

NEGOTIATING IDENTITY THROUGH RISK: A COMMUNITY
CIRCUS MODEL FOR EVOKING CHANGE AND
EMPOWERING YOUTH.

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ABSTRACT

Circus as a community theatre medium undoubtedly produces positive results for both the individuals involved and the community in which it resides. This dissertation examines the impact of those results when the “community” is an educational setting. Five descriptive case studies of in-school circus programs are explored in the study. These schools are all located in different socio-economic areas and serve culturally diverse students and communities across Australia.

The nature of circus is also examined; particularly the elements of risk and the perceived sense of danger that are associated with successful circus. These aspects are recurring, necessary elements in the discussion of in-school circus programs. Other recurring themes outlined in the results include:

- an increase in the physical fitness of participating students;
- individual and community pride as dominant student, staff and parent reactions;
- a new “positive” utilisation of space;
- an alignment of individuals’ projected and actual selves;
- the development of peer tutoring systems and new ways of learning;
- a new public face of the participating schools which, in turn, creates a new climate within the schools - which includes an overall decrease in violent and anti-social behaviour in the school, the home and the community.

All five of the descriptive case studies are considered successful by the staff, students and parents interviewed. Success in this case is measured in terms of popularity, both within the school and its wider community, and in the decrease of various anti-social and identified destructive behaviours.

These results are examined under the categories of physical, psychological, mental, scholastic and sociological benefits. The data also emphasizes a number of obstacles to successful circus programs, and offers suggestions for overcoming these obstacles. The principals and practices extrapolated from the data collected provide a framework for how “circus works” within an educational framework.

The results of the study and their subsequent discussion, highlight the personal and communal benefits, and illustrate the notion that “circus works” as a tool for evoking change and empowering youth. The notion of risk is illustrated as intrinsic, and essential for successful implementation in schools. Risk is also identified as the element that needs to be managed in order to alleviate obstacles to the instigation and continuation of circus programs within schools.

Post-hoc data has given rise to these conclusions, and when we consider the divergent educational settings as essential contexts for the phenomenon and realization that “circus works”, the need for a longitudinal case study becomes apparent. The principle of this longitudinal case study would be to ensure that it is the unique nature of circus that is solely responsible for the advancements in personal development and community identity within an educational framework.

CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

"I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgment is made in the acknowledgments."

Signed _____

Date _____

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INTRODUCTION

"Circus is good for you. It is the only spectacle I know that while you watch it gives the quality of a truly happy dream"

Ernest Hemmingway.

The focus of this project is to confirm the circus aficionados held belief that "circus works" in the development of young people, and to begin to formulate theories as to how and why it works. Further, it identifies what benefits circus is already providing in the diverse educational settings in which it is applied.

Circus has long been recognised as a spectacle inextricably tied to a sense of wonderment and well being. This is so whether we enjoy the extraordinary feats of professionals as an audience member, or we join in at a local community circus level to expand our personal boundaries.

This dissertation particularly investigates the effectiveness of a community circus model within educational frameworks. It examines a number of cases of in-school circus programs, and contrasts and compares their effects on participants and their communities.

Several aspects of the circus phenomenon are scrutinised including an understanding of what circus actually is, and how this understanding works to assist the development of identity. The uses of circus in both a communal and individual context are closely compared. The notion of risk and how young people and educational authorities interpret it is analysed and contrasted. The uses of circus as a catalyst of change and development are considered from the perspectives of educational and personal development.

Interviews, participation and observation fieldwork, and the collection of archival documents and artifacts all play a part in the collation of necessary data in building an argument in support of circus as an educative tool in the affective, intellectual and physical domains. This study also identifies possibilities for future investigation and research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

“Drama has many faces. And Drama has many uses.”
(Crummy, 1992:225)

This quote from Helen Crummy, who is widely recognized for her pioneer work in community theatre in the United Kingdom, is at the essence of this Literature Review. Circus is one such theatre medium that has many faces and many uses; one example being the empowering of young people and their communities through its successful utilisation within an educational/community framework.

Community theatre is not a new concept; as Crummy outlines:

“Community Arts are of course not a new idea. It has been going on for centuries. The only difference in Craigmillar was that we had stumbled on it as a catalyst for community development”. (Crummy, 1992: 144)

Helen Crummy’s book “Let the People Sing” is an inspirational account of how the process of making art changed the ethos of her community – “Craigmillar” and empowered the people to take risks, evoke change and create a new identity for themselves and their community.

I intend to examine this “face” of community drama through examples of the work of Helen Crummy and her contemporaries: Welfare State International, Neil Cameron and Reg Bolton. Neil Cameron and Reg Bolton began their theatre training with Helen Crummy in the early seventies and attribute many of their community ideologies and philosophies to her original work in Craigmillar.

Though similar in ethos, Cameron and Bolton work in different mediums today. Cameron uses mainly environmental, site specific, celebratory community theatre to evoke change and empowerment; taking theatre back to its “roots” both physically and metaphorically. This type of community theatre blurs the “high/low” distinction that normally categorizes and dictates the popularity and purpose of art; a “breakdown” of theatrical hierarchy, which encourages equality, autonomy, risk and empowerment.

Bolton uses another “face” of Drama that blurs the “high/low” distinction in culture: Circus. Community Circus is a powerful catalyst for change and community development in modern society. Although relatively written research has been done about Circus, there are a number of practical examples of the circus process evoking change in individuals, their culture and thus community.

Many of these examples feature youth culture, particularly “Youth at Risk” and provide evidence for Circus becoming an integral part of any school’s curriculum. Particularly in a climate where the factors that indicate the susceptibility of young people to participate in “risky activities” are on the rise and youth culture is rapidly transforming; school climates are not keeping up with developments in youth culture and innovative programs are needed to help “arm” young people against the increasing pressures facing adolescents. (Gonzalez, 1994)

The scholastic, physical, psychological, sociological and mental benefits of the Circus process are extensive and have been acknowledged by a number of Circus practitioners, educators and young performers; so then...as Reg Bolton succinctly phrases the question in his article “Circus in Education”:

“If this Circus stuff is so ‘good for you’, why has it not been universally adopted by schools; why is there so little Circus in Education?” (Bolton, 1999: 9)

COMMUNITY ARTS MODELS

“In an age when the man and woman in the street feels more and more divorced from the people who make the vital decisions, it is my intention in this book to tell how a creative and caring spirit can enable people to shape their own destiny. Through the arts Craigmillar people found a key to unlock the creative energies lying dormant in their community, and they used them to improve the quality of their lives.” (Crummy, 1992: 12)

“Let the People Sing” is the inspirational story of Helen Crummy and her fight to change the culture at the Craigmillar housing estate outside Edinburgh, Scotland. An area of poverty and deprivation that was built by the Government in 1929 in an attempt to “hide away” the working class and “clean-up” Edinburgh, the “Festival City.” It is a celebration of the power of the human imagination, creativity and spirit and its incredible personal, social and political potential. A story of empowerment; the emphasis being on the process of the community making community art about their history, their future and the changes that must be made to all facets of their community to create a new identity and secure their survival.

“Working in partnership – does this mean they are now prepared to recognize all people for what they are, valuable human beings to be given equality of opportunity and equality of choice in a society where the creation of wealth is not the governing principle?” (Crummy, 1992: 239)

A number of community theatre companies share similar philosophies as Helen Crummy; one of the most notable being Welfare State International. Founded in 1968 by John Fox, Welfare State International has achieved “international acclaim for its joyous blend of visual spectacle, popular theatre and celebration.” (Coult and Kershaw, 1983: 1)

Welfare State International believes all human beings need to celebrate and share their humanity and that art belongs to everybody. Not just skilled professional performers and spectators with the “correct” social and economic status.

“This long-term process of research and practice seeks to re-establish, away from the conventional building-based middlebrow/middle class theatre, the popular traditions of the working class, such as Carnival, the Feast of Fools, the Fairground, the mummers’ plays, that vein of subversion-as-entertainment that runs through so much of folk and song.” (Coult and Kershaw, 1983: 1)

Welfare State International’s handbook “Engineers of the Imagination” looks at the combination of craft and technology; past, present and future and gives recognition to the human imagination as the power that drives rational and creative action and, most importantly, makes change, promotes risk and individual and community evolution.

