. Lavers et al. (2019) define Contemporary Circus through its non-definability and its hybridity with other performance styles. Several hallmarks of contemporary circus are resistance to technical virtuosity, resistance to dramaturgical conventions of Classical and New Circus, and an especial rejection of the performance unit known as an “act” (Lavers et al., 2019; Purovaara et al., 2012). Performances labelled as circus may include many disciplines, or only one. They may include many performers, or only one, or a preponderance of objects post-humanistically centered (Robitaille, 2023; Focquet et al., 2019). Performances may include music, soundscapes, speech, dialogue, silence; techniques may include standardized circus equipment, specially constructed circus equipment, or simply use the environment as the circus apparatus. There are too many contemporary circus companies to name: I encourage the reader to attend their closest circus festival and experience contemporary circus directly.

“Circus” is a title much like “sport,” it describes a general experience that conjures up specific ideas in each individual mind. Each contains multitudes, and the specific images that come into mind will be directly related to personal experience and knowledge. Yet the two categories are different insofar as we expect a tennis player to say, “I play tennis” rather than “I do sports,” which seems a vague answer. A contemporary circus artist is most likely to say, “I do circus” rather than “I do tightwire.” To say “circus” is to always/already include multiple forms



because since its inception, the term “circus” has by definition included multiple techniques and disciplines. It is only with the recent development of contemporary circus that entire shows might be dedicated to exploring a single circus discipline. Nor are the techniques static; where elephants and clowns were long heralded as the “pegs on which the circus is hung” (ostensibly stated by P.T. Barnum), most Classical/Contemporary circus performances are now include only domestic animals, if any, while differentiated clowns are difficult to find in Contemporary shows where performers are frequently their own anti-heroes, thereby undermining one of classical circus’s dramaturgical reasons to include clowning.

The techniques and skills included in “circus” have shifted over time. While always including physical exceptionalism by humans, “circus” has at times also included technological innovations like electricity (Arrighi, 2012; Jacob, 2002; Speight, 1980). To discuss knowledge transmission in all circus, through all of history, then, is to cast a very broad net. The nature of circus, however, makes this a possible task: the international-yet-tightly-interconnected, historically small, and disciplinarily cross-contaminating global community of circus means that practices developed in one country were necessarily exported and made available as inspiration or direct transmission to other artists. Artists met (and still meet) each other when circuses cross paths or when artists are hired into different shows. The circus field has always included close colleagues who are simultaneously the only competition for performance work, which has in turn created a community of practice that can be in equal turn professionally secretive and protectively intimate (Bolton, 1999; Langlois, 2014; Lave & Wenger, 1991). It is reasonable, then, to extrapolate specific trends identified in the historical record as representative of the global circus field, if perhaps not the exact experience of every artist in every country at that

particular moment. Each of these categories will be discussed in the rest of this chapter through the lens of knowledge transmission practices and expectations.

### ***Before Astley: Practices that Became ‘Circus’***

This section provides an overview of the very early history of knowledge transmission in techniques which we now frequently categorize as ‘circus’ as a foundation for understanding the different ways that the diversity of circus arts has been understood and valued in different countries, focusing on specific moments from the histories of juggling, acrobatics, and *commedia dell’Arte*. This is meant to provide context for the different ways that circus education has developed, and to describe how common techniques like acrobatics and object manipulation can come from very different roots with very different meanings for the audience. Any extensive history of dance, theatre, circus, music, or sport will note origins in prehistoric rituals where every person had a direct relationship to what we now call the performing arts through ritual, game, or conflict-based displays of physical mastery.

In prehistory and early recorded history *context*, rather than *type* of activity (dance, theatre, circus) was a signifying factor. For instance, religious ceremonies preparing for hunting, making offerings, and re-telling mythologies and creation stories included skills that would today be categorized as dance, acrobatics, theatre, juggling (object manipulation), or magic/illusion. Yet these same actions might also be performed in the context of preparing for or ending a battle, or in games of skill, strength, and playful combat – done both to pass the time and hone the skills necessary for hunting and war (Mauclair, 1999; Mauclair, 2002; Ziethen & Serena, 2003). While certain members of society (priests, warriors, etc.) may have received specialized knowledge from peers and predecessors, overall, these skills were learned and used within the context of

quotidian life. Over time performative skills became more differentiated and practitioners became specialists.

Archeological evidence shows both the earliest recorded acrobatic skills and a sustained, broad practice of acrobatics in WuQiao, China for at least 3000 years (Fu, 1985; Mauclair, 2002). If other cultures had enduring representations of their activities from 3,000 years ago, we might find that either the Chinese created an entirely novel activity, or that acrobatic forms were widely practiced ceremonially throughout Africa, the Americas, Europe, and Australia. In any case, records indicate that WuQiao residents made their living in three different yearly phases: as farmers, as soldiers and as acrobatic performers (Fu, 1985). Not all performers were entertainers; in Ancient Japan specialists performed symbolically meaningful acrobatics and object manipulations during important events like baptisms, weddings, funerals, when family members did not want to perform the ritual requirements (Mauclair, 2002; Ziethen & Serena, 2003). The development of performing arts as a profession happened differently in different countries during different eras. Compensated performance was often means of earning income when other work was not available, therefore the development of specific education for professional performance is linked to the status of performers in each era.

Accounts of most types of performers from ancient times into the medieval – and often the enlightenment era – indicate apprenticeship-based knowledge transmission. Even where ‘schools’ exist, these were typically styled as master-apprentice transmission. As with most vocations in human history, performers of this era were usually born to families of performers, learned the family trade within extended family circles, and did not have much social mobility. An example of representative knowledge transmission practices is found in *commedia dell’arte*, which itself is foundational in much of the clowning and character performances in Classical

circus. Commedia dell'arte, evolved from folk traditions, became distinguished from other contemporary performance forms as a style of comedic Italian improvised comedy in approximately 1545 (Rudlin, 1994; Taviani & Schino, 1984). It consisted of well-defined characters and scenic rules that allowed for incorporation of unique talents during *lazzi* interludes (improvised set-pieces based on loose narratives and comedy bits) – a style still used today in many types of circus and theatrical clowning. At least some commedia troupes were nomadic; the Gelosi company is documented in France in 1571, where they played for King Charles IX and other nobility (Taviani & Schino, 1984). The exact history of how individuals became engaged in this type of nomadic performance is unclear because the primary sources for information about commedia performance in the mid-1500s are audience accounts – representing the literate observers' impression of performance – and factual documents such as contracts, travel records, playbills and legal proceedings (Taviani & Schino, 1984; Watson, 2001). Neither of these sources sheds much light on the knowledge transmission process. Records of travel often reference spouses and children in the troupe, indicating that performance troupes were dominantly family-based, and children apprenticed in the troupe to learn the profession (Taviani & Schino, 1984). When actors learned the craft, and at what age they began performing, is so unremarkable as to escape record. Marriage into the troupe/profession was also a possibility. Bartoli's 1782 tome about Italian theatre describes the early life of famous 17<sup>th</sup> century commedia player Isabelle Andreini (1562-1604) in two sentences, from her birth to poor parents to her marriage with commedia actor Francesco Andreini at 16. After her marriage, she became one of the troupe actors, eventually earn international renown (as cited in Taviani & Schino, 1984). This same type of story is the majority experience for many of the performance disciplines that became incorporated into circus.

Because most people were born into, or married into, the professions that became circus, there are few records of broad educational systems to ensure quality performing arts activity. There are exceptions for certain practices used in circus, such as horsemanship, which was essential to military prowess and therefore not exclusively a performance activity. Certain forms of dance, theatre and opera also developed schools as cultural expressions. But the mix of popularized forms presented in circus rarely benefitted from organized knowledge transfer in the historical record. An exception that proves the rule is the example of a performance school begun in China in 720. The Tang Dynasty (618 CE) reunified warring factions into one country and revived a festival performance called the ‘100 games’: a diversity of performance activities including pole balancing, juggling, tumbling, human pyramids (human pagodas), music, dance, and animal imitation (Jacob, 2002; Maclair, 2002; Ziethen & Serena, 2003). To perpetuate and refine performance arts, the emperor founded the first known school of performing arts: the ‘Pear Garden’ (Jacob, 2002; Maclair, 2002; Ziethen & Serena, 2003).

This is an important event in the eventual development of contemporary circus education because it foreshadows the principles guiding the creation of several circus schools in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century. Namely: 1) the emperors who promoted the ‘100 Games’ were invested in arts as an expression of prosperity and cultural pride; 2) a school was created and funded by the governing party to ensure the future and quality of these arts by providing space, resources, and educators who would take full responsibility for the long-term formation of new artists; and 3) that somehow students were selected to attend this school. These themes will be recurring in the creation of circus schools and professionalizing circus education programs: there is often a cultural impetus to produce home-grown exceptional performers that will embody the values of that society (strength, superiority, creativity, resilience, artistry, perfection, etc.). Students are

selected in some manner, and that manner has an explicit or implicit relationship to performing-arts families (Festival Mondial de Cirque de Demain, 1987). Finally, performers from these programs will reap the results of the programs themselves – which is to say the creation of educational programs accompanies a cultural shift regarding performing arts. If the political power changes, or the cultural esteem of performing artists changes, these performers will reap the results. If the proliferation of schools brings into question the very definition of the artform itself and revolutionizes the performance locations and performance codes, the artists experience both favourable and negative repercussions.

### ***The Invention of the Classical Circus***

Due to his success and general reference as the origin of what became Classical circus, we will also begin here with Philip Astley's story. The performances at Astley's riding school, beginning in 1768, are cited as the moment "circus" as a form came into existence. Although not unique, Astley's represents a perfect storm of influences that created an enduring performance form. Astley, like other military horsemanship experts whose expertise was no longer needed for war, was looking for new sources of income after the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763 (Jacob, 2002; Purovaara et al., 2012). As seen above, compensated performance was used as an economic complement when other work lacked. He opened a riding school, Halfpenny Hatch, in Lambeth, London where the children of nobility were taught genteel riding. Like several contemporaries, Astley's riding school was also a performance venue (Jacob, 2002). Experimental locations for performance were born in response to the English Licensing Act, introduced in 1737 (Ziethen & Serena, 2003). Increasingly frustrated with the political satire in

theatrical performances, the British government instated these language laws<sup>4</sup> attempted to better control the quality, and content, of performances by requiring theatres to obtain government approval for the content of their shows. As a result, text-based theatrical venues decreased in number while performances of many types began to take place in unusual spaces– for instance street shows, fairs, and, eventually, Astley’s Amphitheatre (Ziethen & Serena, 2003).

Neither the type of performance nor the performances located in an unusual venue were unique. Many of the elements of Astley’s performances remain in classical circus: the show is formed of displays of horsemanship interspersed with acrobatics, jugglers, magic/illusion, comedic performance, and other types of animal presentation, within a ring designating the performance area. Astley was not the first to intersperse acts – see the *commedia* practices and the 100 Games above – nor the first to perform in a round space. Other presentations of “acts” including horsemanship in ringed venues pre-existed and were contemporary with Astley (Jacob, 2002). Many theatrical performances of the time usually happened in round theatres and would occasionally include juggler, rope dancers or animal presenters (Jacob, 2002). However, the combination of regulations on performance in England, an excess of post-war skills and audiences around London, his performances on horseback reveling in historical victories thereby stimulating national pride, and his marketing and fee schemes, meant that this particular format caught on, became known under a certain title, and is attributed to him. Following rapid and tremendous success in Europe and Russia, Astley’s particular model of performance was rapidly

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<sup>4</sup> Similar stringent language laws introduced in 17<sup>th</sup> century France limiting the use of speech to the state sanctioned Comédie Française and French Opera also caused evolution of the form of *commedia dell’Arte* from spoken Italian to gibberish. By 1697 all *commedia* troupes had been expelled from Paris (Mic, 1980). The performances continued in *les théâtre de la foire*, however, creatively using *grammelot* (nonsense) language and increasing physical storytelling (Rudlin, 1994).

replicated by other producer/artists and quickly spread across the world (Jacob, 2002). The first use of the word ‘circus’ to advertise this type of performance was when Astley’s protégé Charles Hughes and Charles Dibdin opened the Royal Circus in 1782 (Jacob, 2002). From England, this form, now called Classical or Traditional Circus, spread far and wide, hitchhiking on the industrial revolution to global destinations and swept into small American and Australian communities along with the construction of railways (Davis, 2002; St. Leon, 2008).

The elements of circus performance – acrobatics, object manipulation, comedy, animal training – were all present in society before circus became its own form of performance. The methods of knowledge transmission would not have changed at first, but rather developed alongside the new form as circus-specific performance codes and props gained traction with audiences. Knowledge transfer in classical/traditional circus practices from the late 1700s into the late 1900s was much the same as it had been before the innovation of the form. Schools of acrobatics, dressage, theatre contributed to the apprenticeship of the techniques used in circus in certain cases, but most commonly performers learned their trade through family or other close bonds (Festival Mondial de Cirque de Demain, 1987; Jacob, 2002, 2008; Mauclair, 2002; Maleval, 2004; St. Leon, 2000). Knowledge of certain forms was written down, especially where practices were presented in venues other than circus – for instance gymnastic instruction, horsemanship, and elements of juggling and magic techniques (Ziethen & Serena, 2003). Much of the knowledge was transmitted orally and through apprenticeship.

As circus practices became more differentiated, fewer texts specify how to train the techniques and build equipment; there are no manuals written by the famous flying trapeze or wire walking families of classical circus fame (Tait, 1996). Innovations and new methods in circus specialties remained in small networks as “knowledge of performing techniques and circus



skills were shared, developed and retained between family members” (St. Leon, 2008, p. 37-8). St. Leon (2008) recounts several acrobatic troupes getting together and exchanging stories of how to perform certain tricks, something still commonly done among circus artists today, though frequently through digital sources. Reg Bolton, noting the paucity of textual traces for circus education, proposes that the “lack of literary communication among circus folk could be due to secrecy, or illiteracy or to the pointlessness of transmitting complex physical skills through the written word” (Bolton, 1999, p. 11).

While specific stories are centered in their era and culture, it is reasonable to extrapolate similar training methods to achieve similar results in this international performance form. With little access to circus education, most performers learned their trade either because they were born into a performance family, or because they ran away to become part of a circus family—like famous Russian animal presenter Boris Eder, who joined up with a circus at 12 years old, followed by several years of near-indentured servitude while he learned acrobatics (Hammarstrom, 1983). At other times, performers might come from gymnastic clubs, yet still learned the circus-specific skills through apprenticeship with circus performers. Like Eder, when children from outside circus families were trained to perform circus, it was through apprenticeship and the child were typically adopted by, or given to, the circus family who would be instructing them. Acquiring orphaned children was a regular practice in many countries as orphans were considered inexpensive to train because more care and resources were spent training biological children than adopted or fostered apprentices (Hammarstrom, 1983). These children did not run away to join the circus but were sought-after assets. St. Leon (2000, 2008) mentions that “adoption” of orphans, illegitimate or disadvantaged children was a significant part of developing circus talent, but believes the acquisition of children may not have been entirely

ethical, while Tait suggests quotes John Ramsland's belief that "circuses in colonial Australia began to act as informal, if self-interested, child-welfare agencies" (Tait, 1996, p. 32). Notably, international horseback star May Wirth and her sister were both adopted Aboriginal children (St. Leon, 2008; Tait, 1996)<sup>5</sup>.

When circus artists learned their vocation within their family, they regularly transitioned between the roles of student, apprentice, associate, professional, educator, and managers in overlapping succession. Their education and practice were interwoven. While descriptions of education practices in classical circus may be biased due to narrator perception of circus people and practices, there are many reports revealing that learning classical circus techniques was not necessarily a pleasant occupation (St. Leon, 2008). Children in circus, as in agriculture, were a source of labour. St. Leon (2008) mentions that Australian circus families tried to produce many children so that the show would have performers. Records from Australia show that children were instructed, from as early as 5 years old in "riding, acrobats, tumbling, dancing... in order to secure gracefulness" in training sessions lasting from "6 o'clock in the morning... until noon every day" (St. Leon, 2008, p. 78). Alongside their circus training, children learned to play instruments as music was an important part of circus shows (St. Leon, 2008). Training was also done in the winter season, between shows, or on Sundays when the troupes were prohibited from performing (St. Leon, 2008).

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<sup>5</sup> Circus, like all endeavours undertaken by humans, is plagued by racism, sexism, and other attendant prejudices from the cultural eras in which circus is performed. Because there is limited to non-existent literature about knowledge transmission methods that also includes discussion of how cultural prejudice influences the educational aims or experiences (Funk, 2018 among the notable few), a detailed discussion of prejudicial trends in circus performance and marketing is beyond the purview of this dissertation. The recent rise in academic and historical interest in circus is good news for those interested in tracing and unpacking these legacies in classical circus and ongoing challenges in creating circus spaces that are truly equitable and inclusive.

The history of circus knowledge transmission contains multiple such ‘schools’ that refer to the method and approach of instruction, not a specific location, which is apt for a fundamentally nomadic artform, yet location-based centers of learning have also been part of classical circus knowledge transmission. Most have been through an apprenticeship model, such as the ‘Hagenbeck school’ of animal training constitutes the methods developed by the Hagenbeck Family for animal training and presentation, which stemmed from their overall philosophy of the human-animal performance relationship (Jacob, 2002). Despite these, the social and performative unit of the circus family became so rooted in cultural ideologies that questions have arisen repeatedly as to whether people born outside of circus could learn those practices. After the innovation of institutionalized circus education, documentation of attendance includes special focus on the proportion of children from circus families and how the school graduates compare with those educated exclusively in families.

Despite occasional training programs, the majority of circus learning from pre-history, through the innovation of circus itself and refinement of the classical form was done within family units or through direct apprenticeship. This began to change with the creation of the Moscow Circus School in 1927 following the Russian Revolution and continued to shift in the 1970s following cultural revolutions in the West. Institutionalized circus education and contemporary circus forms have fed off each other, bringing escalating changes to both knowledge transmission in circus and the practice and aesthetics of circus itself.

### ***Nouveau and Contemporary Transmission***

The Golden Age of Circus – that circus of sparkles and sawdust, elephants and clowns, touring in tents with famous families drawing audiences away from their small towns for Circus Day – peaked from the late 1800s through the 1920s (Albrecht, 1995; Davis, 2002; Jacob, 2002;

Stoddart, 2000; Speight, 1980). A series of economic and cultural shifts weakened the sustainability of these types of circuses from the 1930s into the 1970s. Among the pan-global shifts was increased access to television reducing audience desire to travel to live performance, rising costs of travel due to recessions and destabilizations in oil supply, a rising social consciousness calling into question the ethical treatment of animals in circus practices, and, importantly, the stagnation of aesthetic as a result of the above-mentioned insular communities preserving the techniques and lifestyle of classical circus practices (Albrecht, 1995; Jacob, 2002; Leroux & Batson, 2016; Stoddart, 2000; McPherson, 2010; Purovaara et al., 2012; St. Leon, 2008). It is a testament to the appeal of circus that this tented form is still found in most countries, even now after so many more aesthetic and cultural revolution.

From this breakdown of classical reproduction emerged a circus form now called Cirque Nouveau. Classical circus is dramaturgically centered around spectacularized and aesthetically separated acts, where exposition the uniqueness of each individual trick, person, act, or family is part of the ticket price. Cirque Nouveau retains spectacularized and separated acts, but links these together with common costume, music, character. and thematic threads (Albrecht 2006; Maleval, 2016; Leroux, 2016). The cultural revolutions of the 1960s brought about a similar creative explosion across Europe and North America. Street theatre practitioners began to seek out circus techniques and training, looking for new ways to express their discontent and shake up the existing systems (Jacob & Vézina, 2007; Rudlin, 1994). The artists creating these Cirque Nouveau performances were replicating the structure of acts but were rarely rooted in classical circus structures: most came from other arts practices and, enamoured of circus, began seeking training with anyone who would offer it and then integrating circus skills into their own artistic and political visions of the performance genre. The founders of influential companies like Big

Apple Circus, Pickle Family Circus, Circus Oz, Cirque du Soleil, and Cirque Archaos were not from circus families (Albrecht 1995, 2006; Leroux & Batson, 2016; Mock, 2016). Driven by these political and cultural shifts, traditional knowledge transmission through apprenticeship-based, close-knit family units travelling and performing together gave way, just as it had earlier in Moscow.

Cultural rebellion took place within the circus communities as well, with schools created by circus performers such as Annie Fratellini and Pierre Étaix in France beginning in 1974, in which students could attend who had not been born into the profession (Étienne et al., 2014). When contemporary circus artists were asked to create a collective timeline of circus in Australia in 2010, they positioned the birth of “their” circus in 1975 – indicating ideological, technical, social, and historical break with Australia’s traditional roots (Arrighi, 2014).

The transition of circus education away from secretive family enclaves to accessible, funded, and formalized systems over a relatively short amount of time has led to new forms of circus. The animal-free, thematically coherent, act-based shows, of which Cirque du Soleil is the most renowned, are frequently referred to as New Circus, while shows that deconstruct the notions of act, or challenge dramaturgies by using only one type of apparatus for a full-length show, are now known as Contemporary circus. Although contemporary circus has been born from the creatively generative crucible that is structured circus education, not all performers have been to a circus school, and not all circus school graduates will exclusively work for contemporary-style productions. The circus profession continues to blur boundaries between formal and informal, art and sport, and, increasingly, between practice and theory.

Professional circus training continues to take place informally and through apprenticeship-like individualized training with renowned experts (Carmeli, 2012; Stroud, 1999).

More frequently, aspiring professionals attend formal programs with or without academic accreditation. In Occidental contexts, differentiation into professions dominantly happens after secondary school as students enter vocations, vocational training programs, or universities, where they will be encouraged to discover their individual pathway. This generalized trajectory does not apply to all domains: certain professional athletes and artists attend specialized schools or programs from a very young age because talent identification happens early to enable focus on their professional aspirations concurrent with their general education. Similarly, in many countries, students can learn circus in primary curricular and extra-curricular programs, attend a circus-option secondary school, followed by a preparatory post-secondary programme to ameliorate general skills, and continue in a vocational or BA-level higher education specialty programme.

### **Circus Schools and Development of the Circus Profession**

Describing the transition from master-apprentice-style education to a structured school environment also describes a global shift in how circus practices and circus people were understood. The innovation of Moscow's circus school marks the beginning of this change, as it became the basis for many circus schools in the West. It served as a reference point for many of the discussions about the development of circus schools: how the curricula and structures compared to the Moscow model (Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987). To fully understand the curricula and pedagogical approach to contemporary circus education, it is essential to understand the pedagogical philosophy and curricular structures of the Moscow Circus School.

### ***The Moscow Circus School: The Model for Occidental Circus Education***

The history of circus in Russia has been well documented in English, likely because of the influence that Russian circus practices have had on the development of global circus. During the 1800s, circus performance in Russia was marked by appreciation of foreign names, provoking many Russian-born artists to change their names or titles (Cornwell, 1993; Hammarstrom, 1983). Tsar Nicolas I, driven to produce more Russian artists and an entirely Russian troupe, opened the first circus school in or around 1847 in Saint Petersburg connected to the Imperial Theatre School (Jacob, 2002; Mauclair, 2002; Purovaara et al., 2012). In the early 1800s, servants (serfs) had their own theatre, and could perform only by paying their master (Mauclair, 2002). When slavery was abolished, these performers began replacing foreign artists, even becoming the owners and managers of performing troupes (Mauclair, 2002). A performer known only as Nikitin began as a slave who then became a professional performer. His sons were directed towards the Tsar's Circus School where they each specialized in a discipline: Akim in dance and dramaturgy, Piotr – inspired by the concurrent visit of Jules Leotard – learned trapeze. The Nikitin Brothers formed the first all-Russian circus in Penza in 1873, performed across Russia, then purchased the Moscow circus building (built by Charles Hughes) in 1886 (Cornwell, 1993; Mauclair, 2002).

Establishment of the Moscow Circus School (The State College for Circus and Variety Acts) in 1927 by the new Communist government provided a platform for many types of innovation: innovations in circus technique, pedagogy, circus equipment, artistic development, and dramaturgies (Jacob, 2002; Purovaara et al., 2012). Harris describes the innovation of the Moscow Circus School as the initiative of circus performers who “decided that theirs was an art form that should be taken as seriously as any other” which is why they should be taught in a

“formal school” (1970, p. 3). Circus schools, many following the Russian model, would eventually become the new standard for Western circus education beginning in the 1970s in France (Albrecht, 2006; Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987; Maleval, 2004).

Prior to the revolution, following on the heels of the Tsar’s school, Russian artists fleeing political instability in Europe returned to Moscow and participated in the formation of the Circus Education Association in 1914 (Purovaara et al., 2012). After the October Revolution, weekly meetings were held in the Moscow circus’ big top tent where the future of circus, along with the future of everything else in Russia, was discussed (Hammarstrom, 1983). Hammarstrom (1983) describes debates fraught with passion for Russian society, as the leaders and the people strived to choose emblems and arts that would represent the society for which they strived. Circus performers who participated in the revolution – notably Vladimir Durov – attempted to ameliorate working conditions for circus artists, but the traditions were difficult to change, and circus training continued to exploit children and focus on “thrill” acts (Hammarstrom, 1983). The circus arts would likely have crumbled away from grotesque aesthetics and accusations about child cruelty<sup>6</sup> were it not for the political work of clowns Lazarenko and the Durov brothers (Hammarstrom, 1983). Their lasting friendships with the artistic thought-leaders of Soviet Russia, especially Anatoly Vasilyevich Lunacharsky who became the First People’s Minister of Education, kept circus arts off the cultural chopping block. Lunacharsky, in turn, was good friends with Vladimir Lenin (Hammarstrom, 1983). Lunacharsky created the Circus House in 1918, wrote treatises in support of circus arts, and argued that circus deserved a place in Soviet arts because it presents physical strength and beauty, offers clowns the option of

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<sup>6</sup> Hammarstrom (1983) quotes then-director Mackarov’s belief that Pre-Revolutionary training theory asserted a pupil must be beaten in order to understand circus arts.



positively reflecting democratic nationalism, and can use historic themes for narrative, tying circus to all the values of the revolution (Hammarstrom, 1983). In 1919, Lenin officially announced the nationalization of the circus, which created a state relationship to circus not yet seen in modern eras and an investment in circus arts that would initiate a long-term and drastic change in the very concept of circus itself (Hammarstrom, 1983; Jacob, 2002; Mauclair, 2002; Ziethen & Serena, 2003). Headed by Lunacharsky, a circus school was built to both increase the number of Russian-born professional circus artists and to change the pedagogy of circus apprenticeship (Hammarstrom, 1983).

The Moscow Circus School was founded in 1927 with the goal of training youth to become professional circus artists. Jacob (2002) points out the results achieved from non-circus-born children in only three years of education marked the school's programme as a new method for circus instruction-- and an entirely new conceptualization of what circus education could be. The school has run continuously, except for closing briefly from 1941-1944 during WWII (Hammarstrom, 1983). When the school re-opened the Moscow Theatre Institute initiated the first professorship of Circus Arts (Purovaara et al., 2012).

The curricula, educational rhythms, and even the style of educational spaces used in the Moscow circus school became the foundational model for the most enduring institutionalized circus educations in Canada, France, and several other areas in Europe. Here follows a focused description of the Moscow Circus Schools education and pedagogical philosophy.

### **Students, Spaces, and Curriculum.**

If they were strong in both sports and school subjects, Russian children could apply for the circus school around 11-12 years of age (Harris, 1970; Hammarstrom, 1983). Auditionees were expected to have strong physical skills, good physiology, good grades, demonstrate

performance abilities such as musicality, and be aesthetically appealing (Hammarstrom, 1983; Harris, 1970). Along with athletic achievement, students were examined by a doctor for physical predispositions (Harris, 1970). One out of every 70 applicants were chosen, with foreign students rarely accepted due to extensive competition (Harris, 1970). In 1983, Hammarstrom reported that 60% of the students were from circus families, and that children of circus families were given preferential treatment in the audition process.

For middle school students, classes last six days per week from 8:30-3:30 (Harris, 1970). When students complete grade 8 (around 15 years old), they transition to the 3–4-year secondary school portion and train for a minimum of 6 hours per day, either during the day shift or the evening shift (Harris, 1970). Curricular content included 4 major circus disciplines (acrobatics, gymnastics, balance, juggling), ballet, academic subjects (visual art, biology, anatomy), equipment care and maintenance, cooperation and professional comportment, creation of circus posters, costume-making and repair, and stage make-up (Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987; Harris, 1970; Ziethen & Serena, 2003). Extra courses in pantomime, voice and acting were given to clown students. Classical secondary education also included classes in physics, math, chemistry, history, literature, geography, and socialist theory, as well as politically and historically important sites, museums, and a variety of live performance (Hammarstrom, 1983). Students were encouraged to do well in academic subjects; the school emphasises physical and mental health through its motto “the balance is better if the head is full” because “the better educated a performer is, the better prepared will he be to infuse his art with socialist ideas” (Hammarstrom, 1983, p. 114; Harris, 1970).

This diversity of circus and academic content increases the multidisciplinary and was meant to prepare the student to develop into the “kind of performer he wants to be” (Harris,

1970, p. 14; Jacob, 2002). Students had some small voice in the choice of their discipline, but disciplines and acts are generally selected by the coaches and creators of the acts, who look for certain physical and aesthetic characteristics, look at the kinds of acts that were missing from active acts, and work to create something unique for the graduating artist or troupe of artists. Even while beginning to specialize in specific circus disciplines, all students were required to learn skills within the four primary circus domains, listed by Harris as “acrobatics, gymnastics, balancing and juggling” and ballet (1970, p. 13)<sup>7</sup>. During winter and summer vacations, the students were expected to maintain their exercise routines (Harris, 1970, p. 47).

The spaces for learning centered around habituating students to the codes of live performance. Harris notes that the spotlights are always on to habituate the artists to stage lighting. Regarding mental and emotional health, Harris offers that when students “become lonely or sad, the director of the school comforts them. He knows much more about each one than they might think, for in his office he has a closed-circuit television screen on which he can watch pupils in the practice rings” (1970, p. 43). Additionally, training in the main ring was visible to anyone walking through the school and to other students in classrooms overlooking the ring, ostensibly to reduce stage fright (Hammarstrom, 1983; Harris, 1970). Many contemporary schools also evoke a kind of inverted Foucauldian panopticon (Foucault, 1977/1995) where administrators and visitors from surrounding offices and corridors on multiple floor levels (because of the height needed for circus) can gaze unimpeded and often unseen on the training spaces, students, and teachers therein.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Harris does not differentiate ‘acrobatics’ and ‘gymnastics,’ leaving the reader to ascertain how those might be understood at the time.

<sup>8</sup> From the administration and visitor perspective, this creates a sense of inclusion with the circus practices. From the student and teacher perspectives, gazing up at surrounding windows visible or invisible viewers may be standing at any moment, the experience is more like being a fish in a fishbowl – a term used by the current students in the SKH

Circus students were prohibited from performing professionally before graduation, though Harris notes that students may travel with state circuses during school breaks and work either as apprentices or stagehands, though rarely performing (1970, p. 47). This relationship prepares them to understand the realities of circus work and touring. Jando (n.d.) also connects the formation of Annie Fratellini's Parisian school with the Russian model, which remains one of the only schools still maintaining apprenticeship relationships between the students and active circus performers (Bezille et al., 2019).

The culmination was a graduation performance where a diploma is presented, after which Soviet citizens can choose their specialty for their performance work within the Soviet Union. Graduating acts were expected to push the technique or aesthetics of the chosen discipline (Jacob, 2002). Students would graduate from the school unless an injury prevented them, and their act would belong to the government, who would place them into the location deemed appropriate to their ability to perform and "be ambassadors of Soviet culture" (Harris, 1970, p. 52). This indicates that performers are not entirely at liberty to choose their circus disciplines and style; their education is in service of an existing cultural-political mission. After 20 years of working, an artist could retire and receive their pension. Circus performers were considered to have comparatively high salaries during the Soviet era, which included homes or apartments (Harris, 1970).

### **Teachers, Pedagogy, and Educational Philosophy.**

From its inception, the Moscow circus school wanted to promote the health, strength, ingenuity, and discipline of the Russian people while celebrating communist political ideology,

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circus programme to describe their experience, and one I have heard used elsewhere in similarly constructed circus spaces.

through circus performance. Purovaara points out that in both circus and sport, “technique was emphasized for ideological reasons. A Soviet citizen’s physical capabilities had to be of the highest level” to portray the artistic and political quality proper to Soviet Russia (2012, p. 107). Many of the teachers at the circus school were retired performers tasked with not only teaching circus technique and building acts but teaching students how to care for their equipment, and how to behave cooperatively and professionally because “perfect cooperation is not only an artistic necessity, but sometimes a matter of life and death” (Harris, 1970, p. 32). Consistently, the Moscow circus school is cited as the progenitor of pedagogy focused on innovation and creation. Ziethen and Serena (2003) state that juggling pedagogy was advanced within the Moscow circus school by Violetta Kiss, and that Nikolai Ernestowitsch Baumann was the first to publish a juggling manual for his students.

The pedagogical philosophy echoes the mission of elevating circus into an art. Harris describes the school as actively distancing itself from “freaks and sideshows” through years of intense and serious training, as “no act can be performed publicly until its artistry is worthy of the audience’s full attention” (1970, p. 6). This performative perfectionism is focused on a final product, not the learning process, and determined by the faculty, which is

full of retired performers from the circus and theatrical worlds, many with fertile minds and eager to experiment. For them, a post at the school offers a comfortable change of pace and the chance to keep active in their fields. ... There is both the time and the space necessary in which to test new routines. The atmosphere is conducive to innovation (Hammarstrom, 1983, p. 73).

Although there is mention of creativity, the risk of exploration is not undertaken before an audience, rather behind the scenes. Mauclair (2002) believes the major innovation from the

circus school had to do with its evaluation; students wrote a concept and defense of their project to a committee before being granted finances from a central authority to purchase the equipment to write the act – the first recorded dramaturgical requirements in circus (2002). Written justification of the artistic vision for circus performance has become a necessity for most contemporary artists when seeking residencies and funding.

### **Impact and Influence.**

This model proved so effective it was “implanted in practically all the countries in the Socialist Block of that time,” and used for the creation of schools beyond Soviet-friendly countries (Ziethen & Serena, 2003, p.125). While the USSR was intact, they considered themselves to have four circus schools: Moscow, Tblisi, Kiev, and Tachkent (Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987; Jacob, 2002). As annexed regions regained their independence, these schools became maintained by professionals within their respective countries. After retiring as the director of the Moscow Circus School, Alexandre Voloachine created, or consulted in the creation of, the circus schools in Mongolia, Cairo, Cuba, Vietnam, Cambodia and Guinea (Jacob, 2002; Mauclair, 2002). The Moscow school is therefore widely seen as the seed model for most circus education around the world, as coaches or directors can trace their pedagogical lineage to the early and well-established Russian experiment with circus education.

When the Moscow Circus school was founded in 1927, very few circus artists came from outside circus families. Mauclair (2002) estimates that only 10% of artists internationally were not born into circus work, instead arriving from competitive gymnastics, animal presentation venues, or theatrical clowning. When the Russian circus started touring in the late 1940s and 50s, it became evident that the circus school format was successfully developing high-skill innovative circus performance. Due to USSR-inspired circus training programs in China, Korea, Cuba, and

many of the Eastern European Socialist Republics, the global percentage of circus artists not born into families augmented to 25% by the 1950s— which included 80% of circus performers in the USSR (80%) and 100% of Mongolian circus artists, (Mauclair, 2002). Even in the late 1960s 80% of the students at the Moscow school are from “non-circus backgrounds,” the other 20% from circus families attending school instead of only being trained within their families (Harris, 1970, p. 6). Mauclair posits that by the 2000s, only 3-4% of circus performers come from circus families (Mauclair, 2002).

The shift from learning-while-travelling to a stationary, stable learning environment fostered a creative renaissance in Russian circus arts, which would not significantly penetrate the West until after the Iron Curtain began to disintegrate. Russian circus, through Soviet-era circus school programs, significantly influenced the development of circus arts in France, the United States, and Canada (Albrecht, 1995, 2006; Jacob & Vézina, 2007). Although these radical changes to circus aesthetics, dramaturgy, technique, and equipment incubated for more than 20 years, in the 1950s, Russia began to send circus performers on international tours as cultural ambassadors. Their innovative and refreshing approaches to circus performance contrasted with the repetitive artistic choices of the classical European circuses (Hammarstrom, 1983, p. 90; Jacob, 2002; Jando, n.d.). A tour by the Moscow Circus to Montréal in 1982 would have lasting consequences on the development of Montréal’s École Nationale de Cirque and Cirque du Soleil (Jacob & Vézina, 2007; Purovaara et al., 2012, p. 134; see also Babinski, 2004) and the French Ministry of Culture based their national circus center (CNAC) on the soviet model (Jacob, 2002). To understand these events, we turn now to the concurrent development of Cirque Nouveau and circus schools which paved the way for the current circus education landscape and contemporary circus aesthetics.

### ***The Institutionalization of International Circus Education***

The specific history and documentation of circus in France makes it the most visible pathway to see the influence and implications of institutionalized circus education on both knowledge transmission in circus and the development of the contemporary circus field. As a country, France invests in arts while also requiring and encouraging formal and informal documentation of who is creating art, the educational and professional pathways enabling their access to the field and ongoing career development, public engagement with arts, and shifts in the culture or field deterring either artists or audience (Goudard, 2010; Maleval, 2010). New Circus, entangled with the development of circus schools, occurred at the same time in Québec, Australia, and the United States as well as several other countries (Albrecht, 1995, 2006; Mullett, 2014; Jacob & Vézina, 2007). Unlike France, none of these other countries invested in circus as a cultural artform by ensuring a national, state-funded school— as the USSR also did with the development of the Moscow circus school (Hammarstrom, 1983; Harris, 1970). The difference in government attention has led to significant differences in the development of circus in each country. At the time of writing, Circadium (<https://circadium.com>) is the United States' only accredited vocational higher education programme in circus. There are also many non-accredited professionalizing programs offering recreational and professional circus training with no unified educational thread (American Circus Educators, n.d.), although there is neither a supported professional field for circus artists to enter, nor an audience base familiar with contemporary circus practices. Australia hosts one BA circus programme associated with a vocational school, the National Institute of Circus Arts (<https://www.nica.com.au>), with an assortment of recreational programs from which students audition, and a similarly insecure professional field. Québec has two accredited vocational circus higher education programs (called 'college' level to



differentiate from a more advance ‘university’ degree) with two corresponding secondary school programs in circus, a well-established network for ongoing professional development in circus called En Piste (<https://enpiste.qc.ca/en>), with several exceedingly large and internationally renowned circus companies dominating the professional landscape while smaller companies – resilient to contemporary concerns in art – negotiate audience interest. The preceding countries have scant resources dedicated to circus when compared with France, which has established the French Federation of Circus Schools (<https://www.ffec.asso.fr>) as a network representing the interests and development of the 500+ pre-professional, preparatory, and higher education circus schools in the country, which includes three BA-level circus schools and ensures that artists with a certain amount of professional performance under their belt qualify for ‘*intermittence*’<sup>9</sup>: financial support for artists who find themselves without work to ensure that they continue to develop circus practices rather than resort to jobs that take them away from their field (Pôle Emploi, n.d.).

Because of these differences, the French example should not be unilaterally applied as a basis for understanding the relationship between circus education and professional experience in every country. Simultaneously, it is relevant to describe the effects of institutionalized circus

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<sup>9</sup> More than one of the participants in the interviews was receiving financial support via *intermittence* because of losing work during COVID, which they described with both gratitude and discomfort. The following description by one participant is not labelled to preserve confidentiality regarding the countries in which the participants were located, but I still believe their words carry more of the emotional significance than my summary could. This person describes it as “*the system where you’re paid when you don’t work ... So, financially, this has been the best year of my life (laughs). I have never been more stable in my income than this year, which is an insane sentence to say in the context of COVID. I’ve rationalized, because I’ve been really dealing with this fact, like, ‘how is it possible that I’ve never worked less, and I’ve never been paid more? That doesn’t make any sense.’ But my friends said, ‘because you worked so much before, you’ve gained the right to this sustainability.’ In France, the systems are there so that when there’s a crisis you’re not completely in the shit. And of course, the problem with the French system is that - and this is something that I’m struggling with - I’m one of the lucky ones. I’m in the shit, this year has been horrible, but I’m really lucky because I didn’t have any financial problems. I couldn’t work, but it’s been okay. This is a privilege, because in France not everybody’s intermittent, so a lot of people can’t work, like me, and they don’t get paid when they don’t work.*”

education in France as a means of understanding how radical the innovation of structured circus education was with regard to knowledge transmission, aesthetics, and professional expectations of both the existing circus companies and newly graduated students. The following overview of the evolving pedagogical mission of higher education circus schools in relationship to the circus field is therefore centered in France due to clarity research and documentation but also extends where possible to include the concurrently growing community of international circus schools.

Two circus programmes appeared in France in 1974, both initiated by circus artists from classical French circus families who felt that the stagnation of circus performance could only be remedied by an infusion of new performers, ideas, and community (Maleval, 2004). Annie Fratellini and Pierre Étaix named their programme “*École nationale du cirque*” whereas Alexis Gruss and Sylvia Monfort’s programme was called “*Centre de formation aux arts et techniques du cirque et du mime*” also called “*École au Carre*” (Maleval, 2004). Taking into consideration the closure of two large French circuses for financial reasons during the 1970s, the French government chose to remove circus from the Minister of Agriculture and instead to place it under the purview of the Minister of Culture in 1979. As a cultural activity, circus received protections through a national school to develop circus artists and the consecration of a national circus to be run by the same Alexis Gruss as above (Maleval, 2004). The national circus school accepted its first cohort in 1985 in an existing classical circus building in Châlons -sur-Marne (later, Châlons-en-Champagne) (Maleval, 2004). The name quickly becomes *le Centre national des arts du cirque* (CNAC) as the building contains three different organisations: a higher education programme in circus arts, a volley for professional development, and a library (later resource center) for documentation of circus (Maleval, 2004; David, 2011). The first school director is Ryszard Kubiak, former director of Poland’s circus school, which in turn followed the pattern of

Moscow's pedagogical programme (Maleval, 2004; David, 2011). Shortly thereafter in 1987, Guy Caron arrived from Québec as school director, on the tails of his formative work launching Montreal's own École nationale de cirque (ENC) in 1981 and his concurrent work as artistic director of Cirque du Soleil (founded in 1984) (Jacob & Vézina, 2007; Lachance & Venne, 2004). Caron himself attended the USSR-modeled Hungarian circus school in the 1970s (Lalonde, 2007). Maleval (2004) cites a terse description of the early years of CNAC as first being directed towards highly technical circus training in the style of the Eastern (read USSR) schools, followed by a Western (read Québec) focus on self-made originality without much regard for circus traditions (p. 219). Yet regarding the pedagogical construction of content and schedule, neither CNAC nor ENC's model differs significantly from the Moscow school allocations (David, 2011; Jacob & Vézina, 2007; Lachance & Venne, 2004; Maleval 2004). The permeation of USSR-style circus education is diluted only by the influence of Chinese acrobatic education which took root in the West in the 1980s in Melbourne, Australia and San Francisco, USA through collaborations with key educators from the Nanjing Acrobatic troupe (Albrecht, 1995, 2006; Mullett, 2014). Chinese, rather than USSR-style acrobatics, became the basis of both circus school education and professional development in both these locations (Albrecht, 1995, 2006; Mullett, 2014).

As circus education was developing around the world, documentation from France traces the shift from informal, self-made programming, to institutionalized, accredited and sometimes government funded courses, through the lens of the concerns brought by educators and administrators of these programs. Soon after the creation of the first circus schools in France in 1974, the first Global Convention of Circus Schools is held in Paris (Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987). Records from these meetings span 1979-1987, revealing tensions and

alignment in the discourse of people invested in circus education, as well as the shifts in pedagogical intention as school directors change and new programs begin.

The meetings are regularly attended by representatives from the major French circus schools, beginning with Sylvia Montfort, Alexis Gruss, and one or more representatives from the Fratellini school. In the first session in 1979, host Dominique Mauclair lists existing circus schools in Budapest, Hungary, Sofia, Bulgaria, Julinek, Poland, Bucharest, Romania, non-specified city in the Democratic Republic of Germany (East Germany). The Mongolian school is noted as close the Russian model. Regarding circus training in the rest of Asia, it is clear that direct apprenticeship to performance troupes is the most common model: China has many different small training centers located in cities to populate the local acrobatic theatre troupes and student specialities are determined by the needs of the troupe, subsequently there is no mobility of acrobats between troupes. Mauclair notes that circus education in Korea and the four main Indian circuses follows similar apprenticeship training within the troupes. At this time, there is one circus training programme in South Africa, a circus school in Egypt noted for high-quality acts, and in the United States the Sarasota Clown College and early stages of the Big Apple circus school are mentioned. In the following sessions, alongside the French representatives, there are always representatives from the Eastern Bloc socialist schools, Asian (Chinese and/or Mongolian) circuses, and from North America as the Big Apple circus school in New York was active while the National Circus School in Montreal was getting on its feet (Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987).

Pervasive through these discussions is concern for the quality of circus acts leaving schools such that students can find a place in the professional world. For this reason, the majority of recorded discussion is presentations of the recruitment, pedagogy, curriculum, and support

structures in each programme, as well as indications of expected professional career. Throughout the presentations, school representatives nearly always mention the relationship to existing circus families and note how many of their students are children of those families, as well as how they are recruiting non-circus-family students. All of the discussions focus on ensuring students can enter the existing field, with a nod towards the necessity of innovation and originality as the means by which circus will renew itself – this especially from the Occidental schools who do not have state-funded circus educations nor centralised circuses into which their students will be hired. Furthermore, the discussions serve to reinforce each school director in their conviction of the relevance of formalized circus education in the face of doubts received from existing circus directors. Naming examples of successful circus acts that have graduated from schools sounds here nearly as a sigh of relief as the schools prove to themselves that yes, in fact, they are achieving what they set out to do.

The concerns for the future of circus and the efficacy of circus schools for preparing artists which undergirds these discussions are not unfounded. 20 years after the last recorded Convention Mondial des Écoles de Cirque, two FEDEC reports indicate that tension still remains between institutionalized circus education and the companies hiring circus artists. In the interim, many changes in circus and global politics affected how circus was being taught and performed. The collapse of the Soviet Union and progressive dismantling of socialist governments significantly affected how circus was funded in those states, with trickle down effects on the existing circus educations. Each circus situation became dependent upon the specific local politics. While the USSR-era Kiev school has remained renowned, the East German school quickly disappeared after the Berlin Wall came down. Meanwhile, the CNAC grew to dominate French circus education, as did Montreal's ENC for North America, while the USA schools more

or less disintegrated (Albrecht, 1995, 2006). Institutionalized circus education programs became more popular, and more countries developed informal and formal opportunities for knowledge transmission of circus techniques. With the mission of creating a centralised committee where issues related to higher and professionalising education in circus could be discussed, the European Federation of Circus Schools (FEDEC) was formed in 1998 by CNAC in France, Les Arcs in Belgium (now called the École Supérieur des Arts du Cirque, ESAC), and Circus Space in London (now called the National Center for Circus Arts, NCCA) (International Network for Professional Circus Education, n.d.; Roberts, 2014a).

Despite its title as a European hub, the FEDEC quickly established itself as an international meeting point for high quality discussions around challenges and methods in circus education – another indication of the ongoing similarities of concerns affecting circus educational institutions regardless of country or funding structure. The overall working method for the network has been to gather circus school directors and representatives in discussion, identify pervasive issues and concerns, undertake field research to better understand the issues, and follow up with free resources to ameliorate the quality of circus education globally (International Network for Professional Circus Education, n.d.; Roberts, 2014a). Among the initiatives undertaken, the FEDEC has published manuals on technical progressions in circus disciplines, best practices in rigging and safety, charters of ethics and deontology, inquiries into the profession of teaching, and now is pursuing questions of comportment and abusive conduct in school environments (International Network for Professional Circus Education, n.d.).

Documentation from the FEDEC shows the development of circus pedagogies, practices, and conversations. On one hand, collecting material and freely distributing the results demonstrates investment in the quality and – to some extent – unification of circus education

practices across all countries and levels of performance. From this angle, the focus is on the details of the circus practices themselves and leaves the career integration to the cultural realities within which each school is situated. It indicates that regardless of the kind of circus practice, the education practices face similar issues and can learn from each other. From another perspective, the hyper-centralisation within Europe creates a prejudice regarding the kinds of careers awaiting students when they leave school, and thereby tacitly imposing Euro-centric assumptions regarding resources, insurance, income, and medical assets that may leave circus programs in many locations without access to the information most relevant for their educational realities.

In any case, similar concerns about efficacy of circus programs and their relationship to the field are evident in FEDEC documentation, though the focus has become on educating the schools themselves in best educational- and circus-practices. Furthermore, these documents show a rapidly shifting field and a re-centring of the circus discussion on the quality of the education itself rather than aiming the students towards a specific *kind* of professional circus work. Behind the documents focusing within school is an increasingly diverse reality of circus work.

At the 10-year anniversary of the FEDEC, studies were undertaken that queried the state of circus education and relationship to field (Herman, 2009; Jacob, 2008). These note shifts in the landscape of professional circus due to the influence of circus schools – for instance, a proliferation of solo and duo acts because circus schools do not favour group acts, nor was the current generation of students interested in committing long-term to a larger group act (Jacob, 2008). And while most artists working for contemporary companies were trained in circus schools, there was still a strong resistance from classical circuses to hire circus school graduates, and a corresponding lack of interest by young artists to work with large companies (Jacob, 2008). Jacob (2008) notes a tendency among circus school graduates to reject the long-standing

“circus act” format in favour of more contemporary dramaturgical deconstructions. The research indicates that employers are still expecting greater professional experience from artists than recent graduates exhibit, but simultaneously recommends that schools resist being told how to educate young artists by the companies (Herman, 2009; Jacob, 2008). The reports conclude that better communication and alignment is still needed between the profession and training programs (Herman, 2009; Jacob, 2008).

These textual traces of ongoing issues in circus education indicate recurring tensions between education and profession, regardless of how the field and programs have continued to evolve over the past 50 years. Concerns from the 1980s-2010s focused on whether and how students were ready to enter the field, with a secondary query about how the field was changing, and were primarily concerned with how circus education related to professional practices of circus: Are students ready for existing work conditions? Who is hiring students of circus schools? Are they learning other arts in school (e.g., painting, music), and, if so, are they using them professionally? What is the best type of education to ensure the continuation of circus? (Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987; Herman, 2009; Jacob, 2008). These are more or less closed dialogues within the field of circus: circus-facing and nearly in denial of the social shifts which have continued since the incursion of Cirque Nouveau in the 1970s. Circus education programs were developing, through their development their graduates were changing the field (Maleval, 2004), and the programs continue to re-orient in an effort to prepare students for a field in flux (Burt & Lavers, 2017).

The conversation seems to be shifting, or at least adding new dimensions to the issues circus schools must navigate. In the prestigious 2020 edition of the Cirque de Demain festival, third year CNAC student Erwan Tarlet declined to perform his aerial straps act, instead he hung



suspended by his wrists for the entire 6-minute duration with the word “demain” written across his bare chest: a commentary on the tenuous future for circus performers in world derelict in an adequate response to climate change (Tarlet, 2020). In summer of 2021, as the COVID pandemic forced circus artists to stay home for extended periods of time, many reflected and discussed experiences of abusive conduct in work and school settings, leading to protests and calls for change in European and North American circus schools, led by a French collective called Balance ton cirque (<https://balancetoncirque946309689.wordpress.com>). It seems that the pause from constantly searching for, creating, and performing work enabled #MeToo to finally catch up with circus. These and other social movements invite – or perhaps force – circus education to recognise how it is situated not only in circus cultures but also in broader social injustices. Circus education has often fallen into the fallacy of circus nostalgia: that because circus values know-how over know-that, circus is exempt from racism, sexism and other “isms.” The evidence for this is the ostensible acceptance of people from many cultures, of many races, and many genders apparent during a performance; all of the differences are equally valued under the big top, as long as each individual can execute the onstage and offstage requirements of professional circus (see V. Amedume’s presentation in Joly, 2023; Stroud, 1999). Yet individuals recount experiences that unsurprisingly demonstrate cultural coding is carried into circus training, creation, rehearsal, and audience interpretations of performance (Joly, 2023; Stroud, 1999).

Post- #balancetoncirque, post-#MeToo, post-#theshowisover, post-#climatestrike; post-COVID, circus education programs have been forced to recognize the relationship between circus and changing cultures. Circus schools are receiving justified critique for outdated pedagogical methods, master-student hierarchies, and tacit acceptance of abusive conduct between students and teachers (Matthis, 2021). If the FEDEC is a weathervane, the SPEAK OUT

project launched in 2023 points towards investigations into the student experience of circus education and smoothing out biases, behaviours and constructs which are, intentional or otherwise, hindering pursuit of developing circus artistry (International Network for Professional Circus Education, n.d.). Network-level initiatives such as this, and those local to circus schools which respond to internal needs to address safe spaces and consent culture, are both an opportunity and imperative for circus school leadership to engage directly with replications of structural inequalities in circus education cultures. Schools can be looking critically at audition and selection processes, educational culture within programs with regard to inclusion and exclusion of different students and educator profiles, and the performers/performances held up as exemplary or important in curricular content to search out opportunities to break with unexamined prejudices and hierarchies. Simultaneously, with increased interest in circus schools as a location for research, different researchers and countries are developing research threads that reveal perceptions of the industrialisation or “artification” of circus performers – or simply seizing an opportunity to research an unusual population (See for example: Andrieu, 2016; Cossin et al., 2022; Degerbøl & Nielsen, 2015; Filho et al., 2016; Ganderton et al., 2022). In response to the self-perpetuating changes wrought within the field, circus education programs are faced with the prospect of continual renewal and re-consideration of programme content and structure in order to maintain relevance.

### ***Summary of Contemporary Issues in Circus Education***

In all cases, and all countries, the innovation of specialized circus educational programs has been the result of changes in the field of circus performance... and has fed those very changes. In many countries, for instance Russia, Cuba, China, there is still heavy government intervention in career-selection. Students are selected for education programmes due to their

aptitude and, upon completion, placed into state-run circus companies. This educational approach acknowledges that certain professions need sustained and structured physical, artistic, and general education in order to achieve the “best” results (whether that be artistic, competitive, etc.). Anathema to the Western ethic of self-determination, one benefit to this type of education is that students do not have to spend significant amounts of energy and time trying to select a profession and find work within that career. They can ostensibly focus on their career, knowing they will be employed and have retirement, and can therefore commit clear-minded energy to their studies and work. The goal of these circus schools is exclusively for students to have career in circus arts (including performance and post-performance involvement like teaching, technical support for performances, or other creative work).