Baz Kershaw, in his book, “The Radical in Performance” describes this kind of community theatre as radical, democratic and essential for a society’s health:

“...here was a community of people constructing an identity through the production of a culture that could potentially enhance their collective agency, self-determination and responsibility to each other...it transcended those normative values and, at least for the time it was happening, created a space and time beyond the dominant, a new realm of civil society, in which the crucial values celebrated through creativity were equality, justice and freedom. In this sense it was not just radical, but coherently radical.” (Kershaw, 1999: 219)

Neil Cameron, who also began his training with Helen Crummy, practices this radical, celebratory theatre all over the world. “Fire on the Water” is his inspirational, personal account of theatre in the community. He stresses the importance of celebration about the “joys of existence” and how our society, despite its ever increasing reliance on consumerism, materialism and anonymity needs communal cultural celebration and play, unity, “magic” and identity. “Theatre is not a building, it is a human activity shared by all.” (Cameron, 1993: 20)

Another of Cameron's books "Maleny Folk Festival" is another testament to the importance of communal celebration and play. The book tells the story of the Maleny-Woodford Folk festival, a celebratory event which Neil Cameron has helped direct for the past 13 years:

"The festival has grown to be one the country's largest and most successful celebrations and yet it retains its feeling of community and peace. At Maleny people from all ages, from the widest ethnic groupings and from every social class, come together from all over the country to celebrate the coming of the New Year. In Maleny, one has the feeling of a hopeful human future." (Cameron, 1995, Introduction: 1)

"I believe that the Maleny Folk Festival is giving us a blueprint of Australian culture by bringing the disparate threads of our social fabric together. This is done without judgmental attitudes and without a political axe to grind, by allowing art to express our commonality as human beings in the world. Never before has there been such a need for the world to unite and redefine the priorities for a cultural agenda which will take us into the future...The Maleny Folk Festival shows us that the techno-culture of video, television, computer games and passive consumerism is not what is needed to sustain our children's children's children. We need a world in which people recognize and respect their common humanity and enjoy their cultural diversity." (Cameron, 1995 : 43)

Cameron places strong emphasis on the importance of including young people in all community celebratory events. "...the needs of children and young people are taken seriously" (Cameron, 1995: 71). He stresses the importance of young people being seen as equals and given the opportunity to create for themselves and each other and celebrate their evolving identity.

"I work in the festival for my own children, to show them the joy of creating something that is worthwhile. The festival lies in people's hearts. They go into the world and take a part of the festival with them." (Cameron, 1995: 73)

Cameron also emphasizes the importance of the chaotic/misrule and risk taking involved in festivals like Maleny "to express the wilder sides of our nature...."

“Perhaps if we are given a chance to let loose and allow the wilder parts of ourselves liberation, it allows us to remain sane throughout the rest of the year as we go about our normal lives. Perhaps we can glimpse the divine in the mad joy of celebration, perhaps we can touch the forces of chaos and uncertainty that scare us so badly and, in joining that energy for a while, lessen its hold over us.” (Cameron, 1995: 144)

It is this energy that Cameron argues is the vital connection between humans and their “intuitive inner selves”...their community and their environment “The festival has a holistic approach and it appeals to the head, the heart and the body...it integrates at many levels.” (Cameron, 1995: 78)

Cameron continued his exploration of this holistic approach to personal and community development through his book “The Running and Stamping Book”. This text contains a series of exercises and observations that are designed to improve performers’ physical fitness, awareness and stamina. Improve feelings of solidarity and community within performing ensembles and “Transfers the actor’s sense of energy and balance from their minds into their bodies and puts them back in touch with the earth.” (Cameron, 1995: 8)

It is interesting to note that some of the recurring factors that are paramount to the success of Cameron’s work are also integral in the work of Reg Bolton. For example: the development of “community” and the celebration of cultural identity. The recognition of young people as equals, and the instigation of programs to value the contributions and experiences of youth and youth identity. The importance of chaos/misrule and risk taking for personal and community development. And the need to maintain a connection between the physical body, the “inner-self” and the environment.

Neil Cameron’s opinion of post-modern life and its potential to destroy cultural development through its emphasis on “passive consumerism” has been briefly stated above. However, according to Cameron, modern culture is moving further and further away from a “traditional community model” and this is having negative ramifications for all aspects of our society. Particularly for young people, who appear to be “bearing the brunt” of our new “techno-culture”:

“More recent research in Europe, North America, the UK and Australia indicates a growing mismatch between the established models of transition and the actual attitudes, choices and experiences of young people themselves. The significant social and economic changes that have taken place since the early 1970s in all of these countries have introduced elements of uncertainty, unpredictability and risk into the lives of this new generation, which their parents and others from previous generations often find difficult to explain or understand.” (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001: 1)

“The home environment of a child several decades ago was usually quiet. Parents and children did a lot of talking and reading....Today’s children, however, are growing up in a very different environment shaped by a culture heavily influenced by multimedia and an ever-increasing pace of activity. The novel brain of today’s student is attentive to and will focus on sensory input that is rapid, emotional, pleasurable and of short duration. By comparison, school is seen as dull, non-engaging and much less interesting than what is outside of school. Educators can either decry the changing brain or adjust to accommodate these changes.” (Cram and Germinario, 2000: 26)

The literature suggests that our institutions and their programs that are established to supposedly foster the strengths of young people and help promote their holistic development are not fulfilling their purpose. Instead...we have created a climate that is increasingly alienating young people from schools and consequently valuable education. Statistics show that truancy is on the increase and schools are having difficulty retaining the enrollments they celebrated in previous years:

“The dominant impression from these figures is of a school system that has responded little to the increasing diversity of student interests and talents that has confronted it following the marked increases in retention rates observed during the 1980s.”
(Dusseldorp Skills Forum, study on truancy 1998: 10)

“To be competitive with the modern culture in which students spend the majority of their time, schools must create learning experiences that are as engaging, as interesting, as multi-sensory, and as meaningful as what the students experience outside the classroom.” (Cram and Germinario, 2000: 27)

YOUTH CULTURE AND YOUTH AT RISK

It is becoming increasingly evident that our schools are not evolving at a rate parallel to our youth culture. As a consequence, the frequency and variety of problems that have traditionally identified adolescents as “youth at risk” are on the rise. “Youth at Risk”; a term “bandied” about often by social workers (be they artists or psychologists) and educators, but what does it mean? A definition published by the ACT Legislative Assembly states:

“There are serious social pressures on a significant number of students in our schools which do place them particularly at risk of not achieving a satisfactory education...These pressures include little or no family support, poverty, homelessness, substance abuse, mental health problems, physical and emotional abuse, discrimination due to race (for the indigenous community in particular) and sexuality, disability and behavioral and emotional disturbance....Students who do not complete their education but who have had a negative social and emotional experience at school can carry the consequences through their lives. If the culture at schools is supportive and inclusive, prejudices evident in the broader community can be constructively challenged. Most prejudices come from ignorance. Surely schools are the place where that ignorance can be replaced with knowledge and understanding.” (Kerrie Tucker in Report no.9 Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation. Legislative Assembly for the ACT 2001 July: 3)

Identifying certain young people as “Youth at Risk” poses a number of problems in the context of successful schooling. Dwyer and Wyn, in “Youth Education and Risk – Facing the Future” identify the “at risk” paradox that inevitably occurs when certain young people are labeled as “Youth at Risk”:

“The intention seems to be one of re-engagement of those categorized and targeted, but the tendency to identify the problems as youth problems (and thus to identify particular sections of the generation as problem youth) has the effect of further alienating and stigmatizing them as outsiders. They become defined as a potential underclass, and then treated as an underclass.” (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001:145)

Australia is now facing serious health problems that are directly attributable to poor eating habits and our new sedentary life style. The latest statistics showing that nearly one in five boys and one in four girls is overweight or obese (very overweight). (Sydney Morning Herald, May 26 2002 : 20) Over half a million young people are sedate and literally eating their way to illness; GPs are seeing more children than ever with type 2 diabetes, a disease associated with a poor diet and lack of exercise (60 minutes, Richard Carlton interview July 7 2002). The critical factors contributing to this alarming increase in obese children are: food intake, time spent in front of the television or computer games, working parents not having time to “support” their children in after school sports programs, single parents not having money to “support” their children in after school sport programs, and playground equipment being insufficiently challenging because council officials fear litigation if children are injured. (Sydney Morning Herald, April 15 2002: 3)

It is vital to encourage the development of physical activity habits in children and adolescents to help establish patterns that will continue into adulthood. (Australian Children – their health and well being. AIHW 1998: 60) An overall improvement in the physical fitness in young people has positive repercussions for their overall quality of life; less depression, anxiety and improvements in social interaction and mental well being. (Eat well NSW, NSW Health, January 2002: 2)