Despite individual differences in delivery and exact content, the curricula within Western, academically accredited, post-secondary circus schools all include learning objectives across physical (circus technique), artistic (dance, theatre), academic, and career management domains (Burt & Lavers, 2017; Funk, 2018, 2019). Each field of study contributes directly to skills circus artists will use when performing and seeking employment, while also providing opportunities for reflective practice and problem-solving by framing learning within their artistic vocation. Circus schools also provide a context for studying the long-term impacts of creativity education because circus schools provide creativity education on three levels. First, circus performance highlights the originality and individuality of each performer. Students are therefore taught artistic and physical strategies to discover movement unique to their physical and artistic qualities and resilience to change as circus acts are regularly modified to fit different venues and contexts (Burt & Lavers, 2017). Second, as the authors of their own work, students are encouraged to discover their unique creative and directorial voice when constructing a

performance experience (Dumont, 2017). Third, students learn entrepreneurial strategies because, despite 3-12 years of intensive training, performance careers are only expected to last between 5-10 years. Career transition is taken for granted within the community (Julhe et al., 2016; Salaméro et al., 2016). Even before they stop performing, many graduates engineer circus equipment, write and direct performances, develop and manage companies, teach, or develop interventions for at-risk communities.

Circus education has a complex history that includes layers of cultural values, national prowess, human achievement, and, remarkably, avoidance to engage with discourses of the ‘discontents’ of modern civilization for many years. While many other forms of knowledge transmission formalized, circus knowledge remained contained within a social enclosure that included classism, racism, mysticism, specific values and ethics, economic necessities, tradition, conservative family structures, nomadism, and firm lines between those within the circus culture and those outside of it. We are not far into this new form of transmission, which has many striking features and, therefore, is both representative of radical changes in the circus arts and simultaneously a motivator of the very schism from which it was born. Because circus retained its private membership well into the modern era, these changes have been rapid, and have truly shaken the objectives, values, ethical compact, and even the very definition of circus arts. As circus knowledge has become accessible, these institutions have both breathed life into a stagnating professional aesthetic and simultaneously committed to the modern humanism philosophy that an education within the arts provides access to knowledge that the individual will combine in new and productive ways. Applying the different theories and understandings of the nature of education and learning, the objectives of educational programs, the ethics and values they inscribe and demand, the assumptions they make about the student and the profession, each

of these explicates the radical and rapid changes that have taken place within the circus arts and the struggle to connect with traditions while simultaneously exploring new territories.

Because of the near-ubiquitous influence of the USSR circus education model, training and curriculum in many circus schools internationally are modifications of the same system. Few contemporary circus programs have been so thoroughly investigated as the Moscow Circus School. Impressions of pedagogical practices in multiple circus spaces were collected by Purovaara (2014). Salaméro's (2009) stunningly detailed dissertation recording different practices and themes in circus education has been funnelled into a few fascinating publications, albeit more limited in scope. Bezille et al. (2019) have conducted a case study of the Fratellini school, which is sociologically sound and anecdotally unimpressive to the people who participated. We can and must speak generally about circus education, but the individual contexts and people involved will have the most significant and final influence. What follows here are three ways in to viewing the structure of the circus programme that the participants in this study attended: historical and philosophical origins of DOCH's circus BA programme, a narrative drawn from all 12 participants of this study, and a personal interpretation from my perspective from my work as head of programme that includes educational intentions and their intersection with practical realities.

### **Research Context: Stockholm's Bachelor of Circus Arts**

This dissertation discusses the apprenticeship of creativity within the Bachelor of Circus programme at the University of Dance and Circus (DOCH), now known as the Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH). Professional education in circus in Sweden was first established by Cirkus Cirkör and then taken in by the University College of Dance in Stockholm in 2005 (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). At the time of writing, there is one bachelor of circus in Sweden, which is

granted by SKH. It was not inevitable that the circus programme be linked with a dance school and then an arts university. These connections have had a significant effect on the curriculum, structure, requirements, educational philosophy, and reputation of circus education in Sweden, not to mention influencing the perception of circus arts within the Swedish performing arts community and expanding the possibilities of university education in circus within the circus community. The histories of the circus BA and the institutions that have housed it are differentiable and entangled. The circus programme is squarely situated within these global knowledge transmission pathways and evolving realities of circus performance and practice, as well as the Swedish education systems, the specific development of the circus BA within Swedish education and circus cultures, and SKH's institutional Artistic Research emphasis. This section describes these different contexts on the development of the programme(s) attended by the participants of this study.

### ***Cirkus Cirkör and the University College of Dance***

The bones of Sweden's circus BA began, as nearly all circus education programs do, within the heart of passionate circus artists. Inspired by rebellious French circus groups and a desire to bring contemporary circus to Sweden, Tilde Björfors and a group of passionate artists founded Cirkus Cirkör in 1995 (Björfors, 2017; Cirkus Cirkör, n.d.; Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). A pre-existing secondary school programme in Gavle, Sweden, provided foundational training in circus for several of these artists (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012; Virolainen, 2011). The Gavle secondary school had its roots in Classical circus, as touring tented Swedish circus used the city for winter quarters (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012). Without access to professional training, these artists continued their education outside of Sweden. Björfors was part of the group which

immediately also began implementing contemporary circus training in the Stockholm region, and recreational classes began in 1996 (Cirkus Cirkör, n.d.).

A trifecta of factors contributed to the rapid development of training programs. Without a circus education infrastructure, international circus artists were reticent to move to Sweden and homegrown Swedish artists like those who had attended the Gavle programme were looking for further education (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012). Arts activism from the Cirkör founders and others attracted funding for New Circus performance and education (Cirkus Cirkör, n.d.; Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012; Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). In response, in 1997 the Swedish Arts Council and the European Union funded an 18-month professional programme run by Cirkus Cirkör (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012). The ambitious Circus Pilots programme (in Swedish: *Cirkuspiloterna*) began with three different sub-programs, one for artists, one for producers and one for directors, which rapidly gave birth to successful companies by graduates of the programme (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012). In 2000 Cirkus Cirkör moved its headquarters to Botkyrka, a developing suburb of Stockholm where they began a secondary school circus programme in collaboration with St. Botvid's Gymnasium (St. Botvids Gymnasium, n.d.) and, with the same funding, expanded the Cirkuspiloterna to become a three-year programme. One of the founding acrobatic teachers, Jan Rosen, continues to teach in the programme, and many of the current teachers also began during the Circus Pilot years.

The early years of the programme which would become the circus bachelor are described as both intentional and somewhat chaotic, with much work being done as needed and not strictly limited by job titles (E. Åberg, personal communication, July 12, 2023; M. Robitaille, personal communication, July 21, 2023; J. Rosen, personal communication, January 30, 2021). Björfors remembers “everything went so fast, and we worked 24 hours a day. We did so many things at

once” (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012, p. 231). In 2002 the programme came under Ivar Heckscher’s leadership, and he would also guide it during the transition into a higher education degree (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012; Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). Heckscher philosophy that “there will be no new circus if all students are educated for the kind of thing that is in the head of old circus people” established the enduring pedagogical philosophy of student-directed learning supported through individual coaching and independent exploration as a means to foster both the technical and creative growth of circus arts (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012, p. 238).

Without being linked to the national education system, the future of the Circus Pilots was uncertain, as it required annual grant applications. When it became clear that the programme could not ensure continuity through grants, nor become accredited as its own institution (J. Rosen, personal communication, January 30, 2021), negotiations began with different university programs. These proved complicated, and there were many false starts. One university programme would reserve spots for circus students on the condition that the Cirkuspiloterna programme shutter and the students apply directly to the existing programme, but without a commitment to ensure existing students would have place and space to complete their education. Finally, the University College of Dance (Danshögskolan) accepted the integration of an independent circus programme, which launched in 2005 (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013; Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012).

Prior to the inclusion of circus arts, the University College of Dance been challenging dance and theatrical pedagogies within Sweden for more than 40 years. From its inception as the Institute of Choreography in 1963 with one year-long choreography programme, the educations offered have been structured around exploration, self-discovery, and practicing art in order to expand and develop artforms (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). Many types of education were added to that



first choreography programme – through many institutional name changes-- including higher education programmes in Dance Pedagogy, Mime, Dance Therapy, Folk Dance, and Education for Dancers (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). Pursuing accreditation in artistic research practices, the then-named University College of Dance established a Board for Artistic Development in 1985, their first Artistic Professorship in 1992, admitted the first doctoral candidate in 2001, and began the first of several master's programmes in 2008 (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). In 2010, the collected programs, including the circus BA, changed their name to the University of Dance and Circus (DOCH), which continues to have excellent name-recognition in the circus world. Although DOCH joined with several other higher education programs in Sweden to become the Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH) in 2014, the moniker DOCH was only formally discontinued in 2020 (personal experience, this occurred when I was already head of programme).

### ***Becoming a Bachelor Programme***

As circus integrated into the University College of Dance, certain curricular and aesthetic changes took place within the programme to comply with Swedish higher education guidelines. For instance, where the Circus Pilots programme accepted a group of students every year, the bachelors programme followed the BA structure already established in the existing dance programs where new cohorts of 10-20 students are accepted every second year (Rosen, personal communication, January 30, 2021). Another change was the addition of a bachelor examination project using artistic research methods, which will be further discussed in Chapter Five: Results. During these years, the bachelor programme established curricular emphasis on artistic research by prioritising independent work by students and relying on visiting artists for a substantial portion of the education (Ellingsworth, 2011; Muukkonen, 2011; Virolainen, 2011). The circus training quickly expanded beyond the bachelor programme and used the university structure to

develop credit-bearing free-standing courses for circus professionals (Virolainen, 2011). By the time Walter Ferrero followed in Heckscher's footsteps in 2008, he was director of a circus department not only a single programme (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). As the circus department expanded, so did the faculty. Heckscher and Ferrero cultivated a team of visionary and passionate teachers and staff whose enthusiasm and expertise contributed to DOCH's circus programmes becoming competitive with professional programmes that had already existed for 30 years. Renowned exploratory jugglers Jay Gilligan, Benjamin Richter and Luke Wilson's pedagogical visions helped guide an approach to juggling which would become a hallmark of DOCH's international reputation; Jan Rosen's work developing teeterboard propelled DOCH's acrobatic prowess; Marie-Andree Robitaille guided the artistic development of the students and programme, formally becoming artistic director of the circus BA programme in 2011 (Damkjaer & Muukkonen, 2012; Ellingsworth, 2011; Hellman, 2014; personal experience working in the department). A comprehensive history of DOCH's circus programme would include many more names and entangled histories of the people and places, but to date that specific story remains primarily in anecdotes.

While the circus bachelor programme adopted certain scheduling, organizational and curricular norms from the University College of Dance, that institution was also affected by inclusion of the circus programme. The most evident initial changes were the infrastructure requirements needed to accommodate circus practices. When the circus bachelor began in 2005, all circus training remained within Cirkus Cirkör's Botkyrka training hall, which was also used for the gymnasium students, professional training, and developing Cirkör's shows.

In 2006 the University College of Dance moved to its current premises in central Stockholm at Brinellvägen 58. The building was retrofitted for dance studios, including two

large studios with extensive ceiling and wall rigging points, storage for circus equipment, and a black box performance space that could accommodate circus discipline needs. Until 2012, however, the circus students would continue most of their training in Botkyrka, formally using these spaces once per week and for certain performance or course collaborations (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013; Rosen, personal communication, January 30, 2021). Some participants in the interviews done for this research who lived these years recalled the excitement and complexity of changing their training location one day per week.

In 2010 the university changed its name to The University of Dance and Circus – Dans och cirkus högskolan (DOCH), the first of several rapid changes that would increase the recognition of circus arts as part of the artistic vision of the institution. That same year, DOCH hosted a conference entitled Circus Artistic Research Development (CARD) the first (or the first publicized) “conference on artistic research in circus” to further knowledge transmission and research dedicated to circus arts (Damkjaer, 2012; Muukkonen, 2011; Purovaara et al., 2012, p. 239; Virolainen, 2011). In 2011, DOCH launched a Master Programme in New Performative Practices that offered a specialization in circus arts (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). With an intention of bringing together the students and educational opportunities, the adjacent building Brinellvägen 34 was renovated to become a comprehensive circus space. In January 2012, the circus programme moved into the heart of Stockholm alongside the other DOCH departments (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). DOCH’s first doctoral thesis in circus was defended by John-Paul Zaccarini in 2013, who then became head of a new master’s programme in circus arts within the expanding circus department itself (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013). In 2014 the official name again changed, to Stockholm University of the Arts, as the many dance and circus programs merged with Stockholm’s higher education programs in opera, theatre, and film (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013).

Despite this change, circus students continued to describe attending “DOCH,” which is why that name has been used for the education attended by participants in this research.

### ***Artistic Research at DOCH***

Artistic research as a means of developing, valuing, and disseminating knowledge through arts practices has been a focal point for all institutional structures within which the circus bachelors programme has existed. This is part of a broader European and Nordic environment wherein academic and professional structures are being developed to recognize knowledges beyond the classically academic representations of reading and writing. Research using arts practices as the method for investigating and articulating knowledge is commonly called “artistic research” in the Nordic and broader European context, though overlapping connections and concerns with research termed ‘practice as research’ in different contexts (Arlander, 2013; Borgdorff, 2012; Hannula, 2013; Lilja, 2012a, 2012b; Nelson, 2013). For instance, from a North American perspective, Nelson (2013) uses the term ‘practice as research’ (PAR) to highlight where performance research differs from that in visual arts because the “ephemerality of the performing arts poses particular challenges to their inclusion in an already contested site of knowledge-production” (p. 18). DOCH, and the current SKH university, utilize the term ‘artistic research’ to describe the site and methods of research activities conducted by second and third cycle students, as well as faculty. Arlander (2013) clarifies the relevance of this term in the European/Nordic context, describing the difficulties of specific terminology centered in arts practices which do not always translate cleanly into different languages. She concludes that in the Nordic regions “the term artistic research is used more and more as an umbrella concept for research undertaken in art universities” (Arlander, 2013, p. 203). In the context of this research, understanding the foundational principles of artistic research contributes to

understanding the circus education environment in Stockholm. Furthermore, it provides a practice, a methodology, by which people learn to develop applied creative thinking through “the deliberate articulation of un- finished thinking” (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 145).

Artistic research lies at the intersection of arts practice and academic rigor. Not all artists engage in “artistic research,” though most artists use research strategies when creating their art (Lilja, 2012a; Nelson, 2013). There are several criteria that qualify a project as artistic research. First, the project must be grounded in the methods of a particular artistic discipline and be in dialogue with those methods to investigate an articulated research question (Arlander, 2013; Borgdorff, 2012). This means that the researcher already has an expertise as a practitioner within their artform and is versed in navigating critique and discourse within that field (Lilja, 2012a). In addition to arts-based methods of inquiry, the project should aim to “expand the frontiers of the discipline by developing cutting-edge artistic practices, products, and insights” as does traditional academic research (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 161). Consideration must also be given to documentation, communication, and dissemination of research results, which can have textual and/or arts components (Damkjaer & Robitaille, 2011; Lilja, 2012b). In this way, the product of the research can develop the field beyond the personal enrichment of the creator through documentation that enables the research to be referenced for future work (Borgdorff, 2012).

Artistic research has strong affinities with other qualitative methods that emphasize situating the researcher, articulating the subjective experience of undertaking research and the effects upon the researcher, and valuing articulation of process and epistemic fallibility as much as (if not more) than a result purporting generalizability (Arlander, 2013; Borgdorff, 2012; Hannula, 2013; Lilja, 2012a, 2012b). Proponents of artistic research believe it departs from other qualitative forms through emphasis on starting from within an artistic practice, recognizing the

creative processes of research itself (Borgdorff, 2012; Hannula, 2013; Lilja, 2012a, 2012b) and re-articulating research questions to find resonance and answerability through particular artistic fields (Damkjaer & Robitaille, 2011). Artistic researchers work with their practices, but also towards finding peace with “a not-knowing, or a not-yet-knowing” (Borgdorff, 2012, p. 173), a “fumbling” (Hannula, 2013, p. 90), “putting acquisition of insight before the creation of a product” (Lilja, 2012b, p. 9), and “risk-taking” without any guarantee of a return on investment (Lilja, 2012a, p. 72). For some researchers, the goal of artistic research is transformation of an artistic discipline, often through the integration of other academic domains. For others, artistic research also has the very real ability to “clarify and illuminate human beings in a social, political, philosophical or purely physical context” (Lilja, 2012b, p. 8). Researching art through the art itself to translate what it knows into other languages, inviting connections, overlaps and resonances between adjacent or unlikely sources, understanding the present to push beyond norms and discover the unknown: this resonates with calls to use creativity as a process, thereby developing applied creative thinking (Gube & Lajoie, 2020).

When the Circus Pilots became a bachelor programme, the circus education became engaged by default with an approach to arts that asked students and faculty to investigate and situate their artistic propositions. This aligned with the pedagogical values proposed by both Heckscher and Ferrero as leaders of the education, and also moved the circus practices further away from the virtuosic spectacularization prized internationally in Classical and New Circus forms. While still ensuring advanced disciplinary training, the programmes outcomes focused more on how the students were becoming artists than repetition of existing forms. Navigating towards artistic research discourses supported the unique voice of DOCH’s circus education that has attracted so many to learn in Stockholm.

Artistic research at DOCH conducted in circus has also had an international reach (Funk, 2022). Through initiatives like CARD, collaborations with guest instructors, and the institutional platform provided by the university, the circus department at DOCH cultivated artistic research intersections within and beyond DOCH (Funk, 2022). Funk (2022) describes the different ways that student in the BA and MA have conceived of their artistic research projects and how it has entered their professional practices, work undertaken by teachers in the school to expand their teaching approaches (Damkjaer & Maussier, 2015), pursuing articulation of methods to teach artistic research in circus (Damkjaer & Robitaille, 2011), doctoral research exploring approaches to contemporary circus practices (Priest, 2019; Zaccarini, 2018), and the work of professional artists who developed their own research approaches in collaboration with DOCH's circus programs (Sánchez-Colberg, 2007). Tilde Björfors was one of the first guest professors in circus at DOCH, where she conducted a four-year research project in collaboration with brain scientists entitled "Circus breaking boundaries in arts and society" (Björfors & Lind, 2009; Virolainen, 2011). Explorations into the possible futures of circus continue with current researchers at SKH (Funk, 2022; Robitaille, 2023), while the presence of circus continues to influence how the university conceptualizes arts practices and artistic research as a whole.

### ***Student Experience of Learning Circus at DOCH***

An important way to understand the educational context in which this research took place is the description given by participants of this study. More detail is given Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods, about the process of coding and selecting text to represent the experiences described by participants. The following section is unique; all participants, regardless of their discipline specialty or graduation year, described essentially the same content

schedule and the same emotional intensity. The following uses participant words and phrasing to describe the universal core educational rhythm of learning circus at DOCH.

Alisan: *Can you tell me about the typical schedule? What was a typical day like?*

Every Participant, from every cohort, 2008-2018:

*The school day lasted 8.30 to 5 or 6. In first year we ran together at 8.30, followed by discipline training, acro and trampoline. The morning classes were divided differently for each student, depending on discipline. Second discipline was added later. Afternoons were for creative things: independent training, presentation preparation, dance, theatre, theory, research, all other classes. Redovisnings,<sup>10</sup> internal presentations for staff and students, lasted full afternoons. In third year, we focused on Closing Acts and had more individualized schedules. Everyone in my cohort worked hard: we stayed late working on technique or presentations, then sauna, home, cook, sleep, school again. For three years: cook, eat, sleep, wake up, restart.*

### ***Circus Education from My Perspective as Head of the BA Programme***

Only a handful of university degrees in circus exist in the world, which is why it is not surprising to often find myself explaining the educational experiences of students in the Bachelor of Circus Programme at Stockholm University of the Arts. The aim of the programme is to prepare students to enter the professional field of international circus performance. A professional circus artist is expected to be able to perform their discipline consistently, to author context-appropriate performances using their existing high-level skills in their discipline and other performing arts, and frequently to also develop shows - short- or long-form performances -

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<sup>10</sup> *Redovisnings*, called ‘redos’ in the colloquial shorthand of the DOCH/SKH community, are described in depth in Chapter Five: Results.



through knowledge of composition, dramaturgy, and scenography (Burt & Lavers, 2017). Most of the student's time is therefore spent in physical practice of some kind. However, physical practice is not mutually exclusive with development of theoretical and vocational knowledge. Above, the participants described their experience of education. As programme head, I describe the education as inclusive of multiple intersections of practice and theory, with different educational experiences providing opportunities to understand theory through practice, and practice through theory. Following this description, I will use Ryle's (1949/2009) differentiation of "knowing that" and "knowing how" to illuminate participant reactions to specific curricular components and, more broadly, the institutionalization of circus education.

At the foundational level, the students train existing and developing vocabularies in their primary circus discipline and pre-existing adjacent practices like dance or theatre. This is done with the close guidance of a teacher. Students are expected to ensure their bodies are maintained with appropriate physical preparation for their practice and individual anatomical needs, such as conditioning strength, or power, or flexibility, or stability, as needed. Physical preparation is semi-guided. These core skills needed for performance in the circus field are normally offered at all post-secondary circus education programmes and training centers (vocational, non-accredited professionalizing programmes, etc.). At the theoretical level, these practices include cultivating knowledge of anatomy, injury prevention and recovery, and training periodization.

To be an author in circus –to create a context-appropriate performance based on either self-imposed or externally imposed criteria – an artist must develop a dialogue between the criteria/context and their own abilities. A circus artist cannot select from all the existing skills in a discipline; they select from their own existing (and developing) skills to compose their performance. To foster this practice, another important and consistent educational experience

through the three years is task-based presentation. These presentations are primarily internal: for only the other students and educators associated with DOCH at the time of performance. Independently or with the guidance of a teachers, students have regular presentations opportunities where they perform composition following a task. Examples of tasks include learning a method of movement from a choreographer and interpreting it into their existing discipline and being given a physical or theoretical impulse/restriction as the basis for presentation. Tasks may require students to describe theoretical underpinnings of contemporary global issues, historical representations of circus, scenographic implications of acoustic/visual choices, challenges to classical re/presentations in their discipline, or any other topic. In these physical practices, students learn to develop and discuss integration of movement and ideas, concepts of composition, and socio-emotional implications of artist-audience interactions. With regard to international circus education, these practices may not be designed into a curriculum for non-accredited/training center professionalizing programmes. Certainly, the percent of time spent on task-based presentation and the type and quality of the tasks differs dramatically between programmes (Étienne et al., 2014).

Performance requires knowledge of on-stage technical and artistic consistency, but also broader knowledge of the diverse stage technologies supporting the performance. In every year of the education, sometimes more than once, student perform for public audiences in a formal (ticketed) show. Through these performances, following a progression over the three years, students hone their abilities to perform professionally (stress management, composition, collective creation practices, supporting the performances of others, etc.) while also cultivating practical and theoretical knowledge of light and sound boards, rigging of circus equipment, set up (load in) and tear down (load out) of theatrical spaces (or equivalent work transforming

training spaces into performance spaces), production timelines for managing creation, rehearsal, technical (light/sound/set) rehearsals, and performances. Situated in practice, including the ‘general public’ in performances provides the opportunity to cultivate professional experiences and knowledge of the practicalities and pragmatics of producing live art. While public presentations are a staple of every professionalizing circus programme, the focus is typically and critically on the artist’s performance, not layering production practices into the learning outcome.

The fourth and final consistent educational experience invites students to represent their practice in letters and numbers. Association with university enables this practice-based programme to reasonably require written descriptions of the above practical experiences. Where earning a degree is not included in successful completion of a programme of study – vocational education, or training centers – it becomes difficult to require written manifestations of practically demonstrated knowledge. Coherent writing will enable students to clarify their own thinking around a topic, describe their vision and projects to funders and audiences, and help them to understand and situate themselves in other circus writing. Practice drawing up budgets, schedules, and production plans prepares them to understand the resources required in different performance scenarios towards the accomplishment of their own projects, from street shows to forming touring companies. The diversity of written representations available reflects the diversity of skills circus artists are required to account for: they must understand the role of a lighting designer to understand whether they will do their own lighting design, or find a budget to hire a lighting designer, and what it will cost in time and money for either of those scenarios.

### **Summary of Circus Education Literature**

Circus practice cannot be separated from the world in which it exists. Circus performances have reflected and responded to contextual environmental, social, economic, and

political realities, which shape performance choices, and audience response to those choices. Circus is not only a set of artistic and physical techniques, but it also always arises from specific cultural and political environments, and for that reason it is simultaneously universal and local, both ahistorical and era-bound, an arrangement of techniques, methods, and presentation that is both a product of its culture while challenging the edges. Many of the significant revolutions in the arts have risen from political changes; we may be living through another such period that again revolutionizes circus education and performance. Laws that affect movement, for instance immigration and border regulations, affect where artists can perform and with whom they can collaborate. Within individual countries, the political approach to circus arts has had substantial impact on the development of contemporary circus. Countries that show the most innovative advancement are those that have allowed, or actively created, space for the pursuit of artistic development and performance by creating schools, providing support for artistic residencies, and helped to fund show development and travel. Further, laws affect how performance occurs – variations in insurance and healthcare in different countries require different financial investments and risk assessment from circus practitioners.

Following the evolution, purpose, pedagogy, outcomes and structures of circus education is a lens through which to understand the significant changes that have taken place in circus (and other performing arts) over time, to understand the role of circus arts within a society, and to understand broader sociocultural shifts in the perception of the role of students generally, the role of performers specifically, the purpose of education generally, and the purpose of art specifically. Tracing the trajectory of circus education highlights social, political, cultural, industrial, philosophical, physical, and environmental changes that affecting every part of society by synthesizing an historically hidden and academically (and professionally) neglected subject.

### **Chapter Three: Curriculum Theory and Creativity Literature Review**

In this section, I review literature pertaining to the object of study, Creativity in circus, and summarize how Curriculum Theory provides a theoretical framework for articulating and investigating my research questions. Curriculum theory enables the observer to discern the different ways that content and environment co-construct meaning during the course of an education and reveal sites where creativity may be enriched or stymied. Overlapping concerns within both fields and theories bolster the frame upon which this research sits. Curriculum theorists, artistic researchers and creativity researchers have constructively intersecting approaches to viewing the relationship between evaluation and environment and its effect on creative expression of students (Gajda et al., 2017; Hannula, 2013; Eisner, 1979/2002; Sawyer, 2012, 2018). As seen above, circus educational practices have followed ostensible curricula of physical and artistic progressions. When housed within standardized institutions, the different curricular practices become more evident – including tensions between how embodied and theoretical outcomes are structured and valued.

#### **Curriculum Studies**

Through its history, curriculum has become the way to denote the system of what is learned at schools through the content, pedagogy, schedule, organization, values, and evaluations. Curriculum theory can offer significant contributions to understanding circus education. While neither the entities of circus nor schools are new, circus schools themselves are a relatively new phenomenon, as shown in Chapter Four. The specific way that these two environments overlap has led to recurring tensions and difficulties (Sizorn, 2014), even as many advocates argue for the value of institutionalized circus education as a means of both preparing students for careers beyond performance and simultaneously legitimizing circus as an art (Funk,

2019; Lalonde, 2007; Roberts, 2014b; Salaméro & Haschar-Noé, 2011, 2012; Sizorn, 2014).

Furthermore, circus schools are preparing students to work in an industry that may have changed by the time they enter the field. Curriculum studies reveal creativity apprenticeship in circus schools by illuminating curricular intentions, values imparted through the hidden and null curricula, and investigating what students learned within these structures. Applying curriculum theory to understanding knowledge transmission in circus has not yet been undertaken in any significant way. Therefore, beyond the narrow titular question, viewing circus education through the lens of curriculum theory enables a mapping of current programs and how they are navigating the intersecting demands of accreditation, artistic integrity, physical health and safety, and dialogic relationships to traditional and local circus *habitus*. In this section I provide an overview of curriculum studies and detail aspects of curriculum theory that offer rich perspectives for understanding aspects of circus education.

### ***History of Curriculum Studies***

Curriculum creates a system through which to understand the educational contract as a society, and curriculum is also responsive to the philosophical, political, and financial shifts in societies. This chapter outlines how the concept of curriculum emerged in North America, and the tensions it replicates and resists, thereby illuminating the systems and tensions at play within circus institutions. As will be shown, the instrumentalist and progressive approaches to curriculum are still present in the practical applications that must be navigated by degree-granting circus programs. Contemporary curriculum theorists propose that curriculum approaches can be re-thought to provide space for transformative autobiographical inquiry (Butler-Kisber et al., 2007; Carter, 2014a, 2014b, 2016; Kumar, 2013). Yet the behemoth of university moves slowly and is still dominated by many structural traditions; for this reason, this

section focuses on the foundations of curriculum theory rather than the more recent and inspiring approaches to educational structure and expectation.

Prior to the innovation of a field of scholarship specifically directed at the discussion and development of curriculum, the prevailing approach to education in North America in the late 1800s was the theory of “faculty psychology,” predicated on the belief that “the mind was ... a muscle to be exercised by memorization and recitation” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 70). Education aimed to strengthen mental abilities (will, emotions, and intellect) through classical content (texts in Greek and Latin). Proponents of this method included US Commissioner of Education (1889-1906) William Torrey Harris and Harvard president Charles Eliot (Noddings, 2015). Eliot was also the chair of the National Education Association’s Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies, establishing an influential curriculum model based solely on content, and later critiqued by Ralph Tyler (1949) in his discussion of the selection of objectives (Kliebard, 1975; Pinar et al., 1995).

In 1859, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) challenged faculty psychology by asking “What knowledge is of moral worth?” while promoting educational aims that included preparing students for parenting, politics, and refined leisure activities through an exploratory, rather than didactic, pedagogy (Batho, 2001). For Spencer, curriculum should follow the trajectory of civilizations, from the simple to the complex, and consequences of behaviors were considered adequate behavioral reinforcement (Batho, 2001). German educational theorist Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841) offered yet another approach, proposing that pre-existing ideas must be activated to ensure links with new knowledge through a process called “apperception” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 78), which was taken up by his followers, the Herbartians, in the late 1800s (Oelkers, 2001). As the curriculum field developed, two powerful directions emerged: social efficiency and

progressive education. Both expanded from focusing on content alone to the actual methods of education, but with radically different visions of the objectives, methods, and cultural significance of education.

The first systemic and coherent formulation of curriculum development came from proponents of social efficiency, the same foundation that fostered both Eugenics and social Darwinism (Apple & Franklin, 1990; Baker, 2009). If factories could be made more efficient through measurements and task analysis, surely schools could benefit from the same process in order to maximize the relationship between resource input and educational output (Eisner, 1969/2005). Using behaviorist experimental science, Edward L. Thorndike believed that by using measurements to investigate the learning process, education would “profit ... as mechanical and electrical engineering have profited by using the foot, pound, calorie, volt, and atmosphere” (Thorndike, 1922, quoted in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 91). John Franklin Bobbitt created a curricular system to industrialize learning objectives: researchers were mobilized to catalogue every task essential to adulthood, from which educational objectives would be selected (Bobbitt, 2009; Eisner, 1969/2005). For Bobbitt, although curriculum takes place both in and out of school, only the portion within schools is the educator’s responsibility (Bobbitt, 2009; Kliebard, 1975/2009). David Sneddon believed that separating ‘normal’ and ‘variant’ children would make classrooms more efficient (Pinar et al., 1995). W. W. Charters suggested a hierarchical ranking of learning objectives to determine which should be taught in schools, and subsequently establishing appropriate pedagogies and instructional order (Kliebard, 1975/2009). Because a scientific approach requires specialists, many of these curriculum theorists also began to specialize in development and consultation (Kliebard, 1975; Pinar et al., 1995). Critiquing this approach, Boyd Henry Bode observed that “neither scientific studies or scientific methods of



constructing curriculum advanced the cause of democracy,” and that developing curricular objectives via job analysis was inadequate for understanding complex activities like citizenship (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 117).

The simultaneous progressive education movement proposed a different approach to education, one directly tied to the birth of American pragmatism in the early 1900s, and with many similar voices (Malachowski, 2013). Eisner (1969/2005) describes this approach to learning as “biological,” as it is derived from the application of Darwin’s evolutionary model to construct stages of growth through childhood, from which appropriate learning objectives and experiences are chosen, based on the educational theories of the Herbartians and Spencer (Oelkers, 2001). Child-centered, progressive education envisioned schools as a location where students would learn the tools to make society more democratic and socially engaged through thoughtfully planned learning experiences (Allen & Goddard, 2017; Pinar et al., 1995). The curriculum centers on educational situations, with which students engage by interrelating subjects and using multi-disciplinary tools (Pinar et al., 1995). Many contemporary thought leaders contributed to the development of progressive education methods. Alongside his prolific writing (e.g., *The Child and the Curriculum*, 1964/1902), pragmatic philosopher John Dewey founded “The Laboratory School” in Chicago, where progressive experiments in education would lead to many practical developments for teachers, students, and schools (Apple & Teitelbaum, 2001). Psychologist G. Stanley Hall proposed that curricula reflect developmental stages and learning differences (Apple & Teitelbaum, 2001). He believed strongly in measuring student outcomes to achieve the aims of the progressive education movement (Pinar et al., 1995). This was echoed by Joseph Mayer Rice, who advocated testing as a means of establishing objective feedback about schools – a paradigm that continues to heavily influence curriculum

decisions (Walker, 1976). Lester Frank Ward envisioned schools changing society by undoing socially constructed hierarchies while Hall, a social Darwinist, believed that schools were locations where children learn to live up to their ordained social status (Pinar et al., 1995). The Great Depression inspired a critical investigation of public schools, with the hope that Progressive reform would prevent such an event in the future. George S. Counts proposed that education was the place to address social inequalities, which divided progressive educators into two ideological camps: those who advocated radical action, and those who believed change was a slow but steady process of incremental, intentional change. Due to the lack of cohesion in progressive education methods, and in response to improved economic conditions, the efficiency approach resurfaced in the 40s (Counts, 2009; Pinar et al., 1995).

One of the single most important texts to be written in the field of curriculum studies was published in 1949 by Ralph Tyler, *Basic principles of curriculum and instruction*. Tyler (1949) proposed that programs first identify their educational aims, from which they can derive specific educational objectives, experiences enabling apprenticeship of those objectives, and evaluation to demonstrate acquisition of said objectives (Kliebard, 1975). By identifying multiple sources from which to draw objectives, Tyler included the disparate factions of progressive and instrumentalist approaches (Kliebard, 1975). Objectives, “changes in behavior that an educational institution seeks to bring about in its students” (p. 6), can be selected from: 1) the child-centered study of learners, which reveals behavioral deficiencies that must be corrected (however, identification of ‘deficiencies’ must consider context; i.e. lack of vocation during the Great Depression was not due to failing schools); 2) the current social conditions (though not all conditions are worth replicating, and future conditions may not resemble contemporary ones); and 3) the recommendations of subject specialists (if content supports average student domain

learning, rather than exclusively as a preparation for professional expertise) (Tyler, 1949). The Tyler Rationale remained the core of curriculum studies, with which others tinkered, modified, or against which they reacted, until the late 1960s (Baker, 2009; Kliebard, 1975).

### ***Entangled Histories of Curriculum and Creativity Studies***

Post-WWII, accelerated by Sputnik's launch in 1957, the United States would re-commit itself to a programme of positivistic measurement and discipline-based, rather than method-based, education while simultaneously funding structural inquiries into creativity by launching programs aimed at identifying and educating gifted and talented youth to develop competitive innovation and maintain America's military-industrial complex. The increase in federal funding and educational scrutiny focused on science, technology, math, and creativity identification, propelled many changes to the public-school systems in the United States (Gardner, 2001; Pinar et al., 1995; Sawyer, 2012). Federal involvement with education reallocated the work of developing curricula to subject specialists; curriculum theorists were no longer called upon as curriculum-makers. The curriculum field was forced to reassess its purpose.

The federal interest in creativity enabled progressive education programs that increased student problem-solving abilities (Sawyer, 2012). One significant attempt to develop a method-driven curriculum was the grade five social studies programme, developed through the National Science Foundation, entitled *Man: A Course of Study* (MACOS) (Bruner, 2009; Gardner, 2001). Using problem-based learning to integrate multiple disciplines, the curriculum revolved around a series of questions about human beings. However, by contextualizing American society on equal footing with other (including Indigenous) cultures, the innovative curriculum was deemed unpatriotic, and discontinued (Flinders & Thornton, 2009). By the mid-1960s, cultural shifts provoked scholars to question the asymmetry between the United States' rhetoric of equality and

the evident inequalities being experienced by women and visible minorities. Curriculum scholars began to explore how schools reproduced or disrupted different systems.

In 1970, Joseph Schwab published an indictment of the curriculum studies field – a provocation that has provided the basis for numerous responses, rebuttals, and reappraisals. In an abrasively catchy opening statement, Schwab (1970) declares that “the field of curriculum is moribund,” and that it must develop new methods to continue its work (p. 1). Schwab’s proposal is that curriculum scholars return to “the practical”: context-bound and participant-bound work to solve local curricular problems. He proposes the process of “deliberation,” something that curriculum scholars must be trained to do in universities to integrate “the practical, the quasi-practical, and the eclectic” into their daily curricular practice rather than focusing on theoretical and abstract aspects of curriculum formation (Schwab, 1970, p. 2).

Predating Schwab’s indictment of the state of curriculum studies, many scholars were already working with ideas that would come to the fore during the reconceptualization of the 1970s: Dwayne Huebner investigated phenomenology, Maxine Greene (1995) turned to imagination and creativity, William Pinar (1975) explored the autobiographical, and Philip Jackson elucidated the hidden curriculum (Goodson, 1989; Jackson, 1968/1990; Pinar et al., 1995). Yet Schwab’s provocation seems to be the dividing line between the field unsuccessfully clinging to its traditional form— curriculum development – and becoming the field that seeks to understand curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995). The scholars questioning the traditions were labelled “reconceptualists,” though they were not formally organized, and soon became the leaders of the field (Pinar, 2009; Pinar et al., 1995).

Not only did these scholars seek to understand curriculum, but they pursued a means for education to generate knowledge. In his essay “Mr. Bennet and Mrs. Brown,” Pinar (1973/1994)

draws a parallel between Woolf's critique that the writers notice everything except for Mrs. Brown herself and the contemporary field of curriculum studies, in which curriculum writers pursue all directions except for the internal, the curriculum of the self. Observing that "we have gone just about as far as we can go in understanding the nature of education by focusing on the externals" (p. 16), Pinar (1973/1994) argues that we must now turn to the internal place from which existential philosophers write in order to answer Woolf's call to attend to character. Pinar (1975) proposes *currere*, the verb conjugation of curriculum, as an autobiographical method by which education can create knowledge, not a platform through which knowledge is brokered. *Currere* answers essential questions about what draws us to specific ideas and experiences, and why certain knowledge becomes part of us while other knowledge bounces off into the unknown. Through *currere*, as through interviews, new information and perspectives can be uncovered (Pinar, 1975). Pinar's work has provided an important foundation for new ways of approaching curriculum. Working with auto-phenomenological inquiry, Carter (2016) connects the introspective and autobiographic auto-educational process of *currere* with phenomenological bracketing to further investigate how re-telling our own lived experiences creates and reinforces the self-imposed curriculum of our lives.

Classroom practices and the utility of learning objectives were also revisited during this time. Eisner (1969/2005) observes that discussions of learning objectives have dominated the discourse in curriculum construction. He points out that the succinct rhetoric expounded by Tyler and his followers pointing to objectives as a means of ensuring appropriate content and evaluation decisions is lacking, as evidenced by the impracticality of actually using these objectives in lived teaching and learning experiences. The industrial model of learning objectives, as well as the biological, Darwinian Progressive model, continue to present the

primary poles of the oscillating pendulum (Eisner, 1969/2005). Eisner himself favors what he terms the “expressive objective,” one that “does not specify the behavior the student is to acquire... [but rather] describes an educational encounter” so that the work of education, rather than the outcomes, are prioritized (p. 34).

Through the process of reconceptualization, curriculum scholars and practitioners began to pursue methods for changing the structures and locations of education as a means of changing societies and empowering students by leveraging poststructural, phenomenological, feminist, and other forms of critical frameworks to investigate curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995). In the fifty years since the reconceptualization of the field, curriculum studies have continued to evolve and, while retaining an interest in understanding curriculum, fragmented into increasingly specialized sub-fields. For instance, many curriculum theorists became dedicated to dismantling systems of oppression (Apple, 1990a; Giroux & Penna, 1979), others to revealing the importance of artistic and aesthetic experience (Butler-Kisber, 2002; Greene, 1995; Eisner, 1979/2002). The work of curriculum theory, however, has seemed to diverge even more deeply away from the increasingly commercialized, standardized, and accountability-driven approaches to education (Goodson, 1989; Patrick, 2013). School boards in the 1980s, and again in the 2000s, re-emphasized not only discipline-based content, but enacted strict measures to ensure these disciplines were being taught (Goodson, 1989; Patrick, 2013). The many factors at play will be explored in the following sections.

### ***Hidden Curriculum***

Apple (1990a) proposed that education simultaneously holds explicit/visible curriculum which includes content, assessment and learning activities, and hidden curriculum which includes all the behaviors and codes being learned but which are not part of the content or

assessment. The ‘hidden curriculum’ refers to everything learned aside from the explicit objectives of an educational programme. In a math class, primary school students learn the explicit curriculum of arithmetic while also learning the hidden curriculum: sitting still for long blocks of time, when to speak or be silent, how to silence the body’s needs by waiting. Apple’s (1990a) construct makes visible the ways that prejudices regarding class, race, gender, etc. are systematically transmitted through the structure of education. Eisner (1979/2002) expands this framework with the third, null curriculum: all of the content, knowledge and methods left OUT of educational curricula. Remaining aware of the opportunity cost of choosing content asks curriculum designers to be more accountable of exclusions rather than focusing only on what to include. We name these as separate curricula to better understand networks and gaps in learning experiences.

Because each curriculum contains “a selection and organization from all available social knowledge at a particular time,” choices have been made about which material is important, legitimate, and valuable by people who have non-neutral ideological and cultural assumptions (Apple, 1990a, p. 17; Giroux & Penna, 1979; Goodson, 1989). Schools have always transmitted the values, and perspectives of groups holding power. By ensconcing their stories and values as the only “legitimate” knowledge, schools’ function to “control meaning” (Apple & Franklin, 1990, p. 63). These ‘hidden’ systems frequently reinforce the oppression or exploitation of certain people to the benefit of those in power (Apple, 1990b; Margolis et al., 2001). Hidden curriculum scholars assume that schools work; they suggest asking instead “for whom do schools work?” (Apple & Franklin, 1990, p. 81).

Apple and Franklin (1990) argue that teaching hegemonic values was the explicit intent of early schools. Public schools took shape in the 1850s (Apple & Franklin, 1990; Goodson,

1989; Pinar et al., 1995). In the United States, these schools were explicitly designed to preserve the cultural and historical values of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture, which felt it was losing its identity through the increase in immigrants, the migration of newly freed Black people to the North, and industrialization, which pulled people from their small communities to the cities (Apple & Franklin, 1990). There was a great fear that the “moral impurities” of immigrants would taint the existing communities, therefore the children needed to be cleansed of these impurities through the education system (Apple & Franklin, 1990, p. 66). Rather than integrating other cultures, schools were designed to teach minorities to fit in. A focus on community (achieved by conforming to the existing community) was the first focus public education (Apple & Franklin, 1990). Curricular objectives therefore included both the essentials of community participation and preparation for integration into stratified career paths (Apple & Franklin, 1990; Pinar et al., 1995). Rallying around community was short-lived, however, and the selection of appropriate curricular content soon shifted from maintaining a homogeneous community to assessing intelligence.

Certain of the inferiority of minorities, Thorndike used behavioral psychology to prove his hypothesis that minorities were “scientifically” less intelligent, which explains the differences in their education objectives and outcomes (Apple & Franklin, 1990, p. 74). His experiments unsurprisingly proved their hypothesis, reinforced racism, classism, xenophobia, and conservatism, thereby “provid[ing] the ideal solution to the ideological problem of justifying one’s power over other competing and ultimately threatening groups” (Apple & Franklin, 1990, p. 78). The existing (white, male, Anglo-Saxon Protestant) experts were demonstrably more intelligent because they were already in the most prestigious jobs and leadership positions. Their offspring should therefore be educated as the future leaders, while minorities would be educated



for “followership” (Apple & Franklin, 1990, p. 75). Thorndike, Bobbitt, Charters, Sneddon, and the other advocates of social efficiency saw education as a means of integrating minorities into a community where each level of “intelligence” worked at their appropriate level and was socialized to accept it. Schools served the function of the increasingly industrialized society by teaching people that they had appropriate places within it, and that they could not expect better – thereby both creating and socializing the labor stratification necessary to ensure workers for industrial jobs. Educators embraced the scientific and managerial language because it provided “a greater ease of prediction and manipulation” and a strong theoretical lens through which they could justify their actions (Apple & Franklin, 1990, p. 79). During this process, education shifted its emphasis from building a community to socializing an individual into industrial society. Therefore, schools work... for a specific class of people, to preserve a specific social order that relies on stratification and the privileging of a narrow historical perspective, and an incomplete consideration of multiple forms of knowing and community building (Apple & Franklin, 1990).

Philip Jackson’s book *Life in Classrooms* (1968/1990) brought the hidden curriculum of quotidian classroom culture into curriculum scholarship. Jackson observed which values were being taught alongside, and in spite of, the stated objectives (Margolis et al., 2001; Pinar et al., 1995). Students were rewarded for behaviors like waiting, patience, forming lines, sitting, being quiet, even more than the quality of the assignments they produced (Jackson, 1968/1990). Margolis et al. (2001) point out that Jackson drew from Durkheim (1925), who championed schools as a primary engine of socialization and believed that homogeneity of culture was essential to the proper functioning of society. Jackson and Talcott Parsons – who believed competition within schools correctly taught students that social inequalities were a result of their ability to win to ensure their hard work – promoted consensus theory (Margolis et al., 2001). In

consensus theory, the curriculum is a means of ensuring that pedagogy rightfully reinforces a narrow set of social values defined by wealthy, white, male, Anglo-Saxons (Apple, 1990a, 1990b).

During the 1960s, Marxist theorists proposed an alternate idea, the “correspondence thesis,” arguing that the traditional systems of schooling contributed to “the maintenance of the capitalist system” because ostensibly universal values were being taught in different ways to different classes of people (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 7). Pierre Bourdieu and Basil Bernstein’s respective philosophical approaches contributed to correspondence theory by calling attention to culture as an engine of reproduction (Margolis et al., 2001). Approaching the analysis of schools through the lens of class, early hidden curriculum scholars applied Bourdieu’s argument that knowledge acquired during childhood socialization as a function of their social status, their “habitus,” is carried into the classroom (Margolis et al., 2001, p. 7). How their particular “habitus” is valued will influence how they are treated, how they learn, and the general expectations of their accomplishment. Bernstein laid out how language in schools reflects the middle class [white] norms and displaces/denigrates other language grammar and syntax. Class analysis showed that the teaching and learning was unequal in schools for different classes of students (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1990b; Apple & King, 1990).

Critiquing the correspondence theory approach for seeing educators and students within school systems as “passive recipients of the reproduction process” (Giroux & Penna, 1979; Margolis et al., 2001, p. 8), Henry Giroux (1983) proposed “resistance theory,” seeing that any location of conflict or contradiction can be a zone of resistance. Rather than unthinking replicators, stakeholders are viewed as active participants in their socialization or resistance to that socialization. Rather than always acting towards progressive ends, resistance was observed

in working class boys who rejected the ecumenical socialization of liberal arts education, effectively reinforcing their job prospects by rejecting new perspectives on gender, culture, and knowledge (Margolis et al., 2001). Elliot Eisner (1979/2002) also proposed that all of the content, values, and experiences left out of an education programme constituted the “null” curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995). Study of education must consider the objectives for student learning (the explicit curriculum), what values students learn through the organization, pedagogy, and discipline of the school (the implicit curriculum), and what the programme has left out (the null curriculum).

There are several common ways in which the hidden curriculum is expressed. Because certain content is selected to be part of an educational programme with specific outcome intentions, legitimizing certain knowledge through inclusion in the official curriculum is one expression of both the hidden and null curricula (Apple, 1990a; Eisner, 1979/2002; Giroux & Penna, 1979; Goodson, 1989). Partitioning the day into succinct and equal units of time is another way that specific values are reinforced. Limiting social interactions to lunch and recess teaches that work is not a social environment, and rewards students who have the skills to complete the allotted work in the limited time (Giroux & Penna, 1979). Hegemonic perspectives are reinforced through assessment, because “what you assess is what you get” (Beghetto, 2010, p. 453). In 1979, Giroux and Penna called for significant reductions of assessments in school as a means of circumventing the hidden curriculum, favoring Freire’s (1968/2005) method of discourse. Eisner (2009) suggests that one problem with the development of objectives is that the people designing them are highly specialized and therefore unable to extrapolate how objectives might be different in other fields. Eisner contests the idea that objectives enable programme evaluation by distinguishing the idea of a standard – something concrete against which things are

measured – and a judgement, which is used to evaluate things qualitatively, such as art, poetry, and creativity. To conflate the two is a disservice to the qualitative domains, he argues. Eisner (2009) believes that we need to take a broader view of the methods and theories from which curricula can be designed because “the means through which imaginative curricula can be built is as open-ended as the means through which scientific and artistic inventions occur” (p. 87).

Rewards and discipline are also essential transmission tools of the hidden curriculum. Giroux and Penna (1979) point out that ensconcing competition as natural teaches students that someone “must always come in last” (p. 28). Apple and King (1990) trace how kindergarten students learn to differentiate work from play by the way they are allowed to interact with the different items. Jackson’s (1968/1990) seminal work observed the curricular emphasis placed on discipline, rather than learning, through reward and punishment (Flinders & Thornton, 2009; Giroux & Penna, 1979). These studies show that behavior receives much more attention than the ostensibly important content, and that behavior is policed in different ways that reinforce stereotypical cultural hierarchies (Anyon, 1981). The décor and physical environment are part of the hidden curriculum, as well. For instance, Costello’s (2001) detailed observations of the buildings at two University of California, Berkeley faculties, the Boalt Hall School of Law, and the School of Social Welfare, show how organizational cues indicate who is welcome or foreign to the schools, what behaviors are expected and valued, and expectations for graduates. Perhaps most compelling are the three epigraphs taken from interviews she conducted where students speak about how they feel in the building (43). It is clear that the students have learned the hidden curriculum of inclusion and exclusion, and their internal emotional environments belie the impact that structures have on individual experiences.

## **Creativity Studies**

Creativity as a concept has not been consistent across cultures or time. Current definitions account for context, disciplinary domain, originality, appropriateness, and personal significance (Beghetto, 2010; Csikszentmihalyi, 1996/2013; Sawyer, 2012). Originally thought to be bestowed and withheld by deities, creativity became seen as an internal character trait during the Enlightenment (Allen & Goddard, 2017; Sawyer, 2012). With each new wave of creativity research, creativity has been refined and re-defined. The first wave of creativity research began in the 50s and focused on examining the personalities of eminent creators (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996/2013; Sawyer, 2012). During the 80s, the second wave of creativity research, driven by cognitive psychology, tried to understand the internal process of creativity in the mind (Sawyer, 2012). These individualist approaches studied personality aspects that enabled creativity using psychological trait theory (Sawyer, 2012). This type of creativity is defined as a new idea made manifest as long as it is new to the creator. Even if the idea is not new to the world, this is termed “little-c” creativity, thereby acknowledging the creative work that takes place (Beghetto, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). The third wave of creativity research took an interdisciplinary and sociocultural approach by looking primarily at how systems and societies foster creativity, which also began in the 80s (Sawyer, 2012). The sociocultural definition holds that “creativity is the generation of a product that is judged to be novel and also to be appropriate, useful, or valuable by a suitably knowledgeable social group” (Sawyer, 2012, p. 8). This focuses more on the creative elements of the idea and the process of creation, rather than the internal traits of the creator (Sawyer, 2012). Further, this recognizes that creative solutions to large problems are often solved collaboratively and emerge from the context of culture (Sawyer, 2012). This type of widely recognized and significantly influential novelty is called “Big-C” creativity to demonstrate its broad and

enduring impact (Beghetto, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). Depending upon the context, then, the word ‘creativity’ can be interpreted in several different ways. To encourage linguistic precision, in business contexts creativity is an individual trait whereas innovation is something accomplished by the entire organization, like a new product (Sawyer, 2012). The two words cannot be used interchangeably.

### ***Education and Creativity***

As discourse around education, schooling, and curriculum accelerated towards the end of the nineteenth century, several theorists included creativity within the process and objectives of education. John and Alice Dewey established the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago in 1896 as a place for experimental education, and it rapidly grew and received acclaim and much interest (Pinar et al., 1995). Dewey proposed a problem-based curriculum that encouraged students to draw on multiple domains while resolving the prompts, “so that the child was encouraged to utilize creativity and acquire basic academic skills simultaneously” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 107). From a more empirical stance, Alfred Binet’s intelligence test was adapted by Stanford’s Lewis Terman in the 1920s as he began to study the links between high intelligence and “human potential” (Sawyer, 2012, p. 16).

During and after WWII, the United States advocated conformity as a symbol of patriotism and loyalty to country and company (Sawyer, 2012) – with the attendant cultural prejudices that circumscribed what activities were considered ‘patriotic’ for different races, religions, classes and genders. Creativity was launched into the public eye after WWII, as the Cold War turned into the Space Race (Sawyer, 2012). Politicians became concerned that conformity was limiting American innovation and suddenly the idea of creativity became much-discussed, much-funded, and the existing education system much-critiqued (Sawyer, 2012).

Creativity-focused research was launched by J. P. Guilford's address to the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1950 advocating research into the connection between "creativity and learning" (Sawyer, 2012; Smith & Smith 2010, p. 252). Paul Torrance's development of creativity assessment tools placed him among the founders of creativity research (Sawyer, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2010). The major funding initiatives from the Federal government in the 1950s facilitated scientific and creativity research, including the Title III initiative financing "Projects to Advance Creativity in Education (PACE)" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 174). Following Terman's apparent success at intelligence testing, the National Science Foundation (est. 1950) developed tests to identify creativity to recruit the "best" scientists from pre-determined cultural candidate profiles (Sawyer, 2012).

After the launch of Sputnik in 1957, many politicians and citizens demanded to know whether the education system was providing quality knowledge to US children. Admiral Hyman Rickover, a vocal proponent of the discipline-based classical curriculum, blamed the Progressive method of education for preventing students from the type of creativity necessary to ensure technological dominance over Soviet scientists (Ozmon & Craver, 2008; Pinar et al., 1995; Sawyer, 2012). Without creative thought, Rickover and several other authors argued, America would effectively lose the war and eliminate Western civilization (Sawyer, 2012). In a discussion of the sudden funding for creativity identification and augmentation, Sawyer (2012) observes, "the goal ... was no less than to better understand freedom and its place in American society" (p. 17). The concept of creativity therefore became intricately linked with both intelligence and freedom, values that many use to identify themselves as Americans. With the resurgence of empiricism post-WWII, creativity became instrumentalized towards the development of science, technology, and the military (Pinar et al., 1995; Sawyer, 2012). Despite the work of curriculum

theorists like Ross Mooney and Laura Zirbes, who both wrote passionately in the 1950s advocating for a “curriculum grounded in creativity research,” it was not long before creativity research was nearly exclusively justified through a means-ends lens (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 156).