Unfortunately adolescent depression and suicide is also increasing at an alarming rate:

“It is apparent that suicide is now a major cause of death among young men and women in Australia today, second only to motor vehicle accidents as the greatest cause of death.” (Youth Suicide in Australia, Mental Health Branch. Internet – Aus. Available from: <http://www.SPIRIT/2002/Suicide%20Information/Mental%20Health%20Branch> Accessed 10th February 2003)

Studies have also shown (Kosky 1987 and Alvin 1993) that attempts at committing suicide have increased in the last decade or so and these rises have occurred mainly among young people (Ibid). The human and economic costs of suicide are huge:

“Apart from the loss of life, there are health care costs associated with attempted suicide and it can be particularly difficult for friends and family to deal with the circumstances associated with the death.” (Australian Social Trends – Health – Mortality and Suicide. Internet – Aus. Available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics: <http://www.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/> Accessed 10th February)

Drug and alcohol abuse amongst teenagers is also on the rise:

“Attitudes towards drugs in childhood presage future use. There is some support for the theory that children who use cigarettes, alcohol and other illegal substances run a greater risk of moving to harder, more addictive drugs. There is also evidence that peak time for starting tobacco smoking is in early teens.” (Australia’s children-their health and well being. AIHW 1998: 170)

The increase in prescribed drugs for young people is also alarming and needs to be addressed in the context of “Youth at Risk”.

“Over the past decade there has been a phenomenal growth in the use of medications to treat behavioral and learning problems in children. In Australia between 1991 and 1998, there was a 2400 per cent increase in the prescription of dexamphetamine (Dexedrine) and a 620 per cent increase in the prescription of methylphenidate (Ritalin). Both drugs are being used primarily to treat children diagnosed with either ADD or ADHD....medical researchers and pediatricians are concerned about what they believe to be the misdiagnosis of ADHD and the consequent over-prescription of stimulant drugs. (Professor Florence Levy, Children’s Hospital Sydney in Sydney Morning Herald – Good Weekend. “The Wild Ones” May 11 2002: 21)

The article continues to explain the alarming availability of these stimulant drugs over the internet and then states that there are other environmental, psychological and socioeconomic factors that may be cause the behavioral problems that are often misdiagnosed as ADHD; these drugs are being used to “cover up” the symptoms rather than address the causes. The side effects of these stimulant drugs are only now starting to be researched in adolescents; among the side effects: enlarged hearts and other long term (potentially fatal) physiological problems and links to “rising levels of school violence.” (Sydney Morning Herald – Good Weekend. “The Wild Ones” May 11 2002: 21)

The “risk” factors discussed above apply to an increasingly large number of adolescents and therefore, the “At Risk” paradox presented by Dwyer and Wyn now has another dimension; it is not a question of labeling specific students as “At Risk”, rather:

“Even if one believes that his or her children are not engaged directly in high risk behaviors, and even if one’s own family is not poor, few people consider themselves or their children immune from such dangers as random violence; few believe that their communities or businesses can continue to prosper if the economic competitiveness of the economy rests on the cohorts of youth wherein drug and alcohol abuse, school and failure dropout, delinquency and crime, and teenage pregnancy are increasingly more prototypic occurrences. As such, it is not just some youth that are at risk, or just some communities that face the problems of losing much of their next generation. It is all of America’s children, all our children, that are at risk.” (Lerner in Dwyer and Wyn, 2001: 151)

It is this combination of rising risk factors and the antiquated philosophies of our schools (Stinchcombe, 1964. Reid, 1986) that indicate the need for innovative strategies to enhance the learning experience of adolescents and finally recognize youth culture and identity as an ever changing process:

“...the assumption still persists that, while the social realities and reference points of transition may have become much less certain, ‘youth’ is still the same sort of experience that we, the teachers, the parents and the policy makers, went through ourselves. We read our pasts into an experience that we, in another voice, say has been transformed.” (Dwyer and Wyn, 2001: 2)

Community theatre practitioners like Helen Crummy, Neil Cameron and Reg Bolton have been promoting an answer to this dilemma for years: – the arts! A report commissioned by the United States President’s committee on the Arts and Humanities “Champions of Change: The impact of the Arts on learning 1999” discovered that arts are seriously underestimated as effective in combating the multiple causes of stress and anxiety facing today’s young people:

“Researchers unanimously found that engagement in the arts nurtures cognitive, social and personal competencies by developing multiple skills and abilities...arts can have a tremendous impact on young people of school and post-school age who have the greatest need – offering poorly motivated students renewed interest in learning and enhancing their self-concept and ability to relate positively with others.” (Hare, “Arts for the Sake of Success”, Inform December 5, 2001: 7)

Director-General, Ken Boston also provides powerful research based evidence in the article to support the claim that students that study Arts disciplines at school are more likely to be happy and engaged and grow into healthy, creative, agile thinkers who are generally more employable in the work force. Furthermore, he maintains that the arts should not be reserved for only gifted or talented students, but be should be part of every school's core curriculum.

“Champions of Change’ provides indisputable evidence that the Arts contribute to our growth as human beings. The Arts provide a way for students to participate in life’s experiences rather than just learning about them. The Arts can introduce students to experiences and understandings that they may not be able to acquire in any other way. The compelling evidence from this research should provide a powerful lever to motivate communities and governments to ensure the provision of quality arts education for all students in Australian schools.” (Boston, “Arts for the Sake of Success”, Inform December 5, 2001: 9)

The need for the Arts within schools and other youth programs is evident; especially in light of recent discoveries about the need for innovative programs if student “consumers” are to choose school as the most popular option for their daily stimulation. Consequently what is needed, is a form of the Arts that Dr Boston advocates above; something that will provide students with the tools to combat all of the risk factors already discussed, actively engage them in learning and assist adolescents with defining their identities.

DEFINITIONS OF CIRCUS AND THE ROLE OF RISK

As Steve Ward explains in his Masters thesis “Role up and join the Circus”:

“Circus offers challenge, creativity, physical and personal development. Because it is non-elitist it is more accessible to young people, especially those from areas of social deprivation, than most art forms...it is not an activity that precludes anyone – all can participate and benefit.” (Ward, 1991: 23)

Before we can fully comprehend the benefits of circus within a youth framework, we must define what circus is and what it represents for different facets of society. The Oxford Dictionary defines circus as:

“1. Rounded or oval area lined with tiers of seats for equestrian and other exhibitions; amphitheatre of hills. 2. Traveling show of horses, riders, acrobats, clowns, performing animals, etc; (Colloq) disturbance, scene of lively action.” (Oxford Dictionary, Oxford, 1976: 181)

Bill Blaikie in his article “Circus in Education” offers further clues to the definition of circus, based on a categorizing/analysis of circus skills:

“A possible classification of Circus skills could be:

- . juggling
- . tumbles
- . throws
- . balances
- . stiltwalking-handheld and then fastened below the knee
- . trapeze
- . slackrope and tightrope
- . clowning.” (Blaikie, 1988: 36)

These definitions, though succinct, do not give us much information about what circus actually is and how it works...in fact there is a huge “hole” in Circus literature. As Bolton points out:

“Visit any library, especially any university library, looking for books on criticism or aesthetic studies of different art forms. There are shelves and shelves full of music theory, literary criticism, visual art analysis, drama studies...Now look for the section on circus studies. You’ll be lucky to find one volume...! There is a pitiful dearth of academic work on circus because it is presumed that no-one wants to read it.” (Bolton, 1999: 10)

Fensham argues this lack of circus literature is attributable to the labeling of circus as working-class, marginalized entertainment that has been both “idealized and phobically avoided by bourgeois culture” (Fensham, 1999: 4). In the cultural “limbo” between subordinate and dominant, high and low culture; circus exists, invading artistic distinction and dissolving theatre in its role as a status dictator, a reinforcer of class distinctions: A perfect “face” of Drama to use as a tool for discovery, equality and empowerment.