An interest in the qualitative aspects of creativity bloomed as many schools – and the establishment culture as a whole – were shaken through the 1960s and 70s. Along with reconceptualization of a curriculum field with more critical approaches to inclusion and discrimination came a renewed interest in creative approaches to understanding curriculum (Pinar et al., 1995). Writing in the 1960s, Macdonald believed that curriculum should allow a student to “develop his or her own thinking and values, and to encourage creative responses to reality” (Burke, 1985, cited in Pinar et al., 1995, p. 178). Over his many years of writing, Elliot Eisner has been a passionate defender of qualitative educational experiences and values, those which resist easy measurement, predetermination, and verification. In opposition to the many quantitative questionnaires and surveys proposed to measure or ameliorate creativity, Eisner advocates for instead re-thinking the evaluation process as a means of increasing learning that aims for “novelty, originality, or creativeness as the desired outcome” (Eisner, 2009, p. 88). He believes that education, including curriculum-making, is more closely related to art than to industry. He draws on Dewey’s definition of the role of art criticism towards increasing the appreciation of art and believes that concept applicable to education seeing the child also as a work of art that needs to be appraised and approached creatively (Eisner, 2009).

By the 1980s, although the field of creativity research was flourishing, another surge of (neo-) positivism lashed back against the preceding social experiments and reforms. Several books written for the public and highly critical of the school systems impacted the development of the curriculum field. Charles Silberman’s “*Crisis in the Classroom: The Remaking of*



*American Education*” promoted the idea that schools kill creativity (Pinar et al., 1995).

Silberman followed the British Plowden Report in suggesting that open classrooms and informal education were the way of the future (Pinar et al., 1995). These renewed attacks were concurrent with increasing waves of scientism, empiricism, and eventually the era of accountability and standardized testing that would open the door to our current neoliberal, commodified educational structures (Patrick, 2013). Advocacy of the merits of creativity and an interest in ameliorating identification of systems and methods to teach creativity has become even more significant, as evidenced by the number of publications, research initiatives, and measures that have been developed (Bakhshi & Windsor, 2015; Collins, 2006; Collins et al., 1991; Harris, 2016; Hearn et al., 2014; Greene et al., 2019). Critique against creativity research emphasizes the neoliberal rhetoric associated with contemporary creativity discourse, focused on capitalistic, product-oriented innovation, thereby defining creativity as exclusively individualistic and devoid of ethics (Beghetto, 2010; Burnard, 2006; Morgan & Nelligan 2018).

### ***Tensions Between Curriculum and Creativity***

The importance of integrating creativity into traditional schools is most frequently framed as a means of preparing our students for “the increasingly complex and ill-defined nature of life in the twenty-first century” (Beghetto, 2010, p. 447). Yet within schools, creativity has been limited to specifically acceptable expressions within certain contexts, especially those that do not detract from the smooth functioning of the school day or require disciplinary intervention (Smith & Smith, 2010). In education, creativity is usually associated with early childhood education, arts instruction, or talented and gifted programs – indicating a hidden/implicit assumption that normal, mature, and non-artistic youth need not prioritize creativity (Sawyer, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2010). There are several contradictions and problems inherent in the allotment of

‘creative’ activity to those three domains, though there are equally good reasons creativity research has found a home there.

Early childhood education and arts programs have in common a potentially more flexible curriculum, and perhaps more qualitative outcomes, which permits educators to nourish creative expression. Limiting the notion of creativity to primarily arts domains implies that non-artistic work cannot benefit from creativity – and conversely that artistic work is inspired, rather than the result of dedicated work (Sawyer, 2012). This is demonstrably incorrect, as studies of the eminently creative tout the importance of creative habits in all domains, including maths, sciences, medicine, engineering, etc., therefore limiting creativity education to only specific domains or students contradicts the very values that are expounded (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996/2013; Sawyer, 2012). Yet tying creativity to arts education has significant benefits for the arts disciplines themselves, whether creativity is enhanced through arts practices. Due to the nature of educational funding in many countries, this association has been leveraged by schools in order to maintain arts programming (Sawyer, 2012). If creativity is important, the argument goes, and arts education fosters creativity, then it is essential to maintain arts courses even if they are not quantifiable in the same way as the well-funded Science, Technology, Engineering, and Maths (STEM) subjects (Sawyer, 2012). The structure of this argument is wobbly for two reasons. First, creativity has not proven to be domain-transferable; therefore, learning artistic creativity does not make someone more likely to innovate in mathematics (Sawyer, 2012). A similar hypothesis that has been equally difficult to demonstrate is that integrating arts into other disciplines in interdisciplinary curricula facilitates a deeper learning of those subjects (Sawyer, 2012). Second, it denies that arts are valuable within themselves and reduces a multidimensional experience to a potential benefit for STEM disciplines (Sawyer, 2012).

Associating creativity with talented/gifted students reinforces the mythology that only a few inspired geniuses are blessed with creativity (Sawyer, 2012). Creativity testing has been one of the measures used to identify talented/gifted students, though many tests still rely heavily on IQ (Sawyer, 2012). Further, because creativity has been associated with students identified as talented and gifted, many educators are implicitly taught that fostering creativity for the average student is not part of their quotidian tasks (Beghetto, 2010). Finally, there are overall problems with associating creativity to specific domains rather than pursuing a curricular structure to develop creativity. Many extracurricular programs have been developed to foster creativity, including programs in robotics, sciences, environment, and politics, but testing whether these activities actually improve creativity has not resulted in conclusive evidence (Sawyer, 2012).

One critique of traditional school has been the emphasis on memorization, which is perceived to detract from pedagogies to enhance creativity. However, deep knowledge within a domain is a prerequisite to most creative innovations. As participants in developing domain knowledge, schools are therefore essential to one of the primary components of creativity development (Sawyer, 2012). This runs counter to the critique that the structure and curriculum necessarily crush creativity – a critique often levied against traditional schooling (Beghetto, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). Still, the structural logistics and curricular requirements of most schools are relatively incompatible with the characteristics of creative personalities, unless they are creative exclusively within the confines of time, task, and acceptable outcome (Beghetto, 2010; Sawyer, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2010). Even when teachers are personally invested in fostering creativity, the very structures of schools often prohibit creative outcomes (Beghetto, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). Most schools still rely on the old standard of the teacher at the front of the room and many student desks in rows facing unidirectionally (Beghetto, 2010). The most common

pedagogy is known as IRE: Initiate, Respond, Evaluate, where the teacher asks a question, students respond appropriately, and the teacher confirms whether they have provided the correct answer (Beghetto, 2010). Personality traits correlated with creativity such as questioning conventions, risk-taking, and autonomy are disruptive to classroom mandates of conformity, scheduling, and preparing for standardized testing (Beghetto, 2010; Sawyer, 2012).

Accountability testing – evaluation – is what actually crushes creative opportunities (Beghetto, 2010; Eisner, 2009). When evaluations validate only memorization, teachers narrow the content of the classroom to ensure maximum success for their students on standardized tests; the antithesis of presenting creative opportunities (Beghetto, 2010). In fact, to ensure that students are receiving the same material, many curricula have literally been scripted for teachers to read, further prohibiting creative response (Beghetto, 2010).

When creativity researchers and teachers are asked to define creativity, very different traits are named (Beghetto, 2010; Smith & Smith, 2010). The professional definition of creativity requires that the result be new, of high quality, and “appropriate to the task at hand,” (Smith & Smith, 2010, p. 254). Smith and Smith (2010) explore how each of these criteria are related to educators’ definitions of creativity. Instead of requiring that a creative idea be new, educators frequently use the words ‘creative’ and ‘different’ interchangeably. The word ‘creative’ can therefore be complimentary or euphemistic (Smith & Smith, 2010). Further, when educators define creativity as that which is ‘different,’ creativity becomes special and not an everyday tool (Smith & Smith, 2010). Additionally, teachers rarely require that a creative contribution be high quality as they are more interested in process than creative product (Smith & Smith, 2010). A bad idea may precede a good one eventually, so all ideas are within the process (Smith & Smith, 2010). Finally, creativity researchers emphasize appropriateness to ensure that new ideas are

useable, while teachers tend to emphasize only originality (Beghetto, 2010). Without equal consideration for appropriateness, it is no surprise that creative solutions are unwelcome (Beghetto, 2010). If idea appropriateness is emphasized as part and parcel of its creative ‘success,’ teachers may be able to structure a more constructive and realistic relationship to creativity (Beghetto, 2010).

### ***Domain Generality and Domain Specificity***

Early research into creativity posited a domain-general view of creativity (Runco & Bahleda, 1986; Sawyer, 2012; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018) which viewed creativity as a fungible, innate quality like intelligence. Intelligence is correlated to ability; a certain amount of intelligence is required to learn and do, and intelligence can be broadly measured (discriminatory histories of intelligence testing notwithstanding). Intelligence does not predict what it will be used for, but lower intelligence limits certain abilities. If creativity is like intelligence, it can be applied to many different scenarios and would be domain general: a certain measure of ‘creativity’ could be used in service to any domain. Because early creativity theories believed that creative capacity was within a person, much foundational and lasting creativity research is predicated on an idea of innate and measurable creativity. Testing for creativity has been closely tied to intelligence testing, especially in the search for ‘gifted’ students, expected to be both intelligent *and* creative.

The most well-known tests for creativity (e.g., Torrance tests) and educational strategies for enhancing creativity (e.g., divergent thinking exercises, insight problem strategies) rely on the assumption that creativity is general and therefore transferable: strengthening creativity in one domain will increase creativity in other domains (Baer, 2015; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Sawyer 2012). Domain-general theories of creativity assume that creativity is present in most

people to a greater or lesser extent, can be transferred between activities/domains, and can be trained and increased. Further, it predicts that people with high creativity will be highly creative in multiple domains and that increasing creative practices in one domain will be transferable to other areas. If these are true, identifying someone with high creativity in one field would mean they could apply their creative abilities to any other domain and achieve unprecedented solutions.

This holy grail of ability has been undermined by creativity testing itself, which often shows inconsistent and weak experimental results while consistently revealing that creativity is not transferable between domains and cannot be tested generically (Baer, 2015; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Sawyer 2012). Furthermore, the common-sense observation that someone highly creative in maths is unlikely to be highly creative when finding solutions to international diplomacy has also been borne out (Baer, 2015). Baer (2015) notes that the uniquely American insight to value, research and develop creativity as a means to fight the Cold War is equalled by the ephemeral American Dream that excellence in one domain should and could be transferable to others.

In his extensive and destructive critique of domain generality in creativity research, Baer (2015) iterates that domain general should be evidenced in testing through corresponding scores from creativity tests in different domains, transfer of creativity between related domains after creativity training in one (e.g., from poetry to prose), and correlations in creativity testing independent of intelligence scores. None of these bear out. If there is such a thing as a general creativity quotient, we have not found a way to test for it. Baer argues comprehensively for theorizing a domain-specific creativity comparable to expertise: something learned but specific to a skills and context. With this lens, creativity can be trained and increased but only in

delimited contexts, high creativity in one domain is not transferable to high creativity in other areas, creativity assessments and creativity training must be domain-specific to provide results.

This perspective is borne out across much creativity testing and development (Baer, 2015; Sawyer, 2012). Although there may be elements related to all forms of creativity, such as intrinsic motivation or divergent thinking (Runco & Bahleda, 1986; Sawyer, 2012; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018), Baer (2015) argues that the exact way these are related to creative expression in different domains means they are only related categorically, not in practice. Baer's arguments for domain specificity are concerned with creativity teaching and testing at a large scale. Sawyer (2012) reinforces this belief, concluding that "more specific 'microdomains' probably don't represent innate predispositions of a person; rather, they're likely to emerge after years of practice, education, and training" (p. 60).

Bridging the notions of exclusively specific or general forms of creativity is recognition that generalized, similar strategies in combination with specific knowledge of a domain implies the co-existence and collaborative nature of both domain generality and domain specificity (Gube & Lajoie, 2020; Sawyer, 2012). Studies of professional creativity in all domains and arts education observe similar patterns for approaching complex problems using a creative process that is iterative and recovers from 'failed' attempts by re-orienting the knowledge gained into a solution (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Fasko, 2001; Sawyer, 2018). Application of those strategies is more domain-specific, requiring the knowledge of the field to accede (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2013). This leaves creativity research with the complicated task of identifying methods or strategies that might enhance creative thinking in many (or all) domains of knowledge while also ensuring adequate transmission of existing knowledge such that the new ideas are informed and

applicable (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Runco & Bahleda, 1986; Sawyer, 2012; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018).

### **Summary of Curriculum and Creativity Literature**

Creativity research over time follows three major approaches to understanding the way that people move from the known to the unknown. One approach is theoretical, based on the different types of possible studies. The theoretical approach to creativity is most inclusive because it does not rely on measurability, but it is also most vague because it cannot account for actual variability of individual and environmental experience. Many studies focus on measurable components, for instance divergent thinking, as a proxy for identifying creative potential and tendencies, especially in educational testing (Baer, 2015; Fasko, 2001; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). These studies will always be incomplete, however, as the tests can never be comprehensive, can never include all the social and environmental factors contributing to developing and expressing creativity, and are measuring against finite assumptions of non-creative expressions. Another approach is retroactive, researching the histories of eminent creators to find commonalities that might lead to a better understanding of the conditions which foster creation and innovation. Informative and interesting, these studies go further towards capturing the complex inter- and intra-personal contributors to innovation, as well as socio-historical contexts leading to creative breakthroughs (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996/2013). Yet, because few innovators have passed through identical education, it is difficult to determine which of their experiences contributed enduringly to their eventual creative work. Woven into these approaches are the foundational beliefs that creativity is either domain general, like intelligence, or domain specific, like expertise (Baer, 2015). Perceptions of if, or how, creativity can be taught are tied to the researchers' beliefs about whether creativity is general or specific.



Increasingly there is evidence that elements of generality and specificity are part of creative processes and creative products (Sawyer, 2012).

This research draws on the most concrete elements from each of the three creativity research strands. Because of the difficulties in formally assessing ‘creativity’ (which is why easily assessed components are measured but descriptive studies are retrospective, see Csikszentmihalyi, 1996/2013), I approach this topic retrospectively and individually: not Big C, but other c creativities. By focusing on graduates from the past 15 years of a single circus arts degree programme, this research will illuminate how individuals educated in the same context, for work in the same milieu have (or have not) applied creative thinking to real-life uncertainty. Comparisons and resonance between how former students experienced developing creative thinking through their education, and the facts of how they have navigated their professional and personal lives, will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the development of applied creative thinking within domains, which could then be included in other educational programs seeking to build similar expertise.

Triangulating an understanding of circus education through the lenses of curriculum theory, creativity studies and circus studies provides a means of understanding the historical and contemporary professional realities of the circus field for which an education programme must prepare students (circus studies), the means by which learning is taking place and the contextual factors affecting how students value different aspects of formal and informal knowledge transmission (curriculum theory), and finally whether (and how) learning circus can prepare students to interface with the complexities of a constantly evolving field and the attendant unknowns of the global future (creativity studies).

## **Chapter Four: Methodology and Methods**

This study asks how students of DOCH's circus BA programme learned about creativity within the programme and whether they applied it in their professional lives using the two following research questions:

Q1: What did students learn about creativity within the circus arts profession during their studies at DOCH?

Q2: In what ways have graduates from DOCH applied creative thinking within and/or beyond situations of circus performance?

Because some approaches to circus education are focused on repetition rather than creation, the first question allows for the possibility that some students did not experience learning creativity. I further ask if graduates of the programme show applied creative thinking (Gube & Lajoie, 2020) in their professional work as indicated by use of creative approaches to re-framing or resolving challenges. It is possible that whether or not the participants learned creativity during their education they will be put in professional scenarios requiring creative approaches. This research is situated in the histories of circus knowledge transmission practices and using the lens of curriculum theory to understand creative practices. All of these questions and knowledges are passed through one single point – myself, the researcher – and it is from that point I select methodologies and methods pertinent to the question and my own epistemology.

Understanding the assumptions of the researcher and the intended outcome of the research project are integral to selecting a methodology within which those questions can be answered, and subsequently choosing the appropriate methods and analytical framework with which to acquire and understand data (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Tjora, 2019). In this section I discuss my epistemology and its relationship to researching circus education and

using the constructivist grounded theory methodology (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006, 2017; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019) as a guiding framework for collecting information about learning creativity in circus school. I then describe the methods of research from participant selection and data collection to the inclusion of directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to complement constant comparative analysis (CCA) (Charmaz, 2006) and collective narrative vignettes (Miles et al., 2014) to contextualize participant voices.

## **Methodology and Epistemology**

### ***Qualitative Inquiry Paradigm***

Within a paradigm of inquiry, researchers may choose different methodologies to investigate their question; within a methodology, researchers may choose different methods of data collection (McKenzie, & Knipe, 2006). The classic division of research inquiry – quantitative or qualitative— refers primarily to the methodology followed but does not adequately account for epistemological and ontological approaches to knowledge acquisition: the paradigm. A paradigm of inquiry is an epistemological perspective which encompasses the type of information we would like to know, what we think can be known, how we can know if the research is ‘true,’ and how we would like that information to be applied, understood, and disseminated (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013; McKenzie, & Knipe, 2006). There is only one paradigm that is strictly associated with quantitative research: positivism/post-positivism. The quantitative research design is typically concerned with large data sets and understanding the world through measurements, while qualitative research is descriptive, interested in the qualities of human interaction with reality (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; McKenzie, & Knipe, 2006; Yu, 2006). Positivism assumes that knowledge can, and must, be verified before accepted as true; it is

incompatible with research describing subjective, shifting, and interpretable qualities, (Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013; McKenzie, & Knipe, 2006; Yu, 2006). Because quantitative research is associated with measurements (although data collection methods are not beholden to specific paradigms or methodologies) it is still considered by many to represent facts, whereas qualitative research is seen as opinions. However, Erickson (2018) argues that quantitative studies are always preceded by qualitative knowledge because in order to find out “how many instances of a certain kind are there,” we must first have identified what we mean by “instance” and “kind,” both of which require qualitative description (p. 36). Considering the objective to understand creativity apprenticeship within circus institutions, qualitative research provides a rich source of data and knowledge.

Qualitative inquiry is descriptive, interested in the qualities of human interaction with reality (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; McKenzie, & Knipe, 2006; Yu, 2006). Through all of the various definitions and evolutions of qualitative research, several traits remain constant. Qualitative inquiry is always interpretive and concerned with representing realities through multiple types of interpretation (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). By searching out participant perspectives within their lived realities, qualitative research provides a “*complex*, detailed understanding of the issue,” (italics original) (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Choosing qualitative methodologies may be due to the question at hand or the epistemological, ontological, and axiological “assumptions” of the researcher (Creswell, 2007, p. 15). Ontologically, qualitative researchers believe that reality is subjective: to represent the multiple truths lived by participants, the research includes the participants’ own words (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Seidman,

1991). The only way to gain understanding of others' realities is to receive their perspectives and how they understand their experience within their context.

Epistemologically, qualitative researchers prioritize the knowledge of the participants. Field work through interviews, observations, and other direct or indirect interactions is a means of amplifying the epistemic authority of the people within the research inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Seidman, 1991). Unlike positivistic sciences, qualitative research views knowledge as always already entangled with the context and humans creating that knowledge. The researcher-as-research-instrument is included in the construction of knowledge; objectivity is neither attainable nor desirable as it would necessarily obscure subjectivities. For many qualitative researchers, emancipation, decolonization, and other forms of social justice are the core values (axiology), of qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Many contemporary researchers believe that qualitative methods should always seek to rectify injustice, and in fact are the most appropriate methods to do so because centering participant experiences within contextualizing structures – their stories and their silences – ensures that we are not only measuring what is measurable but seeking more difficult knowledges (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2017; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

### **Critique of Qualitative Inquiry.**

Critique of the interpretive paradigm within which qualitative inquiry is situated is a reticence to engage in solutions or action related to the information it uncovers (Charmaz, 2006; Erickson, 2018; Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013). The Critical paradigm arose as a rebuke to the false pretense of neutrality. For researchers in the critical paradigm, values become a means of engaging ethically with the communities they are researching (Erickson, 2018). Another

incentive for critical approaches to knowledge was the wave of social critique levied against Western cultures beginning in the 1960s (Allen & Goddard, 2017; Ozmon & Craver, 2008; Ulysse & Lukenchuk, 2013). Political pressure towards equal treatment for all humans, regardless of race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, etc., motivated a deep critique of the structural means by which inequality is preserved. Identifying the structures that maintain inequalities, and the structures that reproduce inequalities, researchers within the critical paradigms use methodologies that challenge the hegemonic, hierarchical, and historical status quo such as feminist theory, queer theory, critical race theory, disability theory, etc. (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Erickson, 2018; Lather, 2006; Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013; McKenzie, & Knipe). Critical researchers believe that if they can identify the structures by which inequality is reproduced, those structures can be dismantled or changed to ensure a more egalitarian society (Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013). Critical methodologies are necessary for investigating circus education, however approaching creativity research from a predominantly critical lens may limit data collection to focus on the zones of inequality without regarding who the structures support.

### ***Myself the Researcher: Epistemology, Affinities, and Assumptions***

Selecting a qualitative methodological approach for this research is aligned with my epistemological and ontological stance, and “assumptions” about the nature of knowledge as it aligns with the topic of creativity education in circus education (Creswell, 2007, p. 15). Warily, I proclaim an affiliation with a pragmatic approach to researching creativity within circus programs as an intent to discover what is actually happening and contextualizing those reality/ies within the goals expressed by the participants (Allen & Goddard, 2017; Creswell, 2007; Hildebrand, 2013; Ozmon & Craver, 2008). A pragmatist approach to research is goal-oriented

and uses methods specific to the issue at hand (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Malachowski, 2013). Epistemologically, contemporary pragmatists believe that there is a transactional relationship between opposites: meaning is construed between the researched and the researcher. Inherent in this belief is that the ends and the means are fundamentally related because the process is immanent in the product (Charmaz, 2008, 2017; Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Which is to say, that for pragmatists, the outcome might be seen as a referendum on the means by which it is achieved. This belief encourages pragmatist researchers to attend carefully to the means used in order to achieve a result, as the process of arriving is necessarily part of the result. Upon examining my beliefs about what research might accomplish in circus education, and situating my ideals within the realities of programming,<sup>11</sup> I feel empowered and grounded by a philosophical stance which recognizes that “truth is what works at the time” (Creswell, 2007, p. 23) and is interested in the applicability of the research to real-world situations (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006).

My epistemological stance is constructivist (the belief that knowledge is constructed within contexts and interactions, and subjectivity necessitates the co-existence of multiple simultaneous truths) and pragmatic (the belief that knowledge is co-created between individuals, social groups, and the systems they live in, and that knowledge applications must account for pertinence within those systems). Given this stance and my personal and professional affiliation with circus education, I find that constructivist grounded theory methodology (CGT) (Charmaz, 2006, 2017) offers a relevant framework to explore my research questions. Pragmatist beliefs about the co-construction and situatedness of data undergird CGT (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz,

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<sup>11</sup> Theoretical construction of schedules accommodating teacher and student time are subjects ultimately to the realities of time and space: the teeterboard cannot train simultaneously with the swinging trapeze in our building. I have the privilege of constant re-centering in the pragmatics of practice.

2017). Because reality is subjective, as experienced by an individual, it is important to enable participants to contribute their own words and questions, therefore they use the participants own words. Participant's unique knowledge and perspectives are the sites of knowledge; it is the researcher's job to discover, uncover, understand, and relay the experiences of these individuals (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). From this research I discover, with the participants, knowledge about the local circus education in Stockholm and offer theories which can hold the complexities of their many truths. From these theories, other educators, thinkers, and practitioners may find resonant ideas to understand the nuances of their own structures from the experiences of participants (Conle, 1996). The philosophically pragmatist underpinnings of CGT contribute to the appropriateness of my choice of this method within my own epistemological stance and research aims.

### ***Pragmatism***

Philosophical pragmatism emerged in the early twentieth century in the United States among educational theorists and social scientists. Pragmatists look for solutions to problems, settling on the most reasonable solution with the knowledge that it may only be overturned by new information or changing contexts (Allen & Goddard, 2017; Hildebrand, 2013; Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Problems are best solved locally, practically, and with attention to impact. For pragmatists, the truth of an idea is only as good as its impact; the real-world implications and applications are the sum of whether an idea is faulty or merited. The history of pragmatism is fascinating, from its reactionary beginnings to its misappropriations and critiques, to its later resurgence and integration into qualitative practices. This section traces the essential components of that history and presents intersections with the other domains of this study: constructivist grounded theory, creativity, curriculum, and circus.



## **History of Pragmatism.**

Prior to the emergence of pragmatism, two dominant forms of inquiry guided the discovery of new knowledges: religious inquiry sought to find God's hand through study and empirical inquiry looked for verifiable, repeatable, categorizable certainty (Allen & Goddard, 2017; Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013; Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Pragmatists reframed research by observing that ideas and systems begin with humans creating them, not in the external world. This was both a reaction against the empirical version of the world proposed by the enlightenment and humanist scientists, and also a response to the rapidly changing environment in late nineteenth century United States culture (Allen & Goddard, 2017). With increased immigration and the intent of integration, pragmatic thinkers recognized that the theories guiding the systems in which they lived were not 'one-size-fits-all,' they were a product of the people that made them, in the era they were made. To establish systems for the current people living in them, the pragmatist approach "decides whether something is worthwhile by testing its effects in a specific context" (Allen & Goddard, 2017, p. 179).

The founders of pragmatism, including William James, John Dewey, and Charles Sanders Peirce, were concerned with finding practical solutions to the problems generated by the scientific and industrial revolutions (Allen & Goddard, 2017; Hildebrand, 2013). Drawing on the Enlightenment's drive to question tradition and demand verifications, aligned with the discoveries of Newton and Darwin, and relying on Bacon's induction method of inquiry, Descartes's deduction, and Locke's empiricism, pragmatism is a philosophy concerned with "the social problems resulting from [the scientific revolution]," while still believing that science can be wielded to help solve these problems (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 123). From Bacon comes a focus on human experiences as primary data and the method of induction: the basis of the

scientific method. Pragmatists borrow Locke's emphasis on the way ideas are born from physical and social experiences, so attention must be paid to the environment (especially, with Dewey, the educational environment) (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Darwin's revelation of the evolutionary process reveals that the universe is always in a state of becoming, and that there is no fixed, final truth<sup>12</sup>. These foundations in positivist thought became the basis for critique as research inquiries become post-structural, critical, and oriented towards social justice.

Pioneering pragmatists aimed to increase democratic and peaceful interactions by using data to leverage connections between science and culture (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), the philosophical engine behind the formation of pragmatic thinking, believed that "... ideas or concepts cannot be separated from human conduct, for to have an idea is to be aware of its effects and consequences (or their probability) in the arena of human affairs" (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 126). From Peirce comes the idea of theory as something that must be conceived of in relation to practical and practice-based experiences. William James (1842-1910) applied inductive thinking to morality and religion, determining that the consequences of a moral belief are the deciding factor for its truth. i.e., it is only moral if its results are moral (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). James believed that "truth is inseparable from experience," therefore different individuals could have different truths because their experiences were different in the real world (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 127).

The progressive education movement is directly tied to the birth of pragmatist philosophy, and John Dewey (1859-1952) was a founder and advocate of both. In the context of education, the pragmatic philosophy proposes learning through "problem-based enquiries" rather

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<sup>12</sup> Incidentally, Dewey was born the same year as the publication of Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, 1859 (Ozmon & Craver, 2008).

than abstract ideas (Allen & Goddard, 2017, p. 180; Hildebrand, 2013). Dewey believed that the only way to improve society was to ensure democracy, and the only way to ensure that was through education; therefore, schools should be democratic incubators where student prepare for the action of democracy (Pinar et al., 1995). A pragmatic/progressive curriculum would be built around teaching students how to develop solutions for social problems (Pinar et al., 1995).

Many of the applications of a pragmatic approach, including the transactional relationship between apparent opposites (subject-object, individual-society), are demonstrated in Dewey's work (Archambault, 1964; Hildebrand, 2013). Dewey did not differentiate between the entities of child and the curriculum and critiqued the strict relationship between children and learning in classical education (Archambault, 1964; Ozmon & Craver, 2008). The pedagogical strategy he brought to the Laboratory School in Chicago, founded with his wife Alice, enabled students to solve problems within their own contexts, following the pragmatist belief that the experiences, solutions, and investigators were all transactionally bound in the creation of meaning (Hildebrand, 2013; Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Dewey believed that working out solutions to an actual problem would develop "creative intelligence," which seems to have been borne out in the research on creativity (Ozmon & Craver, 2008, p. 128; Sawyer, 2012).

### **Critique of Pragmatism.**

Philosophical pragmatism fell out of fashion after the 50s with the rise of Existentialist and Post-Structuralist critiques of knowable data (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Critiques of pragmatism point out how easily ideas can be instrumentalized when focusing solely on the local contexts without an in-depth consideration of their long-term and wider consequences (Allen & Goddard, 2017). There is a risk that means and method take priority over the ends – although that is distinctly refuted by Dewey's writing. Allen and Goddard (2017) discuss Horkheimer's

critique that “pragmatism threatens to reduce truth to ‘nothing but the successfulness of the idea’” (p. 180). In education, a superficial interpretation of pragmatism might lead to each educator and department feeling pressure to continually prove their relevance to contemporary society, rather than focusing on broader, less immediate, educational aims (Allen & Goddard, 2017). A pragmatic approach to qualitative inquiry has also been critiqued as furthering existing structures and privileging Western knowledge over other forms of knowing when it seeks to resolve problems within a system rather than critiquing the systems themselves (Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

American philosophers Richard Bernstein, Richard Rorty, and Cornel West proposed Neo pragmatism, which better incorporates poststructuralist thought by moving away from the relatively rigid behavioral science stances of pragmatism’s first wave (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Contemporary pragmatist thinkers question traditions, structures, and habits to ensure that they continue to serve the people and contexts within which they are located (Charmaz, 2017; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019; Ozmon & Craver, 2008).

### **Pragmatist Philosophy and Circus Education.**

While there are few studies that explicitly connect circus with pragmatic philosophy, it seems that many circus programs have aligned with pragmatic approaches to arrive at their current curricular structures. Pragmatic education focuses on preparing students to actively solve problems in their life beyond school by providing them with inquiry-based learning opportunities (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Teachers are expected to guide the students by offering tools, but not dictate which problems the students will solve (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Ozmon and Craver (2008) describe the ideal teacher in pragmatic philosophy as

an exceptionally competent person – one who possesses breadth and depth of

knowledge, understands current conditions that affect the lives of students, knows how to organize and direct student investigations, understands psychological development and learning theory, provides a supportive environment in which students can learn, and possesses a refined understanding of school and community resources that are available for teaching and learning” (p. 145).

This description is quite similar to the overview of aims provided in the FEDEC’s first handbook on teaching in circus schools:

Providing students with all the technical, physical and artistic pre-requisites necessary for entering the profession of circus artist; Empowering the students; Taking care of students; Professional career and employment conditions (Legendre et al., 2018, p. 120-125).

Progressive education differentiates *educating* a student— providing them with the knowledge, tools, and practical experiences of problem solving to be used in their adulthood – from *training*, a word reserved for memorization and regurgitation without integration and applicability (Ozmon & Craver, 2008). Curriculum in degree-granting circus programs offers more than technical skill acquisition: students receive a variety of academic, entrepreneurship, artistic, and safety courses, making the experience much closer to progressive education than athletic training.

Another expression of pragmatic philosophy is the trajectory of many circus educational institutions which have modified curricular plans alongside responses from the field, the staff, the students, and educational context to find a programme suited to the resources, aims and social realities (Funk, 2017, 2019). At each stage, responsible administrators and planners make the best choices they can, with the best information they have, within the institutional, physical, financial, and cultural constraints, in order to solve problems local to their circus programme.

Working through the different epistemological approaches to research and inquiry, I consistently resonate with the underlying tenants of pragmatic philosophy and its applications for researching circus education. The pragmatist position that knowing and doing are functionally indifferentiable – that ‘knowing’ is only as effective as the resultant ‘doing’ - enables a research approach that can appreciate aspirational universal values while recognizing local particularities. With its roots in pragmatism, constructivist grounded theory provides a method by which a research inquiry can be framed while necessarily attending to the local, situated knowledge provided by participants.

### ***Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology***

Grounded theory methodology (GTM) proposes an epistemological framework that encourages knowledge construction centered on the human experience of the actors within circus education institutions, accounts for the social and cultural influences of physical and bureaucratic structures, considers the relationship of individual institutions to the broader circus cultural histories present locally and globally, acknowledges the researcher as the lens through which this research is approached and constructed, and finally assumes the possibility of comparison with other educational and training programs, enabling this gathered information to potentially inform other educational programs within and outside of circus education. The method of grounded theory is designed to “follow the leads that emerge,” making it resilient to surprises and discoveries unknown to the researcher before entering the terrain (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). Grounded theory methodology aims to understand what underlies the interactions within a context or environment in order to generate an explanatory theory (Bryant, 2014; Creswell, 2007).

## **History of Grounded Theory Methodology (GTM).**

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss's *The discovery of grounded theory* (1967) revolutionised the way that data was analysed by developing theoretical understandings of their researched situations through inductive methods rather than with a preconceived theoretical framework (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007). Their publication came at a time when quantitative methods had taken hold overall and qualitative rigor was out of fashion, and needed replenishing (Charmaz, 2006). The previous positivistic approach began with a theory, from which tests and evaluations were constructed in order to better elucidate the theory and hopefully "make predictions," which meant that collected data was already understood within a prescriptive theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2006, p. 4). The grounded theory method proposed instead that data be collected *and then* searched through for patterns, themes, and through lines (Charmaz, 2006). The resulting theory is rooted in, *grounded* in, the data, and therefore contextualized, nuanced, pragmatic, and pertinent (Charmaz, 2006). One of the significant impacts of Glaser and Strauss' grounded theory method was the revitalization and legitimization of qualitative research. They created the first 'guidelines' for every step of the qualitative research process (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz (2006) notes that, because of the era in which Glaser and Strauss (1967) published and due to the rigor of the grounded theory method for analysing and instrumentalizing qualitative research, the term "grounded theory" has subsequently, and problematically, been used interchangeably with "qualitative research," which results in a lack of consistency and coherence in studies purporting to conduct grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006, p. xi).

## **Pragmatism and GTM.**

Famously, Glaser and Strauss parted ways in subsequent texts. In retrospect, the distinct methodological paradigms that Glaser and Strauss each brought to *The discovery of grounded theory* presage their eventual difference of opinion regarding the way in which the method should be applied (Charmaz, 2006). According to Charmaz (2006), “grounded theory marries two contrasting – and competing – traditions in sociology as represented by each of its originators” (p. 6). Glaser applied the mantle of positivism that he received during his training at Columbia University to the codification of qualitative methods by “specifying explicit strategies for conducting research” with the hope of generating the same rigor as quantitative methods through the detachment of the researcher and method-specific jargon (Charmaz, 2006, p. 7). Strauss’s Chicago training in pragmatism encouraged seeing theory as a tool that could only be as good as its applicability to real-world scenarios, while symbolic interactionism attended to the way communication (interaction) constructs the society we inhabit (Charmaz, 2006). From Strauss, therefore, comes attention to human subjectivity and agency within the processes of human interaction and an emphasis on interpreting action (Charmaz, 2006), which can be seen in the recommendations to create codes for the data with action-based, text-derived phrases.

Bryant (2014) connects the resulting grounded theory itself with the ideological approach of American pragmatist philosophers John Dewey and Henry James, who believed that theories were only as valuable as their real-world applications. Bryant (2014) outlines the connections between the criteria used by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to ensure the rigor of a grounded theory (outcome) – grab, fit, work, modifiability – with the fundamental tenants of pragmatist thought. For Bryant, *grab*, when participants in the field feel resonance with the theory, is the same as Dewey’s requirement that theory be useful in practice. *Fit* is the requirement that the theory



actually reflect what is happening in the field, rather than the hopes or desires of the researcher. The requirement that a grounded theory *work* is that it serve as a tool, in Dewey's words, for the purposes of the field, and that it serves the needs and contexts from which it arises. Pragmatists emphasise that every answer and solution is only as good as the context it serves, therefore as the context shifts, the answer/theory/solution may also need to shift. This is Glaser and Strauss' final requirement, that a grounded theory have *modifiability*, so that it is responsive to the contextual changes that may have taken place between the research, development, and application of the theory (Bryant, 2014).

### **Critique of GTM.**

Several critiques have been levied against the grounded theory method. One type of critique came from the surge of research using grounded theory methods, but with limited articulation of how the researchers obtained their theory from their data, leading to accusations of frivolity and inadequacy (Bryant, 2014). Another critique of the method was Glaser's initiatory position that researchers should "stay away from the relevant literature" until research was well underway, while still reading widely and generally, as a means of ensuring that they were open to possibilities in the coding process (Bryant, 2014, p. 132). Unfamiliarity with foundational literature risks an unguided, uninformed, and redundant study – Bryant argues that it is better for researchers to have some knowledge of current and past predecessors. However, because the themes and topics necessarily arise from the data collection process, it is unrealistic to expect that a full review of the relevant literature will have been undertaken prior to the data collection and analysis process; GTM requires, by its very nature, that the literature review process happen at least twice, one before data collection and once during data analysis, though the researcher will likely be engaging with relevant ideas throughout (Bryant, 2014).

As noted, positivism construes the researcher as an objective instrument who does not bring personal influences to the data collection and analysis process – a perspective that Glaser and Strauss continued to advocate in their initial text (Charmaz, 2006). One critique of the way in which Glaser and Strauss explain the grounded theory method in their pioneering book is inattention to the researcher’s role in the creation of that theory (Bryant, 2014). Each researcher may see different critical information within a situation, as phenomenological, critical ethnographic, and poststructuralist research emphasizes. In order to approach grounded theory with respect to the advances that have been made in regard to subjectivity in the research process, it is imperative to undertake a critical grounded theory, one that complicates and elucidates the researcher perspectives, and perhaps even complicates and elucidates the structures influencing participant experiences. Building an approach that addresses these critiques, Charmaz (2006) differentiates between “constructivist,” which accounts for the researcher’s participation in the creation of a grounded theory from the data, and Glaser and Strauss’ “objectivist” grounded theory method, which seems to imply that a theory will spring full-fledged from the data in a relatively empirical fashion (Bryant, 2014). Charmaz’s constructivist approach is one of the principal contemporary ideological approaches to grounded theory; the other is Strauss and Corbin’s reliance on “systematic procedures” (Creswell, 2007, p. 64).

### **Contemporary and Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT).**

The two contemporary ideological approaches to grounded theory are the constructivist orientation (advocated by Charmaz) and the reliance on “systematic procedures,” described by Strauss and Corbin as contemporary grounded theory (Creswell, 2007, p. 64). Strauss and Corbin (1998) believe that qualitative research should engage with the “‘six Cs’ of social processes

(causes, contexts, contingencies, consequences, covariances, and conditions)” by following precise steps ensures rigor and validity (Starks & Trinidad, 2007, p. 1374). Because my research follows Charmaz, I will here focus on her articulation of constructivist grounded theory (CGT).

Informed by her extensive training with both Glaser and Strauss, Charmaz (2006) proposes a constructivist grounded theory that situates the researcher as the instrument and interpreter of the research, noting that while the methodology lays out a series of steps that can be followed by any researcher, the action of following those steps and interpreting the data leads to a non-neutral final representation (Charmaz, 2006, 2017). Knowledge emerges from the interplay between the researcher and the participants; the researcher provides a frame to begin the inquiry and ensures that participant realities guide the subsequent steps (Charmaz, 2008). CGT encourages researchers strive to see the “world as our research participants do – from the inside,” which comes with risks, because how our participants see the world may not resonate at all with us, and we may frankly disagree with it (Charmaz, 2006, p. 14). Charmaz is a strong advocate for understanding the researcher and the participants as situated within their respective experiences and realities, recognizing that the data itself and the theories that come from it are interwoven into the lived experiences and diverse perspectives of the participants and researchers, therefore theory cannot be objective (Charmaz, 2006).

Drawing upon the philosophical pragmatist aims that saw research as a means to enable democracy and democratic participation, Charmaz (2017; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019) believes that CGT provides a method of research which is inherently anti-Neoliberal, anti-Individualist, and which can amplify voices that have been silenced or otherwise structurally sidelined. Because the researcher must approach knowledge construction with the participants and understand themselves as participant within that construction, CGT also encourages awareness in

the researcher of the views and privileges they bring to framing the research questions and their understanding of the responses. Seeking to understand themes that connect both similarities and differences in the data predisposes attention to gaps, silences and injustices that can be illuminated. CGT is an important method for researching circus education because its very structure includes inquiries into what stories are being told by participants about their experiences, and what those experiences can tell educators about the realities of local social, political, and educational structures.

### ***Supplementary Qualitative Analysis Methods***

This qualitative inquiry research study is situated within an Interpretive epistemological paradigm. The underlying aim of all Interpretive methodologies is Understanding (German *verstehen*), an attempt to capture a glimpse of a deep understanding beyond the superficial (Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013). Understanding obtained by the researcher is represented through description and interpretation, through the activity of meaning-making and contextualizing the research within contemporary, historical, and (frequently) etymological environments. Each of these methodologies, though striving for understanding, have nuanced differences in their epistemological and ontological perspectives. Nearly any method can serve the Interpretive methodologies' quests for Understanding. Typical methods include textual analysis, arts-based methods, thick descriptions, poetry and fiction, and any other means by which experiential truths can be revealed (Creswell, 2007; Lukenchuk & Kolich, 2013). Although some methods of data collection and analysis are primarily associated with specific methodologies, using multiple approaches in qualitative research has been suggested as a means of increasing creditability and validity in the research outcomes, rather than aiming primarily for trustworthiness (Humble,

2009). While constant comparative analysis was the guiding analytical framework, two additional analytical methods supplemented interpretation and representation of the data.

### **Directed Content Analysis.**

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) describe three ways that qualitative content analysis can be approached. “Conventional content analysis” begins with participant text and follows an inductive path to tagging units of text with codes. This approach includes techniques like constant comparison analysis. Through “summative content analysis,” a researcher begins with a quantitative tallying of a certain set of words or concepts, and then moves beyond them to understand the context in which these terms are used. Analysis of this type might be used to understand the way a topic is being addressed within a particular context or towards a specific audience. Hsieh and Shannon (2005) propose that “directed content analysis” (DCA) is used in qualitative inquiry when the research aims to elaborate or complicate an existing theory. Where the data is being compared with specific theories, the codes assigned to units of data are predetermined from the existing literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Researchers look for resonance and absences that can support, enrich, or expose gaps in existing theory. Using directed content analysis enables researchers to deepen knowledge around targeted topics. The choice to use both CCA and DCA in this research provided two complementary frames for understanding the participant stories by both comparing the participant’s experiences to known creativity theories (DCA) and also inductively following the topics raised by participants (CCA).

### **Narrative Analysis.**

Narrative analysis informed the collective narrative vignettes, which are one of the ways participant voices are represented in this dissertation. Narrative analysis is the method used to analyse and represent data in narrative inquiry research (NI). Narrative research is usually

interested in one specific person's experience (Butler-Kisber, 2018; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Creswell, 2007). Arising from literature studies, narrative research has been widely adopted in qualitative circles (Butler-Kisber, 2018; Creswell, 2007). Studies of an individual in other fields, e.g., psychology, have been retroactively claimed as part of the narrative research tradition (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Narrative approaches in education have included the autobiographical method of currere (Pinar, 1975), poetic inquiry (Butler-Kisber, 2010, 2018; Butler-Kisber et al., 2007; Leggo, 2004), as well as analysis of children's stories, folktales, and myths to uncover the guiding themes and realities threading through our lives (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). According to Connelly & Clandinin (1990), narrative research enables the researcher to contextualize participants as "storytelling organisms who, individually and socially, lead storied lives" (p. 2). This may be why contemporary uses of narrative inquiry can include decolonializing and social justice research where participants are actively engaged in understanding not only the narratives they are researching, but also the narratives they hold about themselves and their positionality (Carter, 2022). In all forms, the researcher undertakes a process of recognizing that their identity is intertwined with their experience, and that the same is true for their participants, therefore they focus on building a relationship with the participants to ensure accuracy of the final representation (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Carter, 2014b; Schaefer, 2013). The pieces of the story are gained through interviews, "field notes of shared experience," journals, and a variety of other recounting methods (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 5). The analysis and final product of this methodology requires reconstructing, restorying, the narratives into a comprehensive and chronological whole, a process that has been critiqued as risky because it might fundamentally change the meaning of a story or remove that story from its rightful owner (Creswell, 2007).

Narrative analysis guided one of the methods used to represent participant voices in this text. Narrative vignettes (Miles et al., 2014) were a guide for creating single narratives drawn from the experiences of multiple participants. Although this research has not followed, nor aimed for, narrative inquiry representations, calling attention to collective participant stories has enabled more representation of the complexities they described while also maintaining participant confidentiality, especially where difficult knowledge is discussed.

### **CGT Data Collection and Analytical Methods.**

Classical GTM used interviews as the primary data collection source (Bryant, 2014; Creswell, 2007). Interviews are not the only method of data collection; Glaser (2001) has repeatedly stated that “all is data,” leaving subsequent researchers to interpret how to apply that statement to their research. For Charmaz’s CGT approach (2006), “All is data” means that the type of data used will depend upon the research question itself because data is only as useful as its relevance to the question at hand. She warns that even things that seem to be ‘hard’ data come from sources constructed by humans. The choice of methods must therefore be “attended to” to capture the best quality data for the question at hand without reifying unexamined habits or thoughts of the researchers through ill-prepared questions or reactions (Charmaz, 2006). Charmaz uses Blumer’s (1969) ‘sensitizing concepts,’ initiating interests or ideas from which the researcher proceeds, as “*points of departure* to form interview questions, to look at data, to listen to interviewees, and to think analytically about the data” (italics original) (Charmaz, 2006, p. 17). However sensitizing concepts do not dictate the results of the research. CGT encourages following the research where it leads by listening for recurring themes or silences.

The primary analytical method of data analysis developed for GTM/CGT research is constant comparative analysis (CCA). This method begins analysis while data is being collected.

The researcher analyses the data by reading through the texts and noticing themes, ideas, commonalities, absences, and other resonances between participant words and, perhaps, existing theory or literature. These commonalities form categories labelled with codes, the names of which are drawn from participant words whenever possible. These coded categories further inform the type of questions and information being gathered about the topic of research (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The details of CCA and how it was applied in this research are further discussed below in the Analytic Methods section. Of note, Charmaz's (2006) constructivist approach focuses instead on the interaction between researcher and researched, with the aim of "learning about the experience within embedded, hidden networks, situations, and relationships, and making visible hierarchies of power, communication, and opportunity" (Creswell, 2007, p. 65).

### **Methods, Participants, Data, and Analysis**

My research questions began with a curiosity about what students at circus schools are learning beyond the concrete outcomes visible in the practice of their disciplines. My pre-existing interest in curriculum and education directed my research inquiry towards higher education in circus arts. The growing body of literature focusing on higher education in circus is primarily in French and discusses the globally unique *filière* of circus education in France (Bezille et al., 2019; Cordier, 2007; Cordier et al., 2019; Legendre, 2014, Étienne et al., 2014; Perez-Roux et al., 2016), therefore I was especially interested in under-researched higher education programs in other countries. Concurrent research experiences in quantitative approaches to creativity measurement during my MA and PhD courses sparked my interest in the ways that creativity is understood, learned, and manifested. Developing a question that could be



answered, which I found interesting, and believed relevant to deepening knowledge of circus education practices came at the intersection of the above knowledges.

The primary question became: what did students of DOCH's circus BA learn about creativity during their education? This question includes investigation of professional creative practices one possible measure of if and how creativity was learned during education. I envisioned interviews with graduates from multiple schools to look for overlaps and gaps in experience. Through the proposal and planning phases of the research, however, it became clear that the scope was too large and risked obscuring pertinent information. While many aspects of circus education are similar, the rhythms, spaces, environments, policies, and people are part and parcel of what differentiates programs. It seemed evident that most relevant answers would come from graduates of the same programme – an important foray into this topic from which future research across multiple programs could be devised. During the process of preparing the research proposal I began my work as an assistant professor of circus at the Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH) and head of the Bachelor programme in circus. DOCH graduates had always been an intended population for this research question, yet holding this position added a layer of complexity to the research process: could conducting interviews with graduates from another school be perceived negatively as some form of 'spying' or disinterest in the programme for which I worked? Would results from interviews with graduates from SKH/DOCH be seen as impartial or biased promotion of the school? The more I learned about the programme, however, the more I realized that DOCH graduates were an ideal population for investigating the question of whether/how creativity is learned in a circus programme.

## ***Why Research DOCH Graduates?***

### **Artistic Research Environment.**

Stockholm University of the Arts has fully embraced the high value placed on artistic research in Nordic countries (Arlander, 2013). Although the expectation of new knowledge is applied to doctoral students and professors, the circus bachelor programme benefits from the valuing of artistic exploration for the sake of developing an artform from within. Through the advocacy for artistic research by the Vice-Chancellor Efva Lilja during her eight-year term, as well as the artistic research of professors and pedagogical directors within the circus programme itself, circus students experience an environment where their artistic knowledge is valued and challenged. Towards the development of artistic research in circus, DOCH held the first “meeting point for artistic research in circus ... where research questions were put forward, methods discussed and ideas exchanged” in 2012 when it hosted the CARD, Circus Artistic Research Development conference, followed by publications that included text and video (Damkjaer, 2012; Lilja, 2012, p. 7). John-Paul Zaccarini, the first to defend a dissertation in circus at DOCH, went on to become a professor in circus and other arts research at Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH). Pedagogical coordinator Marie-Andree Robitaille and visiting professor Camilla Damkjaer researched methods of teaching artistic research to circus students as a means of guiding circus learning away from training culture and towards reflective practice (Damkjaer & Robitaille, 2011). In such an environment, where artistic expertise can become something that “contributes to social and individual development and to an expanded understanding of expression and impression in contemporary life,” circus students are offered opportunities for both the necessary domain expertise and experimentation with different contexts that contributes to creativity and applied creative thinking (Lilja & Ståhle, 2013, p. 87).

## **Curriculum.**

Professional circus artists experience multiple layers of potential calls to creative action, and therefore circus education attempts to ready students for the different ways that they will be challenged (Burt & Lavers, 2017). They will be asked to create original work because the stamp of a circus artist remains an act that demonstrates their technique and artistic voice. They will likely modify that act for different artistic and technical contexts, and in other circumstances be asked to create entirely new material, often in collaboration, for developing shows. Beyond performance itself, artists must navigate financial complexities, often in different countries simultaneously, and apply creative thinking to marketing, networking, auditions, and business structures. Without externally structured schedules, they often find solutions to navigating the unknowns of contract work, creating a pattern structure, lifestyle, present and future that is resilient to the unknown and rapid to choose action in uncertainty. Beyond work related to circus, their career transitions, family life, or other realities may benefit from creative approaches. Having been prepared for these potential futures, circus school graduates offer an untapped opportunity to investigate how “applied creative thinking” is integrated into career realities (Gube & Lajoie, 2020).

## **Best Practices for Learning Creativity.**

Gube and Lajoie (2020) argue that higher education should provide learning environments that enable applied creative thinking, which include opportunities for “idea generation, elaboration, and analysis; learning the tools for creative collaboration (communication skills, openness to input, group idea refinement and implementation); learning to tolerate ambiguity; asking insightful questions using multiple perspectives that aid in problem finding; and internalizing the notion that failures along the way are a welcome part of the

learning and innovation process” (p. 10). An institutional backdrop that emphasizes artistic research, small class sizes, content that is delivered in classroom and practice-based settings, pass-fail evaluations that favour a format of presentations and feedback, the fact of engaging with physical risk, and many more details of the programme situate the Circus BA at Stockholm University of the Arts as an ideal place to research whether these conditions in fact lead to applied creative thinking within the domain of circus, and creativity more generally.

### **Access.**

During the interviews, analysis and at the time of writing, I held a position as head of the bachelor of circus programme at SKH, formerly DOCH. This position gave me access to documentation of the curriculum from the circus department and documentation of institutional curriculum changes. I was on site for interviews with key administrators past and present, all of whom still live in Stockholm, as well as connections to the graduating classes. Finally, although there are no specific ethics documents required by Stockholm University of the Arts, I earned the support of the university to research the circus BA through discussion and explanation of the project.

### **Method of Data Collection: Interviews and Experience.**

Qualitative research methodologies prioritize participant voice and lived experiences and therefore frequently use methods such as interviews, open ended surveys, observation (field work), textual analysis and reflexive memos (field notes) (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Charmaz, 2006). Interviews are the most common and consistent method to elucidate the perspective of the participants; yet there are many types of interviews, conducted in many types of ways, with the aim of collecting many types of information, in consideration of the topic, participants, analysis, and audience (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Erickson, 2018; Forsey, 2008; Seidman, 1991).

As part of our culture, participants are likely to have already completed many different interviews, for many different purposes, before participating in a research process (Forsey, 2008). How an interview is conducted is determined by the researcher's epistemology, methodology, and socio-political relationship to the participants (Seidman, 1991). Interview guides are recommended to ensure alignment of intention with outcomes (Charmaz, 2015) and can help lead to writing that will be understood by a future reader (Forsey, 2008).

Formally, the data for this research was collected by interviewing participants and centers participant experiences. Informally, my work situates me with insider knowledge of the curricular, administrative, interpersonal, and physical realities and histories. As a fish swimming in water, I cannot entirely bracket my professional experiences with regard to my interpretation of the data. Interviews were conducted soon after I began my work with SKH. While I do not believe my professional role inappropriately influenced the interview guide (Appendix C), it may have been a factor in how participants responded. To limit this influence, I chose to only interview people who had graduated from the programme before I started my job. Although this does not eradicate possible power differences as my current role positions me to hire circus educators, this power differential is limited by the fact that not all participants are interested in teaching, nor necessarily living in a location conducive to teaching in Stockholm. Attention to the power and privileges of the researcher's position(s) is an important aspect in situating the research results and interpretation (Charmaz, 2017; Charmaz & Belgrave, 2019).

### ***Participants and Data Collection***

#### **Selection, Recruitment Procedures, and Informed Consent.**

The primary participant pool for this research was professional circus artists who graduated from the three-year BA circus programme at DOCH. DOCH accepts an average of 15

students every alternate year, with 94 artists graduating between 2008-2018. The original intention of the research included the voices of administrators and educators; therefore, participants were invited from two different populations: graduated alumni from the bachelor's programme in Circus at DOCH from the time of its first graduating class (2008) until the cohort that graduated (2018) before I arrived as programme head (2019), and educators and administrators of the bachelor's programme in Circus Arts at DOCH.

My intention was to interview two people from each graduating class to gain perspective on the different realities experienced by students in the same cohort. All graduating students from the 2008-2018 cohorts were invited to participate in the research. An email (Appendix A) was sent to all 94 alumni of the DOCH circus BA who graduated between 2008-2018. Administrator/educator participants were asked in person and also sent the same email. The emails in both cases contained an invitation letter describing the research, the right to withdraw, an attached consent form (Appendix B) and a request that the recipient indicate if they prefer not to be contacted in the future.

Of the alumni invitations, three emails bounced back, and two alumni wrote to decline participation. Several wrote to say they were interested but unavailable, while others wrote expressing interest depending upon the timeline and type of research. A follow-up email did not elicit more interest in participation from those who had not responded. Through a process of self-selection, between one and three graduates from each cohort were interviewed, for a total of 12 interviews. Six interviewees were male and six were female. The participant specialties included aerial, acrobatic, balance and object manipulation disciplines. These will not be further specified to preserve confidentiality. Participants ages ranged from not younger than 30 to not older than 50 years. Interviewees signed consent form (on paper or digitally) before the interview began.

All respondents were older than 18 and either completed, or taught, an English-language undergraduate course of study.

Ultimately the two interviews conducted with administrator/educators did not reveal more information about the student experience of learning and applying creative practices therefore they have not been used in the analysis and no further interviews were conducted. The memories, descriptions and concerns raised by administrator/educators provide corroboration of the formal voice of the existing curriculum and programme due to their influence over schedules, content and budget. However, these interviews are integrated into this research to fill out the contextual details of curriculum and learning environment where that information is unavailable in published documents. Where relevant, these private conversations are cited. The administrator/educator interviews do suggest that others type of research questions could be answered and may be used as a basis for future inquiry.

### **Confidentiality, Risks, and Benefits.**

Participants were informed that personal details would be made confidential in all publications and any other forms of dissemination of this research. Circus is by nature very unique: individuals would be quickly identifiable through their apparatus, work trajectory, gender, and education history by anyone familiar with past cohorts from DOCH. Due to the nature of our richly networked professional field, I chose to obscure specific participant identities in order to focus on their statements about curriculum and professional experience and limit interpretations of this data by readers with existing relationships to the participants. As the objectives of this study are to generate a comprehensive view of creativity apprenticeship within circus education, some individual responses have been combined into narratives that communicate a wholistic impression of the overall educational experience (see Analytic Methods

in this work). During the analysis phase, I alternated between reading transcriptions of single interviews and working with thematic text blocks – at times aware of the individual participant and at times immersed in the multiple perspectives around a topic. In reporting this research, amalgamated narratives have proven the best way to convey important curricular information while maintaining participant confidentiality. Participants have been invited to share their participation on their own terms (social media, conversation, etc.) if they desire to be associated with the products of this research.

No incentives were offered for participation in this research. There were few risks to participants, and participants mediated the level of risk they were willing to take. Reputational risk was one of the possibilities; if participants reported negative experiences of their education or career, they may have risked their reputation within the narrow professional circus field. In my role as head of the bachelor of circus arts at DOCH, participants may have felt that it was risky to share certain information with me, or they may have felt that they needed to frame information in a specific way with regard to my position. As noted above, this risk was mediated by focusing on graduates of the programme.

There are benefits to participants of the study itself, DOCH's circus BA programme, other circus education programs, and, potentially, other programs interested in fostering applied creative thinking. Participants reflected on their experiences and made connections between the programme and their choices which may not have been evident before. They offered feedback about positive and negative aspects of different learning experiences. Participants may also feel a benefit from participation through validation of their experiences and the opportunity to share their trajectories. Because reputation remains the largest contributor to ongoing work in the circus milieu, enabling participants to associate their name to developments in circus (ex.:



companies, education programs), particular methods or philosophies for teaching and/or creation, and having their name recorded for posterity, the opportunity to be identified in the research may be perceived as a benefit.

### **Data Collection and Management.**

Interviews took place during autumn 2020 and spring 2021, a year into the pandemic, which affected the interview questions as all participants were navigating their new reality. I created a semi-structured interview guide (Appendix C) that asked participants to reflect on general and specific details of three categories: 1) their experiences when they were students at DOCH, 2) their professional life before COVID, and 3) their experiences of COVID at the time of the interview. These key informants provided perspectives about the school environment, educational philosophy, and definitions of creativity within their programme. Interviews were planned to last around 60 minutes. While remaining responsive to everyone, the actual interview times ranged from 45-90 minutes. All interviews took place on the online meeting platform Zoom. As approved by McGill's REB, Zoom calls were video recorded with an additional audio recording as a back-up device. After interviews I wrote reflections to myself to draw out anything I felt could be useful for future analysis. This follows the GTM invitation to "write preliminary analytic notes called memos about our codes and comparisons and any other ideas about our data that occur to us" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). I use Charmaz's (2006, p. 74) notation to label my reflective memos with the category of text (memo) and the date. This example of a reflective memo shows how I was noticing unexpected themes and reflecting on my own experiences in circus:

*Two interviewees have noted that the thing they take with them the most is the network, or lack thereof. They both feel disillusioned by this. The transition from secondary to*

*undergrad is difficult in that way. I also remember being disillusioned by that: the education and graduation is set up as primordial, but in fact the networks within the school (peers, educators who give references) and through the school (alumni, local contracts, guest instructors, university collaborators) are a significant, sometimes entirely dominant construct to the education itself. (Memo, 7 Feb 2021)*

Memos assist researchers by enabling them to keep track of their ideas and interpretations of the data, including personal reflections on the research process, the context of an interview, as they move from discrete codes to “analytic categories” and, possibly, to a pragmatic theory (Bryant, 2014, Charmaz, 2006, p. 3).

To maintain confidentiality and ensure reliable terminology<sup>13</sup> I transcribed all interviews from the audio recordings. Because the transcription process was concurrent with beginning analysis, this is discussed below. To verify that the research is being conducted and analysed reliably, participants were informed that supervising professor Mindy R. Carter might request access to the transcripts and recordings. Interview recordings, transcriptions, digital copies of participant consent forms, interview transcripts, personal memos and all associated data analysis were kept on a password protected and encrypted hard drive that will remain in my possession for seven years after successful dissertation defense. Paper copies of consent forms, interview notes and memos will be destroyed after successful completion of the dissertation, and only

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<sup>13</sup> Circus vocabulary is both international and regional. Participants use colloquial, acrobatic and/or native language to describe similar movements depending upon the communities they are part of. For instance, a participant might describe a full rotation in the air as a salto, flip, vrille, or by the name of a discipline-specific trick name. My personal experience with transcription services in circus research has shown that these words and concepts are incompletely or inadequately transcribed due to lack of contextual knowledge on the part of the employed transcriber. Therefore, undertaking the transcription myself assures that the correct terminology, in the correct language, is used in the intended context.

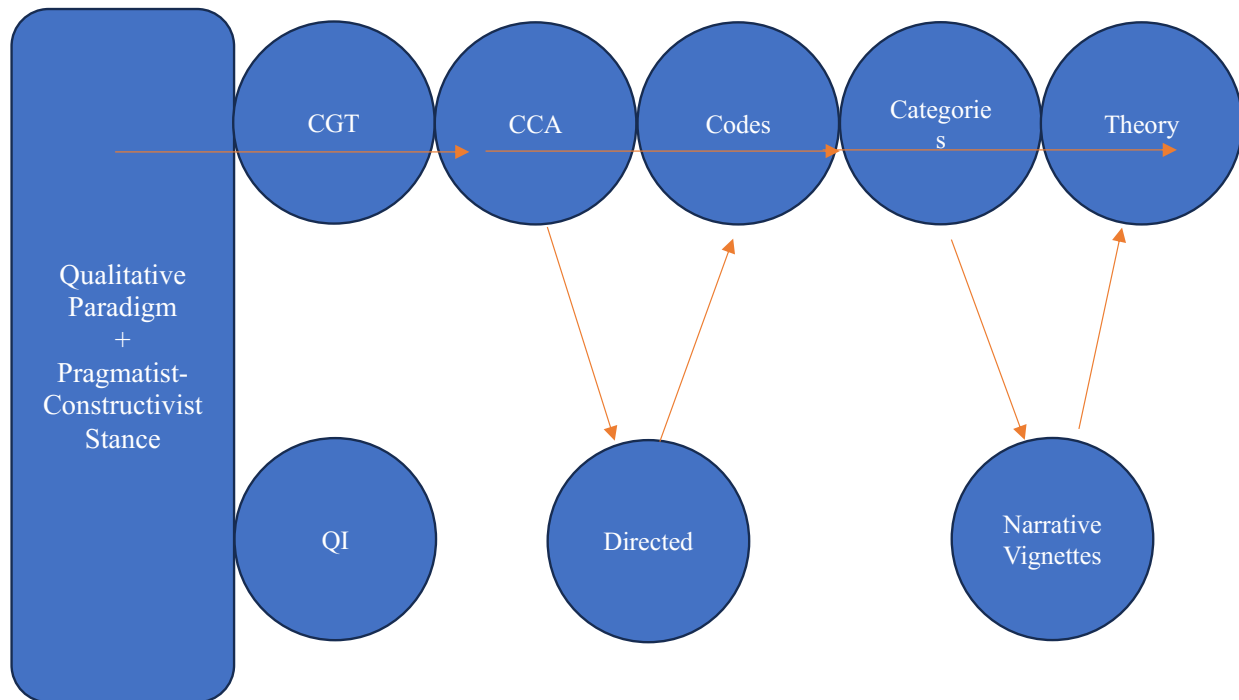
digital copies kept for any future analysis or research projects, using the above-mentioned protections.

***Analytic Methods: Fail Until the Thing Becomes Something Else***

While my original intention was to follow only the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) method, working with the transcript data led me to include supplementary modes of analysis and representation of the participant voices. When asked if they considered themselves creative, one participant described not calling themselves creative because they “*just fail a lot. I fail until the thing becomes something else.*” This is also an excellent description of the process I experienced working with different methods of analysis that could answer my research questions, retain participant voice, preserve confidentiality, and allow for the presence of emergent themes. In this section, I describe the stages of data analysis beginning with transcription, the subsequent methods of constant comparative analysis (CCA) and directed content analysis, followed by my rationale for including narrative vignettes (Miles et al., 2014) alongside transcript text as an important component of adequately contextualizing participant voices. The two ways that my methods deviated from classical CGT are visualized in Figure 1: Visualization of CGT Methodology with supplemental QI methods.

**Figure 1**

*Visualization of CGT Methodology with supplemental QI methods*



**Transcription.**

CGT proposes that to find saturation, interviews should be transcribed, and analysis begun while data collection is ongoing. After beginning transcriptions with the first interviews, I chose instead to complete all interviews before moving to the transcription process. This personal memo marks my realization that what I was gaining from the interview and memo process was enriching my understanding of the connections between interviews:

*I planned originally to interview/transcribe/code before moving to the next interview, following classical GTM process. I have been doing many interviews – only transcribed one so far – and not yet coded any. Now I think that the overlap process may be beneficial. Taking memos about what stands out to me will contribute to my coding as I see what comes up naturally. Then, transcribing will remind me of more interview*

*details, some of which will stand out differently in light of new interviews. The interview-memo-transcription-memo-coding process becomes more recursive and more interconnected. This seems already to be a richer process than what was initially planned, because it does not frame the first interviews as more foundational than later interviews. It recreates a more dialogic relationship between interviews (them), memos (me) and coding (it). (Memo, 24 Jan 2021)*

Transcriptions went through two phases: Raw Transcription and a subsequent Working Script. I used Otter.ai software to generate preliminary texts, then read through these texts while listening to the audio recordings to assure accuracy. In this first phase I repeatedly listened to the voices of the participants and their stories. These first transcription documents I entitled “Raw Transcriptions.” They remained as faithful as possible to the participants words and rhythm, leaving the interview responses in large text blocks and adding notations in brackets for unspoken modifiers such as long pauses, sighs, and laughter (Seidman, 1991):

*Alisan: So, I would like if you could tell me about what DOCH was like when you attended, like, what do you remember about it?*

*Participant (Raw Transcription): Yeah. I remember like, my first impressions, because I was, as many others, like, doing many auditions in different schools in Europe. And the, my biggest reason for why I chose to go to DOCH was that I felt that people were very, they felt very happy and enthusiastic in DOCH compared to the other schools, somehow, and the teachers... like in France, there was more this like distance, in a way, between like the teachers and the students, while in DOCH it was easier to talk to the teachers, and felt more like... the teachers were listening to the students a lot. Which I really*

*appreciated. And then when I started, we started with being in Alby, actually, like for the first, I think, like, six months or something. And then we would have the lessons in Alby and then we would have some like dance classes in the city and we took the tunnelbana to go to the city and attend to the dance classes. Yeah, I don't know what to say. (T6, p. 1)*

Because speech is not text, faithful transcriptions included many pauses, unfinished sentences, sudden topic changes and absent words needed to relay meaning to a reader. During the second phase of transcriptions, I created “Working Scripts” – prioritizing grammatic and conceptual fluidity without sacrificing meaning – while again listening to the recordings to assure accuracy. In these documents I began to separate the text into topic blocks while keeping the order of speech, making necessary grammar and vocabulary adjustments to clarify the participants intentions:

*Alisan: Could tell me what DOCH was like when you attended?*

*Participant (Working Script): I was, as were many others, doing many auditions in different schools in Europe. My biggest reason for choosing DOCH was that I felt the people were very happy and enthusiastic in DOCH compared to the other schools. In France there was more distance between the teachers and the students, while in DOCH it was easier to talk to the teachers. It felt more like the teachers were listening to the students. Which I really appreciated.*

*When I started, we were in Alby for the first six months. We would have the lessons in Alby and then we would have some dance classes in the city. We took the tunnelbana to go to the city and attend to the dance classes. (T6, p. 1)*

During this phase of transcription, I began analysis by noting units of the transcripts that were similar or resonant. The first codes assigned to the transcripts came from these preliminary

observations. I then uploaded the Working Scripts into the Atlas.ti qualitative software programme where I began the process of constant comparative analysis (CCA).

### **Data Analysis.**

Data analysis used constant comparative analysis (CCA), with the addition of directed content analysis (DCA) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to supplement the categorization of specific research themes. The primary method of GTM is constant comparison, a process of coding data as soon as it is collected, creating categories drawn from the words and phrases of the participants, and then comparing the codes and categories every new data set to the existing body of codes/categories until no new information about the issue arises, a state called saturation (Charmaz, 2006; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). The first phase of labelling units of text is ‘open coding.’ In this phase, researchers label sections with descriptive code names. It is a phase of generating understanding about the content of the transcripts and developing preliminary categories that contain groups of related codes. This is followed by ‘axial coding,’ where categories formed during the first phase are seen in relationship (Charmaz, 2008; Maxwell & Miller, 2008). During this phase, the codes and categories are compared to determine if and how they are related towards determining which are sub-categories of larger themes. CCA aims to enable the development of an encompassing theory that describes the interrelationship between the different categories (Charmaz, 2006, 2008). DCA uses existing theory as a guide for understanding the data where the aim of the research is to “validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory” (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1281). Predetermined codes drawn from existing theory are used to tag units of text and new codes are generated for significant text that does not fit into those initial categories. The researcher maintains awareness of gaps and

absences and nuances of alignment and dissimilarity with existing theory in order to complement or complicate what is already known.

The data analysis for this research began with the process of CCA open coding and generating code names drawn from the interview text. By transcribing all the interviews in parallel I was able to identify resonant similarities and surprising differences between the different participant experiences. Orienting myself within the geography of the applied creative thinking of DOCH graduates, I engaged in a type of “zigzag” (Creswell, 2007, p. 64) or “spiral” approach that moved from broad, collective stories to “focused” individual memories (Bryant, 2014, p. 121). To demonstrate the process of using both CCA and DCA, I here show the path of open coding to generate categories of creativity definitions (Figure 2: Open coding in Atlas.ti) and then clustering them into broader categories (Memo, 24 February 2022). I then use DCA to refine categories by labelling text with predetermined codes from literature defining creativity (Figure 3: Definitions including “novelty”), discovering an additional category of ‘contradictory beliefs’ about creativity leading to the addition of another set of predetermined codes derived from literature discussing beliefs about creativity (Figure 4: Process of analysis leading to ‘beliefs about creativity’ category), and returning to axial coding where the categories were viewed and situated in relationship to each other (Figure 5: Category beliefs about creativity and sub-categories).

I used CCA open coding to tag units of text related to creativity definitions with the aim of letting participant voice guide the categories. To find definitions of creativity elsewhere in the transcripts than from the direct interview question, I first (re)read and searched the Working Scripts using the key terms *defin\**, *creat\**. I then coded blocks of text as “creativity: definition” which included: “participant defines creativity,” ‘participant experience of creativity,’



‘participant describes creative process or outcome.’” Editing for succinctness but using only the participants’ words, I placed significant blocks of text into an excel document and labelled 1-12 for each participant so all definitions of creativity could be seen in one location. Figure 2 shows an example of open coding in the Atlas.ti software.

**Figure 2**

### *Open coding in Atlas.ti*

**A: Can you tell me your definition of creativity?**

I think it is when you try to do something and not try to reproduce. So you...I guess it's obvious; you create something – and you hear it in the word creativity - but you, you try to ... Ah it's a very hard question. I'm not this word definition master but... I think you try to find new ways to achieve, or capture... to achieve something. For example: to reach the top of your pole, find a new way than what you were just doing all the time. That would be a creative task. And, and I think it's a bit hard to see if there was a lot of creative work put into something or not. I think it's a lot of this: trying to explore and do things, mixing things and trying and having [an] open mind. This is a lot about creativity.

**A: Were the other people that were in your class at DOCH creative?**

I think. I think it had very high value. There were two people in our class were very creative. And they were being cool also, even though they weren't the most twisting masters. They were quite twisting masters also, although not the most. So, it was definitely cool that they were really going deep. But I think most of us at the moment were not very creative. I think we were quite much trying to reproduce. Also as I said earlier, the school was not very smart, at that time at least, at the trying to give us a path ... giving this basic exercise, and I said: "Go up the pole and don't try to do the double twist. We have a lot of technical hours where we do double twist but now it's another moment and now I want you to do something else." So no, I would not consider us very creative.

**Codings**

- ◇ Creativity Definition
- ◇ Creativity: can't determine work fro...
- ◇ Creativity: creating new things
- ◇ Creativity: in a way it hasn't been do...
- ◇ Creativity: mixing things
- ◇ Creativity: not reproduce
- ◇ Creativity: requires openness, readi...

**Status**

Created: October 20, 2021  
Alisan Funk  
Changed: October 20, 2021  
Alisan Funk

The following memo marks a step in the process from open coding to directed content analysis.

*Spent some time aligning Creativity codes. From 90+ codes in the code group 'CREATIVITY' there are now four code-groups aimed at teasing out different discourses about creativity. Some codes have also been consolidated and/or renamed. The four groups are now: CREATIVITY DEFINITIONS, CREATIVITY LIMITATIONS, CREATIVITY TEACH/LEARN, CREATIVITY THEORY. This should help me get a sense of the landscape. Now I have also spent some time (re)reading a few chapters in the Cambridge handbook of creativity to prime me to refine the DEFINITIONS and the THEORY categories. (Memo, 24 February 2022)*

Through identification of preliminary categories relating to creativity, it became apparent that certain units of data could be understood through the application of existing concepts in creativity literature. Using DCA to guide categorisation of creativity definitions demonstrated where the participant definitions overlapped with existing theory, and where the circus artists provided descriptions that expanded or complicated the definition in the literature. Figure 3: Definitions including “novelty” shows how I identified and drew together participant definitions of creativity that included the theoretical definition of “novelty” as a requirement for assessing if something is creative.

### Figure 3

#### *Definitions including “novelty”*

- It’s the ability to create **something new** from what you have at the moment. To create **something new** from what you're given.
- To dare to do something **in a way it hasn't been done before**.
- When you try to do something and **not try to reproduce**. ... you try to find **new ways** to achieve, or capture... to achieve something. (...) **find a new way** than what you were just doing all the time.
- You have this thing, you want to do this thing, but how do you do it? ... I believe this is where the **originality and the new things** and the groundbreaking things [come from]. (...) somehow through the process of solving the problems, because you're you, it’s gonna **be different**. It's going to **end differently**.
- Putting up **new problems** or finding **new problems**.
- Creativity starts with **not doing every day the same path** to get to the toilet, instead **finding a different** way around in creat[ive] ...be creative!

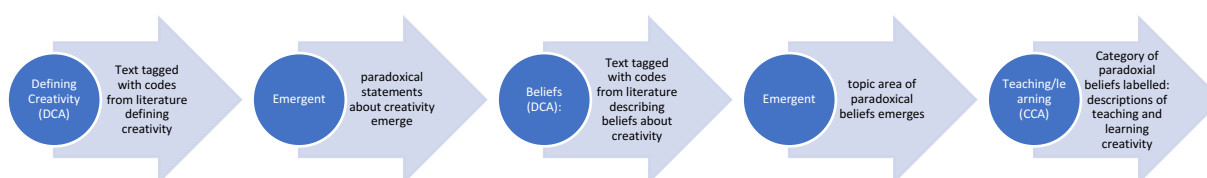
- ...do something over and over and over again until you **get to something else.** (...)

Maybe creativity is also to dare to step into **new worlds.**

Initially, the only pre-selected codes I used were from the definition of creativity to see where, and where not, participants were describing creativity in a way that aligned with the research literature. During the analysis process, an additional category emerged as I noticed contradictory statements regarding creativity which did not fit easily into the ‘definition’ categories. To preserve the juxtaposition of these contradictions, new codes were created, which became a category of ‘beliefs about creativity’ through axial coding. Following the clarity of that categorical name to contain the contradictory statements, I then applied code names from literature relating to beliefs about creativity to my reading of the transcript text (Figure 4: Process of analysis leading to ‘beliefs about creativity’ category).

**Figure 4**

*Process of analysis leading to ‘beliefs about creativity’ category*

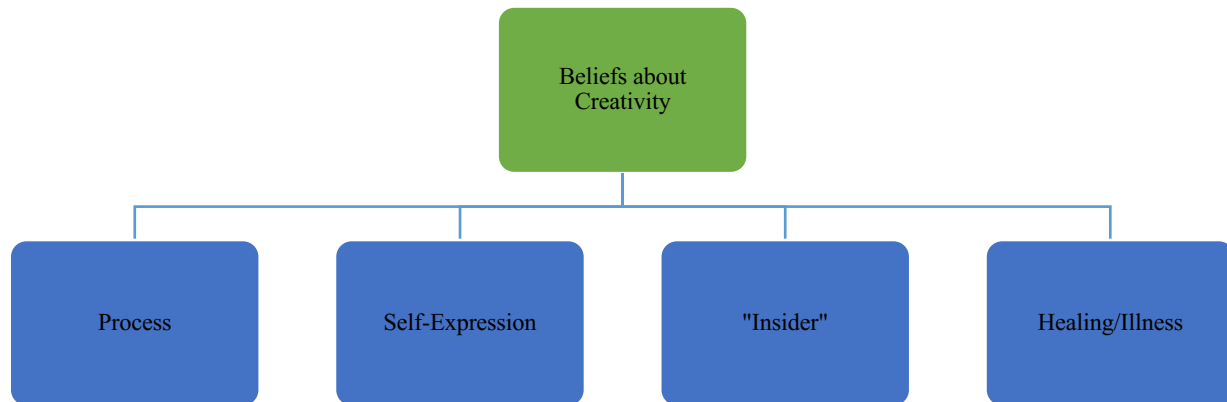


Naming the units of text with codes derived from existing theories of how Western culture views creativity led to clear categories showing where the participants’ beliefs overlapped or deviated. Three significant types of beliefs emerged. Participants describe creativity as a process and the result of self-expression during their interviews. Participants describe the opposite of the Western belief that creativity comes from outsiders; many reference the importance of domain

knowledge for creating something new. Finally, there are beliefs adjacent to seeing creativity as illness or wellness that I have also noted (Figure 5: Category: beliefs about creativity with sub-categories).

**Figure 5**

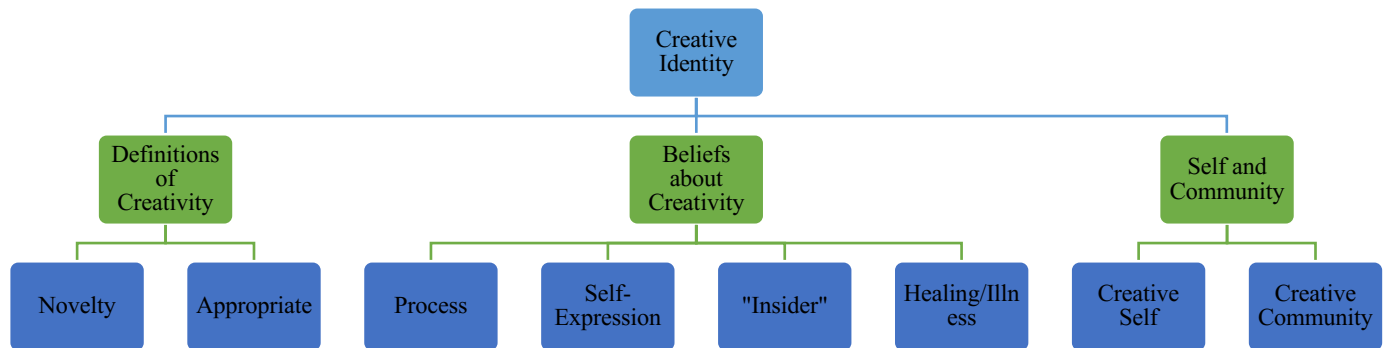
*Category: beliefs about creativity with sub-categories*



Using axial coding, I worked with these different categories to understand them in relationship to each other. The participant definitions and beliefs were both separate and yet influencing each other. Furthermore, these categories were influencing how the participants described their own creativity (Creative self), whether they perceived their peers to be creative (Creative community), the process or possibility of learning creativity in DOCH, and how they expressed creativity in their professional lives. Finally, it became clear that these categories were all part of a larger theme of Creative Identity, influenced by what each participant believed about being creative (Figure 6: Creative identity theme with sub-categories). This theme, in turn, contributes to the overarching theory of applied circus creativity that emerged from this research and which is further described in Chapter Five: Results and Chapter Six: Discussion.

**Figure 6**

*Creative identity theme with sub-categories*



The above examples show how the data analysis process expanded and contracted as units of data were tagged with codes, collected in categories, and seen relationally to each other. In Chapter Five: Results, I note the data analysis process that led to each set of categories for transparency and clarity of process.

### **Representing the Voices: Transcript Text and Narrative Vignettes.**

The final phase of presenting qualitative research relies on examples of participant voices to prioritize participant descriptions alongside researcher interpretations. Another important aspect for trustworthiness of qualitative research is the demonstration through participant voice of how categories were made, which gives the reader an opportunity to perceive the lens(es) with which the researcher analysed the data. As I reached this phase of presenting the research, I became aware that direct quotations of transcript text compromised the confidentiality of certain participants. Yet, presenting the topics in these units of data was essential for communicating how I came to understand the relationships between categories and themes, leading to the theory of applied circus creativity. Furthermore, the content of these units was similar to ideas in many other transcripts, yet often presented from a unique view. I sought a way to represent these

recurring themes, using participant words, but without compromising confidentiality within this very small community of graduates from a well-known education programme within a globally small and interconnected community.

Because the participant narratives that I wanted to represent were similar, I used the qualitative analytical methods of narrative analysis (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) and narrative vignettes (Miles et al., 2014) to guide the creation of collective narratives. These vignettes forefront “a focused description of a series of events taken to be representative, typical or emblematic” of the participant experiences in this research (Miles et al., 2014, p.183).

Text examples throughout the presentation of this research are therefore labelled in one of two ways, depending upon whether the example is from a single transcript or if it is a collective narrative vignette representing a common experience of multiple participants. Transcripts use the notation of the transcript number and page number. An example from page seven of the first transcript will read: T1, p. 7. Narrative vignettes are followed by the word “Vignette” and the number of voices integrated into the story. A vignette representing a common experience described by five participants is labelled as: Vignette: 5. Vignettes are used for two reasons, first where confidentiality was a concern, and second to emphasize a common experience.

I have chosen to include the number of participant voices in each vignette for the special interest of stakeholders in circus education contexts. These topics are significant whether raised by one, or many, of the participants. In each case these issues highlight important features of educational and professional experiences that contribute to a fuller understanding of how creativity is learned and applied through the course of circus education. However, I also believe it is significant for stakeholders in circus education to see if the experiences being related were

lived by a majority or minority of participants. Participants describe very positive experiences of the DOCH environment, and also very difficult emotional realities. Both of these topics are important, but it is helpful for circus educators, programmers and administrators to see the preponderance of people describing positive experiences in relation to the minority who related significant challenges to contextualize where and how interventions might be undertaken to minimize or defray future negative experiences while reinforcing the positive ones.

To demonstrate the way these narrative vignettes were created, I here present descriptions of the daily schedule that form the foundation of the vignette presented in Chapter Three: Circus and Circus Education Literature. Through the following series of excerpts, I show how I selected, combined, and refined resonant descriptions to present a collective representation of an experience, emotion, or topic.

I began each interview asking the participant to tell me about their educational experience of DOCH, which I sometimes followed with specific prompts about the content, schedule, or differences between the three years. These prompts helped participants reflect on more of the details of their experience. Even within cohorts, the descriptions of the schedule are not identical. This could be due to actual differences based on teaching schedule, or errors in memory. Below are listed some of the diverse, yet similar, descriptions of the participant memories of the schedule from different cohorts which form the basis for the final Vignette:

*It was extremely long days, which were self-administered. The first two years I was there 10-12 hours a day, normally six days a week. First and second year, technical classes start at 9. You work with your body all morning, then in the afternoon were academic classes, or workshops like performance, dance, theatre: the non-high-impact stuff. When all the teachers leave, you take a break, then you do your own training all evening, take a*

*sauna, and go home. In third year the schedule flipped. The brain work, the artistic work, was in the morning, and the physical work was in the afternoon. (T1, p. 1)*

*I came to school between 7.30 and 8.00 to warm up. Then discipline class, then one hour of lunch, and then you usually had a workshop or second discipline in the first two years. You finished by five, then stayed in school, trained more. If I had a presentation on this or the next Friday, I worked on that, otherwise I worked on technique. Or research. Or whatever I was interested in at the time. Then third year was more focused. Less classes, less workshops, more free time to spend on your research and Closing Acts. (T3, p. 1-2).*

*In first year and some of second year we literally performed every Friday, which was super intense, but looking back at it, what a good opportunity. We were given tasks, sometimes by a guest teacher because we had these afternoon blocks. Our normal training was always the same: In first year we all got there at 8.30 and then ran. Then we'd have our discipline training, including acrobatics and trampoline. Later on we'd start with our second discipline, if we did that. Afternoon was for the more creative side of things: we trained on our own, had dance or theatre workshops, and time to work on our show or redovisning. I usually stayed until eight. Our class was really hard working. And then, go home, cook, sleep. It was really like that. And sauna. (T4, p. 1-3).*

The three examples above demonstrate the diversity of detail and different approaches to description used by participants. During the interviews and transcription, I noticed that 12 of the participants shared similar stories of long days, feeling that they and their cohort worked especially hard, and that their whole life revolved around the training space. From these stories I



created the narrative vignette that appears in Chapter Three: Circus and Circus Education Literature. The aim of the final Vignette is to capture the commonality of long days, extra training, and the rhythm of the quotidian and annual schedule. I have simplified the language and made it less personal overall, however I have also kept some personal touches that illuminate the experience. For example, although not every participant mentioned the sauna, I have kept that reference in because it exemplifies the culture and resources of Scandinavian training environments and is uncommon in many circus schools. These choices resulted in the final Vignette used in Chapter 3:

*The school day lasted 8.30 to 5 or 6. In first year we ran together at 8.30, followed by discipline training, acro and trampoline. The morning classes were divided differently for each student, depending on discipline. Second discipline was added later. Afternoons were for creative things: independent training, presentation preparation, dance, theatre, theory, research, all other classes. Internal presentations lasted full afternoons. In third year, we focused on Closing Acts and had more individualized schedules. Everyone in my cohort worked hard: we stayed late working on technique or presentations, then sauna, home, cook, sleep, school again. For three years: cook, eat, sleep, wake up, restart.*

(Vignette: 12)

While this is not the story of any one individual, it IS the common experience shared by all the students: that of arriving early, working hard, staying late. It gives a sense of the overall rhythm that remained consistent despite many changes to the formal curriculum, syllabi, and credit allotments. This vignette is the backbone of the experience all participants describe, and within which the rest of their learning took place. The other vignettes have followed the same process of construction: I noticed similarities, selected, and retained evocative representations of

the topic, and simultaneously worked to create a text example that could not be tied to one particular person or cohort with the aim of preserving confidentiality.

### ***Map of Categories and Themes***

This section presents a map of the sub-categories, categories, themes, and theory that have resulted from data analysis. Using CCA and DCA to analyse the transcript text, many codes became clustered into smaller categories, which are color-coded dark blue in Figure 7: Applied circus creativity with sub-themes and sub-categories. From these small categories, nine larger categories became evident: a) explicit curriculum of creativity, b) implicit curriculum of creativity, c) null curriculum of creativity, d) definitions of creativity, e) beliefs about creativity, f) self and community, g) creative practice within domain, h) creative practice beyond domain, and i) circus identity. In the map below, these are color-coded green. I determined that the significant and resonant data could be clustered into three themes 1) learning creativity, 2) creative identity, and 3) creative practice. These are color-coded light blue in Figure 7. Where I first saw these three themes as separate descriptions of the educational and personal processes of learning creativity, through the process of writing the narrative vignettes and describing the interrelationships in this dissertation, it became apparent that these three themes can in turn be clustered under a single large descriptive theme: applied circus creativity. As will be shown in Chapter Five: Results and Chapter Six: Discussion, applied circus creativity includes methods of approaching an expanded notion of professional practice in circus, communities of practice, and individual creation of circus presentations.

**Figure 7**

*Applied circus creativity with sub-themes and sub-categories*

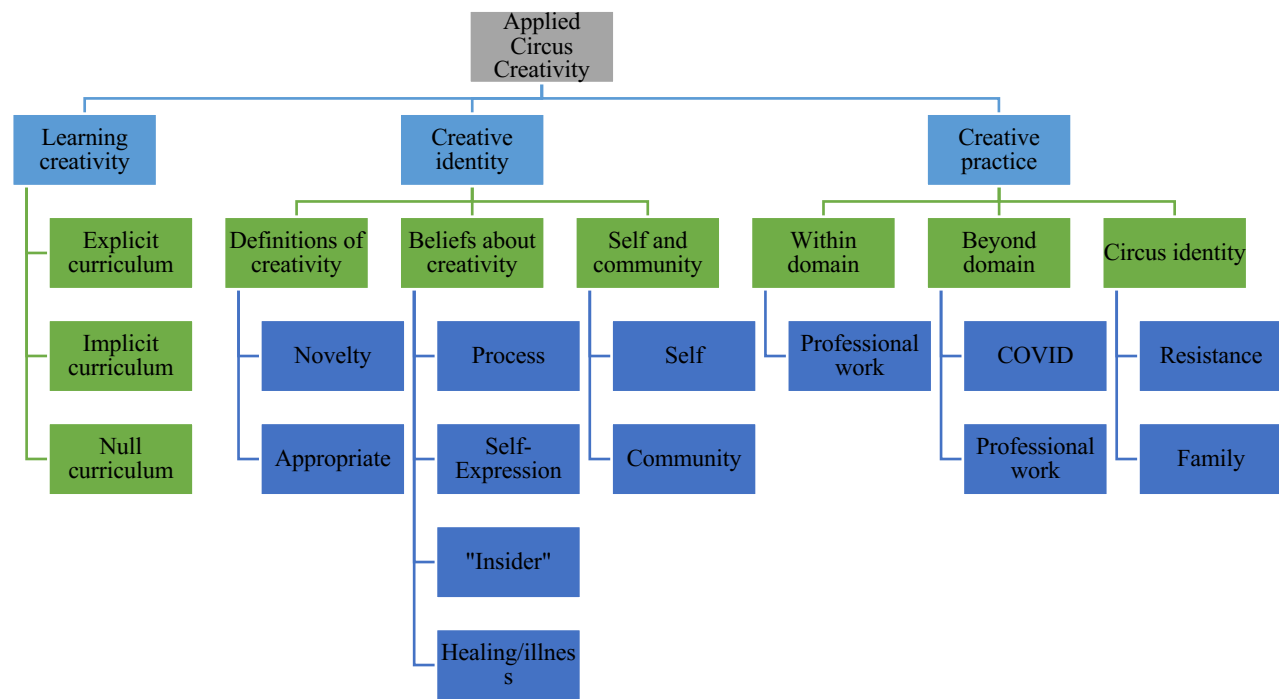


Figure 7 provides the map which will guide to subsequent chapters. Sections of this map will be presented where relevant to track continuity between sub-categories, categories, themes and the final result in the results and discussion chapters that follow.

### **Summary of Methodologies, Methods, and Analysis**

From my situated professional roles and epistemological constructivist and pragmatist stances, and regarding my research questions, I selected the constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) as the guiding qualitative approach best suited to uncovering pertinent responses from participants. Twelve people who have graduated from DOCH's circus bachelor programme self-selected to be interviewed about their experiences in circus school. Because data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, all interviews took place on Zoom and additional questions about COVID were added to the interview protocol. Data analysis began

with constant comparative analysis (CCA) (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007; Starks & Trinidad, 2007), from which resonant themes emerged highlighting shared experiences. In addition to constant comparative analysis, I used directed content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to create tags for units of data and situate the categories to elaborate or expand existing theories. Through a process of open and axial coding using names derived from the transcript text (CCA) and existing theory (DCA), the categories resolved into three main themes leading, which in turn constitute the overarching theory of applied circus creativity. This will be discussed in Chapter Five: Results and Chapter Six: Discussion. Participant text is used to exemplify these categories in two different ways. Direct excerpts from transcripts are labelled with a transcript number and page number. At times either a need for increased confidentiality or the desire to represent a collective experience prompted me to write collective narrative vignettes (Miles et al., 2014). These vignettes are duly labelled and include the number of participant experiences from which they are created.

From the participant voices and through the analytical methods, clear information has emerged connecting learning experiences in circus school with knowledge and use of the creative process in professional and personal life after graduation. The next two chapters present the results and discussion of this inquiry.

## **Chapter Five: Results**

The purpose of this research is to understand the connections between the participant's educational experiences during the Bachelor programme in circus at DOCH and their creative practices in their professions. My interrelated research questions began as 'during' and 'after' categories:

Q1: What did students learn about creativity within the circus arts profession during their studies at DOCH?

Q2: In what ways have graduates from DOCH applied creative thinking within and/or beyond situations of circus performance?

These questions served as an important foundation from which to gather information about how creativity was learned during their circus education at DOCH and how participants expressed creativity in their professional work, however the 'during' and 'after' division has proven moot during the course of analysis. All participants described a curriculum that fostered their professional creative practice, but not all participants consciously connected the creative aspects of their professional practice to their learning experiences. Participant descriptions revealed that while all had learning experiences that aligned with best practices for teaching the creative process, their individual beliefs and definitions of creativity influenced whether they believe creativity was taught during the course of the circus BA programme. Through the course of data analysis, three themes arose which, in turn, describe what I call "applied circus creativity." Applied circus creativity includes the process of learning creative methods and identities through education, community, and culture. It also includes the ways that these professional artists applied their creative methodological approach to problem-finding and problem-solving within their specific disciplinary practices, and in an expanded sense of the domain of the circus

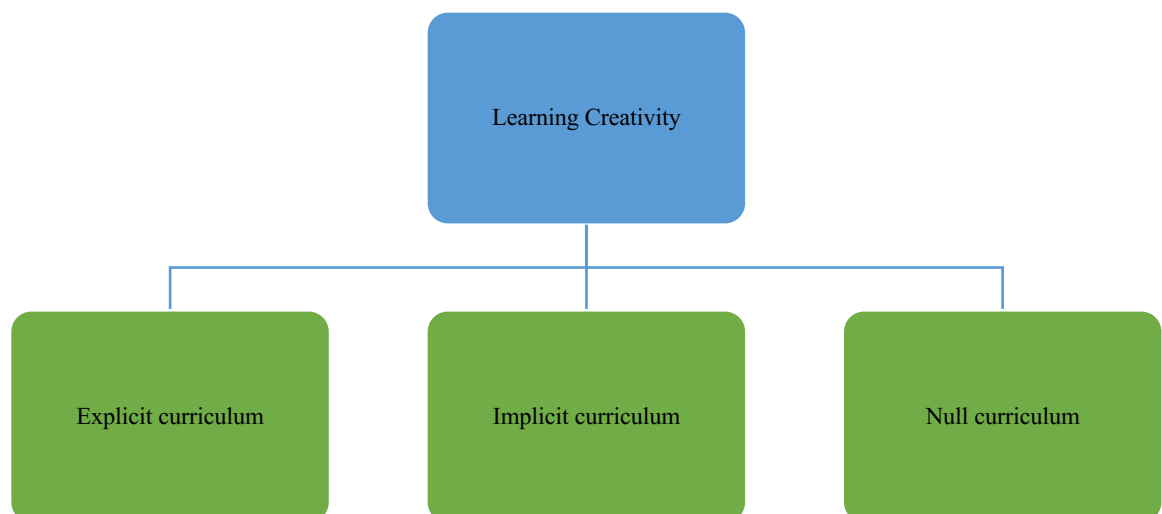
profession. Both research questions are therefore answered through these three themes and resulting theory of applied circus creativity. In this chapter I present the three themes that arose from data analysis, including their categories and sub-categories, with examples from the transcript texts and collective narrative vignettes.

## Learning Creativity

This section presents examples of how the participants describe being taught creativity through the explicit curriculum and learning creativity through the implicit curriculum, with an additional acknowledgment of where students noticed content missing from their education: the null curriculum (Eisner, 1979/2002). The theme “learning creativity” contains descriptions of the “curricula of creativity,” which are examples of the explicit and implicit curricula described by participants, and references to the null curriculum, where participants noted absences of content that they feel affected their educational experience.

### Figure 8

*Learning creativity theme with sub-categories*



The formal curriculum, expressed through syllabi, is a legal contract between student and education institution. In programme and course syllabi, institutions commit to providing certain

information and outline requirements students must accomplish. This contract is a quality assurance document, setting expectations for both the programme and the student. The BA programme syllabus has changed for every cohort, which means that, formally, students from any single graduating year did not complete the same curricular programme as students from any other cohort (Appendix D). Many factors contributed to the syllabi and BA programme changing so frequently. The circus BA has been contained by multiple educational structures from the time it joined the University College of Dance, before becoming the University of Dance and Circus (DOCH), and then finally merging with other arts institutions in 2014 to be named the Stockholm University of the Arts (SKH). Throughout these structural changes, new iterations of course content were made. At one point changing university and government requirements regarding minimum course credits required smaller courses to be consolidated. In addition, the perception described by participants (below) that their voice is an important factor in the education is accurate: feedback from students has influenced curriculum structure and content. In fact, it is a requirement that programme administrators demonstrate *how* student course evaluations are being addressed, including changes to content and course structure.

While these examples and other realities have resulted in changes to the formal curriculum, these differences were not apparent in the participant discourses. Despite differences in the number of credits for a subject or how the course was described in approved syllabi, the essential rhythm and content of the days, weeks and years has remained stable. The course names and learning outcomes float on the lived content, less of Aoki's (1986/2005) curricular "tensionality" between written and lived, and more a parallel student experience of learning circus AND being enrolled in a university structure. Confident in their memories of content, several participants notice their own lack of relationship to the curricular structures containing

that same content, and differentiated their lived experiences from the structure in which those experiences were housed:

*We had a lot of really interesting things - but I don't know what course it was under actually where we did some reading and creative writing and got super clear feedback on our writing also in discussions. (T7, p. 2)*

*As circus students we were caught up in our own world and what we wanted to achieve. There was huge distance to the academic university world. In the end of the year, we'd have a meeting with someone in another department who'd go through course evaluations, asking: did you achieve this specific objective this year? I remember I didn't understand the questions, or what the goals really meant. So, I would just say "yes," because I knew it was good for the school somehow. But I didn't really connect to it. Now that I think about it, it's a bit strange to have that attitude. I think it was the same for almost everyone in our class, that we didn't really connect. (T6, p. 4)*

*The circus school changed my relationship to creativity but not the university. (T9, p. 9)*

It is unsurprising, then, that many of the participant memories combine the explicit and implicit curriculum.

### ***Explicit Curriculum: Practicing the Creative Process.***

Two elements of the BA programme, which remained relatively stable over the many iterations of the programme, form the category of 'Explicit Curriculum.' Through the process of



CCA, the ‘*redovisnings*’ and ‘Exam Project’ emerged as significant experiences where students learned the process of creative work.

Participant narratives of the explicit curriculum include course content, assigned tasks, evaluations where elements of the creative method were taught. In addition, I noted participant descriptions of curricular and pedagogical practices associated with fostering creativity in primary education and the sparse studies in higher arts education.

### **Redovisnings.**

All participants describe the scaffolded process of short-term task-based assignments resulting in a physical presentation using the vocabulary of their circus discipline within specific guidelines that constrained existing habits while encouraging the students to explore connections beyond their quotidian practice. The presentation of these tasks is called a *redovisnings* - translatable from Swedish as *presentation* or *account*. The *redovisnings* are a staple of the circus BA curriculum, from its inception through the present day. With shifts to the BA programme over time, there have been changes in who provides the task, how often they are presented, and who was in the audience. *Redovisning* tasks offer students the key elements of learning and practicing the creative process, including the practice of connecting their discipline to other topic areas, engaging in dialogue about their process and ideas, and re-orienting their work in response to ‘failure.’ The task assignments were often related to the afternoon course content. For instance, student might be asked to present elements of character work in their discipline after working with a clowning instructor for two weeks. When the programme was housed in Alby, in the Cirkus Cirkör headquarters, the audience could include professional artists, secondary school students, and the administrators and creators with Cirkör. After moving to the KTH campus, the audience was more generally limited to students, friends, and alumni.

*First and second year we had a redovisning every Friday, working with a task in our discipline given by the programme heads. This is part of why students from DOCH have such a high level. It was a challenging, intense, and invaluable experience to perform my discipline in front of people so frequently. The audience was our cohort, alumni, and anyone else who wanted to come. Redovisnings could last full afternoons. I appreciated getting to try out lots of material in front of each other. We presented and failed at whatever we wanted – artistic ideas, discipline experiments— and saw differences in idea development of third- and first-year students. (Vignette: 7)*

Connecting their primary discipline work to other fields serves multiple purposes. It expands the student's knowledge of adjacent fields from which they might draw inspiration, it provides other frames of information and evaluation, and it develops the practice of making connections between topics, shown to be a key practice of the highly creative (Csikszentmihalyi 2014; Sawyer, 2012).

*I'm grateful for the high-level dance and theatre teachers from whom we learned to mold our technique because I was always looking for a way to relate them to my discipline. I liked working alone on creative ideas, like when we created presentations inspired by use music, art, or text. It was the first presentation where I was happy with myself and my first contact with contemporary artmakers. (Vignette: 6)*

Re-orienting from failures is demonstrably essential to finding an answerable problem and a context-appropriate solution (Sawyer, 2019). All participants described an atmosphere where trying out ideas was encouraged, though not all describe learning to feel creatively safe within the DOCH education. A few participants described failure feelings when their idea did not work out, but none were deterred. Several other participants described only a lack of failure during the

programme because they had the impression of being so supported in their process of trial, error, and discovery. All participants described certain failures as part of the process of being an artist and making work.

*I hate failure yet I failed all the time in school because I felt very supported by the teachers. I failed when I would do a redovisning and what I planned didn't work out, or when I set out to do something and didn't achieve the goal. I was often pissed off about the tasks because although it generated constructive internal work, the result might look like shit and there was no adequate explanation of the assignment. But in the end, I really benefitted from that process. In the end, there was never really failure because when you got frustrated it was like part of your own development somehow. It's not really failure, it's missing the mark. It's learning. You have to fall to get up again. (Vignette: 5)*

Discourse-based assessments ensure that students articulate their choices and receive the impressions of informed viewers. Significantly, students also recognized relevant and dialogic feedback as one of the most essential elements for learning about their artistic work. This is highlighted by the participants who also recounted negative or inadequate experiences with feedback from educators and peers. Although separated into two narratives to highlight the similarities, several participants describe experiencing feedback that was positive and some which was lacking.

*After the redovisning we received constructive critique in a feedback circle with students and teachers. We'd talk about what each person did. It wasn't always useful because everyone felt obligated to say something. Sometimes it just felt like being judged for my artistic choices. It was most helpful when it was very direct and helped me see my failures. We were asked: what do you want to say? Did you say it well? I remember being*

*slayed for my ideas by third year feedback– it was shocking but also some of the best advice I'd ever gotten in my life. It was hard receiving such truthful feedback during my first year, but it made me understand the value of developing technique. (Vignette: 7)*

*After redovisnings we received constructive critique sitting in a feedback circle. It wasn't all useful because everyone felt obligated to say something. A lot of times I felt misunderstood. Sometimes it just felt like being judged for my artistic choices. Other times, there was so much praise and just stating what happened in the redo without actual honesty. The least helpful moments were when the people giving feedback told you what they thought, but didn't want a conversation about it, which made everything they said after that kind of meaningless to me. I would have benefitted from more direct and constructive feedback about my work. That was missing for me. (Vignette: 4)*

These narratives reinforce the relevance of guiding feedback for artistic work with clear pedagogical aims and creating an environment where critique of a project can be separated from critique of a person. The desire some participants express to have more critical feedback indicates that they approach their work seriously and expect it to be taken seriously by peers and staff through dialogue and articulated observations with the intent of ameliorating alignment between intention and presentation.

Participant descriptions point to *redovisnings* as a frequent and (typically) low-pressure way for students to practice the creative process. The tasks were generally constructed to challenge student thinking about approaches to their practice; designed more to break students away from habits and preferences than to scaffold iterative development of a creative concept.

## **Exam Project.**

In some senses the whole programme is constructed to scaffold iterative creative processes regarding a specific circus discipline because students constantly develop, present, re-work and evolve their practical, aesthetic, and compositional approaches to their primary discipline. This culminates in the final research project, which requires students to articulate an iterative creative process, and documentation of that process, over an extended period, resulting in formal presentation. When the Circus Pilots (Cirkuspiloterna) became a BA programme, one of the major curriculum changes was the addition of a bachelor's degree Project. Called variously through the interviews as the degree project, Examworks, the independent project, and the research project, one participant described this large project as the main difference between the former professional training programme and the subsequent degree programme:

*When we became a university there were no changes except the addition of the personal project because it's part of university education. It's a great project so it was a positive change. We had to write a and defend the work with an opponent. In normal Swedish universities, it's a big 10-week assignment that requires formal writing. For us, it was a document describing our research and conclusion. (T9, p. 6)*

The equivalent of a thesis, this semester-length project now happens consistently in the 5<sup>th</sup> term (autumn of the third year). Situated in the artistic research practices of SKH, students develop an artistic research question related to their circus discipline and relevant methods to research through practice, document their process through evolving methods, from which they conduct a performance-presentation demonstrating some or all aspects of the work. Each student has an outside eye working with them periodically through the process, someone chosen collaboratively between the student and programme head to support their individual question,

approach, and guide knowledge development. Students then write a short paper describing the process (5-15 pages, depending upon the student and project) and defend the paper in a conference-style presentation, and serve as an opponent for a peer to elicit articulation of alignment between the question, process, and final presentation. All of the participants noted the significance of this educational experience, and many connected it with deep learning about creative process and the value of iterative work towards a creative product (performance). Because of the complexity of this experience and the overall impact it has on creative development, an extensive meta-narrative is included here.

*In second year, we learned about research and in third we had a real academic research project that lasted three months: starting with a question, developing it over time then presenting. University provides a framework for documentation using guidelines developed over centuries. The research project taught us these protocols and frameworks, how to develop and present an idea. The artistic research project with an outside eye is one of the best things DOCH offers. This was an important course. It was good to be pushed to do the research which I would not have done by myself. I don't speak or write well so university always felt elitist, but from our teacher I learned how to do the degree using body and mind, and to develop an idea into something concrete, which is a tool I still use today.*

*Doing the research was a nice challenge. I was grateful for the opportunity to train my mind and put myself into another headspace. It was a lot of independent time, a lot of hours into one project, which I'd not done before and never since. It felt I'd been through army training in order to have the physical ability to then explore my own artistic approach using my discipline. I'm usually pragmatic in nature and would not*

*usually investigate one thing from so many perspectives, but I found physical and philosophical approaches to my idea which was very fun.*

*I feel lucky I chose something interesting and worked towards it, learned about methodology and seeing it from many different sides. Each student was given space to research what they wanted. That level of liberty was unprecedented for me. DOCH taught creativity through the research project which didn't restrict what we did but how we did it. The process was framed and supported with tools and feedback. All of my artistic experiences follow from learning this process. (Vignette: 6)*

The many small redovisnings, occurring multiple times every month during the first two years provide the students with practical experience generating and testing ideas. The degree project pushes this practice into a longer and more critically examined creative work where students learn to return repeatedly to examine the alignment between their plan and the reality of their work, ultimately providing a platform where students must defend their work in writing and speech while simultaneously engaging in constructive critique of their peers. Additionally, this project serves one of the BA programme's primary aims to develop the field of circus arts from within practitioner knowledges.

### ***Implicit Curriculum: Environmental Influences.***

These descriptions reveal how the learning environment of teachers and peers guides socialization into the values of circus, circus work and circus community.

To highlight areas where participants might not associate learning experiences with pedagogical and curricular practices encouraging creativity, I noted where participants spoke about feelings of emotional safety during their education, how they described experiences of failure and challenge, and memories about the educational atmosphere and interpersonal

relationships that influenced the learning experiences. These memories also reveal the implicit curriculum experienced by students which taught values and expectations about circus culture and the work of being an artist.

### **Intrinsic Motivation.**

*I put so much pressure on myself. It was so intense, so hard, and I was so tired. At the time they told us to be careful with our bodies, but everything we did every day was teaching us the exact opposite: go to the maximum even if it hurts. That was the philosophy of the school. (Vignette: 3)*

Participants noted that while they felt great pressure to perform at their best, they associated that pressure primarily with their circus practice and not with the institutional requirements. They appreciated that the grading system was pass/fail, enabling a focus on dialogic forms of evaluation. This atmosphere encourages intrinsic motivation, often seen as a prerequisite for creative achievement (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Sawyer, 2019).

*I put a lot of pressure on myself. I felt the other students were the best in the world at what they were doing, so I had to become good enough to justify being allowed into such a great place. I was afraid of failing the school's expectations if I didn't have a high enough technical level at graduation. This internal pressure was the source of failure feelings. It was so intense, so hard, and I was so tired. Some days I felt really depressed; you're in the hall just training, training, training, facing your limits every day. Every day you're learning things you can't do. I felt failure every day, I felt failure when I didn't master the high level of acrobatic technique I expected of myself and that my teacher wanted. This is the negative side of being pushed to be your best. (Vignette: 4)*



### **Supportive Environment.**

Internal pressure to succeed was a significant driver whereas most participants could not remember if they even received grades during the education.