Circus (referring to Oxford’s definition No.2, traveling “ring” circus) has been in Australia since 1847, made famous by such families as Astleys, Ashtons, Burtons and later Fitzgerald’s and Wirths (Calligan, 1999: 41). In fact, Ashton’s Circus is the oldest registered performing Arts organization in Australia and one of the three oldest Circuses in the world. (Appleseed Productions – video, Ashton’s Circus Skills 1 and 2). Lorraine Grant, the performance director of Ashton’s Circus maintains it’s harder and harder for Circus families to make a living in Australia. She is sixth generation Ashton family and performs six acts in the show (each family member performs at least three!) and has seen many cultural changes – including having to acquire 700-900 licenses to perform per year! “People are changing – young people enjoy different forms of entertainment now” (Grant in Appleseed Productions Videos, Ashton’s Circus Skills 1 and 2).

What do young people enjoy? What does circus have to do to engage youth culture? Perhaps the Oxford colloquial definition of circus: “disturbance, scene of lively action” is a more appropriate “face” of circus for contemporary youth culture. After all, our society (and many others before it) tends to stereotype our young people as a problem generation. Mary Ann Hunter examines the labeling of young people in her article “Contemporary Australian Youth – Specific Performance and the Negotiation of Change”. She explains how our “established generation” came to view “the restructuring of the labor market” and the constantly changing social and economic climate of this country through its relatively newly acquired capitalism as the faults of young people...

“contributing to a contemporary state of social and cultural anxiety for the established generation, whereby young people are being blamed for a myriad of social and cultural ills ranging from rising street crime to falling theatre subscriptions.” (Hunter, 2000: 28)

However, as Hunter points out, our modern world is changing and (as previously discussed) the traditional links between family, school and work seem to have weakened; young people have new pressures to deal with, as both producers and products of modern culture.

“Issues of power remain at the core of many young people’s experiences. In particular institutions reproduce patterns of inequality which young people must negotiate individually and with certain risks, even though a common perception is that young people’s lives are endowed with greater variety and choice.” (Hunter, 2000: 28)

Some have drawn parallels between the cultural “limbo” that circus exists within: “...the circus has a definite function in our culture, but its relation to it is not clear; it seems to be at the same time both ‘within’ and ‘outside’ culture “ (Bouissac in Mullet, *Circus Activity in Australia*, August, 2001: 9) and young people as both “producers and products of modern culture.”

Reg Bolton’s definition of the many strands of circus clarifies the position of circus today:

“Firstly, there is ‘traditional’ circus that comes from the nineteenth century institutionalizing of circus acts into one form of presentation in the ring and the tent. Secondly, there is the ‘new’ circus that paradoxically comes from the late twentieth century rejection of institutionalization and the adoption of circus arts by artists interested in the popular form of circus, which after thirty years can hardly be called new. And ‘thirdly’ there is the community circus, which has a profound effect on community arts in Australia and is the offshoot of the political ideas that lead to the formation of new circus. There is also a healthy freelance sector that includes what I have called the ‘fringe’ circus that includes all the amateur circus activities and the marginal circus performances including the ‘ferals’, the physical street performers, the juggle clubs, the revitalized sideshows, and also the ‘yellow pages clowns’” (Mullett, Circus Activity in Australia, August, 2001: 10)

This definition illustrates how diverse Circus is and how, as an art form, it can reject mainstream culture and embrace it both (Mullett, Circus activity in Australia, August, 2001: 10) “It is this contradiction that makes it such a vital sector of the arts.” (Ibid)

Helen Stoddart expands on this cultural contradiction:

“The circus is mendacious, eternally opportunistic, at turns demotic and status-seeking, absurd and charming, breathtaking and predictable; prone to material catastrophe and yet driven by unparalleled physical skills and spectacular showmanship. Culturally and geographically it is eclectic, yet also type ridden. Alternatively, sometimes simultaneously, it is conservative, outlawed, conformist and transgressive. Always undeniably a live and fully visible spectacle in which no back-or side-stage tricks are possible, it has also operated some of the most famous of deceits.” (Stoddart, 2000: 1)

Ward suggests that it is the mysterious, eclectic nature of circus that undoubtedly adds to the appeal of circus for young people; a magical art form with no definite boundaries or rules...

“The magic of the circus still exists. This is a phenomenon that is rooted within all of us. It is held within our folk memories. I have experience of children who have never seen a circus performance, either live or recorded, who have been enthralled by the idea of circus alone.” (Ward, 1991: 23)

However there is more to circus that attracts young people to participate in its many facets: risk. Circus is fundamentally based on elements of risk, personal and communal.

“Circus is, above all, a vehicle for the demonstration and taunting of danger and this remains its most telling and defining feature. Physical risk taking has always been at its heart; the recognition that to explore the limitations of the human body is to walk a line between triumphant exhilaration and, on the other side of this limit, pain, injury or death.” (Stoddart, 2000: 4)

“Risk: the measure of uncertainty about the ultimate consequences of a particular activity.” (Chicken and Posner 1998: 11)

The elements of risk in circus may make circus incredibly appealing to young people, and Jeanette Gonzalez in her article “Adolescents’ perception of their risk-taking behavior” discusses a number of reasons for an increase in young people’s indulgence in risky activities:

“Adolescents purposely seek out risks to: 1) take control of their lives; 2) express opposition to adult authority and conventional society; 3) deal with anxiety, frustration, inadequacy, and failure; 4) gain admission to peer groups and demonstrate identification with a youth subculture; 5) confirm personal identity; and 6) affirm maturity and mark a developmental transition into young adulthood.” (Jessor and Jessor in Gonzalez, 1994: 1)

Other arguments for adolescents engaging in risk taking behaviour include: “The need for change, variety and intensity of stimulation manifests itself in sensory, social and thrill-seeking behaviors.” (Jessor and Jessor in Gonzalez, 1994: 1)

Deborah Lupton in “Risk” further examines the notion of risk and its associations with pleasure. She maintains that individuals engage in “risk activities” to induce “pleasurable” sensations and improve personal perception. Lupton maintains humans take risks to appear “superhuman”; portraying superior qualities that allow us to court danger without harming ourselves. To break rules and go beyond boundaries that are externally imposed on us:

“Participating in activities that are coded as dangerous or risky can bring an adrenalin rush that allows aficionados to escape the bounds of the rational mind and controlled body, to allow the body’s sensations and emotions to overcome them for a time. There is a sense of heightened living...of breaking the ‘rules’ that society is seen as imposing upon people.” (Lupton, 1999: 152)

Lupton also explores the nature of communal risk taking and how this kind of group activity can foster a kind of “collective effervescence” or “communal spirit” as the participants rely on each other for safety and security as they push boundaries and discover new limitations (ibid: 153).

“The whole thing of teendom – acting out, going for thrills and risks, experimenting with drugs; circus arts can channel that energy in healthy ways. Balancing on a tight wire or standing on a globe or riding a unicycle are things you really have to do in order to be successful. There is nothing phony. You get up in front of 300 people and there is a rush. Also, this is the time when the body and mind are undergoing all these changes – the hormonal things. When you put them on a tightrope or have them focus for juggling, they have to be balanced and coordinated and self-controlled.”
(Davis in Sugarman, 2001: 171)

Lupton concludes a “safe” risk activity, such as circus, should be promoted so that the desires of young people to be seen as taking risks can be fulfilled by a constructive activity as opposed to activities which will literally place the young people “at risk”.

“Some risks, therefore, are not to be avoided but rather embraced as part of the trajectory of self-actualisation. To live a life that involves the avoidance of all risks is to be stultified, moribund, trapped in old habits and ways, to fail to develop as a person.”
(Lupton, 1999: 155)

There is a large amount of research to suggest that young people not only want to take risks, but should be encouraged to do so. “Parents who recognize appropriate risk taking and acknowledge it will usually get a more courageous child.” (Jensen 1998: 21) Bolton maintains one of the most important features of Circus for young people is its potential to provide the same perceived “risk factor”, whilst actually teaching young people how to be safe: “Children must also take risks. That is what childhood is for. That’s how you learn.” (Bolton, 1999: 15)

Circus, by definition, can give young people a healthy, attractive alternative to other risk factors that are available to youth to “combat” adolescent stress. This quality alone should be enough to convince schools of the inherent benefits of circus in education. However, there are many more benefits of Circus Arts within a youth framework: scholastic, physical, psychological, sociological and mental. All of which are inter-related, but deserve separate acknowledgement and discussion.