*If we got grades, we didn't know or care; at the end of the day doing the tricks you wanted are the "grades" that matter for yourself. We only knew what was required to pass. If someone was absent or presenting poor work they'd be spoken with individually. Pass-fail was the best thing for me, it made me feel free. You can't grade what we do, we're all so individual. No one has ever asked to proof that I passed a theoretical course. I don't know where a circus artist would need those grades. (Vignette: 9)*

Two additional participants reference how decisions made by other students, or passed down from other cohorts, negatively affected their experience. Whether ceasing a particular portion of the content or work with specific educators was decided by the students or the programmer was not pursued as part of this research. It is equally possible that student feedback highlighted tensions or gaps in the curriculum, which were then addressed by responsible faculty. Negative and positive feedback from students must always be considered by curriculum designers. Perhaps in addition to receiving how valuable it was for students to have their knowledge of their educational needs integrated into the programme, administrators following this type of discourse-based design could communicate where student feedback has decided, or where it has only influenced, decisions made by those responsible.

Finally, many participants describe the bespoke nature of the educational experience. This narrative describes being supported as an individual and an environment that nourished individual knowledge and individual forms of expression. However, these students also at times felt abandoned in their process.

*My experience was that DOCH was very individual. Our schedules were very individual. When I wanted to train more disciplines, the programme heads only asked if I could handle it. We had career management and rigging classes where we each focused on what was relevant for our goals. We were given a lot of space to investigate our own path, which is where to find one's own creativity. Every student found out by themselves how to become unique. Training independently is important for creativity so you don't forget who you are during all the learning, but it's hard to have energy for that. It can also feel lonely and not very directed. Everyone was positive and supportive – tell us more about your weird idea, push it more— but we were never told something was bad.*

(Vignette: 9)

This meta-narrative holds tension between the knowledge of having benefitted from being encouraged as individuals to explore individual creative voice and the experience of loneliness during that process. Being able to persevere through difficult emotions is also an important part of sticking with the creative process, but perhaps that aspect needed more explicit scaffolding from educators or administrators

*In school I was taught that to do circus you have to love technique and love training 10 hours per day because most of the feedback was about development of technique, not much else. Some coaches told me to focus more on my technique because audiences want to see tricks, but I pursued my own weird forms of expression. I've now been working for 10 years following my own vision.* (Vignette: 5)

In the small, intimate environment of circus education the boundaries between teacher, student, friend, mentor, and areas of respective expertise can be blurred. The daily training classes between one student and one teacher necessarily address physical and emotional development as

the student learns strategies for self-care and perseverance. Participants expressed an expectation that the education and administration personnel exhibit the same level of emotional and psychological expertise as they do in their direct fields of expertise.

Both positive and negative memories of the learning environment evoke a desired experience of community where individuals are valued, education is bespoke to individual needs, and where physical, emotional, and educational needs are all taken in hand by the responsible faculty. Through these descriptions it is clear that students expect their teachers not only to deliver content related to the programme, but also to provide an amicable and emotionally responsive atmosphere where students are constructively “pushed” within their discipline while also providing the same level of institutional expertise for navigating interpersonal difficulties.

*Everybody felt the teachers were dedicated, wanted the best for you, and weren't afraid to dream big, like, “you're going to be the best in the world!” As a student you feel good because you're both pushed and supported. But there's a flip side. My discipline then was all about how many saltos you can do. My teacher was like, “we're gonna do flip, back flip, front flip, double twist.” We pushed the whole three years. In third year, I had to decide what technique to work on for my final act. I decided to stay with technique that made artistic sense rather than push acrobatically. It impacted how my teacher and the other students saw me, like, “you're not so acrobatic.” This created a feeling of “shit, I'm not the best in the world, I'm not the one that leaves these three years with all the flips.” This was my strongest failure. (T10, p. 2 & 6)*

*I witnessed another student experience a difficult situation and not receive adequate or timely support from our cohort or the school. DOCH needs more awareness that some students are going through bad times, and that the teachers aren't the people who should be dealing with it because it's not their job; they're not trained psychologists. We need someone in the institution to speak with people going through bad things, that's the biggest improvement needed.<sup>14</sup> (Vignette: 5)*

*It was great to see teachers and administrators from different countries working together, not just one head making all decisions. I had a good vibe with all of the teachers: even other teachers were helpful when I went through difficult times. (Vignette: 3)*

One common element in the above examples is the importance of how others around are perceiving the student within the circus activities. Participants also described how they felt their own voice was a key element of the educational environment. They felt they were participants in creating their education, not only that they received judgement and support from others.

### **Validation of Voice.**

Where learning environment supported creative risks, the participants describe feeling supported by the teacher team and programme heads, being listened to as agents of their own education, and that the education followed their individual interests and strengths. Many

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<sup>14</sup> Most Stockholm universities, including DOCH/SKH do not provide in-house mental or physical health support but instead subscribe to a student health network that supports students in stress reduction and with navigation of the Swedish health care system so they can acquire the correct and relevant professional support for their specific needs. Current SKH students are well-informed of the different points of access to physical and mental health services, which can also be found in flyers on billboards in the circus training space, on the student website, and annual reminders from the administration and Student Unions. Because this was not a primary area of inquiry for this research, I did not pursue discovering how the students in these cohorts received healthcare information, but several participants mention not using their university emails or other university information networks and only relying on word-of-mouth within the narrow, international circus community for information about life in Sweden.

participants described having their own vision of circus and finding support for that vision from their teachers and peers. These participants noticed how their strong self-knowledge became a relevant factor in their experience of the programme in comparison with other students.

*I was very free to choose what and how I wanted to do things. I felt very supported to handle artistic and disciplinary challenges by the teachers. Personally, I hate failure, yet I failed all the time in school because I felt very supported by the teachers. I got on well with my discipline coach and still visit when I'm in Stockholm. The teacher team encouraged us to dream big and pushed us to be the best in the world; their dream of excellence became ours also. I felt very safe to experiment and would have tried more things if I could. I felt the circus department protected us, taught us not to be scared of the outside because they would be there for us, which is really rare. (Vignette: 7)*

For many of the participants, the experience of having their voice be taken seriously in the construction of the education left a strong impact. They felt important and valued, but also recognized the responsibility inherent in having influence over their own education.

*I was positively challenged by having responsibility for my own education. DOCH offered a buffet and we chose how much to eat. The teachers were in constant dialogue with the students: were we happy with our schedule? Do we want to change anything? The staff listened to our ideas about guest teachers and our feedback on the curriculum. Student opinions affected things. We said it wasn't working with our ballet teacher, so they stopped the class, and we got something else. We were trusted regarding how to make a good education in circus. It impressed me that they were really trying to listen to each student. It was like being told we could order the most expensive dish on the menu. (Vignette: 9)*

In having their voice taken seriously by faculty, these participants learned to take themselves seriously as authorities in their own experience.

### **Environmental Hinderance and Negative Experiences.**

While no participant reported an exclusively negative experience, several described difficult situations that negatively affected their learning experiences. Like the above positive narratives of experiencing support, the following narratives reveal learning environments that hindered feelings of community, trust and emotional security and therefore may have impeded creative risk-taking. A participant whose narrative is used in one of the below threads began their interview saying “*DOCH was the school of my dreams and also the three toughest years of my life*” (T5, p. 1)

These following collective narrative vignettes about difficult experiences are not from the same few participants, rather these experiences were mentioned only a few times throughout all the interviews. Three types of problematic environment were mentioned by participants: being adjacent to difficulties experienced by another student, interpersonal difficulty with their primary discipline teacher, and difficulties attributed to all circus discipline teachers being male.

Several participants describe being adjacent to struggles experienced by other students. The incidents described by these four participants are not the same and range from assault to injury. In all cases the participants name inadequate response from the faculty as the reason they experienced instability in their educational environment.

*I experienced negative emotional and psychological challenges because of an incident which made it hard to know who to trust. It was a year of total chaos where I felt like DOCH didn't take responsibility to address the issues. DOCH needs more awareness that some people are going through bad times and that the teachers aren't the people*

*who should be dealing with it because it's not their job; they're not trained psychologists.*

*I saw teachers react with a total lack of understanding for the struggle that student was going through. Their response made it even harder. (Vignette: 4)*

Discipline classes are scheduled almost every day of the week during the normal academic year over the three-year programme. These are typically between one student and one teacher and last an hour or more. During these classes students learn not only technique but many of the psychological and emotional strategies to persevere through difficult physical activities when their bodies are sore or tired. They are also socialized into the teacher's beliefs about circus and the circus profession. Interpersonal struggles with teachers were received by students as negatively affecting their educational experience, but also as examples of institutional gaps. Unsupportive experiences with teachers were described as being unsupported by DOCH, where individuals were perceived as extensions of the institution.

*Sometimes I felt very supported to explore and develop because the environment is very safe. Yet classes were also a constant struggle because I didn't get on well with my coach. I wasted time trying to avoid conflict. It negatively affected my psychological and technical development because I felt punished for voicing my needs. Eventually I felt the school was working against me. It was difficult to be positive. At the end, I was happy that I succeeded in doing what I came to do, even while being told that I was nothing by the school, constantly being told I wasn't doing what they asked me to do. (Vignette: 3)*

A few participants also noticed interpersonal problems between staff members, or faculty culture. Dissimilarly from the experience of being adjacent to student distress seen above, these participants did not feel overly affected or involved.

*There were also some frustrating issues which I believe should not be a problem in universities these days. For instance, all the teachers at the circus are men. We felt it would be cool to have more women in the building. I had a good vibe with all of them, all the teachers were helpful when I went through difficult times, but there was a strange competitive atmosphere. When I spoke up, I felt heard by some, but for others these were deep traditions that weren't seen as problems. They would say "but this is how it works here" instead of listening to why it was uncomfortable. (Vignette: 3)*

Sweden is one of the most egalitarian countries in Europe, boasting equality in domestic, public, and political spheres. The majority of students and staff at the University College of Dance at the time were female. Within these bubbles, the smaller bubble of circus practice was heavily male, at times to the near exclusion of female staff or students. This aligns with statistics showing that until recently, approximately 70% of circus professionals are men (Funk, 2018). Participant critiques of a hyper-masculinized learning environment – especially during the cohort with only one female student – come from a desire to have a learning environment that is differently balanced. Whereas the addition of teachers of other genders would necessarily expand the models and voices in circus learning, it is problematic to assume that a different gender presumes different approaches to circus, pedagogy, or curriculum. As with other critiques of the learning environment, the underlying complaint must be separated from the presumed cause if effective resolutions are to be identified.

The participants did not report feeling that these difficult situations prevented them from developing creatively. In some cases, participants explicitly tied their environmental challenges to feeling that they developed creatively in spite of their school experience, where others describe moments of being supported and parallel moments of difficulty.



### ***Null Curriculum: Absence of...***

Situated in professional experiences, many participants described content essential to their current practice which they believe was missing from their education. In the shifting landscape of professional circus, identification of the null curriculum from contemporary artists has the potential to be invaluable. Yet in every case where a participant pointed to inadequate content, another emphasized the value of that same content. Finding these themes, I returned to verify if multiple participants expressing a similar experience attended DOCH during the same years; instead, I found oppositional statements within the same cohorts.

*We had career management in the last term which wasn't helpful to me. I learned more after school. There's a big difference between what you learn in school and the real work. (Vignette: 5)*

*We had some career management where we students focused on what was relevant for our goals. I practiced writing applications. I was one of the few that did that. I hated it, but I'm happy now that I did because that's my life at the moment! Many of the projects my cohort made started there. (Vignette: 4)*

Curriculum designers must use caution: there will always be a null curriculum for not everything can be taught within the space and time allotted to higher education. Nor should a programme expect to teach every skill used in professional life. Rather, we must be clear and confident in the specific aims of our programme and how the three curricula align with our stated priorities.

### **DOCH Didn't Teach Creativity.**

I discovered a set of contradictory statements from participants where they express that on one hand creativity cannot be taught/learned in school, yet on the other hand the same

participant describes learning tools and processes they continue to use in their professional creative life. The following three examples show how participants describe their beliefs that school didn't teach creativity, yet simultaneously describe learning creativity. In this section, these are shown as succinct examples of where participants perceive content is missing.

*The school didn't teach creativity in a way that I could learn, maybe it didn't teach creativity at all. I felt my creativity decreased over the education. ... I also learned a lot of skills which serve my creative process now, so it's happening even if it didn't happen during school. (T2, p. 9-10)*

*The programme itself isn't set up for students to be creative because it is mostly focused on technique. ... DOCH taught me the method I use in my work today. I learned to arrive at the technique I do now, which isn't the same as when I began. (T3, p. 6)*

*Creativity wasn't taught specifically at DOCH. ... DOCH changed my impression of circus. I realized circus is about creativity, not about skill. Or it's about both, in my opinion. (T4, p. 12)*

While describing personal acquisition of creative practices and tools through the education and a belief that creativity is a process, these participants paradoxically believe that university structures prohibit learning creativity. Participant beliefs that institutions prohibit learning creativity are further discussed below in the section on creative practice, in the sub-category about resistance as a factor in circus identity.

### ***Summary of Learning Creativity***

With such an emphasis on the lived curriculum and disassociation from the formal curricular structure, it is unsurprising that participant memories of their learning experiences blur the implicit and explicit curricula. Recounting their experiences at DOCH, participants interwove these three categories, reminding us that the experience of all three is simultaneous, entangled, and co-constructive. In describing what they have unlearned from the distance of their professions, these narratives also highlight the difference between the explicitly physical content of learning disciplinary techniques and the culture within which those techniques are being valued and evaluated.

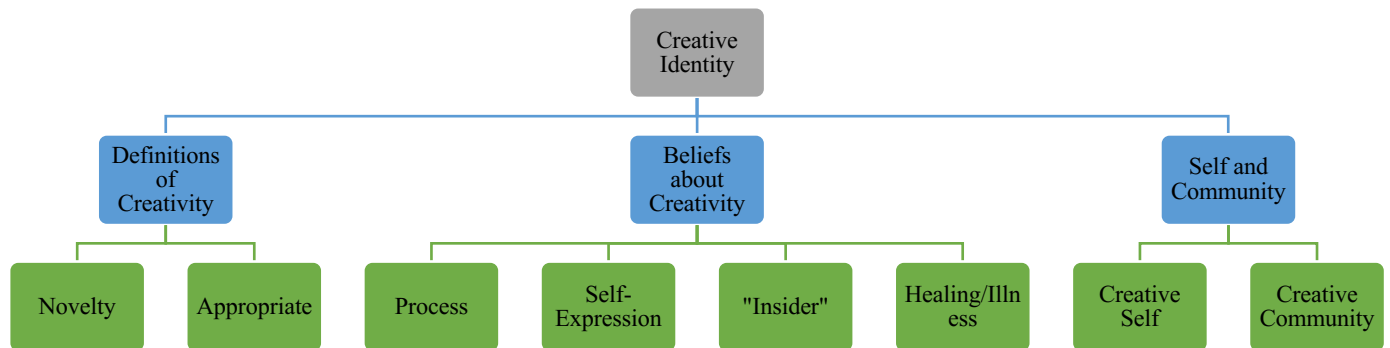
In this section I have described the curriculum of the DOCH circus BA in the context of circus higher education needs and included participant memories of Eisner's three types of curricula (1979/2002). Participant descriptions blur explicit, implicit, and null curricula. Further, these descriptions reveal a disassociation between the lived experiences associated to learning circus-pertinent skills and the formal course containers documented in syllabi. Participant expectations of their learning experience align with initiation into communities of practice rather than following a higher-education trajectory of independent study. Further details of the connections between these three curricula and professional work will be addressed in the section below on creative practices within the circus profession.

### **Creative Identity**

The category 'Creative identity' is one of three categories that makes the theory of applied circus creativity (see Figure 7, p. 163). It is made of three sub-categories, each of which is collects together groups of themes.

**Figure 6**

*Creative identity theme with sub-categories*



To answer the research questions, participants were asked for their own definition of creativity, whether they considered themselves to be creative, and if they believed other people in their DOCH cohort were creative. Through the process of open and axial coding, category formation revealed that participant *beliefs* about creativity were dominant influences over their perception of whether creativity could be learned within an institutional programme, and therefore whether they believed they themselves or others in their cohort had learned creative practices at DOCH. Identifying the differences between participant definitions of creativity and their beliefs about creativity proved key to perceptions of how creativity is taught or learned.

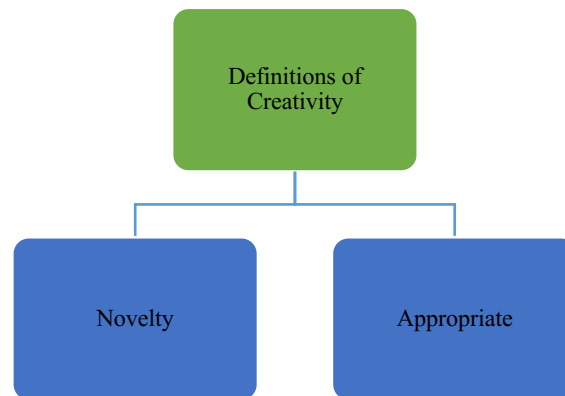
In this section I present examples of participant descriptions related to the three categories contributing to this theme: 1) definitions of creativity, 2) beliefs about creativity, and 3) self and community, each of which in turn consists of subcategories (Figure 6: Creative identity theme with sub-categories). The sections of text which appear below are drawn from throughout the interview transcripts; descriptions of creativity were not exclusively answers to the directed question in the interview protocol.

## ***Definitions of Creativity***

The category ‘definitions of creativity,’ made of two sub-categories, is itself one of three categories creating the larger category of ‘Creative identity,’ which in turn is one of the three categories that make up the theory of applied circus creativity (see Figure 7, p. 163)).

**Figure 9**

*Category: definitions of creativity with sub-categories*



Two working definitions of creativity by respected researchers outline the terms used to investigate alignment between formal and participant definitions. Sawyer defines creativity as “the generation of a product that is judged to be novel and also to be appropriate, useful, or valuable by a suitably knowledgeable social group” (2012, p. 8). Amabile’s definition is similarly described methodologically as “the production of ideas that are not only novel – different from previous ideas in some way – but also appropriate: useful, valuable, correct, or somehow fitting to the purpose that the individual creator intends” (2018, p. 1).

To align with the formal definition of creativity, I “asked” the transcripts if circus professionals include the concepts of ‘novelty/newness’ and ‘appropriate/useful/valuable’ as integral to their understanding of creativity by using these as codes for the text (Figure 9: Category: definitions of creativity with sub-categories). I tracked how many interviewees directly mentioned each concept, while also noting which of the participants did *not* mention the

concept in question. Looking for gaps between the literature and the participant definitions helped me see if the literature definitions resonated with the majority of participants.

### **Creativity is “Novel – Different from Previous Ideas.”**

Seven of 12 interviewees evoked novelty/newness when defining creativity. The following are all participant definitions of creativity that included concepts of newness, originality, and difference.

*Creativity starts with not taking the same path every day to get to the toilet, instead finding a different way around in creat[ive] ...be creative! (T2, p. 8)*

*Putting up new problems or finding new problems. (T3, p. 7)*

*...do something over and over and over again until you get to something else. (...) Maybe creativity is also to dare to step into new worlds. (T5, p. 12)*

*When you try to do something and not try to reproduce. ... you try to find new ways to achieve, or capture... to achieve something. (...) find a new way than what you were just doing all the time. (T8, p. 7)*

*It's the ability to create something new from what you have at the moment. To create something new from what you're given. (T9, p. 7)*

*You have this thing, you want to do this thing, but how do you do it? ... I believe this is where the originality and the new things and the ground-breaking things [come from].*

*(...) somehow through the process of solving the problems, because you're you, it's gonna be different. It's going to end differently.* (T10, p. 14)

*To dare to do something in a way it hasn't been done before.* (T11, p. 8)

A slight majority of participants associate creativity with developing something new. Most explicitly use the word “new” while a few imply newness through descriptions of finding something different than their habitual or prescribed patterns, including “not reproducing,” “finding something original,” and “questioning habits.”

**Creativity is “Appropriate: Useful, Valuable, Correct, or Somehow Fitting to the Purpose that the Individual Creator Intends.”**

In STEM fields, an appropriate solution accounts for the type of solution needed given the context, resources, existing technology, laws of physics, etc. In arts, while there are many time-, resource-, and space-specific constraints, appropriateness is generally understood to be related to the artist’s intention as they are the only one who can accurately judge if the art ‘result’ has achieved the (time/space/budget/aesthetic/symbolic/etc.) intention (Beghetto, 2010; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). I added the code “Creativity is appropriate to context” to text segments where participants describe creativity in direct relationship to the artist’s intention and/or the specific context. The following six participants included “appropriateness” in their definitions of creativity. I have added additional comments in parentheses clarifying how I interpreted the context to which the creation is appropriate.

*(...) choosing the course of action— without the influence, or minimizing the influence— of habit or convention from society or education.* (appropriate to creator intention, T1, p. 9)

*Finding ways to express yourself that suits yourself. (appropriate to creator intention, T4, p. 11)*

*For example: to reach the top of your pole, find a new way than what you were just doing all the time. (appropriate to creator intention, T8, p. 7)*

*To create something new from what you're given. It's so situational. (appropriate to context, T9, p. 8)*

*To me, it's about having an idea, or having a picture of something you want... and then you adapt it. You adapt it to the context in which you evolve. This context is something that you want to fix, that you're going to decide: this idea can only exist in this context. So, then you're going to set the context, but you're going to make this idea live there. (appropriate to creator intention and context, T10, p. 14)*

*To dare to do something ...your own way. (appropriate to creator intention, T11, p. 8)*

A fundamental part of creativity is usefulness or applicability to a purpose. These definitions link a set of constraints to the process of creativity, for instance having an idea and then finding a way to bring it into reality, or the imposition of a task (climbing a pole, using two sticks, getting to the toilet).

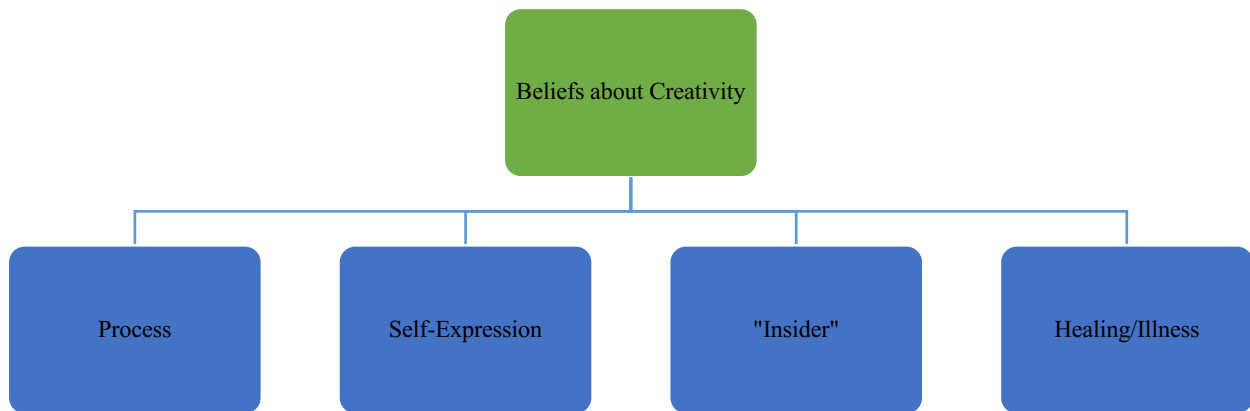


### ***Beliefs About Creativity***

The category ‘beliefs about creativity’ is made of four sub-categories. It is one of three categories creating the larger category of ‘Creative identity,’ which in turn is one of the three categories that make up the theory of applied circus creativity (see Figure 7, p. 163).

**Figure 5**

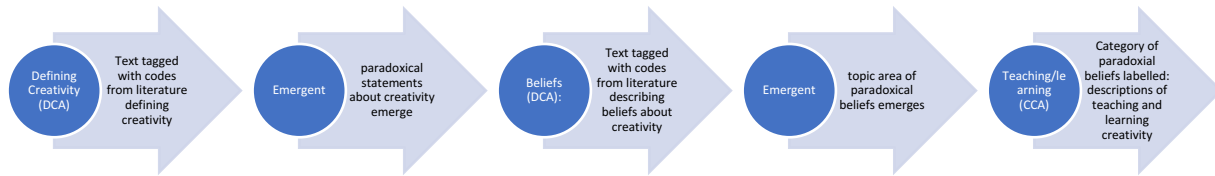
*Category: beliefs about creativity with sub-categories*



While analyzing the data, contradictory statements by participants led me to consider if they were holding beliefs about the nature of creativity (or creative people) that contradicted their own definitions and experiences (Figure 4: Process of analysis). Returning to literature about Western cultural beliefs led me to concepts which resonated with the transcript texts and provided a set of code names derived from common assumptions about creativity. In the topic area of ‘definitions about creativity,’ predetermined code names were applied to transcript text.

**Figure 4**

*Process of analysis leading to 'beliefs about creativity' category*



Sawyer provides two helpful lists of beliefs about creativity. The first is a set of 10 Western cultural beliefs about creativity (Figure 10: Ten general beliefs about creativity), and the second is a more focused set of four beliefs, which he explores in the context of investigating learning outcomes in arts schools (Table 2: Adapted summary of four beliefs). Summarized in the tables below, bold text highlights the beliefs described by the participants in this study.

**Figure 10**

*Ten general beliefs about creativity in Western cultures (adapted from Sawyer, 2012, pp. 12-14).*

1. The essence of creativity is the moment of **insight**.
2. Creative ideas emerge mysteriously from the unconscious.
3. Creativity is more likely when you **reject convention**.
4. Creative contributions are more likely to come from an outsider than an expert.
5. People are more creative when they're **alone**.
6. Creative ideas are ahead of their time.
7. Creativity is a **personality trait**.
8. Creativity is based in the right brain.
9. Creativity and **mental illness** are connected.
10. Creativity is a healing, **life-affirming activity**.

The second set of beliefs comes from a study Sawyer (2018) conducted to determine if creativity was included in the learning outcomes and pedagogical processes of art and design schools. The research sought to identify whether the educators saw creativity through any of the following four lenses, and if so, how that affected their teaching practice and expectations for their students.

**Figure 11:**

*Adapted summary of four beliefs about creativity in arts schools (Sawyer, 2018).*

- 1) Creativity is a **personality trait**. It is innate, fixed, a potential that can be released through development of field knowledge, including techniques of the medium and context for the domain.
- 2) Creativity comes from unburdened **self-expression**. We all have creativity in our subconscious which can be released by removing the blocks we've learned in the socialization process through personal development.
- 3) Creativity is a flash of **insight**. It is unpredictable and sudden. We must learn the techniques of our practice in order to apply our insight to our medium and practice idea recognition while waiting for inspiration.
- 4) Creativity is the result of a **process**. It is a practice of small frequent steps and re-orientations towards a goal, which includes navigating constraints, developing knowledge of techniques and context, and following through on long-term projects where time enables ameliorated alignment between vision and outcome.

The most common descriptions of creativity by participants in this study were those that included references to a process (trying, failing, returning to ideas, receiving feedback from

others with the aim of ameliorating an idea), and that creativity comes from expressing the self through an artistic proposition. In this section I will first describe the predominant beliefs about creativity expressed by participants with examples from the transcript text, and then present examples of paradoxical statements where participants' beliefs and definitions of creativity are not aligned.

**Belief: Creativity is the Result of a Process.**

All participants described elements of a creative process that is iterative, includes recovering from failures, and that they learned aspects of process during their DOCH education. In this category I included participant statements on the importance of trying and failing. Where participants describe trying, receiving feedback, re-orienting and trying again they are naming the benefits of a cyclic, iterative process.

*Creativity is To Try.*

*We got a lot of weird redovisnings assignments, and we had to learn to make mistakes and make a fool ourselves in front of people. At the time I was super pissed off, because, like, "do a piece, and it should be with your discipline, but you're not allowed to use any equipment, only the floor," and you're like, "that's fuckin' hard." You try something, but it's shit to look at. Because it's internal work. Then it's presented every Friday. But I'm very happy I took advantage of trying shit out and failing in school, because it was so good to just try whatever, explore ideas and make it interesting. Maybe it fucks up, but it's okay. It was really good to be in front of people in that safe environment. (T9, p. 7)*

*What is creativity. Creativity is ... to try, to try out. That's what's creativity. And the really creative people of our century are not scared to fail because they have failed and they continue on, they will continue to fail. And it's great to fail. (T12, p. 12)*

*The research was an experience. I'd never before put so much time into one research, nor after either. The first time we tried it out, I didn't come up with anything good, so I spent a lot of hours researching this not-so-great thing I wasn't interested in. The second time was very nice in terms of developing creativity. I understood what it was about, and that I had to actually choose something interesting. The whole methodology aspect, seeing it from many sides, was nice. Normally I wouldn't investigate just one thing. But I just did a huge research project about that one idea. It was very fun. I found all kinds of philosophical things about loops and music, my discipline, and my apparatus. (T8, p. 8)*

These descriptions of the importance of trying and failing, over short and extended time periods, indicate a belief from these participants that creativity is not a sudden 'Eureka!' moment but rather ongoing work that includes dead-ends and mistakes on the path towards a final result.

#### *More Creative When Alone.*

A Western Cultural belief about creativity which participants describe as part of their creative "Process" is the relationship between independent time and creative output. Participants seem to evoke simultaneously the belief (or experience) that "People are more creative when they're alone" in conjunction with the time needed for exploration of an idea. I connect this belief to 'Process' because Sawyer (2018) also clearly demonstrates that time to work with and through an idea, to return and re-work failures, is essential for learning creative process in arts schools. This belief manifested in three different types of narratives. The first narrative describes

positive experiences with the education where independent time contributed to creative development.

*In school it's good behaviour to try things and be bad at them to find out how you work. We were given a lot of space to investigate our own path. We received many constructive creative challenges in class, then used that material for the three or four weeks until we had another teacher. In the artistic research project I learned to develop an idea into something concrete, which is a tool I still use today, from starting with a question, developing it over time, then presenting. It was a lot of independent time, a lot of hours into one project, which I'd not done before. I chose something interesting and worked towards it, learned about methods and seeing it from many different sides. (Vignette: 9)*

The second narrative vignette shares the same beliefs about independent time as an essential ingredient of the creative process through the lens of what they felt was missing from their educational experience. While separated into these themes to highlight the experiences of participant relationship to independent work, aspects of these narratives are drawn from the same transcripts meaning that the experiences were not mutually exclusive.

*We had diverse teaching in the afternoons, but not much time to integrate those ideas. It takes huge effort and energy to escape the box created for you. Not many people left their boxes or dared to fight for their creative voice. It's hard in only three years to find enough energy, time, and space for developing technique and artistically-looking-for-something-different. To be creative you have to search, and we didn't do that much. Training independently is important for creativity so you don't forget who you are during all the learning, but it's hard to have energy for that. I liked working alone on creative ideas, like with Ivar when we created presentations inspired by art. (Vignette: 9)*

A third way this belief surfaced was in descriptions of the COVID-19 pandemic. Here, sudden access to time is received as a hidden gem among the destabilizations. Even while undergoing threats to livelihood and identity, these participants recognized the luxury of time to create and explore new directions.

*I believe I'm quite creative, but it's hard to keep creating new things when I work all the time. When I developed a solo show it was refreshing to set aside time for finding new things. But even new things are not always really deep creativity. Being creative is a luxury of time. During COVID I've been frustrated by so many cancelations, but overall I'm quite fortunate. I've had time to write, go deeper into my artistic thinking, build material, develop performances. Time is a luxury. (Vignette: 9)*

An emphasis on process rather than outcome is one of the pedagogical measures that supports the development of a sustainable creative practice. Another belief, that creativity comes from the self, points towards how an artist knows when they have arrived at the result by following their own internal compass.

### **Belief: Creativity Comes from Unburdened Self-Expression.**

Most participants describe self-expression as the fuel for their process. The circus participants speak about using knowledge of themselves, and questioning their own habits and conventions, as the means by which they guide their creation process. Finding ways to express their artistic, aesthetic selves by receiving provocation from multiple sources, disciplines and people is the path to manifesting their unique vision. There are four different distinct ways that participants described self-expression as an important aspect to developing and asserting their creative voice: 1) that it arises from the unique creative core in every human, 2) the experience of freedom to prioritize self-expression, 3) choosing to reject conventions in favor of one's own

expression, and 4) being nourished by a safe environment in which to explore self-expression.<sup>15</sup>

These beliefs indicate that several of Sawyer's (2012, 2018) reported Western beliefs may in fact be subsets of the experience shared by these participants that in order to be creative, one must express one's core self (innate/personality trait) by finding freedom from pre-existing patterns (rejecting convention), which is fostered in an environment safe from destructive critique (process).

*Creative Core: Every Human is Creative.*

Several participants expressed the belief that all humans are creative and have creative potential, but the way they are educated affects their creative expression. The following examples describe creativity as interwoven with personhood; a core revealed through the creative process.

*Sometimes I think either you have [creativity] or not. But it's not creativity exactly, because everybody's creative ... rather, it's the capability of transforming your creativity into something that other people can experience. (T11, p. 9)*

*I think every human being is creative. Afterwards, it depends on your education and the way you're brought up whether you can open this creativity. Since I was a kid I've seen a*

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<sup>15</sup> None of the participants included consideration of the social constructs that circumscribe *who* is permitted access to creative freedom. This demonstrates that participants were speaking from places of situated privilege enabling them to not include barriers to creativity imposed by race or gender. Although these participants speak about creativity being fostered through education and safe spaces for expression, history shows that education alone has not effected the social changes needed to assure safe and free creative expression for all races, genders and social classes. It is further recognized by this author that including this content in a footnote participates in a 'reification' of formal writing that relegates discourses critiquing socio-cultural hierarchies to the margins rather than centralizing the way that pervasive and structural prejudices predicate the stories and experiences considered to be universally relevant. Research into the way circus has received and reproduced socio-cultural prejudices is necessary and urgent, especially from scholars with the attendant critical and scholarly expertise.



*lot of art, so my parents opened creativity for me. I think I'm really lucky, actually, to swim into creativity. I've made my career around that. (T12, p. 12)*

#### *Freedom AND Rejecting Conventions.*

Creativity rooted in self-expression was also evoked when participants described the feeling of freedom to explore their own unique vision, which included rejecting conventions. Participants describe both breaking with general convention and specifically breaking their own habits.

*And this stays with me throughout all the work I do, how to be free and how to communicate freedom instead of only trying to impress the audience with my tricks, it's more like how to communicate something with what I do. (T6, p. 7)*

*For me, creativity is the freedom when you create things. It can be many many things, but it's more focused on your feeling than the results. (T7, p. 5)*

*Creativity starts with not taking the same path in your house every day, instead finding a different way. To be creative in handling normal basic things. You start creativity on a very tiny level, then it's super individual and diverse. The way I might want to be creative is maybe completely different from someone else. And their creativity doesn't really suit me, and I'm like, "Oh, my God, what is that!?" That's a very hard question. It's very broad. I would say it's a very individual definition of "what is creativity." (T2, p. 8)*

*Creativity is when you try to not reproduce. I guess it's obvious: you create something – it's in the word creativity - but you, you try to find new ways to capture... to achieve something. For example: to reach the top, find a new way other than what you do all the time. I think it's hard to see if there was a lot of creative work put into something or not. It's a lot of this: trying to explore, mixing things, trying to have an open mind. (T8, p. 7)*

#### *A Safe Environment for the Weird Stuff.*

Participants indicated that a constructive environment is an essential component for fostering or suppressing pursuit of one's own creative voice. Self-expression is also about feeling safe to express oneself, freedom from judgement and even to be appreciated for the unique and unusual.

*When I got to school, the people in DOCH, not the teachers but the people, are so accepting. They pick up on your traits that are weird and they think those things so fascinating and brilliant that, like, creativity becomes yourself rather than something you're trying to hide. I feel being creative is also the way you decide to hold yourself and live. (T4, p. 11)*

*As a whole, I did feel like the school was giving me the safety of saying, "Go for the weird stuff, don't let anyone else tell you that your weird stuff is not relevant, because it is, because it's yours, and you have the right to express this and you should. And here are the tools to do it." I would say this was pretty good. (T10, p. 13)*

Although Sawyer (2018) concludes that no evidence emerged to indicate self-expression is an important pathway to creativity, I find nothing contradictory about discovering one's

artistic voice through unfolding discovery of oneself. The definition Sawyer (2018) uses of ‘Self-Expression’ functionally precludes its usefulness as a means of understanding creative process. He aligns the belief that creativity is a form of self-expression with Romanticism, the Freudian subconscious and creativity self-help guides. Sawyer (2018) differentiates between the pedagogies that foster learning the creative process— which consist of dialogically scaffolded, judiciously constrained, long-term tasks focused on process not product wherein techniques, context and creative voice are concurrently acquired – and those which would reveal a belief that creativity comes from unburdened self-expression. His evidence is excerpts from professors rejecting the notion of creativity as a “mystical thing” and guiding their students towards “deliberate creativity” rather than waiting for insight. Yet the ‘Insight’ belief about creativity is a separate category. By aligning ‘self-expression’ with concepts of spontaneous generation and mystical thinking, Sawyer misses the opportunity to see the generative motor of pairing creative self-expression with creative process. Perhaps interviews with professors focusing on pedagogical methods obscured the necessity of self-expression in the development of artistic voice. As described by the participants in this study, self-expression IS mystical in that it is the unique. Their experiential descriptions of discovering and nourishing their creative voice resonate with Martha Graham’s assertion that

There is a vitality, a life force, a quickening that is translated through you into action, and there is only one of you in all time, this expression is unique, and if you block it, it will never exist through any other medium; and be lost. (De Mille, 1991, p. 264)

For these circus creators, each artist necessarily brings their own self into creative process and creative outcomes. Their self-expression is both fuel and compass guiding them towards the result. Running parallel with the belief that their own selves are essential to creative expression,

participants also asserted the importance of domain knowledge towards effecting a truly creative offering.

### **Creative Contributions are More Likely from an Insider.**

A common myth about highly creative ideas is that they come from outsiders able to offer a perspective unavailable to those educated within the field and familiar with its conventions (Sawyer 2012). Significantly, participants in this study expressed the opposite view, describing the importance of technique in their discipline for the creative process.

*In the beginning, no matter how creative they are, everyone will do the same with a drum until they've taken a thousand classes and studied for a long time. Then they can start to be creative because there's a whole language. There's so much old knowledge. It doesn't matter if my three-year-old is the most creative person, when he drums, he will still just do boom, boom, boom, because he doesn't know what he's doing. (T8, p. 7-8)*

*In circus, some are very creative, and some are very technical, and some are both. But you can't go the creative way without technique. Some people go "artistic" because they lack technique, but it's rare they come up with cool things. To be creative, you need to have a big library and technique to be free. In juggling, you need to do basic patterns with good technique, then after you can be creative because you have the fundamentals down. Whereas if I teach you three balls, it's hard to be creative from day one. (T9, p. 8)*

This reinforces the relevance of Domain Specific theories of creativity, underscoring that training within a domain is more likely to predict creativity within that domain because training enables access to the existing knowledge pool and the results of creative process are recognizable by the gatekeepers of that domain (Baer, 2015). Participant recognition that creativity is

expressed through and with technique indicates how the embodied repetition of practice influences manifestation of a creative idea.

### **Other Beliefs: Creativity as Healing or Illness.**

Sawyer (2012) lists several beliefs about creativity that he claims are common to Western cultures which did not appear in any of the participant's descriptions. None of the participants referenced beliefs that creative ideas are before their time, that they originate from the right brain nor that they arrive through a mystical subconscious process. Few of the participants expressed mystical or maladaptive beliefs about creativity. Western culture developed a Romance-era mythology of the genius-as-madman which has become a bias that highly creative people are likely to be mentally ill, ipso facto mentally ill or socially maladaptive persons are more likely to be creative. There is little to no scientific evidence for this particular belief – in fact while Csikszentmihalyi (1996/2013) shows highly creative people have some tendency towards having an outsider perspective on society, their ability to generate creative ideas and products relies on their ability to plan and execute consistently over long periods of time. Only one participant alludes to a belief that people who are maladapted to society are more creative than others:

*My friend posts a new sequence every second day, like the result of a creative challenge he gave himself. But he doesn't ever work. He has been very unlucky with work. But he's very happy, so it's all good. He has the time to create, so he creates a lot. (T9, p. 8)*

No other participant explicitly links high creativity in exchange for professional success. At the other extreme, one participant espoused a more mystical description that resonated with the belief that “Creativity is a healing, life-affirming activity”:

*Creativity is freedom, creativity is chaos, creativity is cosmos, it's what makes you step forward and try something. I think creativity and imagination are the soul of our society today and it's been forgotten. (T12, p. 12)*

Although not one of Sawyer's explicitly stated beliefs, one participant indicated their belief that either someone is creative or not.

*I don't know if creativity is something you can teach, to be honest. It's a bit hard what I said because it's something I've been thinking about not so long ago. Sometimes I think either you have it or not. (T11, p. 9)*

Elsewhere in the interview, this same participant also spoke about the process of learning to be creative and do creative work. This type of contradictory belief about whether creativity can be learned, while also describing having learned the creative process during school, is discussed more in the section below about resistance as a factor in circus identity.

These examples of how participant beliefs align with, or deviate from, the existing literature about creativity show that within the apprenticeship and profession of creative practice, the beliefs that hold most universally are those related to a central core from which creativity is generated (self-expression), and that creativity is an iterative process. Despite these beliefs, participants generally still describe their own creativity and that of their cohort in terms of whether it exists or not. From the above definitions, one might expect to hear descriptions of one's own creativity and that of others as an ongoing process - that a person works hard at being creative – rather than a binary status.

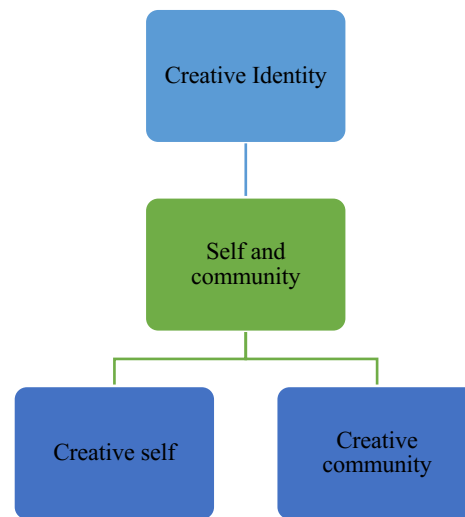
### ***Self and Community***

The category 'self and community' is one of three categories creating the larger category of 'Creative identity,' which in turn is one of the three categories that make up the theory of

applied circus creativity (see Figure 7, p. 163). ‘Self and community’ is made of two sub-categories.

## Figure 12

*Category: creative self and creative community*



Many creativity assessments have been developed to ascertain quantitative and comparable measures by which to understand the level of creativity among different types of populations. I strongly considered using validated tools to measure creativity, which would provide another perspective on the ostensibly objective level of creativity of each participant in comparison with their subjective impressions. Instead of charting participant responses within a creativity ‘test,’ I instead followed self-report (Kaufman, 2019) and peer-assessment (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010) techniques by asking them about their perception of their own creativity and that of their cohort. Kaufman (2019) demonstrates that creativity self-report tests are “not ideal, but better than you think,” and Hennessey’s (1994) Consensual Assessment Technique is a peer-based, domain-specific group assessment technique especially relevant in art fields. For the purposes of this research, what matters more than any ‘objective measure’ of creativity – which we have seen are contested and for which a validated measure of ‘circus creative activities’ has

not been developed – is the way these artists understand creativity (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010).

The interview questions were structured such that participants first were asked their definition of creativity, and then if members of their cohort were creative. Finally, they were asked about their own creativity. The former questions enabled the participant to establish their own beliefs in a general sense, and then to “test” those beliefs against their knowledge of their cohort. All clearly used their own definitions, as one participant stated, “*by my own definition, yes, I am creative*” (T1, p. 9). Participant beliefs about their own creativity and that of their cohort are followed by descriptions of more general beliefs about creativity using the four Belief categories with which Sawyer (2018) investigated arts education programs, with sub-categories drawn from Sawyer’s list of Ten Beliefs (2012).

### **Creative Self.**

Self-assessments regarding beliefs about creativity are included in the many assessments done to establish how individuals relate to their own creativity and the concept of creativity (Kaufman, 2019). Kaufman (2019) suggests that self-assessments can be especially helpful when investigating how people feel about their own creativity and creative practices. In order to retain the participant-centered description of learning and professional experiences, I did not include formulaic self-assessment tests of creativity or creative beliefs. Instead, I asked participants to describe beliefs about their own creativity and the creativity of other students to situate their curriculum descriptions within their own perceptions of their milieu. With these interview questions, I followed Kaufman’s idea that people practicing creativity can offer an assessment of their relationship to creativity.



Most of the participants felt they were creative to some extent. Seven of 12 answered “yes,” while two answered that they were “trying” or that it depended on the context. Three participants answered “no,” but these answers were all then tempered through further discourse. The answers did not show any gender bias in self-assessment of creativity, nor association with disciplinary specialty or graduation year.

*Yes, but when I think too much about the result I get stuck. Or when I'm too much in my head and judging everything I do, I feel I'm losing the creativity a bit. But yes, I see myself as a creative person. (T7, p. 5)*

*I consider myself to be very stubborn and curious. But I don't consider myself to be very creative. I think I just fail a lot. I often try to do things, then I fail, and then it becomes something else. I know that many people consider me to be creative. But I don't actually find myself very creative. I find most people are much more creative than me. I think I'm just being more stubborn somehow, and the stubbornness becomes creativity because if I'm curious about something, then I follow that until I find something. (T6, p. 8)*

*I guess no, I'm not always creative, but I think it's something I really fight for. Yeah, I should, dare to say that I think I'm creative. (T5, p. 11)*

Several participants responded negatively to the question “do you consider yourself creative”? I drew together their descriptions of the feelings of not being creative into a single vignette to highlight the resonating tensions.

*Do I have a creative voice or not? I feel like I don't. I consider myself curious about finding it out. I'm not always creative, but I think it's something that we fight for too. I'm*

*trying, I'm trying hard. I'm very creative compared with my primary school peers. But then I compare myself to certain people in the circus community, or in in the world in general, then I'm the most basic, not-creative person. It depends... Yeah. Yes, I think I'm creative. But I'm insecure and shy about it. I'm afraid of being judged. I'm trying.*

(Vignette: 5)

These participants seemed more hesitant to claim the word ‘creative’ for personal reasons than due to an actual lack of engagement with idea-generation and problem solving. Their descriptions indicate active engagement in creative working methods such as perseverance, divergent and convergent thinking, and problem-generation. While they might not name themselves as creative, it is apparent that they use the creative method to approach their work from their descriptions of problem-generation/problem-solving behaviors, which are definitionally creative.

### **Creative Community.**

The validity of asking the participants to assess the creativity of their cohort is drawn from Hennessey and Amabile’s (2010) Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT). At higher education and professional levels, the CAT is recognized as the most valid approach for determining creativity within a field (Baer & McKool, 2009; Hennessey, 1994; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). One reason that CAT is considered so effective for assessment is that it does not rely on a foundational domain-general or -specificity theory: regardless of the theoretical construct within which the creativity is understood, experts in the field would be best at assessing (Baer & McKool, 2009). Because the CAT is most effective at assessing comparative creativity within a specific group (usually artistic works of a certain niche category), it is entirely appropriate to consider participant responses as an adequately informed litmus test

of the proportional creativity within their cohort group. This is, of course, especially true for the cohort groups which had multiple participants interviewed for this research.

The answers did not show any gender in assessment of peer creativity, nor association with graduation year. Half of the participants completely agreed that the members of their cohort were creative. The other half of participants felt they could not say the group was creative. Instead, these six participants either felt that some members of the cohort were creative, or that overall, the cohort was more invested in developing circus discipline techniques than creative approaches to performance. Some participants seemed especially critical of creativity in their peers and were more likely to answer that their peers ‘tried’ to be creative, or that they were more ‘technical’ than creative. Below is presented an example of each of these types of answers.

*Some. The particularly creative ones were creative from the beginning. Occasionally someone unexpected had a flash of brilliance. There was an average spread of creativity in our class compared to society in general. (T1, p. 9)*

*I think what happened after school is incredible. Four companies started. Some of us are still using material we started working on in school. Some are maybe not circus artists anymore, but whatever they are, they’re really creative. They bring the creativity they learned in school in what they do today. (T12, p. 12)*

*In general, during school time, we were more technical all of us. I saw the class that just graduated last year, and I was like, “wow, they're really creative.” They are very different from my class. Even when they arrived they were so creative in what they do, and so confident. My class was more technical. (T2, p. 9)*

The answers are relevant in the context of the cohort, not necessarily as an expression of creativity within the discipline. These responses are resonant with CAT, where a panel of field experts assess the creativity of a product or project in that domain (Baer & McKool, 2009; Hennessey, 1994; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Sawyer, 2012). Although experts in their own technical discipline, despite attending circus education for many years, these participants are not likely experts in the niche fields of each other's primary disciplines – their histories, contemporary expressions and nuances across different countries and performances. However, they do form part of the 'expert panel' that could evaluate creativity levels within their own cohort. In fact, the only potential members for such a panel would be peers in the same cohort and the teaching staff for the programme. None of these participant responses should not be interpreted as definitive regarding the creativity of cohort peers. However, standing further back, it is possible to get a sense of whether DOCH graduates consider others in their cohort creative, and what assessment criteria they are using to define creativity in fellow students. Broadly, the students in DOCH considered their peers to be creative in some or all situations, or working towards being creative. The caveat is the differentiation between 'creative' and 'technical,' as if the two cannot co-exist.

### ***Summary of Creative Identity***

The participant definitions include a strong overlap with formal definitions of creativity, but it is only a slight majority. This indicates that neither 'newness' nor 'appropriateness to context' are encompassing descriptions of creativity for these participants.

The types of 'newness' described in the above definitions can be connected with Pro-C and little-c levels of creativity. For the majority of interviewees, "newness" is about doing something different from their usual habits rather than aiming towards creating something new in

their domain which would transform their discipline or field. Compare the broad, domain-facing (Pro-C) description “*in a way it hasn’t been done before*” with the more local, personal (little-c) descriptions of: “*from what you’re given*,” “*a new way than what you were just doing all the time*,” and “*stuck with my own ideas*.” Additionally, this is borne out by the larger quotation blocks where creativity is described in very personal ways. Personal is also achievable: it is a much healthier mindset for an artist to perceive success as finding a new pathway for themselves than it is to set out success as only Big-C creative achievements.

“Appropriateness” is a more straightforward concept for, say, an engineering problem than for an artistic proposition. An original idea that does not solve the engineering problem cannot be seen as properly ‘creative,’ while original artistic ideas often generate new artistic propositions for future projects when not applicable for the current context. Amabile’s (2018) definition that creative outcomes must “fit the purpose the creator intends” seems that it should describe evaluation of circus creators. If we begin with the ‘product,’ the end of the process – the performance – and we ask if this product is framed within the creator’s intentions, then yes, this definition is accurate – at the stage of the final product. The participants who described creativity as context-relevant situated their creative process in a dialogic exchange between creator and environment.

The slight majority of participants who described creativity in alignment with research literature leaves open the question of whether it accurately describes the experience of creativity for circus professionals. However, these very personal definitions might contribute to the longevity of artistic practice and be related to adaptive expertise potential; participants describe constantly assessing habits to query them for limitations might predicate a readiness to apply new knowledge in non-familiar situations.

These participants revealed many beliefs about how to recognize creativity and how it is learned. If creativity is a moment of insight, then of course it cannot be measured or evaluated. A belief that creativity is a trait hinders appreciation of the methodological benefits of education. If creativity is a trait, it cannot be taught, whereas if creativity is a method, it can be taught intradisciplinary, as in DOCH and Sawyer's design schools (2018).

All participants indicated beliefs about, and descriptions of, creativity being developed through process work. This shows that regardless of their statements about whether creativity is taught by schools, they demonstrate that the process of creativity can be learned, therefore that creativity can be taught. Additionally, by naming aspects of creative process they learned at DOCH, they indicate that attending the BA education programme affected their approach to creative process and that they learned more about professional creativity through their education at DOCH. These participants from different years during the programme experienced curricula that meets best practices for creative development. One reason they may not have felt a change in creativity could be attributed to another set of beliefs about 'creativity.' Belief that creativity is a personality trait, or results from insight (Sawyer, 2012) may mean they do not closely associate the process of creativity with the identifier of being creative. The curricular elements they name as part of recognizing their creative journey are described in the next section.

Participant responses can be considered 'valid' in the sense that they accurately represent the beliefs of participants about their own relationship to creativity. Within these responses, the participants raise essential questions about how creativity is understood, how it shifts with context, and the work needed to develop creative practice. None of the participants rejected these questions. Rather, all participants offered a response about their own level of creativity and that

of their peers, which means they felt able to engage with the idea. This *should* be true of working artists – what a relief that it is.

In this section I described participant definitions of, and beliefs about, creativity, including beliefs about their own creativity and that of their cohort. Through comparison with existing definitions of creativity in research literature, these findings show that participants include elements from the formal definition such as newness, originality and appropriateness while also expanding the definition to be more inclusive of method (creative process and approach) rather than focused on a final outcome (product). All participants believe that creativity is a process, and that self-expression is integral to that process.

### **Creative Practice**

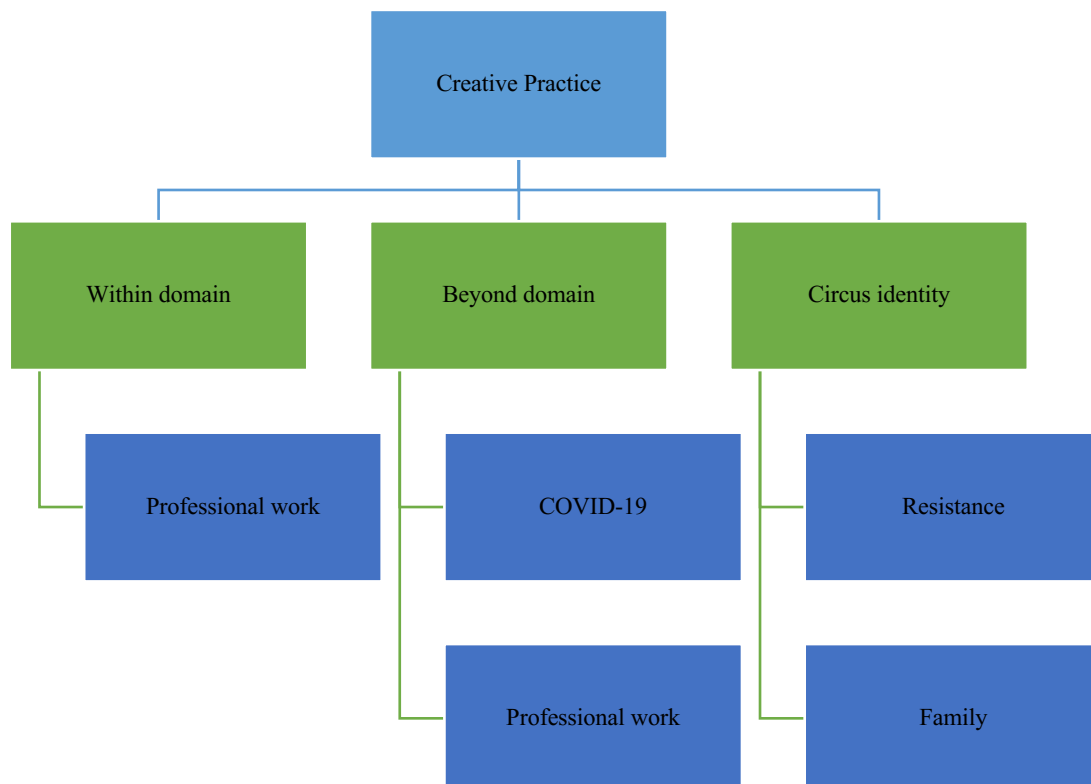
The category ‘Creative practice’ is one of three categories that makes the theory of applied circus creativity (see Figure 7, p. 163). It is made of three sub-categories, each of which is collects together groups of themes.

All participants described examples of creative process and practice in during their education, in their professional lives, and in navigating the global COVID-19 pandemic which occurred during the course of this research. At first, I separated the categories into creative practices during DOCH and during professional practice. It became apparent through the course of data analysis that, in fact, the different examples made up a larger category which I have called “creative practice” because apprenticeship of the creative process in school was so entangled with the practices described by participants in their professional work. Furthermore, naming the category ‘professional practice’ let me see that another category – circus identity - which had previously seemed separate, was informing how the participants conceived of creative practices within larger constraining systems of education, legislation, and community (Figure 13:

Category: creative practice with sub-categories). In this section I present examples from transcript text and narrative vignette to show the content of these categories. I furthermore situate these categories within creativity theory related to domain specificity and generality, which is then expanded upon in Chapter Six: Discussion.

**Figure 13**

*Category: creative practice with sub-categories*



### ***Within Domain***

The professional work of contemporary circus artists often, but not necessarily, is described by Pro-C, the ongoing practice of generating ideas and products within a field demanding artistic, creative, or design output (Kaufman & Beghetto, 2009). Simply the fact of being a circus performer does not necessitate using creativity, however. Performing the same act



over many years requires the skills of interpreting and communicating with an audience, but does not meet the criteria of being novel, high quality and context-appropriate solution.

In their professional work, all participants describe what is known as Pro-C, professional creativity, which is the kind of ongoing generative creativity used by artists in their artistic practice: constantly finding 'solutions' to the artistic problems posed by the intersection of vision, skill, and resources. Another way to understand this is that they all demonstrated domain-specific creativity, where the domain can be defined quite narrowly as their niche circus discipline specialty, or more broadly as all of the field-related contexts that arise in professional circus work, including the administration of companies, recovering from injuries, and navigating the complications of contract work. I include in this broad domain all of the topics we address in circus school, any content that is 'taught.'

### **Professional Work.**

One of the interview questions asked how the participants themselves connect their profession and their educational experiences. Many spoke about tools learned for developing creative work in educational experiences at DOCH which they continue to use in their professional work. The following is an extended meta-narrative representing the learning experiences and tools that helped develop the creative practice and identity of these artists.

*I learned that I offer something unique as an artist, which comes with a responsibility to defend my ideas. I learned to keep pursuing an idea, digging for what I want to say, even when no one gets it: If you don't get the funding you applied for, you have to stand for your idea but also understand what needs to be changed so other people believe it too. I learned to try a lot of stuff, fail, and find originality from it: what comes from you, your own story. But I also learned while doing nothing, just reflecting about myself, about who*

*I was. These different knowledges are a gift in my current practice. Thinking back, I learned the most about myself from moments I felt the least understood. I learned that to get something, to make a change, you have to work fucking hard. Navigating DOCH and the people I met there taught me more than the classes. I direct companies now because of the people I met at DOCH who helped me: I had people to call whenever I had questions including people running the programme and in Sweden more broadly. The university forced us to play with the system, which actually prepared me for my work running circus companies. We had to be creative to get around administrative restrictions while assessing what might be physically dangerous, endanger our student status or harm the school. We learned to break rules without collapsing the entire system, which is a lot of what I do now: finding loopholes to make circus performance happen.*

(Vignette: 12)

This vignette shows how the content, interpersonal interactions, learning environment and overall system interacted. From the perspective of their professional practices, all of the graduates describe formal and informal learning that prepared them to navigate the complex roles required to navigate a professional contemporary circus career.

All of the participants reported using domain-specific creativity in their pre-covid professional practice. Some participants describe finding new ways to work with their discipline. Injury was one precipitating event. Injury can have significant effects on income, artistic expression, and identity. When asked about a failure experience during the education, several participants named injury as a failure, indicating the psychological intensity of injury experiences for circus students and artists.

*The biggest challenge in my career so far was an injury that stopped me from performing for more than a year. It was hard but, in the end, I found out about my own value, what I do when I can't do circus the same way. There's always a way through: if one foot doesn't work, there's another foot, two hands. Obstacles actually create creativity. I'm confidently navigating keeping my body healthy since recovering, I changed how I train and perform. I don't want to get injured again because it really challenged my identity after training for so long to then become unable to perform. I'm doing even harder things now than before because I'm better mentally prepared. (Vignette: 3)*

Facing injury after the education ended, these artists could have moved their professional work into areas that don't require the same level of physical engagement— directing or running a company for instance. Instead, they describe re-orienting their activities and ideas to account for the new context in order to find a pathway back to their performance. They also demonstrate learning new strategies for creation and self-work to expand their abilities as performers and artists.

Several of the participants describe replacement work as an important part of their early career. In these contracts, a circus artist steps into an existing show to replace another artist who has left. Replacement artists must match the artistic, character and disciplinary work of the artist who held that role before. Because the new artist was not part of the creation, it might seem an unlikely place for development, but these narrators describe a process where their knowledge of creative process serves to develop relevant to the context while still authentic to their own artistic voice.

*I was asked to replace an artist. Then I started being part of that show and have kept working with the company. It was a really incredible company and working with them*

*was probably the most creative development I've had. I found my place and realized how I like to perform. When you replace someone, you don't have to be creative: you just double someone. Then with time you start being creative because you want to make the role fit your body, your being. And then creativity starts out of wanting to feel good, authentic. (Vignette: 3)*

Responses from these artists demonstrate that creative process and engagement with self-expressive guidance can be brought to bear on any stage of the circus career.

### ***Beyond Domain***

The creative skills learned through the education are applied not only to development within the narrow domain specialty of their primary circus discipline, but also provide pathways into the multiple kinds of performance scenarios in which a professional artist finds employment.

#### **Professional Work.**

Many of the participants spoke about developing new strategies and frameworks for creation and performance by embracing collaborations, experimental contexts, and new experiences. These artists approached new opportunities with curiosity and readiness. They describe the iterative process of encountering new frames (contexts), creating within and for those frames, and developing their own creative process and expression through the experience of intersection.

*I've been working with multiple productions, creations, and collaborations. The core of these is always an idea I am inspired to explore. These rarely come from circus, but I explore them with my circus discipline. An early one was quite a challenge actually; I went straight from school into a creative process with someone from a different school and we had very different ways of creating and thinking about performance. But it was*

*also very good. Another challenge was that I didn't see my partner often because we had different specialties. We found ways to make performances together, which has been inspiring to both of us. I also did some studies unrelated to circus and then got very excited about making a performance with those ideas. (Vignette: 6)*

While all of the respondents continue to perform as artists, those who formed their own companies describe expanding their creative work into administrative, marketing, legal, engineering, and other fields adjacent to their stage practice.

*I've (co)founded a touring company with someone from my cohort, which then moved to another country, so I've learned about co-productions, funding, and the difficulty of creating across countries. I do administration as well as performance and creation for my company. I write the applications, book travel, arrange residencies. It's stressful because it's not my expertise, but I'm improving. I'm motivated to keep creating my own performances after doing contracts for other companies that I found artistically dissatisfying. (Vignette: 5)*

This is appropriate for the careers they have chosen and indicates that either going through DOCH's BA contributed to their ability to generate novel, high quality context-appropriate solutions, or that they already had that approach to their work and attending DOCH did not reduce their creative approaches to their work.

## **COVID 19.**

Initially the interview questions sought evidence for adaptive expertise through response to professional challenges. After the interviewees were selected, but before the interviews began, the COVID 19 pandemic arrived. An additional question asking participants about their experience of the pandemic has provided a rich and powerful indicator regarding the

participants' abilities to apply their existing knowledge of being circus performers into a radically new global context where live performance is prohibited. This provided an opportunity to discover if the participants were using a creative process approach to re-framing their situation in a way that enabled them to find quality solutions appropriate to their respective realities and context (family, finances, personal ambition, professional identity).

All of the participants describe experiencing destabilizing difficulties in their professions. Surprisingly, all of the participants also describe positive experiences, with many using phrases like “*I’ve been lucky*” and “*perfect timing.*”

*Even though I’m doing well, the effect on my work has been incredibly challenging. At first COVID was a rollercoaster of postponement and cancelation. It felt like a yo-yo, being told we’d perform, then not, then yes, then no... it was a very heavy feeling. I got very mentally tired. But I’ve also been very fortunate during COVID. I see so many artists struggling but for me, it came at a perfect moment in my life. Receiving financial support from my government made me feel valued as an artist and that the work we do is recognized as significant. I handled my finances as gig worker well and I don’t feel any additional economic stress from what I’m used to. (Vignette: 12)*

Only one participant did not mention any additional activities beyond maintaining their discipline training. The rest of the respondents describe finding activities related to their profession outside of their normal habits. For some this was taking courses or applying (and receiving) residencies. For others, especially company owners, there was added labor to preserve networks and contracts providing work for themselves and the artists that work for them.

*The type of work I’m doing has changed. Now I’m on the computer all day trying to save my company. It’s a lot of unpaid work and time to constantly cancel, reschedule, adapt*

*the performances to meet changing guidelines. I've been busy writing grant and residency applications for myself and my company. I'm grateful for my limited previous experience writing grants. It has helped to think of this as a "writing year." Most of the applications were approved, much faster than usual, so I've also been getting projects going. I don't feel far from my career. When things start up again, I'm ready. (Vignette: 5)*

These participants are demonstrating applied creative thinking by using their creative process approach to expanded work activities. As seen above with response to injury, these artists could have shifted to another kind of work or responded to the pandemic-unknowns with waiting, freezing, or withdrawing. Instead, every artist who also had responsibility for a company invested more energy and resources than usual into reinforcing the foundations so that it would be sturdy whenever live performance could again happen.

Finally, all of the participants described an ongoing engagement with circus arts. Several specifically mention considering leaving circus to pursue another career but finding themselves re-invigorated when given the opportunity to perform for live audiences, no matter how small. These artists describe planning to incorporate the experiences of self, family, friends, neighbors, and culture had during the strange suspension of COVID into their future work.

*I've had time to reflect on what I do as an artist. I'd been considering leaving circus because I was exhausted from the work, but this pause made me see how much I love it, how much I love doing circus for an audience, and realize that the world needs circus now more than ever. Having a year to train, not tour, deepen my family and friendships was nourishing and I will bring that experience into my work when I can start creating and performing again. (Vignette: 6)*

I interpret this response in alignment with the creative process tool of re-orienting from failure. When faced with a dead-end for their performance careers as they have known them, these artists used a strategy learned within their discipline: to re-frame their experience and find a pathway to success that aligns with their artistic vision, ‘authenticity,’ and the context.

The overwhelming positivity and resilience reported by respondents could be attributed to a self-selection bias: the personality and experiences of people willing to speak during the pandemic might be more generally positive than those who chose not to. However, self-selection took place before the COVID pandemic began. This fact approaches experimental randomness and offers a litmus test for the COVID experiences of graduates from DOCH’s circus BA programme.

### ***Circus Identity***

This category emerged from axial coding in constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006). I was uncertain at first whether this category was a subset of the “creative identity” theme, or whether it was an entirely separate theme unto itself. With further analysis, where I followed an accordion-like process of expanding and collapsing the sub-categories to look for resonant relationships between them (Butler-Kisber, 2010), it became evident that the concepts of circus identity being espoused by the participants were informing how they applied their creative practice. This category is accurately labelled ‘identity,’ yet this identity informs the types of creative actions being taken and therefore belongs with the theme of “creative practices.”

### **Resistance.**

Several of the participants spoke expressly about resistance to, and rejection of, institutional structures. This theme reveals concepts of circus identity as a form of resistance, expectations of a difference between educational experiences and institutional structures, and



believes an unconscious value hierarchy between different knowledge types that affects how creative practices are understood. These resistances described by participants to the changes enforced by “university” are sometimes regarding physical premises, sometimes university guidelines, and sometimes a more existential notion of threatened circus realities. A close reading of the statements of rejection of “university” reveals a perception of circus identity that stands definitionally opposed to institutionalization.

*Defending Circus Against Institutionalization.*

The institutionalisation of circus education has been relatively recent (Funk, 2018; Salaméro & Haschar-Noé, 2011, 2012; Sizorn, 2014). Many of the participants in this study experienced the progressive institutionalisation of the circus education in Sweden as it moved from informal, professionalizing activities to the administrative frame of a university curriculum, and finally into the buildings and spaces of an institution. The artists interviewed for this study are therefore uniquely situated to reflect on the benefits and complications associated with the institutionalization of circus education for individuals and the field itself. They seem to suggest that circus must remain vigilant within institutionalization to retain its identity AS circus. For these participants, institutionalization necessarily corrupts ‘circus,’ therefore ‘circusness’ is diluted by the structures of university.

*It was good when the university structure was kept from interfering with our education.*

*The university structure was noticeable when it intruded or compromised our training.*

*For instance, when the coaches needed to attend meetings instead of working with us, or*

*are expected to do research instead of working with us, or when too many students were*

*accepted into our cohort, and it reduced the number of teaching hours. None of those*

*university demands improves circus education. Or when the learning outcomes written on*

*paper – like in management class – aren't aligned with what we actually need to learn in order to do circus. In my cohort we didn't care that it was university, we just wanted to learn things and we knew DOCH was a good school. (Vignette: 3)*

*There are negative aspects of being in a university: more administration, inflexibility of rules. Institutionalization of education means losing the ability to let go and try what you want. We lose the trust we cultivated when we took care of each other. Legislation kills artistic because it imposes boxes. One effect of university is that there were weird restrictions and measurements imposed from "someone up high" without knowledge of how circus works – though I can't remember any specific examples now. (Vignette: 4)*

*DOCH tried too hard to meet university standards by imposing academic assignments. We had to write a paper in second year for our personal project and defend the work with an opponent. That's the only time I remember being clearly evaluated because a few people in our class failed and had to re-write the paper. Some students struggled with the things like the bibliography and terminology. These assignments missed the mark because it's neither pedagogical nor productive to force students into a framework that can't adapt to them. The student is crushed by the weight of rules and can't do their best. How could it be adapted so everyone finds their place? For me, it was good to be pushed to do the research which I would not have done by myself, but no one has ever asked to proof that I passed a theoretical course. (Vignette: 4)*

Several of the participants attended the programme as it moved locations from the Cirkus Cirkör training hall in Alby to the current location in central Stockholm, where an existing factory was

retrofit for the circus education. Some participants spent most of their education in Alby, others began in Alby but moved quickly to DOCH. In both cases they have similar comments that conflate the institutional shift to a university structure with the physical structures where the training takes place themselves; and in which the institutionalization restricts circus.

*Alby felt like a free environment, then we entered a very locked cirkushallen. When we moved geographically closer to the dance building, we felt more administrative impact. In Sweden the rules can't be bent. When asked for our thoughts after a tour of the new building, we students said: too many doors are separating spaces, too many locked places. They were indifferent: legislation requires fire safety doors and locks to protect expensive things. Ticking those boxes was unrelated to our education. I'm less interested in now that DOCH has become institutional. DOCH is a locked fortress nowadays— you never know what's really in the four walls. (Vignette: 5)*

One participant clearly described a sentiment that seems to resonate with the previous resistances, while also articulating how the circus students both believed they were part of university while simultaneously othered by university requirements:

*The education was very theoretical. It was deceptive because we had so much theory in Swedish. We felt our education was stuck in between university rules and boxes, and the dance education which existed from before. It had nothing to do with training and learning circus technique - that's what we all wanted. I kind of thought I'd quit school because it was not what I expected at all. After the Christmas break things changed when Walter Ferrero became prefect. He understood, "okay, this way is not gonna educate circus artists." He understood he had to fool the system. He told us he couldn't do much because the system is THE SYSTEM of university, which is quite locked and not so*

*flexible. But he found a way to transform some courses from theoretical to practical, which for us students meant training. That's what we were striving for, what we wanted: to be good in our disciplines. It's what we wanted coming to a circus school. Circus must be a practical education, you can't learn to do a salto on paper. At the end of the day, it's also about that. (T11, p. 1)*

'Fooling' the university implies that the circus department was disguising what was actually happening, the necessary actions that helped students attain circus goals. This participant believes a practice-based education is necessarily 'fooling' an existing university structure, that replacing theory courses with practical courses is akin to the cuckoo's egg, hidden in a nest and being raised under the pretense that it is something which it is not. The feeling of "fooling the university" assumes that if the real circus intentions and actions were known, they would not be in alignment with the goals of the university.

In light of the above statements demonstrating a belief that university restrictions both do not support circus education (and therefore must be fooled into allowing circus training), and that institutional legislation actively suppresses community and creativity, it comes as no surprise that several of the participants did not believe creativity could be learned in school.

*The school didn't teach creativity in a way I could learn, maybe it didn't teach creativity at all. I felt my creativity decreased over the education, also because I had a dominant partner who killed all other ideas. (T2, p. 9)*

*The programme itself isn't set up for students to be creative because it's mostly focused on technique. (T3, p. 6)*

*Creativity wasn't taught specifically at DOCH. (T4, p. 12)*

*Structurally, you can't assess creativity in school. You can't put it in a course plan. How do you put a number on creativity? I mean, I'm sure many people have tried. (T1, p. 9)*

Some participants also felt in league with the circus staff and faculty *against* the university, as in T11's description above that Walter's understanding and action demonstrated alignment with the circus and against the 'system. For these participants, restrictions weren't perceived as exclusively negative or destructive. Instead, they see the experience of trying to work around legislations, with the tacit support of the circus faculty and staff, as an important preparation for their professional work.

*We had to be creative to get around administrative restrictions while assessing what might be physically dangerous, endanger our student status or harm the school. We learned to break rules without collapsing the entire system. For instance, we attached a job to the keypad so anyone could unlock the door, but they (university administration) took that away. The leaders of the circus programme were okay with it, though they couldn't completely align with us against their university bosses. University made us play with the system, which ultimately prepared me a lot for my work running circus companies. (Vignette: 2)*

The above vignettes and transcript texts describe the ways in which resistance to institution is constructed by the participants as integral to developing their circus identity and their creative identity. These identities are further nourished through the communities of practice in school, in the circus profession, and in the international circus community (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

### **Community of Practice.**

Participants describe being influenced by the values and culture of their peers during school and in the professional community of circus. One way to understand the entanglement of socio-emotional environment and content that was presented in the descriptions of curriculum above is to consider that participants expected circus education to be an initiation into a community of practice rather than a standard university experience. Each of the following sections presents descriptions of the influence of these different communities on forming a circus identity and understanding of professional practices.

#### *Cohort Community.*

Students come from many countries and bring their own standards of behaviour and expectations to training and dialogue. Because the cohorts are relatively small, between 10-20, and because students spend most days training together for long hours, the attitude and behaviour of peers towards circus and creativity strongly affected the learning experience. In DOCH, the attitudes of both teachers and students influenced how these participants learned become members of the circus community. The following vignette describes a common experience described by many of the participants where the value placed on circus disciplinary technique by their cohort delimited their own creative development.

*There was pressure from my peers at every presentation to land my flips. Every time I didn't land the flip, I felt affected by how I was seen by my peers. This challenging atmosphere crystalized my experience of failing at the kind of circus expected from me. Acrobatically it's obvious when you fail. We had some dominant guys with too much influence. If they hated the ballet teacher it was decided for everyone, even when other people were excited for the classes. One person who I worked closely with was very*

*creatively dominant and there was no space for my creative voice because it caused him stress. My own creativity withered because of that. (Vignette: 5)*

*Group meetings weren't a class but were significant to me. We'd discuss guest teachers, redovisnings<sup>16</sup>, independent courses, cleaning schedule, but the most important was that everyone sat together. (T5, p. 2)*

#### *Professional Expectations Set by Faculty.*

The hidden curriculum of staff and faculty attitudes towards the purpose of circus education was also part of an initiation into a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Many of the teachers and staff come directly from circus practice, and even those who have not been circus practitioners themselves are part of an extensive international network of circus teachers and administrators. Several of the participants described being significantly affected by what they learned from the teachers directly about being part of the professional circus world, here collected into a narrative vignette.

*There was no strong artistic vision. Most of the feedback was about circus technique. A coach told me I would never work if I wasn't the best in the world and to focus more on the big acrobatic tricks. It's not true; I'm not the best and I've been working consistently since graduation. They also told us to be careful with our bodies, but everything we did taught the exact opposite: go to the maximum even if it hurts. That was the school philosophy. The only risks we took were in technique. Creativity wasn't as important as*

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<sup>16</sup> *Redovisning* is a Swedish word meaning "presentation" in this context. It is used at DOCH/SKH to denote both informal and evaluation performances presented to other students and staff within the school, during the school year.

*doing a double. We were technically skilled but didn't push artistic boundaries or bring anything new to the field. (Vignette: 5)*

While some participants associate high skill levels with the ability to pursue more of their creative vision, the above narrative describes an environment where students received beliefs about spectacularized virtuosity on a linear spectrum in opposition with creative and artistic strengths. With the development of contemporary circus and its shift away from classical dramaturgical conventions, this narrative marks a moment in circus education programs where discourses are also changing about the relationship between performing skills to impress and utilizing technique towards an artistic proposition.

*Professional Community.*

Participants also frequently referenced common knowledge or attitudes in the broader circus community. The following transcript excerpts demonstrate some of the different ways in which belonging in the circus community affected these participants.

*Generally, when I meet the circus community, I'm like, "this community is so nice," everyone's so open minded and interesting. It's an essence of who I am, and I take that approach into everything I do. ... I didn't really see myself as an artist because I hadn't really thought about it. Now I'm in this art community, we talk about it, we're inspired by each other, it's part of our lives. At least, for some of us in the circus. (T 4, p. 10 & 12)*

*The new circus hall was beautiful. It was exciting because I was one of the few people in my class that interacted a lot with the dance department. But it was a big fail in terms of community. In Albany, it was nice to hang out in school after classes because new energy*



*came into the room when professionals and high school students showed up to train, and we had a lot of friends from the past years - it's a small world - so it was nice. (T8, p. 1)*

*DOCH told us in management classes that there are circus festivals and things, but we never knew what those were. And because we are so far away from the European central circus community, we were educated in a bubble, believing only WE are the circus world! And I think this is so wrong. (T2, p. 11)*

These participants are nourished and inspired by their community. They recognize the importance of meeting with other friends and community members for refreshing their creative, mental, and physical energy. Without the community, individual identity is affected, expressed by participants as a lack of knowledge or connection when community is not accessible.

*Circus People are not Academic.*

Some participants made generalized statements about circus that situate excellence in circus practice in opposition to excellence in traditionally academic modes of knowledge. These cases demonstrate not only reification of mind-body duality, but also an identity-based rejection of academic knowledge representations as not-circus. If circus is physical and physical is in opposition to mental, the highly skilled acrobat must ipso facto be inadequate in written tasks.

*Circus is full of people who have an allergy to academia. Or they dropped out of school, or they're 17 and they didn't finish school, or whatever. So putting emphasis on grades would have driven people away. (T1, p. 3)*

*I'm sure on paper evaluations the people who couldn't do a double probably had higher marks than those who could. Lots of people who could do triples couldn't read and write.*

*I think they failed lots of the afternoon courses because they just didn't attend. But they could do a lot of twists and flips, so they had street cred, which is what matters in our business. No one's ever been asked to show they got good marks in history. (T8, p. 5)*

Where I first saw these statements as only related to circus identity, it became apparent that in fact the hierarchical mind-body duality expressed by these participants is part of much larger cultural underpinning beliefs about which knowledge is important. In the discussion section I theorize the above tensions with institutionalization from both the perspective of circus identity (Dumont 2021; Sizorn, 2014) and Gilbert Ryle's knowing-how/knowing-that differentiation (1949/2009). I will draw attention to the ways in which incorporating circus changed the curricular structures in which it was housed, changing the very university structures these participants claimed to protest.

### ***Summary of Creative Practice***

This section presented participant experiences of creative practices in their education at DOCH, in their professional work, and while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. Analysis of these categories demonstrated that students are being taught creative and professional resilience that prepares them to manage challenges within and beyond their field – as evidenced by the participants' use of these same creative strategies to navigate the COVID pandemic.

This section also illuminates the uneasy fit between student expectations of circus education and the reality of university structures to identity formation in circus (Dumont, 2021; Sizorn, 2014). When situated in the broader theoretical context, participants seem to be describing differences in knowledge transmission, and value judgements, of “knowing-how” and “knowing-that” types of learning experiences (Ryle, 1949/2009). Rather than seeing the circus and institutionalisation as mutually exclusive or in constant tension, framing this resistance

within archetypal conceptions of the value of knowledge types enables a discussion of institutionalized circus education that builds both forms of knowledge simultaneously. In Chapter Six: Discussion, I propose that rather than the category mistake of placing these knowledges on a linear spectrum, the evidence shows that the university structures and the education were mutually affected by cross-contamination between these non-mutually exclusive knowledge types.

### **Summary of Results**

To answer the question of whether and how graduates from DOCH's circus BA learned creativity, and whether they use applied creative thinking in their professional practice, this chapter presents participant narratives about their perceptions of the curriculum learning experiences during the course of their education in the DOCH Bachelor programme in circus, their definitions and beliefs about creativity, and descriptions of their professional practice before and during COVID through the lens of applied creative expertise. Implicit, explicit, and null curricula are interwoven in the memories; participant descriptions of learning content are rarely differentiated from the teachers and student present. This indicates that the education was experienced as initiation into a community of practice and socialization into a profession.

Participants describe curricular and pedagogical best-practices for developing creative identity and creative practice, including task-based open-ended problems encouraging iterative process in an environment where failures are re-oriented towards success. Evaluations were dialogic and students were assured independent time to explore their ideas while also being included in decisions about the education itself, teaching them to value their voice and self-knowledge. Nevertheless, some participants were not convinced that creativity was taught during their education. This is explained by examining how certain beliefs about creativity interfere

with concurrent definitions of creativity as a process. Examples of how the participants use the creative process to solve career “problems” (new contexts, changing environments) show that both before and during COVID all participants were using a problem-finding and problem-solving approaches to creating artistic work within their specialized domain, and to address professional challenges and problems beyond their specialization. Chapter Six: Discussion contextualizes and theorizes the relationships between the themes presented in Chapter Five: Results and demonstrates how the research supports an emergent theory of applied circus creativity.

## **Chapter Six: Discussion**

Creativity is touted as the means by which as-yet-unknown problems facing humanity will be solved, such as climate crisis, energy and technology needs, natural disasters, and shifting economic realities (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010). Gifted and talented scouting programs have sought to identify people who are likely to be creative, and therefore innovate in important sociocultural domains, through creativity and intelligence testing, after which participants become specialists in their respective domains. This model presumes that like intelligence, creativity is an innate quality that will be reliably expressed with specific testing procedures, such as the Torrance test, panel of expert arts evaluations (Sawyer, 2012; Smith & Smith, 2010). The domain specificity of these tests, and the literature justifying when and how they are relevant and predictive of future creative achievement, reflects the results of decades of creativity research that has complicated and revealed subjectivity within presumed definitions of ‘creativity.’

This research shows that graduates from DOCH’s circus BA learned the process of creativity within their narrow domain specialty and subsequently applied the same type of creative thinking to new professional contexts. I have named this application of the same methodological approach beyond the domain of specific practice, yet still related to the aim of attaining professional circus goals, applied circus creativity.

### **Theory of Applied Circus Creativity**

The research supports a theory of applied circus creativity, which is a description of the method by which circus artists learn creative processes within their domain specialty and apply those methods and processes to adjacent domains unrelated to their discipline specialty in order to achieve their circus professional goals. The categories and themes that emerged from analysis

point to an interconnecting theory of applied circus creativity that is built upon how the creative process was learned, how creativity was understood, and how the participants used the creative process in their education and professional lives.

This is shown below by demonstrating how learning the iterative creative process in the theme “learning creativity” provided participants with explicit and implicit curricula supporting apprenticeship of the creative process. It is mediated by the interpretations participants brought to their understanding of creativity which explains why they do not identify as part of their creative practice the many ways they use the same process to problem-find and problem-solve in domains beyond the specialty they were educated in. These understandings are mapped in the “creative identity” theme. Finally, the “creative practices” theme shows how practices of creativity are informed by circus identity, which circumscribes the locations of creative actions and outcomes.

### ***Contribution to Original Knowledge and Implications for Practice***

There are significant ways that the theory of applied circus creativity offers implications for practice in the fields of circus studies and creativity studies. First, the theory of applied circus creativity proposes that grounding apprenticeship of the creative process in domain specific techniques in fact prepares artists to adapt to new knowledge domains by using the same methods to approach adjacent fields as they use within circus creation. One of the challenges faced by circus education programmes is selecting content that supports the diversity of knowledges needed in contemporary professional circus practices (Burt & Lavers, 2017), as discussed in Chapter Two: Circus and Circus Education Literature. Teachers, curriculum designers and programme administrators in circus education, as in many other fields, are faced with a rapidly evolving professional sector. Our education programmes must provide enough

background of established knowledge to assure adequate entrance into the existing field while simultaneously incorporating content that reflects professional realities. Difficult choices must often be made to assure new knowledges are available without unduly compromising elements ensuring stability of the education. For instance, in circus digital performance practices are becoming more common. Educators might ask which content can be modified or removed to incorporate the teachers, tools and time needed to include modules focused on digital practices. The implications of this theory are that educators ensuring development of creative process tools are also ensuring the adaptability of their graduates to the ever-changing performing arts field and ever-changing world.

Second, the theory of applied circus creativity indicates that the creative method successfully taught within a domain can be applied to domains more generally. This re-orientes the debate about domain-specificity or domain-generality to become a pathway *from* domain specificity *to* domain generality. Necessarily a creative outcome (product) requires a creative process. Necessarily learning to use the creative process requires a domain in which to practice the creative strategies. Once those strategies are learned, they can be applied beyond the domain. A proxy for understanding whether a creative method has been used is the framework of adaptive expertise (Gube & Lajoie, 2020): has the person been able to apply existing knowledge from one context into new and different contexts? Can they select the appropriate knowledge for that context (convergent thinking) towards a constructive framing/re-framing of a problem into something that can be appropriately solved?

When creativity is seen as a method, it can be taught as a method. Anyone can increase their creative ability by learning creative methods. This method has intellectual components because facts of the context must be learned and considered in order for the solution to be

appropriate. The environment must be oriented towards qualitative evaluation and understanding ‘failure’ as testing the quality/novelty/applicability rather than as a failure to achieve a ‘right’ answer. The person using the strategy must bring in knowledges from their domain and a curiosity for intersections with other patterns and knowledges towards orienting the problem in such a way that it can be solved. Patience, persistence, and perspective are all components of effective methodological creativity, providing space for ideas to germinate with the perseverance of dedicated timelines. Pressure is important, with the caveat that pressure without self-compassion and patience often suppresses creative insight.

The findings can be applied to programs meant to foster and develop creativity by situating these programs within a practice first and then explicitly challenging participants in domains beyond their expertise. The remaining sections of this chapter demonstrate how the three main themes support the theory of applied circus creativity.

### **“Learning Creativity” Contribution to Applied Circus Creativity**

The theme “learning creativity” collected categories where participants described the different ways that they believe they learned creativity – or not - within DOCH (Figure 8: Learning creativity theme with sub-categories). Using directed content analysis (DCA) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), I tagged units of transcript text where students described their learning experiences with Eisner’s (1979/2002) names for the three curricula present in all education: the explicit curriculum of intended content and evaluation practices, the implicit curriculum of what is learned through environment and values, and the null curriculum of all content and experiences which are not present. These categories came together to reveal the landscape of how student experiences of DOCH’s programme contribute to their knowledge and practice of creativity. Learning these methods becomes the basis for how these participants apply creativity



in their domain-specific and domain-expanded professional lives, leading to the theory of applied circus creativity.

Some participants were aware of learning creative tools and methods while others were not, yet all learned the tools nonetheless. Apprenticeship is characterized by learning alongside and with experts in a particular field or discipline and has been expanded to include environments that scaffold acquisition of cognitive approaches within communities of practice (Collins, 2006; Collins et al., 1991; Lave & Wenger, 1991). All students at DOCH therefore participated in creative apprenticeship by learning the norms of creative work through the explicit curriculum of task-based projects and the implicit curriculum of peers, teachers, and community of practice. Rather than an apprenticeship focused on learning from one ‘master’ educator, the students were apprentices within a culture emphasizing self-expression, curiosity, playfulness and re-orientation from failure which enabled them to acquire best practices for approaching new contexts with methodological continuity.

### ***Experiences of the Three Curricula***

Some aspects of these three curricula were straightforward. It was clear what content was intended in certain courses and evaluation practices. Participants spoke clearly and consistently across all cohorts about learning to try, fail, and try again during *redovisnings* and the Exam Project. Feedback with the group was an important way that they learned to refine and defend their artistic choices to align with their own self-expression goals and the project parameters. They describe learning tools that they continue to use in their professional lives through the content of the explicit curriculum, as well as an overall supportive environment fostered by their cohort group, faculty, and staff, which is part of the values learned through the implicit

curriculum. In many ways, these two curricula were co-constructive with regard to the apprenticeship of creative process and practice.

However, the implicit curriculum was also strongly entangled with student expectations of emotional and community support, that included peers, faculty, and staff, far beyond the purview of standard higher education responsibilities. For example, when a member of the peer group went through a difficult time, some students held the staff and faculty responsible for a difficult learning environment created from not knowing who to trust in their community. This entanglement of expectations regarding the community as a whole, rather than only the community experiences directly connected with the education, are related to the overlap of a formal education with being educated into a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Recognizing this overlap between formal education and community can help educators and administrators set appropriate expectations for students, staff, and faculty regarding the limits of involvement in interpersonal difficulties, and also communicate where legality and confidentiality circumscribe possible actions that are different from community expectations. In the theme “circus identity” I further describe the relationship between the education programme and communities of practice.

The explicit curriculum also came under scrutiny. Some participants expressed the belief that creativity cannot be learned within school because institutions and creativity are mutually exclusive. I connected these comments with the null curriculum in the context of how students learned, but also with beliefs about what creativity is (process; self-expression) and resisting institutions as part of identity formation in circus. With regard to the curriculum aspects, it is interesting to note that even while participants stated that “*Creativity wasn’t taught specifically at DOCH,*” (T4, p. 12), all participants describe learning the methods of creative practice in the

explicit curriculum and experiencing an environment that supported development of creative process because students felt a) safe to fail and try again, b) accepted and encouraged to find unique forms of self-expression, and c) that their voice (knowledge of their own experience) had value in the community and influenced the course of the education and environment. They describe using these same processes and understanding the value of their own knowledge in creation in their professional practices (further discussed in the section on “creative practice” below).

Whether they believe they learned creativity or not, and whether the entanglement of education and community expectations is justified, the experiences these participants describe strongly connects DOCH’s circus BA to research showing teaching professional creativity in higher education arts programs is done through teaching an iterative creative process in the explicit curriculum and dialogic feedback emphasizing the student-artist’s thinking. Furthermore, this research adds to Sawyer’s (2018) findings by additionally showing that validation of student voice and knowledge within the education programme fosters awareness of, and confidence in, the student’s artistic vision.

### ***Learning Creativity in Schools of Art and Design... and Circus***

Perhaps from the legacy of creativity testing as a means of identifying gifted/talented future engineers, research investigating fostering creativity has focused on early years and primary education at one end of the spectrum, and corporate innovation communities at the other. Research into methods of fostering creativity in higher education is typically, appropriately, domain specific. Despite extensive research interest in the careers of professional creatives (Pro-C), there is a paucity of research into university level arts pedagogy. Within that niche, there are few studies describing distinct strategies for imparting creative process methods

(Sawyer, 2018). Even so, there is consistency across many studies with regard to the kinds of socio-cultural environment, task descriptions and evaluation methods that foster or hinder the development of creative ideas that are novel and appropriate to their context.

Central to fostering creativity is the environment within which ideas are to be presented, irrespective of the age or context: this is true in primary school, higher education, business, and science (Gube & Lajoie, 2020; Sternberg & Kaufman, 2018; Sawyer, 2012). Explicit and implicit curricula play a role in the environment where students present ideas. Evaluation practices are pivotal and carried out in both explicit/formal curricula and in the sociocultural interactions that determine whether presenting an imperfect idea will be well-received. Strict evaluation narrows and suppresses creative expression (Beghetto, 2010; Eisner, 2009), therefore students are most likely to exhibit creative thinking in environments that account for and support failures – approaches to problem-finding or problem-solving which do not result in an appropriate solution to the context (Sawyer 2012; Gajda et al., 2017; Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 2014).

Sawyer's (2018) research in two USA schools of visual art and design queried the connections between pedagogical practices and creativity as a learning outcome, needed by the graduates in their professional artistic practices. He found professors in all the schools used similar pedagogical scaffolding to teach and foster the creative process. Students were given open-ended (ill-defined) assignments with many specific restrictions, thoughtfully designed to encourage students to develop existing knowledge, pass through problem-generation, divergent and convergent thinking phases of creation, and to engage with new domain techniques and knowledge. The requisite companion to the assignment is dialogic interaction with the teacher

where students are asked to articulate alignment between their intention and presented work (Sawyer, 2018).

Multiple studies about creativity demonstrate that engaging with problem-generation is a predictor of real-world creativity and suggest opportunities to engage in problem-finding provide develop creative abilities (Gube & Lajoie, 2020). Csikszentmihalyi and Getzels' (2014) art students who took time to choose what objects to draw went on to successful and creative art careers, compared with those who spent little time choosing and most on drawing. Sawyer (2018) proposes that the constraints in tasks given to Art and Design school students promote a "problem-finding process," and develop the iterative process of trying out ideas and re-orienting guided by failures (Sawyer, 2018, p. 158). In other studies, people's ability to solve creative problems in real life was highly correlated with the ability to generate significant lists of real-world problems (Sawyer, 2012, p. 91-92).

The DOCH BA in circus provides an explicit curriculum that supports learning the creative process using methods correlated with other higher education arts programs where graduates enter a field where they will author and create by drawing on the knowledge and techniques of their primary domain (Sawyer, 2018). The circus students follow the same core method of learning the process of creating in their domain as Sawyer (2018) describes in his investigation of pedagogical practices scaffolding learning of the creative process, revealing consistency of explicit curriculum practices.

Speaking to the students about their experiences reveals the learning environment and how it influences what students learn about artistic process and product. In recounting their educational experiences, much of the content described by participants was effectively the hidden, implicit curriculum: things they learned through interactions and discussions, in the way

spaces were used and what kind of agency they had, in how administration and educators selected cohorts of students and the institutional response to difficult interpersonal situations. These experiences affected not only how creativity was learned but were also an important part of the socialization process into the community of practice at DOCH and more broadly into the circus profession. The hidden curriculum created through the socio-cultural interactions of students, teachers, administrators, and Swedish culture taught expectations values that these participants have carried with them into professional practice – for better or worse, whether they agree or disagree.

Specific environmental factors which gave students the feeling of emotional safety and being trusted to make choices are mentioned by many participants, some of whom note the direct link between those feelings and their willingness to take artistic risks (Sawyer, 2019). Other participants mention difficult experiences which caused them to lose trust in the ability of staff to deal effectively with negative events and interpersonal conflict. Students who witnessed interpersonal conflict between others remember it as affecting the learning environment, but don't connect it directly with their experiences of learning, whereas students who were directly involved with interpersonal conflict (student-student, student-staff, student-institution) recount a shift in the way they experienced their own education. While in both types of narrative the students feel they developed creatively, the first narrative describes the experience of creative development linked to the education while the second describes a feeling of developing creatively in spite of the information received from the institutional environment.

The theme “learning creativity” illuminates the ways that the intersecting explicit and implicit curricula supported or hindered acquisition of knowledge about creativity and the creative process. Overall participant narratives about their learning experiences indicate that they

learned in a supportive environment, had scaffolded tasks to practice short- and long-term iterative creative processes, benefitted from dialogue-based evaluations, and were guided to re-orient failures towards completion of a self-defined goal. While learning the creative process is not an explicit curricular aim of DOCH's Bachelor in circus, "*DOCH provided so many inputs: if they wanted us NOT to be creative, they failed miserably!*" (T10, p. 16).

### ***Contribution to Original Knowledge and Implications for Practice: Process-Nourishing Curricula for Creativity***

The theory of applied circus creativity is built upon the theme "learning creativity" because it describes the specific educational location where the processes of creativity are learned. In the case of this study, that location is a university bachelor programme in circus arts that is entangled with a community of practice, however the creative process can also be learned in other contexts. Wherever a creative process is being learned, attention to the explicit, implicit, and null curricula will determine in which ways the structure and environment are supporting or detracting from the aims of developing creativity. In the specific context of this research and its relationship to the three theoretical fields of curriculum studies, creativity research, and circus studies, three significant implications for practice are revealed. Two of these support existing literature and the third suggests a novel research contribution for supporting apprenticeship of the creative process in arts education.

The first implication for practice is to ensure more articulation of curricular content aimed at scaffolding development of the iterative creative process. The programme aims of DOCH's bachelor of circus arts do not describe creativity as an objective, nor do the course syllabi or study guides frame aspects of the creative process as specific learning outcomes. By naming and evaluating learning experiences designed for students to try, fail, re-work, and refine

their ideas as elements essential to the development of creativity, education programmes could ensure more communication with students about how the curricular content supports the development of creativity. Especially when considered in the light of student critiques that schools cannot teach creativity, there is a need for arts education programmes to conscientiously articulate the relationship between creative process and the learning experiences. Students would benefit from meta-conversations about creative practice and creative process where connections are drawn between the professional realities of generating artwork and the artificially constructed tasks assigned within the programme. Education programmes interested in developing these processes are therefore strongly encouraged to create learning experiences and evaluations emphasizing process over product, and frequent opportunities for re-working rather than proposing new ideas for every presentation or task.

The second implication for practice emphasizes the importance of evaluation strategies. Both Sawyer's (2018) research and the current study indicate the importance of dialogic feedback methods for developing an artist's ability to describe, situate, and defend their work. Where Sawyer's research prioritized the professor-as-field-expert guiding the feedback to push on student thinking, my current study demonstrates the additional importance of peer-to-peer discourse for developing context-relevant artistic offerings. Programmes wishing to foster and scaffold the creative process with student-artists would benefit from attending carefully to the ways in which feedback is discussed in order to ensure that a) the informed critique of experts can be integrated and appreciated, b) perceptions of the peer group can guide relevance to socio-cultural context, and c) that the student-artist themselves is an active part of the exchange.

Finally, the third implication for practice is also a contribution to original knowledge in research on circus education and illuminates a gap in research literature about educating for



creativity. Framed here as an aspect of the implicit curriculum, participants in this study reiterate that being included in the decision-making processes of the educational content taught them to value their own voice and experience. Developing student confidence in their own knowledge by enabling them to participate in decisions related to content, guest educators, and rhythm of the education created an atmosphere where these participants also gained confidence in the relevance and significance of their artistic contributions. This finding encourages programs that seek to foster the development of artistic expression to enable student participation in the delivery of the educational objectives and content. Some programs may already be designed to enable student involvement easily, while programs with inherited hierarchical structures may find the work more difficult. In all cases, it is incumbent upon the programme designers, educators, and administrators to find ways to collaborate with students and share how student voice has affected the education in such a way that students also recognize the relevance of their contributions. Participating in the way a programme is delivered further contributes to students understanding the different ways that institutional structures can be worked with towards creative outcomes.

### **“Creative Identity” Contribution to Applied Circus Creativity**

The theme “creative identity” includes categories where the participants define creativity, describe their beliefs about creativity, and describe whether they believe themselves and/or their cohort to be creative (Figure 6: Creative identity theme with sub-categories). Categories in this theme were tagged with code names derived both from a process of constant comparative analysis (CCA) (Charmaz, 2006) and directed content analysis (DCA) (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). DCA names were derived from definitions of creativity and beliefs about creativity found in literature on that topic (Amabile, 2018; Sawyer 2012, 2018). This accordion-like approach to detailing, then expanding, then collapsing the categories (Butler-Kisber, 2010) revealed that

some participants expressed contradictory beliefs about the definition of creativity, whether they saw people around them as creative, and whether they believed creativity could be taught. These alignments and contradictions are all included in the theme “creative identity” because they set the foundation for how participants understood their own process of learning creativity in DOCH’s bachelor of circus arts programme. An understanding of one’s own creativity is essential to interpreting how one uses creative practices and processes, therefore “creative identity” is a key theme for understanding which activities these participants view as part of their own current creative practices. Every participant indicated a belief that creativity is a process, and that creativity comes from self-expression. Several indicate beliefs that creativity is a personality trait, and only one described insight as a means of creative discovery.

### ***Determining “Creative Identity”***

Most participants described themselves and those in their cohort as creative, however there were a few caveats. Some participants did not see that creativity could be taught (discussed in both the above and below sections on “learning creativity” and “creative practices”). Another sentiment was that members of their cohort were more interested in developing circus techniques, which these participants described as mutually exclusive of the development of creative practices. Others emphasized technical vocabulary and domain knowledge as a prerequisite creativity. Very few participants did not identify as creative themselves. Yet all describe the importance of the creative process in their definitions of creativity, indicating that creative work may not be visible even to the creator at times. Further, participants also concurred that self-expression is of critical importance for determining the direction and outcome of a creative work. All participants also describe these two elements in their professional work: working with an idea towards an outcome and being guided by an internal compass towards the

goal. Despite some expressed beliefs to the contrary, all participants indicate that practicing the iterative creative process is central to their artistic identity. The two juxtaposed statements below from the same participant demonstrate the interplay between process and self-expression, as well as the continuity between what is learned in school and professional practice.

*The school didn't teach creativity in a way that I could learn, maybe it didn't teach creativity at all. I felt my creativity decreased over the education, also because I had a dominant partner who killed all other ideas. But I would also say it's amazing, for the school to give lots of technical things, and creativity tools, and then you can bubble it together. It doesn't necessarily happen within the three years. It might just happen afterwards. I'm trying new creative projects now with those tools. (T2, p. 9-10)*

*Creativity starts with not doing the same path in your house every day, instead finding a different way around. To be creative in how you handle normal basic things. You can start creativity on a very tiny level. And then it's super individual and diverse. Because the way I might want to be creative is maybe completely different from someone else. And someone else's creativity doesn't really suit me, and I'm like, "Oh, my God, what is that!?" That's a very hard question. It's very broad. I would say it's a very individual definition of "what is creativity." (T2, p. 8)*

This person sees creativity as a form of self-expression because it must be done in one's own way, is harmed by a judgemental environment, and evokes the notion that creativity is the rejection of convention because it requires not relying on a habit. Even though in their description of the school programme this participant expressed a belief that DOCH did not teach creativity, they later identify that tools learned during the programme are guiding a current creative practice, emphasizing that creativity is work, not innate. This person sees the tools they

learned regarding the creative process during school are manifesting now as they continue to work in the present.

### ***Gaps in the Definitions of Creativity***

Beliefs about what creativity is and how it manifests have guided creativity inquiry, theory, identification (testing), and interventions aimed at developing creative process and product. Though much of the established literature on creativity, a product-centered definition has enabled precision when differentiating separate concepts such as originality and divergent thinking from creativity (Amabile, 2018; Runco & Bahleda, 1986; Sawyer, 2012, 2018). A working definition of creativity, then, describes a result or product that is both new (original) and context appropriate. This delimits originality to relevance, rather than accepting all original suggestions as manifestations of creativity. In the case of artistic work, the fact of creation is usually a foregone conclusion, but the question of context remains challenging. The originality and appropriateness of artistic work is therefore typically assessed within the context of the field and the parameters of the project, with the acknowledgement that the artist's own vision and sense of fitness to purpose is among the factors that must be considered (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997/2013; Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 2014; Gluck et al., 2002; Sawyer, 2018).

The participants in this study do not describe the result of creativity as a product; the closest they come is to describe the process and context. It is likely that these artists do not conceive of their creative output as a 'product' which needs to be aligned to context. In Gluck et al.'s (2002) inquiry, the definitions of creativity provided by 'free' and 'constrained' pictorial artists provide another framework for illuminating the meaning of creativity for these circus artists. Specifically, Gluck et al. found that "free artists did not give any general criteria for evaluating creative products in their fields," concluding that this "reflects the well-known

problems of evaluation in the fine arts” (2002, p. 64). Where the circus participants describe a context or problem to solve, they also include the creator as instrument of deciding the ‘rightness’ of the final creation. Whereas Gluck et al. (2002) spoke with pictorial artists who create something concrete which can be held and touched, circus artists create something ephemeral and time bound. The practice leaves physical traces on circus bodies and requires physical instruments but cannot be ‘touched’ by the purchasing audience/organization. Descriptions of creativity as a process rather than a product underscore the experience of circus artists who inscribe their ‘product’ through the use of their bodies rather than separating the product from themselves. Emphasis on process rather than product reflects the reality that creators in circus and in other ‘free’ arts may transition between many intentions throughout a creation process, and any given process may result in a number different creative ‘products’ – or none at all.

Following the definition of creativity from these interviews reveals a critical element missing from the formal definition of artistic creativity – albeit despite Csikszentmihalyi’s (1996/2013) research into flow – the feeling. For these artists, the experience of creativity is inseparable from the definition. ‘Applicability to context’ is meaningless when the method is given more primacy than the outcome. While only half of the participants describe ‘intention’ or ‘context’ for creative work, all participants describe an internal experience of creativity. For some, the feeling – experience of being creative— is the only definition. Instead of answering the question ‘what is creativity,’ the participants effectively interpreted the question into: What does it feel like to be creative, or to apply a creative method/approach in your work?

The participants in this study, like professional artists, also each bring their own personal beliefs to their work as creators. This may be why it is not uncommon for artists to have a

different experience of, and relationship to, creativity and the creative process. Runco and Bahleda (1986) found differences between artists and non-artists in the characteristics they listed for different types of creativity. For example, “emotional” was listed by artists but not by laypersons as typical for artistic creativity. Through ongoing studies of group differences in implicit definitions of creativity, intelligence, and wisdom, Sternberg (2019) found interesting differences between laypersons and experts, and between experts from different domains. For example, art professors emphasized imagination, originality, and risk-taking in their conceptions of creativity, whereas physics professors considered aspects of problem solving as equally important. We can see that the definitions of creativity offered by these circus artists builds on existing literature about how artist relationships to creativity, and – due to the unique nature of circus demands for simultaneous authorship and interpretation— offer an expanded understanding of how professional, performing artists understand creativity.

### ***Creativity from Within the Domain***

Analysis shows that the participants in this study learned creativity tools during the education programme within their specific domain: circus performance of their specialty discipline. Furthermore, several explicitly stated that they believed significant creative contributions could only come from people with domain knowledge.

*To be creative, I think, you need to have a big library and a certain technique to be able to be free. In juggling, you need to do basic patterns and have a good technique, and then after that you can be creative and do whatever you want because you have the fundamentals down. Whereas if I teach you three balls, it's hard to be creative from day one. (T9, p. 8)*

This is situated within a larger debate in the creativity literature about whether creativity is domain specific (it can only be done within the domain of expertise) or domain general (creativity is a trait that can be applied across domains). Baer (2015) argues that creativity should be theorized as domain specific because research demonstrates that creativity can be enhanced in narrow, micro-domains but not more broadly (see also Sawyer, 2012). Targeted creative development in poetry increased poetic creativity, but not creativity when writing short stories – indicating that even within the broader domain of writing creative strategies were not transferable (Baer 2015; Sawyer 2012). Research into creative methods and process demonstrates that within a domain, creative approaches can be taught such that artists can apply their knowledge to the shifting demands of professional challenges (Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 2014; Sawyer, 2018). Yet these artists are also trained in relatively narrow fields – graphic designers are not expected to demonstrate creative expertise in writing.

This research into creativity apprenticeship in circus education shows that methods acquired through narrow domain practice of specialized circus discipline were used beyond that domain. All participants expanded practices and skills beyond the narrow specialty of their circus discipline. Many acquired new circus skills in other disciplines. Many expanded their artistic vision to writing, directing, managing companies, and collaborations between different art forms (acting, dance, photography). This could indicate either an expansion of ‘domain’ knowledge, or that once practiced within a domain, creative process can become a methodological approach to problem-identification/ problem-solving (Csikszentmihalyi & Getzels, 2014) in other domains. Findings from this research indicate steps towards bridging the gap between domain generality and domain specificity. Through learning the creative process within a narrow domain, supported by a community of practice and with content from practical and theoretical knowledge

foundations, participants were able to apply their expertise to shifting contexts and adapt the creative process beyond the frame in which they were trained. I have named this practice of applying the same creative methods beyond the domain in which they were learned applied circus creativity. This has implications for arts education and educating for creativity in non-arts-based domains.

***Contribution to Original Knowledge and Implications for Practice: Understanding Circus as a Creative Art***

The theory of applied circus creativity is built upon the theme “creative identity” because it describes how participants understood the meaning of creativity, and how they recognize it in themselves and others. Uncovering the way individuals define creativity, and how their beliefs about creativity circumscribe the activities and results they view as creative, is an important aspect of educating professional artists. Attending to discrepancies and contradictions between definitions, beliefs, and the naming of self and others as creative could reveal where students misconstrue a creative result with a creative process and undermine the intrinsic motivation needed to overcome the inevitable failures that constitute creative process work.

Three key elements from this research suggest ways that these ideas could be implemented in practice and enrich future research into developing creativity within education programmes. The three findings extend a theory of how creativity is defined by addressing gaps regarding the development of creativity in student-artists. The third finding is additionally a contribution to original knowledge regarding the conflation of defining (knowing that) and doing (knowing how) in participant descriptions of creativity.

The first finding with implications for practice is the way in which these participants described self-expression in relationship to their artistic practice. In his list of ten beliefs about



creativity in Western Culture, Sawyer (2012) uses the term “self-expression” to describe creative practices and outcomes that prioritize revealing what is inside each of us. Sawyer links these beliefs to near-therapeutic, unadulterated manifestations of our inner worlds. For the participants of this study, however, self-expression was a key indicator for assessing whether a creative outcome was achieving its artistic purpose. These participants describe self-expression as a compass-like tool that guides their ability to bring their own artistic voice into a project, or to initiate a project. This finding suggests that programs designed to develop creativity could benefit from scaffolding students to recognize how their individual perspectives and visions modify otherwise identical tasks. If educators can draw attention to the relevance of self-expression for finding artistic alignment, artist-students may feel more confident trying out ideas and recognizing the creative inputs of others.