SCHOLASTIC BENEFITS OF CIRCUS

Scholastically, circus has a number of underestimated benefits that can actually be utilized as a model for teaching young people HOW to learn and enjoy the learning experience:

“There is much to be done within the field of circus in Education...within this time of educational constraints when teachers feel shackled by Government dictates we need to look for a new road into developing the education of our children. Circus can, if properly used, provide a basis for a wider educational experience that can benefit all.” (Ward, 1991: 67)

There is a definite need to address the unharnessed potential of Circus Arts as an educational tool for the development of young people. “Educational drama should not be about how well students meet adult expectations about theatrical product which is often highly conservative, masculinist and anglocentric” (Hunter, 2001: 29). “The word education comes from the root educare, which means ‘to draw out’ or ‘to lead forth’. Unfortunately, many of us were schooled as though educare meant ‘to stuff in’.” (Gelb and Buzan, 1994: 122)

These ideas from Hunter and also Gelb and Buzan (authors of “Lessons from the Art of Juggling”) share the theory that young people are predominantly told exactly what to do in schools rather than asked what would they like to do or know. When educators’ primary concern should be to take what young people already know and let it lead them into a bigger realm of understanding. Furthermore, they stipulate that education has been used as a means for social control for too long, as a means for keeping things stagnant, ruling classes throughout history creating the “human beings that it wants or needs to serve its interests.” (McEntegart, 1991: 10)

McEntegart further theorises:

“Children are always the new generation of the askers-of-the-profound questions, and we as the people who deal day-to-day with the askers-of-the-profound questions come under very close scrutiny by those who don’t want profound questions to be asked by anybody, especially by children and young people, who are the inheritors of the future.” (McEntegart, 1991: 10)

“Hard Times” written by Charles Dickens in 1854 is centrally concerned with the effect of the Industrial Revolutions of the 1840s. However, one of the underlying themes looks at education through one of Dickens’ aptly named characters: Mr Gradgrind and his “model” school which only teaches “facts” and any child who exhibits an interest in “fancy” or has any creative thoughts is severely punished.

Sissy Jupe (daughter of Signor Jupe, a circus clown) is forever being punished for being creative and exhibiting morals and family values which she has learnt growing up in a circus 'communal/magical' environment where 'fancy' is encouraged. Sissy is adopted by Mr Gradgrind, who attempts to fill her head with 'facts' and extinguish her 'fire' and her 'fancy'. Eventually Mr Gradgrind calls upon the 'Circus Folk' to help him with his own children and realizes how wrong his previous judgments were.

"Hard Times" is a literary metaphor; an important lesson about the power of education and how essential it is to adopt a holistic approach that encompasses fact and fantasy/fancy in order to produce a well-adjusted, balanced, empowered young person and thus adult. (See "Stoddart (2000) – Chapter 6 – '...crammed with all sorts of dry bones and dust': Dickens's Disruptive Circus")

Students need a tool; a process to learn about themselves, their community and world and celebrate their own talents, skills and roles within that community. As Helen Crummy, a long time advocate of theatre as a tool for empowerment states:

"...education in its broadest sense is the key to unlocking the door of a better life for the individual and the means by which a community can learn about itself, grow and play its rightful part in the wider society." (Crummy, 1992: 237)

It is this idea of growth; the process of learning and change that is integral in effective education. However, there is enormous pressure on teachers to produce results and this emphasis on product is often at the expense of a valuable and highly beneficial process.

"Often teachers focus on how well students manage the artistic product without really analyzing the journey they each make to get there. Currently in NSW to be interested in 'process' is seen as old fashioned but our perspectives about process need to be upgraded in line with current shifts in educational practice..." (Hatton, 2001: 29)

Jo Trowsdale (see below) in her article "Harnessing the Potential of Artists in Residence" links the process versus product debate to the 'high' and 'low' art divisions in society and states how process has been undervalued for too long and furthermore, process is vital for self awareness and the development of individuality:

“Alternative views presented by educationalists which have earned the label ‘process’ have asserted the centrality of experience as a vehicle for learning about the nature of an art and about learning in general...They allow for inner, personal sources to influence creativity as well as (and sometimes in preference to) external sources.” (Trowsdale, 1996: 90)

This idea explores the idea of the stimulus for learning, changing and achieving as a process; an upward spiral of growth, coming from the students, NOT necessarily always from the teacher...where the students actively engage in discovery rather than being given an end product to aspire to:

“Educational theory indicates that ‘active’ forms of learning seem to be more effective for adolescents than ‘passive’ forms. Drama in education is about developing creativity and the use of the imagination and, as such, is a valuable tool for intellectual and emotional growth. It is not about public performance but is a process that involves the participants in problem solving and co-operative interaction.” (Bagshaw and Halliday, 2000: 89)

Circus, by its very nature, is based on ‘active’ learning and process. It is this process that is vital in tackling the many mental, physical and social problems that contribute to our ever-increasing population of ‘Youth at Risk’ in schools. It is by stretching young people’s perceptions and potential through circus, that they will have the tools to ‘deal with’ the ‘real’ world.

“By assisting a child in a topsy-turvy world we help his intellectual work because the child becomes interested in creating such a topsy-turvy world for himself in order to become more effectively master of the laws governing the real world.” (Vygotsky in McEntegart, 1991: 9)

Tim Durick makes many observations about the value of circus in schools in his article “Circus and Education”. Scholastically, circus not only taught students to ‘learn through doing’ but also how to ‘learn how to learn’. Durick points out how circus skills are learnt through the stages of engagement, exploration, transformation, presentation and reflection; a model recommended by Peter Forrestal and Brian Cambourne in their book “Small Group Learning in the Classroom”. It is through this model the students explore the skills themselves and thus ‘own’ the knowledge and therefore the power; a valuable tool in improving self-esteem. (Durick, 1993: 3)

“Circus Learning is difficult. It requires focus, effort and the ability to move beyond failure. It teaches good work habits. In a world in which the media lull youngsters into passivity and computers encourage them to inhabit virtual realities, Circus Learning provides an authentic world in which the individual controls his or her actions.” (Sugarman, 2001: 13)

Bernie Neville in his book “Educating Psyche – Emotion, imagination and the unconscious in learning”, examines the nature of schools and the destructive effects of the obsession with utility and intellect as opposed to what lies in the depths (or psyche) of the learner. Throughout his book, Neville draws comparisons between Greek Gods, universal myths and teaching/learning types. When looking at drama teachers, Neville uses an analogy with Dionysus, the God of Drama, spontaneity, creativity, flexibility, vitality and civilization. The Dionysian teacher asks “How can I make this lesson enjoyable for the students and an adventure for me? How can I be with my students so completely in my lesson that we really experience something new together?” Of course these teachers are usually not taken very seriously and accused of trivializing the curriculum through games, creativity and (heaven forbid) fun! However, as Neville illustrates, surely trivialization is rife in History classes where events of tremendous passion and significance like the French Revolution are being reduced to a list of names, dates, causes and consequences (Neville, 1989: 210). Children must be able to learn in their natural state in order to process and own knowledge.

“It ought not to be necessary to teach children and adolescents to be children again, but for some children and most adolescents schooling puts a considerable distance between them and the spontaneous play which is their natural way of relating to the world. Besides, many teenagers live in a prison of other people’s expectations; their behavior is every moment shaped by their fantasies of what peers, school, parents and the larger society demand of them. A Dionysian schooling would not only keep the child alive in them, but nourish it through play, dance and drama; conventional schooling seems more intent on killing it.” (Neville, 1989: 201)

Scholastically, circus allows children to learn through discovery...to allow the knowledge to be “drawn out” rather than “stuffed in”. Young people learn how to learn through circus; they must develop patience, self-discipline, concentration, how to set goals, transform their attitude towards mistakes and failure, recognize and change limiting habitual patterns, overcome challenges, develop coaching skills, and most importantly overcome what Gelb and Buzan call the “I can’t phenomenon”. A phenomenon based on the fear of failure which has stemmed from traditional methods of education which are about getting the right answer to appease authority (Gelb and Buzan, 1994: 96). As circus is not about getting the right answer, it helps overcome the fear of failure and instead fosters what Reg Bolton calls “The Superman Effect”:

“The Superman Effect: Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it’s your self-esteem!

Step 1: you see someone performing a supernatural feat (e.g. riding a unicycle)

Step 2: you can try it for yourself

Step 3: within half an hour you realize you may be able to ride it

Step 4: after an hour, a day or a week, you can ride it

You ARE Superman!” (Bolton, 1987: 60)

Circus as a theatre medium also has potential for learning in a number of faculties: Drama for trust, process, performance, etc. PE, Art (costumes, set, etc), Music (live music is an integral part of effective circus), Commerce (marketing and promotion), Industrial Arts (props, sets, costume design, etc), Home Economics (for new-age fairy floss!) and of course, as Reg Bolton illustrates, Social Studies:

“The history and actuality of circus is a model of Multi-Culturalism and Co-existence. It is a universal art form with an ancient and diverse pedigree. To study its history and contemporary development is to see the world in microcosm, its variety, its challenges, and its ever- changing view of itself. Circus offers scope for debate on issues such as inter-species relationships, race, high-art/low-art, risk, child exploitation, management, truth in advertising, and much more. In Social Studies, circus is both metaphor and reality.” (Bolton, 1999: 14)

Scholastically, it appears circus provides an ideal model for teaching and learning and can dramatically improve the relationship between students and teachers and students and “themselves”....

“...the methodology of Circus Learning can be adapted to other learning. We will note the importance of teachers whom students can trust and who, in turn trust their students. We will see how clearly defined goals and clearly defined methods for achieving them make it possible to venture into frightening areas.”
(Sugarman, 2001: 13)

PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF CIRCUS

Physically, circus has many obvious benefits for young people and some that are more subversive.

As Thomas Collingwood points out in his book ‘Helping at- risk youth through physical fitness programming’: “systematic physical training actually can aid in meeting needs in all three areas of deficits: physical, emotional and intellectual.”
(Collingwood, 1997: 11)

Circus improves inner and outer balance, co-ordination, stamina, flexibility, strength, timing, reflex ability, laterality and mind-tracking. (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

However, upon further investigation we discover that circus does more for the physical self than just the above! Betty Lowndes (1970) in her book “Movement and Drama in the Primary School” discusses how education which focuses on only written expression and verbal development restricts the mental development of young people. She maintains children, through movement teaching, develop:

- “1. Body awareness
2. Body activity
3. Relationship of self to space and other people
4. Awareness of quality of movement.” (Lowndes, 1970: 10)

And that these skills are essential for expressing inner feelings, moods and ideas, and coordinating mind, body and imagination in a total process of “total education.” (Ibid)

“This is important for all children but is especially so for those who might lack the ability to write creatively or to do work with concrete material such as clay. Their own bodies are perhaps the only objects which these children can manipulate and shape easily. Through expressive movement they can enjoy the power of creation.” (Lowndes, 1970: 10)

Physical information about the body and its relationship to surrounding space is a recognized form of intelligence that is not given enough kudos within an educational framework. This intelligence actually has two categories: proprioception and kinesthesia. The former pertaining to information from within the body, such as positions of joints, forces in muscles and orientation in space. The latter; the sense of movements of joints, tensions in the muscles and general data about one's own actions. (Schmidt, 1991: 47)

David Wright, another advocate of the importance of "the body" in education examines the importance of the recognition of bodily kinesthetic intelligence. Wright maintains there are very few theories and ideas in education which explore the unharnessed power of the body as a source of learning. Despite the fact that the idea of the body being a tool for learning and liberation (Wright quotes Boal who believed that perception, awareness and control of the body was the first step in overcoming oppression determined by social and economic forces), Wright maintains educators avoid the body when teaching due to a number of sensitive issues surrounding adolescents and 'personal space'. However, bodily-kinesthetic is a recognized form of intelligence and must be developed in young people in schools. People with this kind of intelligence process information most successfully through the sensations they feel through their bodies. (Jasmine, 1996: 8)

"The conversation with the body is a source of considerable learning. Through entering into this, students and teachers, theorists and practitioners can expand their understanding of their own experience and the experience of the environment within which they create meaning." (Wright, 1998: 94)

Circus is a fun and safe way for young people to be physically active, thus improving their self-esteem (Drever, P. 2002: 15). It is through this physical, kinesthetic learning, circus helps young people become aware of their physical self; its potential and its limitations. They learn to trust and celebrate their bodies, and the bodies of those around them, developing self-esteem, self-actualisation and thus validating the individual. As Rachel Fensham illustrates:

"From the struggle with the physical limits of the body, the performer is able to experience pleasure and to know the price of pain that, I would argue, also leads to the creation of a new self, with a theatrical vibrancy that can also be 'real'." (Fensham, 2000: 15)

"Physical exercise can provide some purpose and meaning in an environment in which none often exists...the meaning of that exercise is in the process, the movement, and the physiological and psychological feelings that occur. The intensity of the exercise lets us know we are alive." (Collingwood, 1997; 12)

PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF CIRCUS

Adolescence is traditionally a very difficult period of time in human development. As previously discussed, this difficult period is further combated by an array of new social and psychological pressures that affect young people today.

“Adolescents are uncomfortable...they are at an age when they start piercing their bodies and painting their hair green, but you put them up here in a socially condoned context where they can paint their hair green and it’s ok...” (Davis in Sugarman, 2001: 167)

Psychologists identify adolescence as a period of tremendous change and transformation. Where personal identity is further developed amongst varying degrees of social pressures and limitations. Erikson called adolescence the “fifth developmental stage”: Identity versus confusion; where adolescents are faced with finding out who they are, what they are all about, and where they are going in life (Santrock, 2001: 43). Swiss psychologist Piaget stressed that adolescents actively construct their own cognitive worlds; information is not just poured into their minds from the environment. (Santrock, 2001: 43)

Elkind believes the adolescents themselves have strong feelings about this sense of individualism. He notes that all young people develop a type of egocentrism whereby “adolescents’ sense of personal uniqueness makes them feel that no one can understand them” (Elkind in Santrock, 2001: 134). Their personal development often becomes introspective and any socio-cognitive influence in the construction of personal identity may produce ‘many selves’ the actual and the perceived self, or selves.

“The adolescents emerging ability to construct ideal selves in addition to actual ones can be perplexing to the adolescent. The capacity to recognize a discrepancy between real and ideal selves represents a cognitive advance, but humanistic theorist Carl Rogers (1950) believed that when the real and ideal selves are too discrepant, it is a sign of maladjustment.” (Santrock, 2001: 299)

This “maladjustment” will, in turn, lead to a lower self-esteem and an unhealthy perception of self image and self worth.

Opportunities such as circus can help to bring the “real” and “ideal” selves into alignment during adolescent development. There is a large amount of research to suggest that physical appearance and perceived self-concepts regarding physical attractiveness are the strongest predictors of overall self-esteem (Santrock, 2001:303). Furthermore, adolescents have the highest self-esteem when they perform competently in domains important to the self. “Therefore, adolescents should be encouraged to identify and value their areas of competence....master those situations and produce positive outcomes.” (Santrock, 1991: 304)

Circus can provide young people with an accurate perception of their physical “real” self and provide them with the avenue to make choices about its successful utilization and development, thus improving their chances of developing a healthy self-esteem. The body is an integral factor in determining any individual’s identity and potential to function within society.

“We have a dual relationship to our bodies. We can experience the body directly through feeling or we can have an image of it. In the first case, we are immediately connected to the self, whereas in the second case, the connection is indirect. A healthy person has this dual consciousness, but it does not pose a problem because the self-image and the direct self-experience through the body coincide.” (Lowen, 1987: 30)

This dualism is, of course, not a new area of research. The Cartesian dualism of having and being in a body has been theorized by many philosophers and psychologists. There are a number of recurring themes: the importance of the recognition of the centrality of the body in the development of identity and one’s sense of interpersonal being, and the importance of the alignment between the ‘experienced’ self and the ‘projected’ self. Of course the theories differ as to where the majority of influence stems from for the development of the perceived/projected self, but they are generally in agreement that we cannot completely remove the body from its social context when examining adolescent development:

“The problem of the body’ is not therefore, simply abstract and philosophical, it also has personal (interpersonal and intrapersonal), social, sexual, biological, historical and existential dimensions among others...” (Lawler, 1992: 59)

The internal/external influences on adolescent development are entwined and embedded within a social context. Circus does not distinguish between these self/other definitions; instead, it provides the tools to successfully incorporate the “adolescent selves” and their environment:

“By turning you upside down, we teach you to stand on your own two feet. By dropping objects we teach you to catch them. By having you walk all over someone, we teach you to take care of them. By having you clown around, we teach you to take yourself seriously.” (Everyday Circus in Sugarman, 2001: 124)

It is this ‘placement’ of individuals within a communal activity like circus that makes self-exploration “safe” for adolescents. Circus, by its very nature is about co-operation and about community. Though many skills require individual application and self-discipline, you cannot make a Circus on your own. Circus is about working together and not, as many school sports and academic pursuits are, about competing against each other.