The second finding is a reinforcement of domain specificity as a predictor of creativity. Several participants definitions included conviction that only those who are well-versed in a field are able to develop new material, the definition of the domain specificity argument (Baer, 2015). None of the participants espoused the commonly held belief that outsiders to a field are most likely to produce highly creative solutions (Sawyer, 2012). This reinforces existing literature advocating for domain specificity as foundational for domain creativity. For educators, this supports learning the creative process with and through domain practices, such that the techniques of the field and the techniques of the creative process are developed concurrently (Sawyer, 2018).

An important contribution to original knowledge within creativity literature is the finding that participant definitions of creativity were, in fact, descriptions of the *feeling* of being creative or doing creative work. When asked to define creativity, half of the participants offered

definitions that aligned with the literature definition including novelty and contextual appropriateness. This means that for half of the participants either novelty or context-appropriate descriptions, or both, were missing entirely from their description of creativity. Participant definitions focused instead on trying ideas and learning from failures, being in tune with oneself to determine the direction and next steps, and being in conversation with collaborators or contexts that break them out of their own habits. An implication from this finding is that educators can support artist-students to learn the creative process by drawing their attention to the feeling of being creative. Making more conscious the feeling of doing the creative process may contribute to contextualizing pre-existing beliefs, fostering resilience to failure, and helping students design an individualized map through the difficulties of being a professional creator.

### **“Creative Practice” Contribution to Applied Circus Creativity**

The theme “creative practice” collects together the categories where participants describe the ways they express creativity (Figure 13: Category: creative practice with sub-categories). This includes projects they did in the context of DOCH’s education, professional practices, and their approaches to navigating COVID-19. These categories emerged from constant comparative analysis (CCA) (Charmaz, 2006). Code names for these emergent categories were derived from participant text. Together, these categories show the different ways in which participants used the creative process, within and beyond their domain specific disciplinary training. Because the practices described by participants are influenced by how they understand what it is to be practitioners in the circus community, this theme also includes the sub-category of “circus identity.” The different creative practices described by these participants, and how they understand them as a function of their circus identity, is the basis for understanding how circus creativity is applied within and beyond the specialized disciplinary domains of circus artists. This

transcendence of creative practice beyond a specialized domain is the core of my theory of applied circus creativity.

### ***Tension Between Education and Institution in Creative Practices***

One category that emerged from descriptions of educational and professional experiences, as well as regulations during the COVID-19 pandemic, was a resistance to, and rejection of, the institutional structures that simultaneously housed the opportunity to produce creative practice. Some participant descriptions included a rejection of, or othering of, university and institutionalization. What I first interpreted as solely situated within circus identity (circus-as-teleologically-anti-institutional) is more richly theorized as an opposition from a practice-based/knowing-how subject feeling threatened by intrusion and circumscription within the classically theory-based/knowing-that academic structure. Institutional change was taking place, however, as the curriculum adapted to ensure learning experiences for the different types of knowledges appropriate to different learning outcomes associated with higher education in circus. Where institutions are often perceived as rigid, we might instead see this institutional evolution as happening on a slower timeline than was perceptible by the students – as ants will not see a tree growing. From a distance, it is evident that the institutional structure was reshaped through dialogue and curriculum re-writing. This was possible because of the institutional aims to value artistic research and practice-based educations, therefore DOCH was receptive to feedback and propositions from students, educators, and programme leaders. In other words, DOCH was prepared to design a programme, but needed the circus practitioners to propose how. It could be said that DOCH knew-that the curricula would adapt, but it needed the circus know-how to enable concrete, relevant change.

We can see from the above student and programme head descriptions that the majority of the experiences had by students are practice-based. As head of the programme, I see tremendous alignment of the programme goals with the educational experiences. As described above, I also see value-added opportunities where the university structure can enrich and develop the field of circus arts through the education of circus artists. Yet through these interviews, and also the interviews from my MA, I have noticed a type of rejection of academic structures by people in accredited circus programs who are benefitting from those same structures. During my MA (Funk, 2017) I interviewed students, teachers, and administrators at the Canadian École Nationale de Cirque in Montréal (ENC) and the École de Cirque de Québec (ECQ) in Québec City. While many agreed that accredited education provided circus programs with financial resources, student supports and status, few people saw the academic structure as a benefit to circus itself (Funk, 2017, 2019). In this current research with graduates from DOCH's BA circus programme, participants expressed thoughtful reflection about the relationship between the university structure (academic, institutional) and the aims of circus education (development of physical performance, readiness to enter an arts profession). As working artists, their perspective enabled a different level of reflection than the participants in my MA research (Funk, 2017). Participants described benefits to themselves personally and the field of circus arts through integration with a university. Some also described indifference or unawareness of the impact becoming part of a university structure had on the education. Many described frustrations they experienced, or witnessed other students and staff experience, attributed to the institutionalization of the education associated with becoming part of a university. Many participants held multiple perspectives simultaneously.

### **Circus Identity: Reciprocal ‘Othering’ of Circus and Institutions.**

Circus is included in all levels of the SKH academic structure, BA, MA, PhD, and professorships, and academic work is included at every level of circus education. Through alumni and educators, DOCH established an international reputation for creative and pioneering circus performance and circus artistic research. Graduates of the DOCH BA programme like Wes Peden and Alex Weibel have revolutionized the approach to their disciplines; the graduate work of master’s students like Francesca Hyde and Saar Rombout demonstrate how theory enriches practice (Funk, 2022), and the artistic research and writing of professors like Camilla Damkjaer (2016) and John-Paul Zaccarini (2018) has advanced critical approaches to circus theory and practice. After producing two conferences about artistic research in circus and several publications (Damkjaer, 2012; Stockholm University of the Arts, 2015), one might predict that all students who passed through the circus BA programme would express recognition of, or affiliation with, how university structures intersected with the circus educations to promote circus practice and research.

My own circus-situated knowledge includes having been a circus student in multiple types of programmes (formal, informal, recreational, self-created), performing as an aerialist, choreographing, and creating work with/for circus artists, teaching circus from recreational through professional levels, and educating circus teachers. When situated exclusively within my circus knowledge, I perceive in these rejections of institutionalization a form of circus identity; bonding together against a threat to the knowledge transmission practices that have ushered in contemporary circus practice. Agathe Dumont’s (2021) description of tensions around legitimacy provide a lens for understanding how these examples are rooted in circus identities by tracing the development of contemporary circus from the form called ‘Nouveau Cirque.’ Dumont describes

political, social, and ideological motivations driving circus artists to establish the performances and lifestyles which have led to these eponymous categories.

Here I will pull on one of the threads in Dumont's (2021) tapestry: the thread of legitimacy. Highlighting tension in Nouveau Cirque "between the intellectual and the popular," Dumont cites a 1971 interview with Jean-Baptiste Thierree claiming that "the circus had become an art form as legitimate as theatre or dance, but ... it will never betray its popular origins." In this sentiment, circus is given a status alongside performance high-art and simultaneously placed in opposition to them. Circus demands recognition as artistically legitimate in the cultural sector while implying that the cultural sector betrays popular audiences. Artistic legitimacy in circus therefore places circus at risk of betraying its popular ideals.

In 1984, Christian Taguet describes his shows with Le Puits aux Images as "more like a theatrical work... there are no animals, there are no freaks either" (Dumont, 2021 p. 190). Seeking the same cultural legitimacy, this statement distances circus from its own traditions. Artistic legitimacy in this case is anti-spectacularization. In these two interviews we can see post-classical circus artists distancing circus from both traditional and elitist categorizations. As circus artists sought artistic recognition, they simultaneously rejected established categories, defiantly demanding that new circus forms be embraced for what they ARE, not what they are LIKE.

Dumont includes the advent of circus schools as part of the "artification" and professionalization of circus arts. French circus schools in the 1970s, Dumont tells us, sought "professional legitimacy" for their students (2021). Although this term is undefined in Dumont's text, we might understand 'professional legitimacy' as the ability to work and be recognized as qualified for work by other circus artists and producers. The previous citations alluded to a quest

for cultural legitimacy. A quest for ‘academic legitimacy’ has not been highlighted as a driving force in the discourse of the artists and educators who ushered in Nouveau and contemporary circus forms. Yet integration into higher education structures inevitably brings an examination of academic legitimacy. Broadly, academic traditions gaze into circus and look for relevance: what parts of circus merit academic study? Conversely, with the increasing support from institutional structures came a challenge to circus identity. Magali Sizorn (2014), cited in Dumont (2021), observes that circus artists “affirmation of circus as a popular artform acts as a way of keeping a distance from the arts reserved for an elite” (p. 194). Simply put: can circus call itself a popular art when that art is learned through elite institutions?

Dumont and Sizorn’s descriptions of circus identity resonate as I attempt to understand why participants describe the feeling of “fooling” the university from their position as circus practitioners. It presumes that circus-as-is is not welcome within the university – is othered by the university. If true, circus-in-university is a disguise worn by circus in order to access the benefits of university-ness but without sacrificing circus-ness to the conformity of university. It posits, perhaps, that there is no such thing as circus-in-university that can be fully circus. Following Dumont (2021), the interviewees perceive their circus knowledge as ‘other’ than university and perceive circus knowledge as ‘othered’ by the university structure. It is a definition which reinforces a circus identity that exists in the tension between popular and professional legitimacy, artistic legitimacy, and rebellion against elitist artistic isolation.

One way that to understand this type of rejection of university structures is as a means of positive identity creation. Keeping a distance from an elitist structure, even while within that structure, reinforces circus artists’ commitment to audience connection, and an awareness that academic legitimacy is not an essential requirement of professional legitimacy in circus.

University offers access to cultural legitimacy, circus training to professional legitimacy. Circus artists may feel, and, I argue below, not entirely without precedent, they are resisting an academic legitimacy that risks making circus so elite that it loses its popular appeal and identity.

### **Circus Identity: Resisting Classical Knowledge Hierarchies.**

When situated in my circus identity, I can experience a type of comfort in the rejection of academic institutional imposition of seemingly irrelevant structures on to effective knowledge transmission practices in contemporary circus. I can ‘other’ my academic self. But it is an incomplete identity. My identity also resides in affinity with academia: classical knowledge representation through words, educational structures that create and evaluate educational experiences with rubrics to assess progression, pathways built on their own histories of networks, communication, and demonstrations of proof to enter professional fields (doctoral dissertations, for instance...). While too embedded in circus to ever feel it is entirely ‘other’ for me, I often feel that I am standing in a threshold between circus practice and circus theory (Funk, 2022). From this threshold perspective, drawing on embodied circus practice and rigorous academic practice, with love for the pathways in each guiding participants towards the respective codes necessary in each type of profession, it becomes clear that circus ‘identity’ as a reason to experience rejection of institutionalization is only one part of the story, and a part situated egotistically within circus. As I draw connections between circus realities and realities in other domains, it is incumbent upon me to recognize that circus artists are not the only people to feel that institutionalization compromises their identity, practice, possibilities, or domain.

A close reading of the fears of institutionalization espoused by participants describes the fear that ‘knowing how’ will become subservient to ‘knowing that.’ As our society is already structured to value ‘knowing that’ over ‘knowing how,’ these fears are reasonable. Using Ryle’s



(1949/2009) distinction provides a theoretical underpinning to explain both the fears and benefits described by participants. It further enables a means of understanding the ways that ‘knowing how’ has been inscribed into the institution through and offers to other programmes a way to diversify educational experiences towards better integration of knowing how and knowing that... and whatever other kinds of knowing we may need in the future.

A proponent of logical positivism, Gilbert Ryle’s classic text “The Concept of Mind” (1949/2009) uses a rationalist approach to critique the Platonic and Cartesian mind-body knowledge hierarchy. Ryle contends that Western religious and humanist thought have fundamentally mis-interpreted the categories of mind and body as opposites and therefore mutually exclusive, rather than recognizing these as different categories that can function well or poorly, together or apart, each in their own right. This “category mistake” becomes conflation of “knowing that” (e.g., that a fact is supported by evidence) with “knowing how” (e.g., how to perform a skill).

Ryle effectively argues that intelligence is manifested through skilled actions and that “knowing how” is often a prerequisite for “knowing that” (1949/2009). Classical humanist traditions conflate the (hidden) processes of mind with intelligence. Ryle contests that mind processes can be conducted well or poorly, just as physical processes can be executed well or poorly. A process just being a product of ‘mind’ does not elevate the quality of intelligence: “theorising is one practice amongst others and is itself intelligently or stupidly conducted” (1949/2009, p. 16). True intelligence for Ryle “applies criteria in performing critically, that is, in trying to get things right,” rather than intimate that a well-performed skill is the product of a “double process” of actively thinking (knowing that) while also doing (knowing how) (1949/2009, p. 17). Ryle delightfully (for this particular research) uses the example of a clown.

Different from someone stumbling on the street, the clown has trained the technique of stumbling to place its occurrence within comedic timing. The clown is not thinking through every step of the performance, nor is the presentation rote. Rather the execution of trained stumbling is the manifestation of intelligent “knowing how,” a “bodily and a mental practice” (Ryle, 1949/2009, p. 22) that is ultimately one process necessarily incorporating physical and cognitive forms of “knowing” into one action. We can recognize this as intelligently done, or not, by the skill and criteria the clown is applying to their performance. Appreciating the performance of such skill and application of criteria, according to Ryle, is also a form of “knowing how,” otherwise the viewer would be unable to differentiate intelligent from “silly” processes. The category of “knowing how” therefore includes doing and the appreciation of doing. Further, “knowing how” is the result of training, which often includes rote repetition but must necessarily also include critical application of pertinent criteria. Because “learning how” is procedural, it can also be partial. For Ryle, truth is binary – whole or nothing – while procedural ability is “inculcated” through “a gradual process” (1949/2009, p. 46). Ryle demonstrates that “learning how” necessarily includes misunderstandings due to the gradual, partial nature of learning a process, concluding therefore that “mistakes are exercises of competence” (1949/2009, p. 47).

Where mind and body are perceived as opposites, and where the functions of mind (theory, philosophy) are valued over the functions of body (labour), “knowing that,” a hierarchy is established between types of “knowing.” This is evident in society where ostensible functions of mind are generally more prestigious and lucrative than careers focused on functions of body because functions of mind are perceived to require intelligence where functions of the body do not. The practice of circus follows Ryle’s (1949/2009) proposition that much knowledge begins

with “knowing how” and thereafter can be developed into “knowing that”: the subsequent theories describing and explaining why and what. Using the lens of “knowing how” and “knowing that” illuminates and contextualizes several types of resistances and assumptions about circus and circus students named by participants.

*Circus People are Good at Flips and Can't Write.*

As I describe in the previous chapter in the section “Circus People are not Academic,” several participants professed the persistent belief that physical and academic engagement in circus are mutually exclusive. For example,

*I'm sure on paper evaluations the people who couldn't do a double probably had higher marks than those who could. Lots of people who could do triples couldn't read and write. I think they failed lots of the afternoon courses because they just didn't attend. But they could do a lot of twists and flips, so they had street cred, which is what matters in our business. No one's ever been asked to show they got good marks in history. (T8, p. 5)*

If mind and body are on a spectrum of the same ‘type’ of thing, then being good at ‘body’ necessarily negates being good at mind. This justification returns often, diametrically – proudly – opposing great skill at body with poor skill in traditional academic fields. But if mind and body are different categories that can each have high- or poor-quality application of intelligence, then we create room to grow the processes of mind and body in their respective categories and can expect the results to be individual not dispositional. An acrobat will be able to intelligently apply (physical/mental/creative) criteria to executing a flip within a show context, they have the disposition to flip intelligently when presented with the context. They may *also* – or not – know the biomechanical and scientific laws governing successful completion of the flip.

Some participants emphasized the contributions of theoretical reflection and academic knowledge structures to their circus practice and artistic voice. These participants describe an understanding of how these two knowledge types can co-constructively inform intelligent circus practice.

*The artistic research project with an outside eye is one of the best things DOCH offers. I love to write, I'm good at sitting and focusing. (T4, p.4)*

*Because I don't speak or write well university felt elitist. During the three-month research project, a teacher helped me learn to develop an idea into something concrete by starting from a question, which is a tool I still use today. That felt like doing university-level circus. (Vignette: 2)*

*Being part of a university is good for the circus programme, the training, the development of our art and the documentation of circus, which has been lacking. Circus doesn't have writing about things we know people did. We need to create traces by documenting our work. University provides a framework for documentation using guidelines developed over centuries. The research project taught us these protocols and frameworks, how to develop and present an idea, so we can be part of creating that documentation. I learned how to communicate freedom instead of only trying to impress the audience with tricks. (Vignette: 5)*

The above narratives reflect not only Ryle's (1949/2009) contention that *how* and *that* are types of knowledges which can be done well or poorly, but also reinforce the educational value

of dialogue between intersecting knowledge types and predict the ability for artists to develop and communicate practice-based research knowledges (Nelson, 2013).

To reiterate: because these participants evoked circus in opposition to institution, this thematic thread first seemed an identity-situated rejection of institutionalization, where circus self-defined as anti-institutional and therefore institutionalization becomes a threat to the circus-ness of circus. Instead, using Ryle (1949/2009) as a theoretical lens, we see rejection of the institution as an identity associated proudly with the value in intelligent practice – knowing-how – and an accompanying fear that the institutionalized valuing of knowing-that will undermine and dilute the embodied core of circus knowledge.

*You Can't Learn to Do a Salto on Paper.*

As described in the “Creative Practice” section of Chapter 5: Results, one participant’s description of their circus university experience seems especially illuminating regarding the expectations students had of circus education. An excerpt from the longer text in that chapter reminds us:

*But [Walter] found a way to transform some courses from theoretical to practical, which for us students meant training. That's what we were striving for, what we wanted: to be good in our disciplines. It's what we wanted coming to a circus school. Circus must be a practical education, you can't learn to do a salto on paper. At the end of the day, it's also about that. (T11, p. 1)*

This participant ascribes to a Cartesian understanding that university conventions value knowledge that is the opposite of the embodied knowledge needed to become a circus practitioner, however through the description reveals that the actual university structure in which the education exists ascribes to Ryle’s (1949/2009) proposed mutual valuing of “knowing how”

and “knowing that,” each in their own proportion and situations appropriate to each. The narrative from one participant in the earlier years of the programme names Walter Ferrero, head of the circus BA programme at the time.

The above description, echoed by other participants in their critique of the university experience, indicates that students felt the necessary ‘knowing how’ of circus was being protected against an encroaching and uniformed expectation that circus be educated through, and evaluated by, standardized ‘knowing that’ rubrics. From the curriculum design perspective, with knowledge of the curricular structures of the existing Dance programmes and the history of the University College of Dance, it is evident that in fact what was happening was modifications of the university curriculum structure to accommodate and value the knowing-how practices inherent in circus knowledge transmission and necessary for the development of the artform. What these alumni were actually witnessing was institutional recognition that “efficient practice precedes the theory of it” (Ryle, 1949/2009, p. 19) and enabling the relatively new circus BA to formulate the curriculum in which its own practice could give rise to its own theorization.

There is ample evidence that the BA in circus prioritizes practice-based ‘knowing-how’ while also developing the means and methods for ‘knowing-that’ with regard to situating circus practices. The evidence is in the curriculum which centers embodied practice(s) around which ‘knowing-thats’ are organized, the practice-focused evaluation methods, and the participant responses celebrating opportunities to write/think through their practices. As described above, many students felt that:

*Being part of a university is good for the circus programme, the training, the development of our art and the documentation of circus, which has been lacking. Circus doesn't have writing about things we know people did. We need to create traces by*

*documenting our work. University provides a framework for documentation using guidelines developed over centuries. The research project taught us these protocols and frameworks, how to develop and present an idea, so we can be part of creating that documentation. I learned how to communicate freedom instead of only trying to impress the audience with tricks. (Vignette: 5)*

This indicates a responsive institutional structure that— while maintaining a broad envelope of legal guidelines ensuring equity, consistency, and validity of the education – actively listens and adapts curriculum to the needs of each artform (albeit on the timeline of institutions, which is to say, perhaps moving too slowly for most students to experience change). Several participants indicated this by remarking that they had dialogic influence over specific content that enriched their engagement with the programme and sense of agency.<sup>17</sup> The participant voices included in the above vignette were witness to moments where the attentive institution reconstituted to accommodate and elevate the practice of circus in university. In sum, whereas the students resisted university for fear of a presumed Cartesian hierarchical ‘knowing-that’ imposition of knowledge value and transfer, the university approached circus practice with a primary value on ‘knowing-how’ and inquired of the practice the best methods for its inclusion within the structure. The methods and means by which SKH has been responsive to circus education derive from its mission to cultivate and forefront artistic research at the second and third cycles.

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<sup>17</sup> *DOCH was in dialogue with us about what we needed for our education. They listened to what we thought was important. My cohort contributed to decisions about the programme like which guest teachers we wanted. We were trusted and listened to regarding how to make a good education in circus. It was like being told we could order the most expensive dish on the menu. (Vignette: 7)*

Certain descriptions included tacit or explicit ‘othering’ of the university and the circus education, made apparent by phrases such as “*circus students are allergic to academics,*” “*fooling the system*” and “*the leaders of the circus programme were okay with [us breaking rules], though they couldn’t completely align with us against their university bosses.*” Close analysis reveals that these participants were expressing a desire to ensure “knowing how” in circus would not be exchanged for “knowing that” (Ryle, 1949/2009) because “*you can’t learn a salto on paper.*” Furthermore, student fears that inclusion within a university structure would compromise core learning experiences and outcomes necessary for becoming a professional circus artist have not borne out; rather, the university in this case adapted requirements for representations of formal knowledge through evaluations to include the type of knowledge necessary for circus performance, namely practice-based and embodied knowledge forms. When syllabi were changed to favour practice-based and practical demonstrations of knowledge over reading and writing, the participant reports that the circus school director “*fooled*” the university. In fact, this is evidence of the university changing in response to the relatively new circus programme better articulating the specificities of circus education. This results in a pair of findings relevant for both discourses of circus education and higher education more broadly: that the university adapted to the requirements of practice-based circus knowledge and that participant resistance can be understood through the category mistake that “knowing how” lies on a linear spectrum with “knowing that,” and therefore increasing academic representations of knowledge will necessarily compromise practice-based representations of knowledge, which in turn (if true) would degrade the quality of circus education.



### ***Removing the Illusory Threat of “Knowing That”***

The tension between what is taught in circus school and what is needed to enter the field is a discussion as old as the invention of institutionalized circus programmes (Harris, 1970; Festival Mondial de Cirque de Demain, 1987). The precise details of the conversation have shifted through the past 50 years as circus education has become the primary pathway to professional circus work, where it in turn has been changing the field and re-defining the meaning of ‘circus work’ (Burt & Lavers, 2017; Funk, 2018; Herman, 2009; Jacob, 2008). Viewing these discussions through the lens of Ryle’s category distinction re-frames elements of resistance from circus practitioners to institutionalisation. A key concern expressed by those hiring circus artists, even into the late 2000s, is that circus students will be inadequately prepared for the rigors of professional circus work (Herman, 2009; Jacob, 2008), even as nearly 30 years of circus school graduates have been entering the field, working with existing circuses and forming their own— often revolutionary – companies (Maleval, 2004). Without an apprenticeship or internship period, it is true that many students might be ‘unprepared’ for certain professional realities; easily remedied by adapting a programme to include internships or apprenticeships, as do many of the French circus schools (Bezille et al., 2019). This is not unlike most other fields of practice, where the rhythm and tasks during the education process are not precisely the same as that of the profession. The need for socialisation into work cultures from education norms is not exclusive to circus. Historical resistance to institutionalisation of circus education from the circus industry, even as schools demonstrated capacity for preparing artists with high levels of technical and artistic excellence, is enriched through Ryle’s lens.

It is reasonable to extrapolate that circus directors and professional artists have also been indoctrinated with cultural biases about the value of “knowing how” in comparison to “knowing

that” with the attendant category mistake that these are mutually exclusive and linearly connected types of knowledge (Ryle, 1949/2009). Following this belief, as indicated by the participants in this study, it is apparent that someone highly skilled at “knowing how” to successfully execute double saltos must necessarily be inadequate at knowing and expressing the biomechanical factors at play, to say nothing of the inadequacy relating the artistic impact in relationship to dramaturgical structure. Furthermore, insisting upon the type of “knowing that” favoured by academic institutions will necessarily limit acquisition of “knowing how” and thereby limit the student’s capacity to develop embodied techniques essential for professional integration. Resistance to institutionalized – especially accredited— circus education can be seen as the desire to protect circus learning experiences against “non-circus” learning experiences assumed to be part of the academicization of circus education. Interestingly, this sentiment has not been eradicated: even these students of a contemporary circus programme lamented that future students will experience more institutionalisation than they, and therefore be limited in their readiness for the circus field, even if the definition of what is required to be an artist in the “field” has changed. One participant of DOCH’s university programme in circus still describes their education as non-institutional and laments for future artists: *“The artists of today who had a non-institutional education will resist problematic politics. I think students who have been educated in a really institutional way will not be ready to resist a system controlling all information, movements, everything”* (T12, p. 9) Yet, these are the same students of the generation who have brought forth #climatestrike and #balancetoncirque – counter evidence that the institutionalisation has curbed their desire for political resistance.

Rather than approaching “knowing how” and “knowing that” as mutually exclusive in the context of circus education, we might instead see how academic structures enhance practice-

based forms of “knowing that” with accompanying and intersecting content enriching student knowledge of the physical, artistic, historical, social, and cultural developments in circus that ground and affect the contemporary moment in which they are entering the field. Embracing Ryle’s (1949/2009) recognition of categorically separate types of knowledge guides educators and curriculum developers to attend to the quality of curricula ensuring “know how” as well as “know that.” Communicating the relevance and co-constructive nature of both types of knowledge within the circus field has the potential to shift future conversations around circus education from a focus on techniques essential for the field to knowledges essential for the field. This contributes to ongoing development of creative process methods by entangling domain specific “know how” and “know that” within the broader framework of iterative process, thereby situating both types of knowledge in relationship to the methodological necessities proper to sustainable arts careers (Sawyer, 2018).

The presumption that creativity is necessarily suppressed by university structures also reveals a lack of understanding of where university structures effectively support the development of a process approach to creative practice. While creativity itself cannot be “*evaluated with a number*” as noted by one of the participants, demonstration of commitment to iterative practices that engage with domain knowledge (techniques, contexts) and respond to specific constraints ensures that artists learn a *method* and are evaluated on their approach to practice, not the result.

### ***Modelling Alternative Approaches to Expressing Learning Outcomes***

The developing discourse around circus education will benefit from application of theoretical lenses, such as Ryle’s distinction between mind/body as opposites of the same category and mind/body as different categories of knowing that can each be done poorly or well

and both of which are needed for intelligent practice. These lenses can help practitioners and educators understand where circus concerns overlap topics in other fields – and where ours are specific to the nature of evolving circus practices and performances. Fields outside of circus can in turn draw models from circus education to consider when navigating the increasingly unstable environments within which all humans currently exist. Formal circus schools in the West began in response to a changed circus field; the previous knowledge transmission methods had stagnated along with the form as fewer circuses had fewer performers, read fewer teachers and fewer places for aspiring performers (Maleval, 2004). Many of these schools followed the pedagogical and curricular models of the USSR's schools, which proved to be both successful at ensuring continuity of high-quality circus techniques outside of circus families and incidentally generated significant innovations in equipment, dramaturgy, and disciplines (Harris, 1970; Lalonde, 2007; Maleval, 2004; Mauclair, 2002). After the first French schools began in 1974, the field has only developed more rapidly as circus artists and companies build upon and reject the work that came before them while exploring contemporary topics of concern and interest. For most of its existence, circus education programs have been adapting to a rapidly shifting field (Festival Mondial du Cirque de Demain, 1987; Herman, 2009; Jacob, 2008; Matthis, 2021). Some changes in the field come from broad cultural changes – the internet, for instance – yet many of the changes are the direct result of the fact of circus education. Circus schools have not had the luxury afforded to most university programs of making only minor adjustments to curricula to include updated information; rather circus programs have prepared students even as type of work, methods to access work, funding structures, and audience tastes have outpaced.

The finding in this research that the university structure adapted to accommodate and integrate representations of circus knowledge points towards potential methods applicable across

domains. Standard representations of knowledge in academics include written and graphed knowledge; these forms are challenged by easy access to hiring writers or using AI software like Chat GPT 4 to complete compellingly coherent written tasks. In the DOCH education, these forms were de-prioritized not because of the accessibility to outsource writing, but because written forms of “knowing that” are only useful insofar as they complement “knowing how” to perform the embodied ideas through circus techniques. DOCH administrations adapted the content and learning experiences to favour the type of knowledge which needed to be represented. Without denying the relevance of academic knowledge transmission, these forms were most productively woven into practical work through task-based assignments. Rather than imposing a structure-qua-structure, the institution adapted to create a structure scaffolding creative learning in circus, as evidenced through participant descriptions of the evolution of practice-based education away from exclusively theoretical content, and the integration of theoretical, compositional and documentation methods through performance tasks. In our society reeling from technological changes, universities could look to circus educations as models for maintaining focus on essential tools of a domain while preparing students to enter field in constant flux.

### ***COVID-19 and Domain Transcendence***

Interview questions intended to elucidate connections between educational experiences and professional trajectory were supplemented to include the sharp reality of personal and professional responses to the COVID pandemic. This unanticipated circumstance highlighted adaptations in professional (i.e., how to pursue professional goals), personal (i.e., injury), and global spheres (i.e., governmental responses to COVID). The effect of the COVID pandemic is among the most high-pressure situations that can be imagined for professional circus artists.

Findings from the interviews show that they also used creative process to re-orient within the new pandemic context. They demonstrated applied creative thinking to new global situation, finding problems they could solve that meet their need for self-expression as artists and humans.

Gube and Lajoie (2020) propose the term “applied creative thinking” as a way of highlighting an overlap between standard definitions of creativity, conceptualized as product-oriented and novel, with the understanding that expertise can be “routine” or “adaptive” (Gube & Lajoie, 2020; Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). This phrase encourages creative thinking beyond standardized contexts while anchoring it within the domain of knowledge (expertise). Where creativity advocates purport that creativity is how humans will solve as-yet-unknown problems in the future (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014; Runco & Bahleda, 1986; Sawyer, 2012), “applied creative thinking” names the type of creativity that could do such a thing: “creative thinking that is based on fluid access to learned knowledge, and the adaptive application thereof” (Gube & Lajoie, 2020, p. 10). The findings from my research indicate that while aiming to educate circus artists, the DOCH programme simultaneously fostered applied creative thinking in students, who used it when navigating trajectories within the circus profession and when live performance was compromised due to COVID-19.

One hallmark of adaptive expertise is the ability of the expert to “respond to novel situations more effectively” (Gube & Lajoie, 2020, p. 2). Applying the framework of adaptive expertise (effectively adapting existing knowledge to changing situations), it becomes apparent that the interviewees described resilience to the COVID 19 pandemic by using their existing skills, knowledge, networks, and self-awareness to critically respond to a sudden radical context change for their work and lives. They were able to provide important framing for understanding their situation (appropriateness), from which they found high-quality (implementable) solutions,

necessarily new to them because pre-existing plans collapsed. This demonstrates implementation of a creative approach (methodology) to life-situations, albeit still broadly within the domain of professional work, but outside of what is taught in circus schools. When faced with a major destabilization, these participants demonstrated using creative-process approaches like re-orienting in an unfamiliar context to transcend domain-specificity. Learning creativity within their domain enabled their creative process to become fungible and transferable into extra-domain contexts.

Every person interviewed used elements of the creative process to resolve personal and professional challenges within the new context, and many were reframing the context to find other solutions regarding who they were and how they existed in the world. This is significant because it aligns with the emerging theory that learning and practicing creativity as a method for approaching problems within a domain may prepare artists, and humans, to choose a ‘creative’ method of reframing when faced with situations outside their domain, thereby transcending the domain-specific nature of creative apprenticeship. Further, this predicts the possibility of developing pedagogical emphasis on creativity as a method rather than a product, which is liberating for artists and proactive for supporting all humans to effectively deal with forthcoming unknowns.

All of the participants received the same type of creative process scaffolding through the explicit curriculum described above, therefore from a purely curricular perspective it is not surprising that creative development occurred, nor that it is linked to the educational experiences of redovisnings and the artistic research degree project. Learning the creative process through domain specificity ensured that not only were the students prepared to work in the ever-evolving field of circus performance, but they were also able to practice the iterative process of

developing ideas for new contexts that align with their self-expression, the motor and guide for finding a solution to artistic problems. Without deep immersion in a domain, they would not have repeatedly practiced re-orienting to adapt to new contexts for artistic expression.

As a representative sample from all graduating cohorts, this indicates that in fact the programme is achieving – or at least not inhibiting – Pro-C creativity in circus authorship (creation of material), narrowly domain-specific performance (circus disciplines), and broadly domain-specific performance (multi-disciplinary authorship and performance). Participants described their own creative process when developing new material, how they approach the difficulties of circus work (touring, managing gigs, funding, and finances, creating companies), and enrichment from collaborations with other arts practices (dance, theatre, visual arts).

The interview questions guided participants to describe their responses to moments of challenge, failure, and difficulty. It is in these moments when creativity can emerge as a strength; in fact, is a central argument of creativity research and development that creativity is the only thing that will prepare our populations to solve as-yet-unknown problems. No participant described passive reception of challenges; all related proactive personal and professional development as a means to overcome challenges. None of the challenges faced by these (albeit self-selected) participants compromised their intention to continue in professional circus work.

***Contribution to Original Knowledge and Implications for Practice: Transcending Domains and Transforming Institutions***

My theory of applied circus creativity is built upon the theme “creative practices” because the categories herein demonstrate that a) valuing the knowledge generated through creative practice in circus arts transformed educational structures at DOCH, and b) that learning the creative process within a specific domain prepared these participants to apply their creative



approach in other adjacent domains in their professions, and to constructively navigate maintenance of professional practices during COVID-19. Two of the findings from this theme have implications for circus and arts education programmes. The third finding undergirds the central tenant of my theory of applied circus creativity. All of these findings constitute components of original knowledge leading to the emergent theory of applied circus creativity.

The first finding is that circus student opposition to university and institutional structures, while understood by the participants as a manifestation of circus identity, is a manifestation of an inherited cultural hierarchy valuing “knowing that” over “knowing how” (Ryle, 1949/2009). One thread through the critique of university structure is a concern that the “how” of circus practices could be eradicated through dilution by academic forms of knowing “that.” This concern has echoed through discussions of circus education. Expanding this theoretical lens to discourses of tension between circus practices and circus education explains why the perceived tension between education and profession has persisted despite significant evolution of both over the past fifty years. To foster the development of circus education, it is incumbent upon educators and programme administrators to demonstrate that developing both “knowing how” and “knowing that” in circus is co-constructive. Those participants who were able to recognize how restrictions within university prepared them to navigate professional challenges reinforce the importance of seeing the ways in which engagement with structural limitations can actively contribute to the process of learning tools needed in the circus profession.

The second finding has implications for how university structures are perceived. Participants indicated that the university only becomes more restrictive and that they imagine they had more freedom than the current students. The governmental regulations legislating the administration of education and use of public buildings have certainly changed over time as the

programme has become more embedded in structures responsible for the safety of students and employees, funded entirely by public monies. However, the circus education programme has continued to adapt to the needs of the practice. Furthermore, participant fears seem unfounded in the context of DOCH specifically as evidence shows the university itself shifted content to better scaffold circus knowledges and their representations. This may point towards a model that could be used in other fields to navigate changes to knowledge representation in the face of rapid AI development throwing into question the means by which students accurately demonstrate acquisition of knowledge and composition in writing. Implications for practice here echo the findings in “learning creativity” which encourage more explicit demonstration of the ways in which the education is responsive to feedback from students and adapts to incorporate changing practices in circus arts. This is further linked to the finding above, that both “knowing how” and “knowing that” drive development of a field, which hints at methods which could be used by institutionalized education structures to adapt to future needs. Where knowing-how and knowing-that are seen as complementary categories which each can be done well or poorly (Ryle, 1949/2009), institutional structures have incentive to maintain both for their own purposes. Starting points for institutions include clearly stating aims and a readiness to adapt within a broad framework. After the establishment of clear guidelines, dialogue with the ‘users’ of the structure and field experts invites contemporary knowledges to propose changes to and within the systems, enabling a slow but responsive path towards change.

The third finding is that circus students learned tools for creativity within DOCH’s circus BA programme which they subsequently used in fields outside of the narrow discipline within which those practices were trained. Participants describe consistent apprenticeship of the creative process within their circus specialties through *redovisnings* and the final Exam Project, yet use

the same tools to navigate other domains like grant-writing, equipment design, collaborative projects in adjacent arts domains, and when adapting to the constantly shifting restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding indicates that the circus education provided both domain specific techniques and creative methods that transcended those techniques. This has implications within circus education practices and possible implications for creativity education. Within circus and arts educations, educators can be assured that emphasis on the method of approaching problem-finding and problem-solution is a good foundation for navigating professional scenarios. Where curriculum designers and educators must make clear decisions about the limited content that can be achieved in a three-year programme, this finding points supports the importance of process-related content over skills-demonstrations. The implications for creativity education more broadly are significant; this research suggests that emphasizing creative process within a domain prepares learners to apply that method beyond the domain and could foster applied creative thinking (Gube & Lajoie, 2020) in a plethora of fields.

### **Summary of Discussion**

This chapter has presented the theory of applied circus creativity, supported by the findings from this research. Applied circus creativity names the practice in circus of learning creative process within a specialized domain yet using the same creative process tools to navigate professional challenges adjacent to circus. I propose that applied circus creativity explains how circus artists navigate the many domains of practice they are expected to engage with by approaching them with the same problem-finding and problem-solving method they use in the creation of their disciplinary presentations.

The theory of applied circus creativity is supported by three themes: learning creativity, creative identity, and creative practices. The theme “learning creativity” shows that the curricular

design and content of DOCH's bachelor of circus fostered apprenticeship of creative process tools in an environment where re-orienting from failure is expected and supported (Collins, 2006; Collins et al., 1991). This is how participants learned the tools and timelines of the creative process, which they then applied in their professional lives within and beyond their domain specialty. The theme "creative identity" revealed how participant beliefs about creativity informed their definitions and identification of self and others as creative. The analysis also showed that while all participants recognized having learned creative process tools during the education, not all connected their educational experience with the development of creativity. This was explained by comparing their beliefs about creativity with their expectations of learning and practicing creativity. This theme also showed that participants, when asked to define creativity, instead described the process of undertaking creative work. Identifying that these participants believe creativity is a process guided by self-expression contributed to understanding how they could follow the same type of creative process in situations beyond their domain without naming it creative. The third theme, "creative practices," collects descriptions of the creative actions taken by these participants and the way they are seen as situated within circus identity. Analysis revealed that all of participants use creative thinking within their domain specialties as professional creators (Pro-C). Descriptions of activities in professional practice and during covid show that participants use creative thinking in areas beyond their stage performance of specialty disciplines. This theme also includes a category of resisting institutions that arose in the context of defining circus activities. Many participants expressed that the university structure and accompanying institutionalisation of circus education was counterproductive to accomplishing the type of learning activities necessary for circus. On their face, these narratives situate circus identity in opposition to institutional structures. Upon deeper investigation, the

perceived opposition can be understood as a manifestation of Ryle's (1949/2009) category mistake equating "knowing how" with "knowing that."

In the closing chapter I summarize the how the research questions were answered, the contributions, and implications of this research. I then describe the limitations of this research and propose future research directions.

## **Chapter Seven: Conclusion**

This research investigated what students learned about creativity in circus performance while studying to become professional artists in DOCH's Bachelor of circus programme, and whether they demonstrated using creative thinking in their profession beyond circus performance. Following grounded theory methodology (Bryant, 2014; Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2007), interviews were coded using constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006; Starks & Trinidad, 2007) to discover emergent themes. Further directed comparative analysis (Hsieh & Shannon) is used to explore the relationship of participant experiences to existing theories of curriculum and creativity. The categories that emerged from these analytical methods became three themes, learning creativity, creative identity, and creative practices, which in turn support a theory of applied circus creativity. Examples from transcript text and narrative vignettes (Miles et al., 2014), used to draw together the experiences of multiple participants and retain confidentiality, provide examples of the categories and themes leading to the final theory.

### **Summary of Research Findings**

After analysis of the data, I propose that the theory of applied circus creativity describes the way by which professional artists in this study applied the creative process they learned in DOCH's bachelor of circus programme beyond their domain of expertise. This theory is supported by findings in the three categories. Results from "learning creativity" show that students learned tools for creative process and expression in the explicit curricular content through activities like *redovisnings* and the Exam Project artistic research project. Creativity was also fostered through the hidden curriculum of the teaching and learning environment which favored process over product, attempts over perfection, dialogue over grades, and individual expression over uniformity. Furthermore, students felt their voice and self-knowledge were taken

seriously by the administration with regard to learning experiences which also taught them to value their internal compass in artistic choices. In the category “creative identity,” participants describe their definitions of, and beliefs about, creativity. From this category it became apparent that participant beliefs influenced whether they saw themselves and others as creative, whether they believed the university could teach creativity, and which types of practices they identify as creative. The final category of “creative practices” includes examples of creative work within the participants’ own circus specialties and beyond those specialties in professional practice, as well as approaches to navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. From this category emerges the finding that participants learned creative processes within their domain yet were able to apply them more generally. Many participants also evoke an idea of resistance to the university and institutional structures, some even deliberately separating ‘circus school’ from ‘the university’ when answering the interview questions, which is addressed in this section as a manifestation of internalized knowledge hierarchies.

This research shows that students learned creative tools at DOCH which they describe using in professional and pandemic contexts. While some may have learned creative processes before attending DOCH, all participants spoke about an educational program that met best practices for fostering creativity, therefore all learned at least some aspects of creative process while attending DOCH. Learning the creative process was scaffolded through content (explicit curriculum) and environment (implicit curriculum) (Eisner, 1979/2002). The explicit content provides opportunities for students to learn relevant domain knowledge and techniques (Baer, 2015), practice problem identification (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014), engage in constrained, open-ended projects that call upon their knowledge and imagination (Sawyer, 2018), receive informed critique dialogically (Fasko, 2001; Gajda et al., 2017; Smith & Smith, 2010), and articulate their

thinking through iterations of long-term projects (Sawyer, 2018). The DOCH program met these criteria for all interviewees in many ways over the years, through transitions of location, written curriculum structure, program leaders and guest instructors. Most significantly, all participants clearly indicated learning the creative process through two staple features of the education. In frequent, short-term projects called *redovisnings* students were asked to devise presentations by combining their circus discipline knowledge with unusual or highly specific tasks (*we created presentations inspired by use music, art, or text*). These were followed by feedback circles with the instructors and other students, presenting opportunities for informed critique and articulation of process and intention. The second consistent learning experience fostering creativity was the Exam Project, a long-term artistic research inquiry into an aspect of their circus discipline scaffolded by artistic supervisors (outside eyes) and the academic research framework of articulating research questions and methods, documenting the process and presenting a final work, and writing a reflective document which is then defended in dialogue with other students. The short-term redovisnings and long-term Exam work provide multiple opportunities through the education to develop and discard ideas while refining an artistic vision (described by these participants as self-expression) to fit a context and timeline; effectively practicing the creative process of problem identification, finding solutions fit to the purpose, and re-orienting from failures.

Well-scaffolded opportunities to practice the creative process take root in the substrate of the implicit curriculum. Environmental factors significantly affect motivation and willingness to take risk, both essential qualities for fulfilling the multiple iterations of refinement required by the creative process (Gajda et al., 2017; Hennessey & Amabile, 2010; Sawyer, 2018; Smith & Smith, 2010). Overall, participants described an environment where they felt safe to fail



creatively within their circus specialties. Motivation came from other students (*I felt the other students were the best in the world*), the teachers (*their dream of excellence became ours also*) and the administrative team (*I had people to call whenever I had questions*). While some participants describe a positive connection with students and staff, others related more difficult emotional journeys through the DOCH education. Nevertheless, even when feeling “*the school was working against me*,” the combination of intrinsic motivation (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010) and scaffolded creative process fostered pride in the artistic outcomes and the development of creative practices still being used in current professional contexts. Situated in circus, where ‘failure’ is part of the practice of acquiring domain knowledge (Perahia, 2021), within a community where creative risk is encouraged, and scaffolded by curricular content providing opportunities to practice alignment of artistic vision and constrained context, all participants demonstrated having learned a creative process during DOCH which they use in their profession to create and adapt circus performances in their discipline specialty.

### **Summary of Implications**

This research found implications for the theory of applied circus creativity as well as implications within each of the three supporting themes, learning creativity, creative identity, and creative practices, which are listed in detail in Chapter Six: Discussion. Rather than keeping them separate, the implications are here summarized with their collective impact.

This research supports several ways that programs can foster the development of the creative process. Programs with the aim of educating creatives would benefit from arranging curricular content and learning environments to make the connections between the formal education and creative process explicit, this helps students draw connections between their education and professional practices, and additionally helps them choose those creative processes

in domains beyond their expertise. These processes can be best learned in environments where evaluations prioritize informed, dialogic feedback that includes field experts (teachers), peer groups, and pushing on the thinking of the artist themselves, which helps students situate their creative offering within a field and cultural context. In programs where student voice is given value and power, students develop confidence in their knowledge, which supports them to have confidence in the expression of their creative vision. Connecting with this self-expression is a means by which artists guide the manifestation of a creative outcome and helps them feel where they are going during the creative iterative cycle of trial and error.

Analysis showed that circus students resisted university structures as part of their identity, which resulted in a teleological conclusion that creativity could not be taught within institutions. In fact, DOCH's education programme supported creative development and changed over the years to adapt to the changes in circus professional practice. Where participants felt their practice-based knowledge (knowing how) was at risk of being subsumed by the hierarchical valuing of written and spoken academic practices (knowing that), instead the education changed to ensure content and evaluations that reflected actual practice and the co-development of practice-based and theory-based knowledge categories. This finding encourages programs to continually evaluate how different types of knowledge are being assessed and prioritised in order to reflect domain-relevant knowledge demonstrations.

Learning the creative process within a domain enables students to engage with field-relevant problem-finding and problem-solving activities. It is therefore beneficial for the development of a field that students learn the creative process within it. It is also beneficial for learning the creative process to situate the practice within a field of expertise. These participants demonstrated that they used creative process approaches to domains beyond their specialty,

which suggests that programs aimed specifically at the development of creativity should situate learning the process within domain specialties before applying the process more generally.

### **Future Research**

This research contributes to research exploring connections between creativity, curriculum, and performing arts (Carter et al., 2015; Hazelkorn, 2004). Further research could take place in circus or arts education programs – or perhaps more broadly in other domains - to investigate how different types of creativity apprenticeship (movement, artistic, academic, strategic) affect long-term resilience to uncertainty. These connections enable the development of curricular strategies outside of circus education to enrich the design of creativity-focused curricula. There are rich implications for future studies of the long-term effects of circus education on career transitions, to see if the same types of creative process strategies are applied during the transition or in the new work.

The finding in this research that circus students viewed circus in opposition to the university – always/already other – from a lens placing “knowing how” and “knowing that” in linear exclusivity suggests another path for future studies. This has implications for curriculum design and analysis within circus education programs, but also sheds light on different ways of approaching recurring conversations within the circus field questioning the alignment between education and profession. Continuing research beginning from the framework of “knowing how” and “knowing that” could further illuminate existing circus curricula and enhance future development, especially as circus schools face contemporary challenges of reconciling historical biases with the needs of current students.

## **Limitations**

There are several limitations of this research that can be investigated with future studies. Because participants self-selected, the narratives are only from those who wanted to engage with the school and who felt their voice would be relevant for the study. All of the volunteers have a current performance practice. It is not clear how many alumni from DOCH's circus BA have discontinued circus performance to move into other adjacent fields, or discontinued association with circus altogether. A more comprehensive survey of graduates might find that this group of 12 is exceptional in their resilient and positive response to the pandemic. Other interesting and relevant perspectives on the curricular experience and its relationship to contemporary professional practices and creativity could also be revealed with a larger sample size. Finally, while most of the participants were generally positive about their educational experiences at DOCH, several were unafraid to discuss difficult and destabilizing experiences. It cannot be concluded, therefore, that only graduates with positive experiences chose to participate in this research.

Studying graduates from one circus programme comes with benefits and limitations. The benefits, discussed in the methodology section, are that following a similar programme with broadly the same educators highlights the individuality of the interpretations and experiences described by participants. Researching only one programme may limit the generalizability of the results because of educational atmosphere, content, and curricular differences in other higher education circus programs. To overcome these limitations a broader survey of circus school graduates and their careers might find more universal connections between curriculum and practice.

Finally, there are limitations inherent in the bias and epistemology of this researcher. My position working for and representing circus in the Stockholm University of the Arts could positively skew my interpretation of the results. One external factor contains undue bias is the high rate of active performers, well-known in the circus field, that attended the DOCH circus BA. This record is what made this programme interesting to study even before I became associated with it. Internally, my vested interest in circus education means that I am curious to find gaps indicative of areas for improvement.

### **Circus Education Manifesto**

This research has been conducted with curiosity, humility, and love. Through it I have repeatedly been called to re-think, re-frame, and re-orient how I understand teaching, learning and educational structures in circus. Through my practice and my research, I have articulated a guiding philosophy for myself in my leadership roles informed by the voices of participants in this study, the students and faculty with whom I work, and situated in the global histories and global present of the circus field. Circus can do many things, and those who participate in circus education, on any scale, are typically passionate about their vision of circus. I am no different. I am driven by an interest in understanding how circus and institutions can find reciprocal nourishments. To this end, I believe circus practitioners can better understand what we might gain from affiliation with institutional structures. To paraphrase one of the participants, I believe circus could be taking more from the buffet.

I envision circus education programs where, when a non-discipline course is poorly taught, the students complain that they have missed out on valuable information, rather than scapegoating anything with a whiff of academia about it. I aspire to experiencing a circus education programme where students attend not only to improve their physical and artistic

performance, but which they also choose because it offers critical reflection about circus in society(ies), engagement with aesthetic traditions, practice-based approaches to career development and overall knowledge that contributes to developing a broader field of circus rather than narrowly preparing only professional performance abilities. Without denigration, I see this as the difference between a superficial ability to perform high-level contemporary (or classical) circus – which should be provided by both training centres and university programmes – and a deeper, broader understanding of the *what*, *why*, and *how* of circus: past, present and future(s). Within this ‘deep’ approach to circus education, courses would be in dialogue with each other, staff and students would understand the interrelated learning outcomes and support them, and it would be apparent how learning to read, write and think about circus practice enhances, rather than detracts from, professionalization. This dissertation is one step in that direction. Thank you, reader, for joining me here.

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## Appendix A: Invitation Letter for Interview

Dear (Participant),

My name is Alisan Funk and I am a Doctoral candidate at McGill University in Montréal as well as head of the BA in Circus at Stockholm University of the Arts (formerly DOCH).

I am writing to ask if you would participate in my doctoral research exploring the relationship between your profession and your experiences of circus education at DOCH.

The interview will last between 30-60 minutes using the online platform Zoom. The audio from the interview will be recorded for transcription, after which the audio file will be deleted and the anonymized transcription kept. You may request a copy of your interview transcript.

### Informed Consent:

- **You may withdraw for any reason before December 2021.**
- There is no obligation to answer all of the interview questions
- Interview responses will remain confidential and will not be connected with your name (neither student, nor educator, nor any other person's name) in publication or presentation of the data, even if names are used in the responses UNLESS THE PARTICIPANT REQUESTS THAT THEIR NAME BE INCLUDED, as indicated by a signature on the consent form.
- Consent for the interview will be given at the time of the interview via signature and date. Please see attached consent form.

**Disclosure:** I am a Doctoral candidate at McGill University in Montréal and head of the BA in Circus at Stockholm University of the Arts (formerly DOCH). The data from this research will be presented in the form of a Doctoral dissertation and be read by the thesis advisory committee and the participants, if interested. This research will also become the basis of published papers and conference presentations.

**If you agree to participate** in an interview, please reply by [date set two weeks from invitation letter] so that we may find a time for an interview.

**If you decline to participate**, and would like to ensure that you are not contacted again for this research, please email me at [alisan.funk@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:alisan.funk@mail.mcgill.ca) with the words “decline survey participation.” No explanation is needed.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact myself, or my supervisor, Dr. Mindy Carter, [mindy.carter@mcgill.ca](mailto:mindy.carter@mcgill.ca)

Thank you for your time and consideration, Alisan Funk  
[alisan.funk@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:alisan.funk@mail.mcgill.ca)





## Appendix B: Consent Form

### Participant Consent Form: Interview of SKH/DOCH graduates

This form provides information about participation in an interview. Please read it carefully before deciding if you want to participate or not. If there is anything you do not understand, or you want more information, please contact Alisan Funk or Dr. Mindy Carter.

**Researcher:** Alisan Funk, M.A. PhD Candidate, McGill University, Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE). Email: [alisan.funk@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:alisan.funk@mail.mcgill.ca)

**Supervisor:** Dr. Mindy Carter, McGill University (Montréal, Canada), Department of Integrated Studies in Education (DISE). Telephone: 01-514-398-4527 Ext. 094457. Email: [mindy.carter@mcgill.ca](mailto:mindy.carter@mcgill.ca)

**Title of Project:** Elucidating the relationship between a circus arts curriculum and the applied creative thinking of graduates in personal and professional contexts

**Sponsor(s):** This research has received support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

**Purpose of the Study:** This research explores the relationship between the creative strategies learned in circus education to the way graduates navigate their career activities.

**Study Procedures:** You are invited to participate in an interview, where you will be asked about your experiences in circus school and your career (in circus or other domains you have pursued). The interview will last between 30-60 minutes, and will be conducted on Zoom. The Zoom recording will be transcribed for data analysis. You will remain known to the interviewer, but the transcription will be anonymized by removing your name and significant identifying characteristics. You may have a copy of your interview transcript upon request.

#### Voluntary Participation:

- Participants can withdraw during or right after the study, at which point all information obtained up until that point will be destroyed, unless you specify otherwise at the time of withdrawal.” Your identifiable data will be retained until December 31, 2021 after which data will be anonymized and combined for publication. It might not be possible to withdraw your data in its entirety. We can only remove it from analysis and from use in future publications.
- There is no obligation to answer all of the interview questions.

- Interview responses will be anonymized and will never be connected with your name in publication or presentation of the data.

**Disclosure of Interests:** I am a Doctoral candidate at McGill University in Montréal and an Associate Professor of Circus Arts at the University of Dance and Circus (DOCH), where I also head the BA in Circus Arts. Students currently enrolled in the DOCH Circus Arts BA are excluded from this study.

**Potential Risks:** There are no anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. The study does not involve deception, presents no physical, personal or reputational ethical concerns and will adhere strictly to ethical standards of educational research. To ensure that there will be no professional or personal risk to participants and their communities, no participant names will be used in analysis and dissemination of this research. Other identifiable information (e.g. discipline, gender, graduation year) will be edited to preserve confidentiality.