There is an enormous need for communal, non-competitive activities within schools if the development of community relations and identity is to be successfully achieved. From a sociological perspective schools are “odd places”; unique social institutions based on middle-class foundations, where the teacher – student relationship is “a form of institutionalized dominance and subordination” (Reid, 1986: 53). It is often this subordination which gives rise to the theory that teachers are in some way superior to students. This would logically make young people inferior – an argument which is not only without justification, but leads to an increase in conflicting issues with authority figures and consequently a rise in “at risk” behaviors (Stinchcombe, 1964:181). Circus is one area where the student can quickly become more adept at particular skills than teachers; consequently inverting this dominance/subordination relationship (if only temporarily) and creating a new power relationship which can only benefit the students development and self-esteem:

“It is an activity in which students can become demonstrably better than the teacher, something that does not happen in many classes, where the teacher holds all the knowledge and therefore all the power.” (Durick, 1993:3)

SOCIOLOGICAL BENEFITS OF CIRCUS

If adolescents are to be given an environment where education becomes stress-free and engaging, a community ethos must be maintained within the school and its framework.

School/public community relations can be defined as:

“A systematic function on all levels of a school system, established as a program to improve and maintain optimal levels of student achievement and to build public support.” (Bagin and Gallagher and Kindred, 1994: 15)

Jim Ife includes equality and choice in his definitions of community and community relations (Ife, 1995: 90) and stresses the importance of individuals being given autonomy if the community model is to work. Ife also maintains the importance of a community model for the development of individual identity:

“...belonging to a community gives one a sense of identity. The community can become part of a person’s self-concept, and is an important aspect of how one views one’s place in the world. The lack of such personal identity is commonly perceived as one of the problems of modern society.” (Ife, 1985: 90)

“...the analysis of these writers indicate the potential inherent in mutually supportive relationships between schools and their communities. Where relationships engender caring between people, a sense of solidarity, and a feeling of ‘belonging’, an ethos may be created which nurtures the social and emotional needs of participants and which may assist them in their individual quest for self-realisation and an enhanced sense of identity.” (Limerick and Nielson (eds), 2000: 73)

The social benefits of circus are further emphasised when we investigate existing youth circuses that are active in schools and their communities: “School taken over by circus – Nintendo shares plummet” is an article written by Steven Miller, the circus co-ordinator at Geelong Grammar School, Glamargen. The article describes how circus transformed individuals, then the school, then the community; a self-perpetuating cycle.

The school “scratched” together resources to start their own circus; the pictures in the article show students in school uniforms, practicing on their school oval with tennis balls, home made juggling clubs and basically constructed stilts and unicycles – but they’re all smiling! The article describes how students arrived early at school (to practice) and used recess and lunch times constructively (aggressive and destructive behavior was replaced with social/community behaviors) and in fact school became “a happy place to be!” Young people from all age groups came together to share skills and laughter!

“It was rumoured that mothers and daughters were stilt walking, fathers and sons diabloed and Nintendo and Sega games were collecting dust in homes around Melbourne. We were witnessing the ‘circusisation’ of our community...it is a rare breed of educator who would commit his school to such a unique undertaking. It is true visionaries who see the world as it could be rather than as it is, and who realize that we don’t live by bread alone – we need circuses too.” (Miller, 1994:15)

Another organization that now recognizes the potential of circus to establish community and thus individual identity is Quebec's "Cirque du Soleil". They have developed "Cirque du Monde", a branch of their organization which works in partnership with Oxfam International to promote "the great potential of young people...where Circus Arts are used as an alternative approach to reach Youth at Risk, especially street kids." ("Cirque du Soleil", 'Allegría' performance program, Asia Pacific Tour 2001-2002: 20)

Nicole Oliver, in her article "The Social Artist and Cirque du Monde" further explores the role of the social artist and the function of "Cirque du Monde" when they "circusise" a community. She highlights the comparisons between action and intervention theatre and Cirque du Monde:

"...they seek to establish a relationship dialogue or exchange with the public...not for youth, but rather with youth. Both emphasize the process of creation and the experiences related to the process rather than the finished product; Action theatre, like "Cirque du Monde", seeks to establish a relationship with society that goes beyond aesthetics and entertainment." (Oliver, 2000:10)

Of course, "Cirque du Monde" are not alone in their utilization of Circus Art as a tool for Youth empowerment. There are many youth circuses scattered around the world (many considerably older than "Cirque du Monde") one of the most renown, right here in Australia: "The Flying Fruit Fly Circus" from Albury-Wodonga. Established in 1980, the circus is billed as "Ordinary Kids doing Extraordinary Things", and is now internationally famous and well sought after! One of the founders of the Troupe, Robert Perrier describes the ethos of the Fruit Flies:

"The thing about the circus is that these kids aren't special kids, they're ordinary kids. We set out to create a situation where we could celebrate the potential of youth in our particular community...it really is a celebration, but it's also professional; but the professionalism didn't come first. We needed to make sure that in the process the kids went through, they would appreciate the process...everyone wants to go away and join a circus; and so they should. For these kids – it's a reality." (Perrier in Bolton, 1987: 20)

Some of the other successful Circus/Community programs include: Reg Bolton's "Suitcase Circus", "Circus West", established in Dubbo West Public School in 1993, "Tsirkus Idnina" from James Cook Boys High School in Sydney, Campbelltown Performing Arts High School's Circus ensemble, Batemans Bay High School's "Clyde Circus" and the famous community circus in Northern Ireland – "Belfast Community Circus".

MENTAL BENEFITS OF CIRCUS

Unfortunately, Arts are often not recognized for their potential in education and are often the first to be “axed” when a school’s budget is outlined. However, new research into how adolescent’s brains work (the texts reviewed here have been published within the past five years), suggest that the Arts and movement are an essential part of every child’s mental processes and successful development. Circus is a perfect compromise between physical activity (e.g.: physical education) and the Arts (e.g.: Dance, Drama) as it engages students through their bodies, whilst still allowing them to creatively explore the potential of their physical and consequently mental identities:

“We are in a time when many children don’t participate in physical education. Budget cuts often target the Arts and Physical Education as “frills.” That’s a shame because there’s good evidence that these activities make school interesting and they can help boost academic performance...Carla Hannaford says ‘Arts and athletics are not frills. They constitute powerful ways of thinking, and skilled ways of communicating with the world. They deserve a greater, not lesser portion of school time and budgets’...This attitude has become more and more prevalent among scientists who study the brain. It’s time for educators to catch on.” (Hannaford in Jensen, Teaching with the Brain in Mind 2001: 89)

Jensen goes on to discuss how the body and the mind are more than just ‘connected’; in fact, the cerebellum, does not only control our motor learning, but is also directly involved in processing our memories, attention and spatial perception, language, emotion, non-verbal cues and even decision making. “Amazingly the part of the brain that processes movement is the same part of the brain that’s processing learning.” (Jensen, 2001: 84)

OBSTACLES TO CIRCUS PROGRAMS

There are a number of reasons to suggest why circus is not seen as “worthy” of a place in most school’s curriculums. Many relate to teachers and their “roles” which have become archaic and staid...in a public service based on tradition, NOT change! A public service which relies heavily on the notion of the Teacher having “control” (thus power) over all learning. A public service which is steadily becoming removed from its “public” and instead becoming solely centred on “academic” results – usually at the expense of individual and community identity.

“Faces of Drama are ambiguous and they are better at raising questions than answers – which is uncomfortable for an age whose institutions and many of its intellectual, political, social and economic assumptions are still positivistic. Every drama is a hypothesis: ‘What if...?’ ‘Let’s suppose...’ Anything is possible and chaos lurks just around the corner.” (O’Toole, 1998:8)

Bolton observes that many educators are scared of the unknown; spontaneity, creativity and the asking of questions. Circus encourages autonomy and student centred learning. Teachers have been taught to feel as if they have the knowledge and consequently the power...all the time. They generally become uneasy if their students know more than they do. Circus is an area where children achieve so quickly that they can soon be demonstrably better than their teachers (Bolton, 1987: 75). Of course this is exactly the sort of role reversal and equality that is necessary to combat the low self-esteem that triggers psychological and social problems.