**Potential Benefits:** Although participating in this study may not benefit you individually, we hope to learn more about the relationship between circus education and creativity. This will be a benefit to the circus community by highlighting successes and gaps in circus education, and it could also have benefits for creativity education in situations outside of circus school. It is possible that individual participants will benefit from the introspection inspired by the questions. For some, the opportunity to have their voices heard may also be perceived as a benefit. SKH/DOCH may also benefit from reflections provided by graduates of the Circus Arts BA.

**Compensation:** There is no compensation for participation in the interview.

**Confidentiality:** To ensure anonymity in all presentations and publications, the researcher may modify information to protect participant identity. This may include changing names or removing the names of companies and festivals; changing the associated circus disciplines; changing the participant's gender, changing the country of origin, or other modifications that maintain confidentiality.

Alisan Funk will transcribe the interviews. Only Alisan Funk and Mindy Carter (doctoral supervisor) will have access to non-anonymized interview data. This data will be kept by Alisan Funk in a password protected document on an encrypted hard drive. By participating, you agree to let these authorities have access to the information. An anonymized copy of the data, with the above modifications as necessary, will be used for ongoing data analysis.

Please indicate your consent below:

*Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_ You consent to be video-recorded during your interview.*

Yes: \_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_ *You consent to be audio-recorded during your interview.*

**Questions:** If you have further questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact [alisan.funk@mail.mcgill.ca](mailto:alisan.funk@mail.mcgill.ca) (McGill University) or [alisan.funk@uniarts.se](mailto:alisan.funk@uniarts.se) (Stockholm University of the Arts).

**Concerns:** If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the McGill Ethics Manager at 01-514-398-6831 or [lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca](mailto:lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca).

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Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name: (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Interview Guide**

### **I'd like to know about what DOCH/SKH was like when you attended.**

- What was a typical schedule (tell me the story of a typical day/week/month/term)?
  - Follow-up questions include: How were classes organized? What kind of things (subjects/content) did you learn? How were evaluations run? Who did you have as guest teachers? How often did you work independently? How was feedback given (by whom, when)?
- Can you tell me a story about a moment (class, teacher, experience) that had an effect on you?
- Did the way the school was run change over the three years, or mostly stay the same?
- Did being part of a university have any effect on the circus education, the students, or the teachers?
- What did it feel like to attend school during those years?
- Did you feel connected to the circus community in Sweden or elsewhere while you were at school?
- What was your experience of 'failure' in classes or the school?
- What was the biggest challenge you had at school, and how did you deal with it?
  - What was the biggest creative challenge?
  - What was the biggest organizational challenge?
  - What was the biggest educational challenge?

### **I'd like to know about what you've been doing since graduating from DOCH/SKH**

- What has your career been like?
- Have you mostly worked in circus, or in other domains?
- Can you tell me about a challenge in your career and how you dealt with it?
  - Is there a time you had to change your act/discipline?
  - Is there a time you had to change your profession?
  - What skills and knowledge have you developed since leaving school?
- Have you found challenges in your career very difficult to resolve, or have you usually found solutions? Can you tell me a story about one of those moments?

- Do you see any connections between dealing with those challenges and what you learned at DOCH/SKH?
  - Do you see more connections with another area of your life: another school, workplace, family, friends, spiritual community, etc.?

**I'd like you to tell me about how you have been dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in your career and profession.**

- What was your first reaction, and what did you need to solve immediately?
- What are you doing now?
- What are you planning for?
- What kinds of challenges do you see to circus?
  - What kinds of solutions do you see?

**Do you have other thoughts or stories about these topics that you would like to share?**

## **Appendix D: Programme Syllabi for DOCH's Bachelor Programme in Circus 2008-2018**

*The earliest syllabi below were not archived in English, therefore I have included the Swedish version only. All DOCH legal documentation is in Swedish, though English translations are often provided for students and staff. In case of a discrepancy between the two versions, the Swedish document will always be followed.*



## Kandidatexamen i Nycirkus

120 poäng

### UTBILDNINGSPLAN

Fastställd av Utbildningsnämnden 2005-04-07

Reviderad

Gäller fr.o.m. 2005-07-01

Nycirkusen vill vara ett fantasifullt forskande både inom området vad människokroppen kan visa och vad den behöver och inom området integration mellan cirkustekniker, teater, dans, musik, poesi & film och andra bildkonster och uttryckssätt.

Nycirkusutbildningen ser det också som självklart att konsten idag behöver praktiska möten med publiken. Inte minst arbete med barn utgör en inspirationskälla som bör tas till vara. Därför ingår utöver det konstnärliga övandet också praktik som handledare i cirkuskurser i programmet.

Nycirkusartisten behöver också kunna föra sig både som entreprenör och anställd i många olika sammanhang på en internationell marknad, vilket utbildningen bör förbereda.

Sist och slutligen behöver den fria konstnären lära känna vägar till källor för ny inspiration fördjupad motivation, varför stor vikt bör läggas på reflektion och möten med erfarna kollegor från olika konstnärliga arenor.

Nycirkusutbildningen omfattar tre års studier på heltid, 120 poäng.

*Syftet* med nycirkusutbildningen är:

- att utbilda artister som förbereder dem för ett yrkesliv inom scenkonsterna med särskilda färdigheter i cirkusdisciplinerna
- att utbildningen skall ge de studerande arbetsmetoder med vilkas hjälp de skall kunna lösa konstans specifika sceniska uppgifter
- att utbildningen också skall ge en grund för fortsatt utveckling som skapande konstnär i det sceniska kollektivet samt inom den individuella cirkusdisciplinen.

*Särskilda mål* med nycirkusutbildningen är att de studerande efter fullgjord utbildning:

- har hög internationell nivå inom en eller två cirkusdiscipliner samt grundläggande förmågor inom övriga gängse discipliner
- behärskar grunderna för att kunna arbeta med dans musik och scenframställning
- har god scenisk berättar- och gestaltsförmåga samt förmåga att ta ansvar för såväl den personliga arbetsuppgiften som för helheten

- har känsla för och förmåga till arbete i ensemble också under ledning av regissör och/eller koreograf
- har stor kännedom om alla yrkesfunktioner som förekommer inom nycirkusområdet och erforderliga kunskaper och kännedom om bestämmelser beträffande säkerhet och riggning
- har goda praktiska och teoretiska kunskaper i cirkuspedagogik, anatomi, kostlära och första hjälpen
- har förmåga och lust till reflektion över den egna yrkesrollen och den samtida konstens utvecklingsmöjligheter och nödvändigheter.

*Allmänna mål för högskoleutbildning enligt högskolelagen (SFS 1992:1434 1 kap. 9 §. Rev. 2001:1263)*

Den grundläggande högskoleutbildningen skall ge studenterna

- förmåga att göra självständiga och kritiska bedömningar,
- förmåga att självständigt urskilja, formulera och lösa problem, samt
- beredskap att möta förändringar i arbetslivet.

Inom det område som utbildningen avser skall studenterna, utöver kunskaper och färdigheter, utveckla förmåga att

- söka och värdera kunskap på vetenskaplig nivå,
- följa kunskapsutvecklingen, och
- utbyta kunskaper även med personer utan specialkunskaper inom området.



## **Utbildningens innehåll**

Utbildningen består av sju huvudområden med olika delkurser. Vissa delkurser är grundkurser, andra påbyggnadskurser.

Av kursplaner kommer att framgå förutsättningskrav m.m. samt vilka kurser som skulle kunna vara öppna för andra högskolestudenter.

Tills vidare är alla kurser obligatoriska.

Nedan redovisas bilden av det första året samt skiss till år 2 och 3.

### **Årskurs 1:**

#### **Cirkus 1**

Grunderna i Akrobatik, Balans, Parakrobatik/Handstans, Luft(:trapets, tyg, rep, ring m.m.), Trampolin, Bungy samt Jonglering (objektmanipulation). Grunder för egen träning: styrka, flex & stretch. Grundläggande kunskaper om rigg & säkerhet.

#### **Disciplin 1**

Differentierat kommer senare.

#### **Scenframställning 1**

Komposition, Videoteknik och data, Mim/Clown, Produktionsövning/Föreställning.

#### **Tvärkonstnärligt arbete 1**

Kultur-Teater- & Cirkus-historia. Seminaristiska möten med personer inom besläktade arbetsområden och/eller av intresse för den konstnärliga utvecklingen

#### **Anatomi 1**

Första hjälpen, Pilates, Massage, Kostlära.

#### **Dans 1**

Klassisk balett, Jazzdans.

#### **Musik/Rytmik 1**

Grundläggande teori, Individuellt instrument/Sång.

#### **Cirkuspedagogik 1**

Teori: individ, Pedagogisk praktik.

### **Årskurs 2:**

#### **Cirkus 2**

Repetition av grunddiscipliner, Fördjupade kunskaper om rigg & säkerhet.

#### **Disciplin 2**

Diferentierad fördjupning.

**Scenframställning 2**

Komposition fördjupning, Mim/Tal, Scenografi/Kostym,  
Produktionsövning/Föreställning/Film.

**Tvärkonstnärligt arbete 2**

Fortsatta seminaristiska möten, Mentorval.

**Anatomi 2**

Alternativa träningsmetoder, Teori.

**Dans 2**

Modern & Nutida dans, Improvisation.

**Musik 2**

Ensemble, Röstteknik/Sång, Sampling/redigering.

**Cirkuspedagogik 2**

Teori: samhälle, fördjupning Pedagogisk praktik.

**Årskurs 3:****Cirkus 3**

Repetitioner grunddiscipliner, Ytterligare fördjupade kunskaper om rigg- & säkerhets/Ansvarskompetens.

**Disciplin 3**

Integrering av disciplin/er med dans, musik, scenframställning.

**Scenframställning 3**

Nummerarbete, Produktionsövning, Föreställning.

**Dans 3**

Valbar kurs på DH.

**Musik 3**

Nummerarbetet.

**Marknadsföring/Ekonomi m.m.**

Eget företag, Arbetsrätt, Bokföring, Marknadsföring m.m.

**Examensarbete**

Nummerarbete alt. Cirkuskursledning.

### **Examen**

För examen krävs att den studerande fullföljt hela utbildningsprogrammet om 120 poäng. Efter överenskommelse med berörda utbildningsledare kan kurser inom programmet bytas ut mot andra kurser inom DH.

### **Behörighet**

Grundläggande behörighet.

Lägst betyget godkänd i Svenska B/Svenska 2B samt Engelska A.

Sökande med utländsk gymnasieexamen och som saknar betyg i svenska, har rätt att söka dispens för att delta i antagningsprov. Den som blir antagen måste dock genomgå test för att visa tillräckliga kunskaper i svenska innanstudierna påbörjas i augusti.

God fysik med regelbunden träning inom minst en av cirkusdisciplinerna eller inom något annat konstnärligt/fysiskt område.

Utbildningen kräver också konstnärlig begåvning, intresse för scenisk gestaltning och samarbetsförmåga.

### **Antagning**

Urval bland de sökande sker först genom Ansökningshandlingar+Video/DVD och därefter genom antagningsprov.

(För övriga regler om antagning se DH's Antagningsordning).

### **Regler för fortsatt studiegång**

Minst godkänd för 30 poäng/år inom utbildningen eller efter överenskommelse med berörda utbildningsledare andra kurser inom DH. För att få börja i årskurs 2 krävs Godkänt i Cirkus 1, för att få börja i årskurs 3 krävs Godkänt i Cirkus 2.

## Programme in Neo Circus, Degree of Bachelor of Arts, 2007-2010

F7C



**Nycirkusutbildningen, 180 hp/  
Programme in Neo circus, 180 ECTS**

**Konstnärlig kandidatexamen, 180 hp/  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts, 180 ECTS**

### UTBILDNINGSPLAN

Fastställd av Danshögskolans utbildningsnämnd 2007-01-19

Reviderad 2007-09-10

Gäller för de nya studenter som påbörjar utbildningen fr o m ht 2007

#### Inledning

Nycirkusutbildningen är en 3-årig grundutbildning för studerande med inriktning mot professionell verksamhet inom nycirkusområdet. Utbildningen leder till kandidatexamen.

Nycirkus är ett konstområde som verkar i gränslandet mellan olika cirkustekniker och andra konstformer; kroppen är verktyget.

För att synliggöra detta ger vi våra studenter möjlighet att möta omvärlden även i föreställningar; konst är dialog.

Konstnären använder olika vägar till källor för inspiration och motivation. Stor vikt läggs därför i utbildningen vid reflektion och möten med aktörer från olika konstområden

Nycirkusaktören verkar både som entreprenör och anställd på en internationell arbetsmarknad. Under utbildningen förbereds studenterna för detta.

Utbildningen vilar på konstnärlig och vetenskaplig grund, samt beprövad erfarenhet.

Studenter på Danshögskolans utbildningar förutsätts ta eget ansvar för sina studier, utvecklandet av egna förmågor och medvetenhet och sitt eget kunskapsbyggande.

Utbildningens kvalitet är en gemensam fråga för studenter och lärare.

Utbildningen följer de allmänna målen för högskoleutbildning enligt högskolelagen (SFS 1992:1434 1 kap. 8 §. Rev. 2001:1263 (Lag 2006:173)), samt målen för Konstnärlig kandidatexamen i Högskoleförordningen, Bilaga 2.

Nycirkusutbildningen syftar till att utbilda studenter med förmågor, kunskaper och medvetenhet till och om människan i fantasirik rörelse.

Nycirkusutbildningen ger studenterna möjlighet att utvecklas till självständiga, medvetna scenkonstnärer med de kunskaper och färdigheter som behövs för att verka inom den nutida scenkonstens olika arenor, både inom den fria sektorn och vid institutioner, nationellt och internationellt. Olika uppgifter samt möten med yrkesverksamma regissörer, koreografer och artister inom det samtida konstområdet ger studenterna möjlighet att vidga sin yrkeskunskap och sin syn på sina arbetsuppgifter.

En grundläggande målsättning är att ge studenten utrymme och tid för personlig utveckling, tid att hinna mogna i sin person och i sin yrkesroll som nycirkusaktör. Stor vikt läggs vid att utveckla studentens egen skapande förmåga samt att stimulera studenten till ett självständigt och öppet förhållningssätt i sitt arbete. Under utbildningen skall studenten utveckla kunskap om och förtrogenhet med konstnärliga processer. Utbildningen syftar till att vara en plats där studenten har möjlighet att bygga förmågor, kunskaper och medvetenhet som integrerar det konstnärliga perspektivet med det praktiska, hantverksinriktade arbetet.

Parallellt med samtliga kurser finns tid för ett processinriktat arbete individuellt och i grupp. Processen har ett övergripande fokus mot professionen och studenten arbetar under hela utbildningen med processreflektion och dokumentation såväl personligt som i grupp.

Under utbildningstiden är vissa kurser gemensamma med studenter med inriktning koreografi, danspedagogik och/eller dans. Detta för att ge en inblick och en ömsesidig förståelse för den konstnärliga processens olika aktörer. En gemensam kurs om kroppen kulturen och konsten utifrån olika perspektiv löper genom Danshögskolans alla grundutbildningar.

Inom alla utbildningsprogram betonas vikten av en god etik, reflekterad syn på kunskap och respekt för demokratiska värden. Diskussioner kring värderingar i fråga om jämställdhet och jämlikhet, integration och mångfald, demokrati och etik förs kontinuerligt och studenterna uppmuntras att reflektera kring dessa frågor.

## **Lärandemål**

### **Kunskap och förståelse**

Efter avslutad utbildning

- har studenten tillägnat sig kunskaper och färdigheter i att självständigt lösa de sceniska uppgifter han/hon ställs inför
- har studenten tillägnat sig en god grund för en fortsatt utveckling som skapande konstnär, såväl enskilt som i ett kollektiv
- har studenten god kunskap om nycirkusaktörens komplexa yrkesroll och förståelse för arbetsmarknadens villkor och möjligheter
- har studenten en fördjupad kunskap och insikt i arbetsmetoder som främjar den egna utvecklingen som nycirkusaktör
- har studenten goda kunskaper om somatisk och mental hälsa och förståelse för vad som krävs för ett hälsosamt och gott yrkesliv gällande; träning, kost, alternativa träningsmetoder, mental träning och skadeprevention
- kan studenten formulera sig och klargöra sitt förhållande till nycirkus som konstnärligt uttrycksmedel och samhällsligt behov

### **Färdighet och förmåga**

Efter avslutad utbildning

- har studenten förvärvat en mycket god uttrycksförmåga på hög nivå inom minst en cirkusdisciplin

- har studenten förmåga till fördjupad scenisk gestaltning och kan arbeta med varierande sceniska uttryck
- har studenten de färdigheter som krävs för en fortsatt utveckling av sin gestaltande och fysiska förmåga inom nycirkus
- kan studenten skapa egna mindre nycirkusföreställningar, samt vara medskapande i av andra ledda konstnärliga processer

#### **Värderingsförmåga och förhållningssätt**

Efter avslutad utbildning

- kan studenten arbeta självständigt
- har studenten en medvetenhet om kroppens signaler, både vad beträffar konstnärlig process, som somatisk och mental hälsa
- har studenten en medvetenhet om nycirkusens plats och berättigande i det allmänna samhällslivet och kan företräda sina ståndpunkter
- har studenten förvärvat insikter om vikten av respekt för de olika aktörer som medverkar i den konstnärliga processen
- har studenten en reflekterad syn på frågor som rör demokrati, mångfald, likabehandling, jämställdhet och jämlikhet och förstår allas lika värde
- har studenten insikt i gruppdynamiska processer och kan arbeta öppet och självständigt i ett kollektiv
- kan studenten förhålla sig kritiskt reflekterande till de uppgifter han/hon ställs inför

#### **Utbildningens innehåll**

Nycirkusutbildningen omfattar tre års studier på heltid motsvarande 180 hp/180 ECTS på högskolenivå.

##### **Kurser**

Introduktion till högskolan, 3 hp/3 ECTS	Dans, 16 hp/16 ECTS
Cirkustekniker, 52 hp/52 ECTS	Musik, 7 hp/7 ECTS
Cirkus i fysisk gestaltning, 4 hp/4 ECTS	Produktionsövningar, 12 hp/12 ECTS
Nycirkus på gatan, 4 hp/4 ECTS	Entreprenörskap, anställning och ekonomi, 5 hp/5 ECTS
Cirkus som bildande konst, 12 hp/12 ECTS	Metodkurs, 5 hp/5 ECTS
Cirkus som konstform, 12 hp/12 ECTS	Examensarbete, 15 hp/15 ECTS
Nycirkusaktörens hälsa, 9 hp/9 ECTS	
Konst, Kropp och Kultur, 24 hp/24 ECTS	

Kursernas innehåll beskrivs kortfattat i kursbeskrivning sist i detta dokument.

#### **Undervisningsspråk**

Undervisning och examination sker i huvudsak på svenska. Delar av undervisningen ges på engelska.

## **Examination**

Om inte annat föreskrivs i kursplanen skall betyg sättas på varje genomförd kurs. Betygsgrader är Underkänd, Godkänd och Väl godkänd. Vissa kurser använder endast betygsgraderna Underkänd och Godkänd.

## **Processdokumentation**

Studenten förväntas att under utbildningstiden föra dagbok över sin process. Dagboken används som bas för samtal och diskussioner om samband mellan utbildningens olika kurser och moment.

## **Behörighet**

- Grundläggande behörighet
- Särskild behörighet  
lägst betyget Godkänd i Svenska B/Svenska 2 B, Engelska A, Historia A eller motsvarande om sökande kommer från annat land än Sverige. För sådan erfordras särskilt språkprov.
- Sökande skall ha en god fysik med regelbunden träning inom minst en av cirkusdisciplinerna eller inom något annat konstnärligt/fysiskt område. Dessutom krävs intresse för scenisk gestaltning.

## **Antagning**

Urval bland behöriga sökande sker först genom ansökningshandlingar + Video/DVD och därefter genom antagningsprov.  
(För övriga regler om antagning se Danshögskolans Antagningsordning).

## **Regler för fortsatt studiegång**

För att gå vidare till nästa årskurs krävs godkända kurser om minst 45 hp/årskurs inom utbildningen eller efter överenskommelse med berörda utbildningsledare andra kurser inom Danshögskolan. För att få börja i årskurs 2 krävs Godkänt i sin disciplin, åk 1, för att få börja i årskurs 3 krävs Godkänt i sin disciplin, åk 2.  
Studenten skall kontinuerligt kunna redogöra för utbildningens innehåll.

## **Avrådan**

Se särskilt dokument

## **Kursbeskrivning**

### **Introduktion till högskolan, 3 hp/3 ECTS**

Kursen innehåller seminarier och diskussioner kring högskoleutbildning, etik och moral, yrkesidentitet samt demokrati och värdegrund.

### **Cirkustekniker, 52 hp/52 ECTS**

Kursen omfattar såväl grundläggande förmågor i disciplinerna akrobatik, ekvilibristik, jonglering och luft, som avancerad förmåga i en eller två av dessa. I avancerad förmåga inbegrips att integrera dans, röst, scenframställning och musik i disciplintekniken. Egen träning vad beträffar styrka och flexibilitet, samt kunskaper och förmågor om riggning och säkerhetsfrågor

### **Cirkus i fysisk gestaltning, 4 hp/4 ECTS**

Grundläggande kurser i tal/röst, mim/clown, interpretation, scenframställning, mask, samt föreställning/produktion

### **Nycirkus på gatan, 4 hp/4 ECTS**

Grundläggande praktiska övningar i publikkontakt, om val av plats och platsens villkor. Samtal och föredrag om gatukonstens villkor

### **Cirkus som bildande konst, 12 hp/12 ECTS**

En praktisk, filosofisk, teoretisk kurs där fysiska övningar varvas med skriftliga. Reflektion med aktivitet. I kursen integreras fysisk intelligens med tanke och teori

### **Cirkus som konstform, 12 hp/12 ECTS**

Övergripande tema utgår från nycirkusaktörens identitet som konstnär. Hur förhåller sig en nycirkusaktör till sin konst och genom den till världen? En teoretisk introduktionskurs som även kommer att genomföras och vidareutvecklas i de praktiska kurserna

### **Nycirkusaktörens hälsa, 9 hp/9 ECTS**

Tränings- och kostlära, första hjälpen, olika träningsmetoder för kropp och själ

### **Konst, Kropp och Kultur, 24 hp/24 ECTS**

Kursen innehåller föreläsningar och seminarier kring olika teman rörande kropp, kultur och konst

### **Dans, 16 hp/16 ECTS**

För nycirkusen anpassad dansträning också med korta introduktioner till olika dansstilar, som är kursrepresenterade på Danshögskolan, samt improvisation och interpretation.

### **Musik, 7 hp/7 ECTS**

Rytmik. Sång- och instrumentalövningar. Ensemble-musicerande. Orientering om relationer mellan scenframställning och musik.



**Produktionsövningar, 12 hp/12 ECTS**

Föreställningar i olika kontexter; dans, teater m fl

**Entreprenörskap, anställning och ekonomi, 5 hp/5 ECTS**

Kursen ger en orientering om villkoren för eget företagande, arbetsrätt, bokföring, marknadsföring m.m.

**Metodkurs, 5 hp/5 ECTS**

**Examensarbete, 15 hp/15 ECTS**

Kurser	delkurser	Åk 1	Åk 2	Åk 3	Total hög- skolepoäng
Introduktion till högskolan		3			3
Cirkustekniker		20	18	14	52
	<i>Parallella delkurser i:</i>				
	Disciplin, akrobatik				
	Disciplin, ekvilibristik	10,5	11	11	
	Disciplin, jonglering				
	Disciplin, luft				
	Allmän akrobatik	2	2	1	
	Disciplinbredd	3	1		
	Koreografisk komposition	4,5	4	2	
Cirkus i fysisk gestaltning		4			4
	Scenframställning och röst	2			
	Mim och mask	2			
Nycirkus på gatan		4			4
Cirkus som bildande konst		4	4	4	12
Cirkus som konstform		4	4	4	12
Nycirkusaktörens hälsa		5	4		9
Konst, Kropp och Kultur		9	9	6	24
Dans		5	6	5	16
Musik		2	3	2	7
Entreprenörskap, anställning och ekonomi			4	1	5
Produktionsövningar			8	4	12
Metodkurs				5	5
Examensarbete				15	15
<b>Totalt</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>180</b>

## Educational Program of Bachelor of Arts in Circus, 2009-2012



### **Cirkusutbildningen, 180 hp/ Program in Circus, 180 HE Credits/ 180 ECTS**

### **Konstnärlig kandidatexamen i cirkus, 180 hp/ Educational Program of Bachelor of Arts in Circus, 180 HE Credits/180 ECTS**

Determined by the Board of the University College of Dance for Artistic Research and Development and Education, 24 April 2009. Revised by the Board of the University of Dance and Circus for Artistic Research and Development and Education, 24 September 2010.

This plan applies to new students starting to study from the autumn term of 2009.

#### **Introduction**

##### **Description of Main Field of Study**

The educational program takes the artistic traditions and technique of circus as its starting point in order to ensure the acquisition of a high level of technical and artistic competence. Through the encounter with various forms of bodily expression, students are enabled to explore their chosen discipline while also developing their personal idiom. The teaching of bodily control, how to plan training, of anatomy and health together with self-knowledge equips students with the means to enhance their individual technical skills.

The main educational program also encompasses knowledge and understanding of artistic expression within the many forms of circus art so that, on completion of the Educational program, students can make their own aesthetic choices and contribute to the development of circus as an art form. The program aims to provide students with the tools to develop their artistic practice on two levels. They should, on the one hand, be able to collaborate as part of a group while helping to create a place of their own within a shared vision and organisation. At the same time students also need to be equipped to create their own numbers and shows. They are therefore expected to acquire skills in choreography, directing and artistic processes. Students are provided with the opportunity to work on portrayal, character work, interpretation, improvisation and encountering the audience. The various aspects of creative stage work are studied in greater depth by continually exploring, creating, rehearsing and presenting artistic projects on the large and small scale.

As part of the educational program in circus, students are expected to be able to relate their own activities to a historical, artistic and social context. This involves work, for example, on the history of the circus arts and their position in the cultural landscape,

Visiting address Brinellvägen 58,  
Stockholm, Sweden

Postal address P.O. Box 27043  
10251 Stockholm, Sweden

Phone +46 8 562 274 00  
Fax +46 8 562 274 10

info@doch.se  
www.doch.se

knowledge of other artistic fields, and of the social implications of the body, culture and art. Students are given the means to be able to reflect on their own practice as both performer and artist and the capacity to locate the work they do in a historical and artistic context. Students are expected to train and develop the ability to verbalise and communicate their artistic ideas and practice.

### **Description of the Educational program**

The circus artist functions both as an entrepreneur and an employee on the international labour market. The Educational program prepares students for this reality.

Recognised and certified expertise underpins all the education provided, as do the principles of artistic and scientific rigour.

Students attending courses provided by the University of Dance and Circus are expected to take personal responsibility for their studies, the development of their capacities and awareness, and for the acquisition of knowledge. The quality of education is an issue shared by students and teachers.

Education within the Educational program complies with the general goals for higher education set out in the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434 1 chap. 8 §. Rev. 2001:1263 (Law 2006:173)), and with the requirements for Bachelor of Arts Educational programs laid down in the Higher Education Ordinance, Appendix 2.

The circus Educational program aims to train students in an awareness of the human being in imaginative movement, and the skills and capacities to realise this. The educational program provides students with the means to develop into independent and aware stage artists with the skills and proficiencies required to operate in the various arenas of the contemporary performing arts, within both the independent sector and institutional bodies, at the national and international level. A variety of assignments and encounters with professionally active choreographers and performers within the contemporary art field allow students to expand their professional knowledge and the way they view their work.

Providing students with time and space for personal development, for maturing as individuals and as professional circus performers, is one of the fundamental goals of the educational program. Great emphasis is placed on developing the individual creative abilities of students and on stimulating the acquisition of an open and independent approach in their work. Students are expected to develop and acquire an intimate knowledge of artistic processes. The program aims to provide a place in which students are able to put together the capacities, knowledge and awareness required in order to integrate an artistic perspective with the practical skills of their craft.

In parallel with all the course options on offer, time is made for process-oriented work - individually and in groups. The study of process is comprehensively focused on the

profession and throughout the educational program, students work on reflection and documentation of the artistic process both at the personal level and as part of a group.

As part of the course schedule, particular course units may be shared with students studying choreography, dance pedagogy and/or dance. The aim here is to provide both insight into and mutual understanding of the various actors in the artistic process.

In all the educational programs an emphasis is placed on a positive ethical stance, the capacity to reflect on knowledge and awareness and a respect for democratic values. Discussions are continually held concerning values and judgements concerning equality and equal opportunities, integration and diversity, democracy and ethics and students are encouraged to reflect on these issues.

## **Intended Learning Outcomes**

### **Knowledge and Understanding**

On completion of the educational program

- Students will have acquired the knowledge and skills required to solve by themselves the stage tasks with which they are faced.
- Students will have acquired a good foundation for continued development as a creative artist, working both on an individual basis and as part of a group.
- Students will be thoroughly informed about the complex professional role of the circus performer and about the conditions and opportunities of the labour market.
- Students will have an extensive body of knowledge of and profound insight into the working methods which can promote their personal development as circus performers.
- Students will be well versed in bodily and mental health and an understanding of what is required to lead a healthy and positive professional life in terms of training, diet, mental discipline and the prevention of injuries.
- Students will be able to formulate their ideas and explain their approach to circus as a form of artistic expression and one which meets a social need.

### **Skills and Abilities**

On completion of the educational program

- Students will have acquired an excellent ability to express themselves at an advanced level in at least one circus discipline.
- Students will be able to create an advanced stage performance as well as being equipped to work with a variety of forms of stage work.
- Students will have the skills required to continue developing their physical and creative capacities in the field of circus.
- Students will be able to create small-scale circus performances and to take part in creative processes directed by others.

**Judgement and Approach**

On completion of the educational program

- Students will be able to work on an independent basis.
- Students will have developed an awareness of the body's signals, both concerning the artistic process and relating to physical and mental health
- Students will be aware of and informed about the role and legitimacy of the circus in social life as a whole and able also to explain and present their views.
- Students will have learnt to reflect on issues concerning democracy, diversity, equal treatment, equality and equal opportunities and understand that everyone has equal value.
- Students will understand group-dynamic processes and be able to work in an open and independent fashion as part of a group.
- Students will be able to approach the tasks they face with an ability to reflect on them using informed and critical judgment.

**The Bachelor Program**

The Bachelor Program in Circus comprises three years of full-time study and amounts to 180 higher education credits (HE)/180 ECTS at university level.

**Course Unit Program**

Circus Discipline, 45 HE /45 ECTS

Artistic Work Within the Discipline, 22.5 HE /22.5 ECTS

Circus as a Performing Art, 22.5 HE /22.5 ECTS

Stage Acting, 15 HE /15 ECTS

Dance and Music, 22.5 HE /22.5 ECTS

Art, Body and Culture, 15 HE /15 ECTS

The Circus Performer's Health, 7.5 HE /7.5 ECTS

Career Management, 7.5 HE /7.5 ECTS

Artistic Research Methods, 7.5 HE/7.5 ECTS

Educational program Project - Artistic Exam Work, 15  
HE/15 ECTS

The content of individual course units is briefly described in the Description of Course Units provided at the end of this document.

**Language of Instruction**

Teaching and examination are primarily conducted in Swedish. Some sections of the course are also conducted in English.

## **Examination**

Unless otherwise stated in the syllabus, grades are awarded for every course unit completed. The following grades are awarded; Fail, Pass and Pass with Distinction. Certain course units only award failing or passing grades.

## **Documentation of Process**

Students are expected to maintain a journal throughout their studies of their working process. The journal provides a basis for tutorials and for discussions of the links between the various courses that make up the educational program.

## **Eligibility**

- Applicants must meet the basic admission requirements for higher education.
- Particular admission requirements: a minimum passing grade in Svenska B/Svenska 2 B (Swedish), Engelska A (English), Historia A (History), or corresponding grades if the applicant is from outside Sweden - in which case a special language requirement applies.
- The applicant should be in good physical condition with regular training in at least one of the circus disciplines or some other artistic/physical field.

## **Admission**

The initial selection of eligible applicants takes place on the basis of application documents + Video/DVD and subsequently by admission test.  
(For additional regulations governing admission see: Dans och cirkushögskolans Antagningsordning).

## **Rules Governing the Continuation of the Course of Study**

In order to continue on to study in the following year of the educational program course, students need to pass educational program course units worth at least 45 ECTS or - by agreement with the teacher concerned - other courses provided by the University of Dance and Circus. In order to proceed to study in the second year of the Educational program course, a grade of Pass in the Discipline concerned is required for the first year of study, in order to proceed to the third year of study, a grade of Pass in the Discipline concerned is required for the second year of study.  
Students are expected to be able to describe and review the content of their studies on a continual basis.

## **Dissuasion**

See the particular document concerned.

## **Description of Course Units**

### **Circus discipline, 45 HE/ 45 ECTS**

This course covers both basic skills in the disciplines of acrobatics, balancing, juggling and aerials and advanced proficiency in one or two of these disciplines. Thematically-based exercises and presentations which integrate circus technique with dance, voice, stage performance and music.

Training in rigging and safety issues, together with strength and flexibility forms part of this course.

### **Artistic Work Within the Discipline, 22.5 HE /22.5 ECTS**

This program combines practical work related to individual composition with theoretical reflections on the discipline of circus. Practical work is carried out through exercises, discussions and assignments in order to integrate individual artistic vision within the chosen circus discipline.

### **Circus as a Performing Art, 22.5 HE/ 22.5 ECTS**

This course unit consists of separate practical exercises which are continually presented in solo form, small groups and as ensemble performance. The student is expected to assist at a performance or at a combination of one or more of the following fields of art: circus, dance or theatre.

### **Stage Acting, 15 HE/15 ECTS**

A practical and theoretical course in which students explore various methods of dramaturgy, direction, clowning and role creation through lectures, practical exercises and presentations in the form of solo work and ensemble projects.

### **Dance and Music, 22.5 HE/22.5 ECTS**

Dance training adapted to circus together with improvisation and interpretation. Rhythmics. Singing and instrumental exercises. Music-making in ensembles. Orientation in the relationship between stage acting and music.

### **The Circus Performer's Health, 7.5 HE/7.5 ECTS**

Instruction in training and diet, first aid, various training techniques for mind and body.

### **Art, Body and Culture, 15 HE/15 ECTS**

This course unit consists of lectures and seminars on various themes concerning the history and development of the circus. It includes encounters with various art forms which are then dramatised using the individual body.



**Career Management, 7.5 HE/7.5 ECTS**

This unit provides an orientation in the terms and conditions of self-employment, employment law and regulations, marketing, etc.

**Artistic Research Methods, 7.5 HE/7.5 ECTS**

The course deals with the methods of artistic creation and serves as preparation for the student's exam work.

**Educational program Project - Artistic Exam Work, 15 HE/15 ECTS**

Students complete a piece of artistic exam work which is presented in practical terms. Also includes a written or other chosen method of documentation.

Course Units		Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Total HE Credits/ECTS
Circus Discipline	<i>Parallel courses in: acrobatics, balancing and aerials</i>	15	15	15	45
Artistic Work Within the Discipline		7.5	7.5	7.5	22.5
Circus as a Performing Art		7.5	7.5	7.5	22.5
Dance and Music		7.5	7.5	7.5	22.5
Stage Acting		7.5	7.5		15
Art, Body and Culture		7.5	7.5		15
The Circus Performer's Health		7.5			7.5
Career Management			4	3.5	7.5
Artistic Research Methods			3.5	4	7.5
Educational program Project - Artistic Exam Work				15	15
<b>Total</b>		<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>180</b>

## Bachelor Programme in Circus, 2011-2014



### Bachelor Programme in Circus, 180 hp/180 ECTS

Konstnärlig kandidatexamen i Cirkus/ Degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts in Circus

Approved by the Board of University College of Dance for Artistic Research and Development and Education, 24 April 2009. Revised by the Board of the University of Dance and Circus for Artistic Research and Education, 3 December 2010. This programme syllabus is applicable for students admitted to the programme from the autumn semester of 2011.

#### Introduction

The Bachelor Programme in circus takes the artistic traditions and technique of circus as its starting point in order to ensure the acquisition of a high level of technical and artistic competence. Through the encounter with various forms of bodily expression, students are enabled to explore their chosen discipline while also developing their personal idiom. The circus programme also encompasses knowledge and understanding of artistic expression within the many forms of circus art so that, on completion of the programme, students are given the means to be able to reflect on their own practice as both performer and artist and have the capacity to relate the work they do to a historical and artistic context.

The Bachelor Programme in Circus is in accordance with general requirements of the Swedish Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434, 1 Ch. 8 §. Rev. 2001:1263) (Law 2006:173) and the objectives of degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts attached in the system of qualification of the Higher Education Ordinance.

#### Intended Learning outcomes

A Bachelor of Fine Arts is awarded after the student has met the intended learning outcomes.

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the field of Circus, including knowledge of the practical and theoretical foundation of the field, knowledge and experience of methods and processes in the field as well as specialised study within the field.

***Competence and skills***

For a Bachelor of Fine Arts the student shall

- demonstrate the ability to describe, analyse and interpret design, techniques and content as well as to reflect critically on his or her artistic approach and that of others in the field of Circus,
- demonstrate the ability in the main field of study to create, realise and express his or her own ideas, identify, formulate and solve artistic and creative problems and to undertake artistic tasks within predetermined time frames,
- demonstrate the ability to present and discuss his or her works and artistic issues in speech, writing or in other ways and in dialogue with different audiences, and
- demonstrate the competence and knowledge required to work autonomously in a professional capacity.

***Judgement and approach***

For a Bachelor of Fine Arts the student shall:

- demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the field of Circus informed by relevant artistic, social and ethical issues,
- demonstrate insight into the role of art in society, and
- demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge and ongoing learning.

***Independent project (degree project)***

A requirement for the award of a Bachelor of Fine Arts is completion by the student of an independent project (degree project) for at least 15 credits in the main field of study.

***Miscellaneous***

Specific requirements laid down by each higher education institution itself within the parameters of the requirements laid down in this qualification descriptor shall also apply for a Bachelor of Fine Arts with a defined specialisation. These requirements are governed in the system of qualification at the University of Dance and Circus.

***The Bachelor Programme***

The Bachelor Programme in Circus comprises three years of full-time study and amounts to 180 higher education credits (HE) at university level.

***Description of the course units***

Below is a description of the course units included in the programme.

***Year 1***

Circus Discipline (in acrobatics, balancing, juggling and/or aerials) 15 HE

Artistic work within the discipline, 7.5 HE

Circus as a Performing Art, 7.5 HE

Dance and Music, 7.5 HE

Stage Acting, 7.5 HE

Art, Body and Culture, 7.5 HE

The Circus Performer's Health, 7.5 HE

**Year 2**

Circus Discipline (acrobatics, balancing, juggling and/or aerials) 15 HE

Artistic work within the discipline, 7.5 HE

Circus as a Performing Art, 7.5 HE

Dance and Music, 7.5 HE

Stage Acting, 7.5 HE

Art, Body and Culture, 7.5 HE

Career Management, 4 HE

Artistic Research Methods, 3.5 HE

**Year 3**

Circus Discipline (acrobatics, balancing, juggling and/or aerials) 15 HE

Artistic work within the discipline, 7.5 HE

Circus as a Performing Art, 7.5 HE

Dance and Music, 7.5 HE

Career Management, 3.5 HE

Artistic Research Methods, 4 HE

Independent Project – Artistic Degree Project, 15  
HE

***A brief description of the content of the courses given (see also the respective course syllabus)***

**Circus Discipline**

These courses cover both basic skills in the disciplines of acrobatics, balancing, juggling and aerials and advanced proficiency in one or two of these disciplines. Thematically based exercises and presentations which integrate circus technique with dance, voice, stage performance and music. Training in rigging and safety issues, as well as in strength and flexibility, form part of this course.

**Artistic work within the discipline**

These courses combine practical work related to individual composition with theoretical reflections on the discipline of circus. Practical work is carried out through exercises, discussions and assignments in order to integrate individual artistic vision within the chosen circus discipline.

**Circus as a Performing Art**

These courses consist of separate practical exercises which are continually presented in solo form, small groups and as ensemble performance. The student is expected to participate in a performance or in a combination of one or more of the following fields of art: circus, dance or theatre.

**Stage Acting**

Practical and theoretical courses in which students explore various methods of dramaturgy, direction, clowning and role creation through lectures, practical exercises and presentations in the form of solo work and ensemble projects.

**Dance and Music**

Dance training adapted to circus together with improvisation and interpretation. The courses include rhythmic, singing and instrumental exercises and ensemble workshops. Orientation in the relationship between stage acting and music.

**Art, Body and Culture**

These courses consist of lectures and seminars on various themes concerning the history and development of the circus. It includes encounters with various art forms which are then dramatised using the individual body.

**The Circus Performer's Health**

Instruction in training and diet, first aid, various training techniques for mind and body.

**Career Management**

This course provides an orientation in the terms and conditions of self-employment, employment laws and -regulations, marketing, etc.

**Artistic Research Methods**

The course deals with the methods of artistic creation and serves as preparation for the student's artistic degree project.

**Independent Project - Artistic Exam Degree Project**

Students complete a piece of artistic exam degree project which is presented through performance or other forms of demonstration. It also includes a written or other chosen method of documentation.

**Tuition and examination**

The studies in the programme are full-time study, which means that 30 higher education credits (HE) per semester. The tuition comprises practical workshops in circus, lectures, group work, seminars, tutorials/supervision and excursions. Some parts of the programme demands compulsory attendance which is specified in the study guides and/ or schedule for the respective course. It is also specified in the study guide what the possibilities for compensating missed any missed obligatory modules (for example if a student falls ill).

Individual examination is continuously carried out through technical presentations as well as through oral and/or written exams. Other means of examination include written papers or practical exercises in class. After every semester there will be one additional examination date. Thereafter the student is able to make up for failed or incomplete examinations once per semester or through terms agreed upon with the teacher responsible for the course. The following grades are awarded after course: Pass with Distinction, Pass or Fail. Certain courses only award failing or passing grades.

**Entry requirements**

General entry requirements for studies on a first cycle level in Sweden. Please visit <https://www.studera.nu/studera/1636.html> for more information.

**Admission**

The initial selection of eligible applicants takes place on the basis of application documents + Video/DVD and subsequently by admission test. The admission test takes place in front of a jury. More information regarding the admission test is available on the website.

**Rules Governing the Continued Studies**

In order to continue on to study in the second year of the programme, students need to pass bachelor programme courses in circus equivalent to at least 45 HE credits. In order to continue on to the third year, students need to have passed a minimum of 105 HE credits the first two academic years. Entry requirements to a course may consist in additional requirements in the form of having completed one or more specific courses in the previous semesters. The entry requirements for each course are stated in its syllabus.

# Bachelor Programme in Circus, 2013-2016



Dans och Cirkushögskolan  
University of Dance and Circus

PROGRAMME SYLLABUS  
Established: 2011-12-08  
Revised: 2012-12-11  
Valid from: Autumn term of 2013  
*This is a translation of the  
Swedish document*

## **Kandidatprogram i circus, 180 hp** **Bachelor Programme in Circus, 180 credits**

The education follows the general aims for higher education according to the Higher Education Act (SFS 1992:1434 1 chapter 8§. rev. 2001:1263) (Law 2006:173), the aims for the Degree of Bachelor of Fine Art in the Degree Ordinance, appendix 2 to the Higher Education Ordinance and the local Degree Ordinance at the University of Dance and Circus.

### **Description of the programme**

The Bachelor Programme in Circus takes the artistic traditions and technique of circus as its starting point in order to ensure the acquisition of a high level of technical and artistic competence. Through the encounter with various forms of bodily expression, students are enabled to explore their chosen discipline while also developing their personal idiom. The Bachelor Programme in Circus encompasses knowledge and understanding of artistic expression within the many forms of circus art so that, on completion of the programme, students are able to make independent aesthetic choices and can contribute to the development of circus as an art form. It is also included in the Bachelor Programme in Circus that the students can relate their own work to a historical, artistic and social context. The students are given the means to be able to reflect on their own practice both as a performer and as an artist and have the capacity to relate the work they do to a historical and artistic context.

The language of instruction is English.

### **Entry requirements**

General entry requirements for education on the first-cycle level with an exemption from Swedish 1,2 and 3 and English 6

### **Selection**

Selection to the programme takes place through selection tests among qualified applicants. The selection test consists of several parts and takes place in several steps in front of a jury. Information about the selection test is to be found at the University of Dance and Circus website.

### **Expected Learning Outcomes**

A pre-condition in order to obtain the requirements for the degree is that the below stated learning outcomes are met.

### ***National Outcomes from the Higher Education Ordinance***

#### **Knowledge and understanding**

For a Bachelor of Fine Arts the student shall

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the principal field (main field of study),

Visiting address Brinellvägen 58,  
Stockholm, Sweden

Postal address P.O. Box 27043  
10251 Stockholm, Sweden

Phone +46 8 562 274 00  
Fax +46 8 562 274 10

info@doch.se  
www.doch.se

including knowledge of the practical and theoretical foundation of the field, knowledge and experience of methods and processes in the field as well as specialised study within the field.

### **Competence and skills**

For a Bachelor of Fine Arts the student shall

- demonstrate the ability to describe, analyse and interpret design, techniques and content as well as to reflect critically on his or her artistic approach and that of others in the main field of study
- demonstrate the ability in the main field of study to create, realise and express his or her own ideas, identify, formulate and solve artistic and creative problems and to undertake artistic tasks within predetermined time frames
- demonstrate the ability to present and discuss his or her works and artistic issues in speech, writing or in other ways and in dialogue with different audiences, and,
- demonstrate the competence and knowledge required to work autonomously in a professional capacity.

### **Judgement and approach**

For a Bachelor of Fine Arts the student shall have:

- demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant artistic, social and ethical issues
- demonstrate insight into the role of art in society, and
- demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge and on-going learning.

### **Independent project (degree project)**

A requirement for the award of a Bachelor of Fine Arts is completion by the student of an independent project (degree project) for at least 15 credits in the main field of study.

## **The Structure of the Programme**

The programme consists of all in all three years' full-time studies of first-cycle studies. The courses that are included in the programme are listed below.

### **Year 1**

Circus Discipline 1A, 7.5 credits  
Circus Discipline 1B, 7.5 credits  
Artistic work within the Discipline 1, 7.5 credits  
Circus as a Performing Art 1, 7.5 credits  
Dance and Music 1, 7.5 credits  
Stage Acting 1, 7.5 credits  
Art, Body and Culture 1, 4.5 credits  
The Circus Performer's Health 1, 2.5 credits  
Entrepreneurship 1, 4 credits  
Artistic Research Methods 1, 4 credits



### **Year 2**

Circus Discipline 2A, 7.5 credits  
Circus Discipline 2B, 7.5 credits  
Artistic work within the Discipline 2, 7.5 credits  
Circus as a Performing Art 2, 7.5 credits  
Dance and Music 2, 7.5 credits  
Stage Acting 2, 7.5 credits  
Art, Body and Culture 2, 4.5 credits  
The Circus Performer's Health 2, 2.5 credits  
Entrepreneurship 2, 4 credits  
Artistic Research Methods 2, 4 credits

### **Year 3**

Circus Discipline 3A, 7.5 credits  
Circus Discipline 3B, 7.5 credits  
Artistic work within the discipline 3, 7.5 credits  
Circus as a Performing Art 3, 7.5 credits  
Dance and Music 3, 4.5 credits  
The Circus Performer's Health 3, 2.5 credits  
Entrepreneurship 3, 4 credits  
Artistic Research Methods 3, 4 credits  
Independent Project, (Degree Project) – Degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts 180 credits, 15 credits

All the courses belong to the main field of study Circus and are obligatory for the student to fulfil the requirements for the degree that the courses of the programme aim at. They can only be replaced by courses with equivalent content.

### **Rules for continued studies**

To start studies in the second year of the programme, the student must have at least 45 credits from the first year. To start studies in the third year of the programme, the student must have at least 105 credits from the first two years. In addition to the above mentioned general entry requirements specific entry requirements can apply to admission to a course. These are stated in the course syllabus.

### **Degree Certificate**

After completing programme studies, corresponding to the requirements expressed in the Higher Education Ordinance degree order as well as University of Dance and Circus Degree Ordinance and the programme syllabus, the student may apply for a degree. Those who have completed the Bachelor Programme in Circus, 180 credits, may obtain the following degree:

Konstnärlig kandidatexamen i cirkus  
*Degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts in Circus*

## Bachelor Programme in Circus, 2015-2018

STOCKHOLM UNIVERSITY  
OF THE ARTS | STOCKHOLMS  
KONSTNÄRLIGA  
HÖGSKOLA



### PROGRAMME SYLLABUS

#### Kandidatprogram i circus 180 hp *Bachelor Program in Circus 180 credits*

**Program Code:** DCIRG

**Established by:** NKU-nämnden

**Established:** 2014-11-27

**Valid from:** Autumn 2015

**Education level:** First-cycle level

**Institution:** Circus Department

**Degree:** Konstnärlig kandidatexamen / *Degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts*

**Main field of study:** Circus

DOCH is since 1 January 2014, a part of Stockholm University of the Arts.

#### Entry Requirements

General entry requirements for education on the first - cycle level with an exemption from Swedish 1, 2 and 3 and English 6

#### Selection

Selection to the programme takes place through tests among qualified applicants. The selection test consists of several parts and takes place in several steps in front of a jury.

Information about the selection test is to be found at the DOCH's website.

#### Language of instruction

The programme is taught in English

#### Aim and Main Content

In the Bachelor Program in Circus one will find a strong emphasis on the various circus disciplines, throughout the duration of the 3 years. The studies of circus disciplines are intertwined with an array of courses, all of which emphasize the discovery of the self, as a practitioner, a creator and even a researcher.

Practice and theory are continuously combined throughout the duration of the programme, they enlighten and strengthen each other in courses containing for example circus discipline, dance, theatre, music with courses in entrepreneurship/management, the circus artist's health and rigging/safety

The education provides students with tools for initiating innovative processes through methods and creations within the area of circus.

The education also provides the student with the tools and abilities to make independent aesthetic choices, enabling them to enter in the various markets with critical awareness and with the insight that their circus practice has social, cultural, ethical and political relevance.

### **Rules for continuation of studies**

To start the second year of the programme, the student must have at least 45 credits from the first year. To start the third year of the programme, the student must have at least 105 credits from the first two years. In addition to the above mentioned general entry requirements, specific entry requirements can apply to admission to a course. These are stated in the course syllabus.

### **Courses included**

All courses are obligatory and belong to the main field of study of Circus.

#### **Year 1**

Circus Discipline 1a, 7,5 credits  
Circus Discipline 1b, 7,5 credits  
Complementary Project within Circus 1a, 3 credits  
Complementary Project within Circus 1b, 3 credits  
Circus expression and bodily practices, 1a, 5 credits  
Circus expression and bodily practices, 1b, 7,5 credits  
Circus performance and interpretation 1a, 4 credits  
Circus performance and interpretation 1b, 4 credits  
Concept and composition within circus 1, 3 credits  
Circus in Society 1, 3 credits  
The Circus Performer's Health 1a, 1,5 credits  
The Circus Performer's Health 1b, 1,5 credits  
Entrepreneurship and Management 1a, 1,5 credits  
Entrepreneurship and Management 1b, 2 credits  
Rigging and Safety within Circus 1a, 1,5 credits  
Rigging and Safety within Circus 1b, 1,5 credits  
Artistic Research Methods 1, 3 credits

#### **Year 2**

Circus Discipline 2a, 7,5 credits  
Circus Discipline 2b, 7,5 credits  
Complementary Project within Circus 2a, 3 credits  
Complementary Project within Circus 2b, 3 credits  
Circus expression and bodily practices 2a, 5 credits  
Circus expression and bodily practices 2b, 7,5 credits  
Circus performance and interpretation 2a, 3,5 credits  
Circus performance and interpretation 2b, 4 credits  
Concept and composition in circus 2, 3 credits  
Circus in Society 2, 3 credits

The Circus Performer's Health 2a, 1,5 credits  
The Circus Performer's Health 2b, 1,5 credits  
Entrepreneurship and Management 2a, 1,5 credits  
Entrepreneurship and Management 2b, 2 credits  
Rigging and Safety within Circus 2a, 1,5 credits  
Rigging and Safety within Circus 2b, 1,5 credits  
Method of artistic Research 2, 3,5 credits

### **Year 3**

Circus Discipline 3a, 7,5 credits  
Circus Discipline 3b, 7,5 credits  
Circus Complement 3, 1,5 credits  
Circus expression and bodily practices 3a, 1,5 credits  
Circus expression and bodily practices 3b, 4,5 credits  
Circus performance and interpretation 3, 7,5 credits  
The Circus Performer's Health 3a, 1,5 credits  
The Circus Performer's Health 3b, 1,5 credits  
Entrepreneurship and Management 3a, 1,5 credits  
Entrepreneurship and Management 3b, 6 credits  
Rigging and Safety within Circus 3a, 1,5 credits  
Rigging and Safety within Circus 3b, 1,5 credits  
Method of artistic research in circus 3, 1,5 credits  
Independent Project, (Degree Project) – circus, Bachelor of Fine Arts, 15 credits

### **Learning Outcomes**

A pre-condition in order to obtain the requirements for a Degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts (180 credits) is that the below stated learning outcomes are met.

National outcomes according to the Higher Education Ordinance

Outcomes for Degree of Bachelor of Fine Arts in the Qualification Ordinance, annex 2 in the Higher Education Ordinance (1993:100)

#### *Knowledge and understanding*

For a Bachelor of Fine Arts the student shall

-Demonstrate knowledge and understanding in the principal field (main field of study), including knowledge of the practical and theoretical foundation of the field, knowledge and experience of methods and processes in the field as well as specialised study within the field.

#### *Competence and skills*

For a Bachelor of Fine Arts the student shall

-Demonstrate the ability to describe, analyse and interpret design, techniques and content as well as to reflect critically on his or her artistic approach and that of others in the main field of study

- Demonstrate the ability in the main field of study to create, realise and express his or her own ideas, identify, formulate and solve artistic and creative problems and to undertake artistic tasks within predetermined time frames
- Demonstrate the ability to present and discuss his or her works and artistic issues in speech, writing or in other ways and in dialogue with different audiences, and,
- Demonstrate the competence and knowledge required to work autonomously in a professional capacity.

*Judgement and approach*

For a Bachelor of Fine Arts the student shall have:

- Demonstrate the ability to make assessments in the main field of study informed by relevant artistic, social and ethical issues
- Demonstrate insight into the role of art in society, and
- Demonstrate the ability to identify the need for further knowledge and on - going learning.

**Independent project**

Independent project (degree project)

A requirement for the award of a Bachelor of Fine Arts is completion by the student, within the frame of the course requirements, of an independent project (degree project) for at least 15 credits in the main field of study. The independent project for the Bachelor Programme in Circus is done during term 5.