Furthermore, the relationship that circus instigates between school and community may be perceived as uncomfortable or threatening to some teachers:

“...the image of the teacher as a professional who is responsive to family and community may be threatening to those teachers whose education has not emphasized the importance of the home and of interaction with parents and community, and who consequently may be unable to articulate a rationale for their work that accommodates such interaction.” (Limerick and Neilson, 2000:171)

Many reasons for the obstacles to circus in education lie within people’s perception (or misconception) of what circus actually is. Reg Bolton offers the results of a survey from the 1999 National Circus Festival as to why circus is not taught in schools. The answers include:

“It’s too marginal...it’s too much fun...school will spoil it...there aren’t enough long words involved...an unachievable teacher/student ratio (insurance premiums, etc)...no exemplary model of success...no agreed standards of testing and analysis...too many prejudices against circus in the conservative minds of the average teacher – gypsies, freaks, animals, clowns.” (Bolton, 1999: 15)

This suggests that circus is not taught in many schools for a combination of all the reasons listed above. A common factor in these reasons is our fear of taking chances. Hooks agrees that adults in authority are afraid of taking chances, despite the fact that most change is directly attributable to trying something new – risking the unknown.

“When education is the practice of freedom, students are not the only ones who are asked to share, to confess. Engaged pedagogy does not seek simply to empower the students. Any classroom that employs a holistic model of learning will also be a place where teachers grow and are empowered by the process. That empowerment cannot happen if we refuse to be vulnerable while encouraging students to take risks...” (Hooks in Hatton, 2001: 30)

The benefits of Art as a process, working as a catalyst for community development have been illustrated by Helen Crummy, Welfare State International, Neil Cameron and many other community theatre practitioners. The scholastic, physical, psychological, sociological and mental benefits of circus with young people, both on the streets and in schools, individually and communally, have been examined and made evident by an ever increasing number of successful Youth Circus Programs...it may be all that remains is to take note of the evidence, take a risk and take a “leap of faith” into circus and the potential of “ordinary kids and their ability to do extraordinary things!”

METHODOLOGY

The case study method is the most appropriate research tool to test this hypothesis “circus works” as the phenomenon, circus, is indistinguishable from its context-schools (Yin, 1993: 3). Furthermore, multiply case studies are necessary to establish how successful circus is within an education framework. These case studies have been conducted within the cognitive anthropology domain; “which studies people’s perspectives as organised in schemata and categories of meanings and inter-related to each other.” (Sarantakos, 1998: 48)

The in-school circus programs were selected for study based on the number of years they have been running and their size i.e.; popularity; exemplary cases which reflected “strong, positive examples of the phenomenon of interest” (Yin, 1993: 12). Ideally, the schools had to be located within different socio-economic areas and made up of culturally different students, with in-school circus programs as their replicating factor. The analysis of these case studies will, in turn, illustrate which causal events (principles and practices) produce the positive outcomes that make up these exemplary circus programs.

Five case studies have been undertaken in 2002, all of which are descriptive in nature; presenting a complete description of circus (phenomenon) within its school framework (context). The proposed schools are James Cook Boys High School, Campbelltown Performing Arts High School, Dubbo West Central School, Reg Bolton’s “Circus in a Suitcase” in-school circus residencies and Batemans Bay High School. A study of Belfast Community Circus has also been completed in 2002, however, due to its different context i.e.: community, rather than in-school, it has not been included in the results section of this study.

The research collected at each school is post-hoc longitudinal data (typically one week – Yin, 1993: 35) and ethnographic in design. The research is predominantly made up of fieldwork: in-depth interviews with staff, students and members of the communities, participant-observation, collection of artifacts (photographs) and archival data from local newspapers, tourist guides and school records. The different sources of information supply information about in-school circus programs from varying cultural perspectives, all co-existing within one specific context or school:

“The great strength of the case study method is that it allows the researcher to concentrate on instance or situation and to identify, or attempt to identify, the various interactive processes at work. These processes may remain hidden on a large scale survey but may be crucial to the success or failure of systems or organizations.” (Bell, 1999: 11)

The interviews have been conducted with a cross section of school staff, students and community members.

Interview candidates include:

- The Principals of the schools; to provide an overview of the executive perspective on the circus program and its future direction.
- Members of staff who object to the circus program, to isolate objections to the program and assess their legitimacy.
- Members of staff who support the program, to identify their reasons for advocacy.
- Students who participate in circus have been interviewed and photographed to determine student reactions to circus, both spontaneous and reflective.
- The parents of these students have also been interviewed to determine their perception of the effect that circus has had on their children, personally, socially and scholastically and any effects on their relationships with their children.

These different sources of evidence: open interviews, participant/observation, archival data and artifact collection, ensure the successful triangulation of data and convergence of all results.

These results have been analysed for emerging trends and patterns within circus programs and their contexts. This process of generalization can be related to typical, exemplary cases and not random theory and principles (Sarantakos, 1993: 26).

CASE STUDIES

JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH SCHOOL

Tsirkus Idnina – Circus of the Future

James Cook High School is a boy's school in Kogarah, South Sydney with approximately six hundred students. The students come from various ethnic minority groups: including Japanese, Chinese, Greek, Arabic and Macedonian. The name of the Circus Troupe at the school – "Tsirkus Idnina" is Macedonian for "Circus of Hope" and was named by the students in 2001.

There is a good reason this circus is called "Circus of Hope." The circus program has dramatically changed the lives of many of the students at the school and continues to give them hope and a reason to get up in the morning and come to school.

Stephanie Brown, a teacher at the school, started the circus program in 1999. However its roots reach further back into a program called "Machismo" which was aimed specifically at teenage boys. Stephanie initiated the "Machismo" program in an attempt to give boys different outlets to creatively express themselves without being bullied and harassed. The "Machismo" program included dance, drama, music, visual arts and circus and Stephanie brought male role models (experts in their field) into the school to tutor the boys over twelve months. The program culminated with an end of year performance under a "Big Top" in their local area where the students displayed all of their new skills.

There were a number of success stories as a result of the program. One of which "John" was on the seven thirty report last year, crediting the school and the "Machismo" program with having changed his life!

"We were on the seven thirty report last year with one of our really difficult year twelve boys...we didn't know what he would say...he said that the program had changed him from someone who had no interest in school, 'couldn't care less' and given him something to focus his ability on...'he owed the school more than he could ever tell us.' We didn't even prompt him! We could not believe what he said!" (Billings.S. School Principal. 2002, pers. comm. 5th June)

As a result of the success of the program, Stephanie was seconded to the NSW Department of Education and Training offices in 2000, to hone the program and introduce it to several other schools. She returned to James Cook in 2001 and began the "Machismo" program again...except this time, she focused on the activity that had produced the most obvious change in the students – Circus!

Stephanie called the program “Machismo” because she wanted to emphasize the fact that it doesn’t “make you a lesser version of masculinity because you’re creative” (Brown, S. 2002, pers. comm. 6th June). James Cook Boys High had a reputation for being a very “sporty” high school, with a particular emphasis on football (all codes). Consequently, the boys who didn’t fit into this stereotype were often ostracized by their peers and by the staff! However, as the boys became more proficient at circus, the climate within the school changed and the Circus Troupe became the “cool” members of the school community and, in fact, began to draw boys from other areas into circus learning:

“A lot of the boys are footy players and they get injured – OFTEN!...Every week shoulders, collarbones, you know, legs everything...so now they come from footy to circus, their parents are saying ‘we don’t want them playing football now cause they’re getting hurt’.” (Brown, S. 2002, pers. comm. 6th June)

This ‘circus migration’ has come from the students as well:

“Footy is more of a macho – look at me I can tackle someone, I can take out someone twice the size of me...circus is more friendlier, more about communication, guys working together and keeping it tight and thinking we can do this, we can pull off anything we want to do. With footy it’s just more violent, more aggressive.” (Year twelve student. 2002, pers. comm. 5th June)

Not only did the school have a reputation for being “sporty” but it also had a reputation for being “rough” and very dangerous:

“Yes the school has had a bad reputation...my first experience on coming to the school was on canteen duty and it was continual fights – like really full – on, not just one or two people fighting, full on brawls. These huge fights out the back of the school, lots of anger, lots of tension, homophobia was rampant and just this feeling of insecurity...Kogarah has the highest rate of domestic violence in NSW, most of our kids experience some sort of violence at home therefore they bring it to school. Some of our boys have been arrested for violent crimes outside of school and they are the boys involved in the troupe.” (Brown, S. 2002, pers. comm. 6th June)

So, which boys do make up this troupe? Circus is offered as an elective subject in years nine and ten and is also offered as an option for sport. The “Performance Troupe” or “Tsirkus Idnina” is made up of sixty boys that have all had to audition to get into the troupe; it is made up of eighty percent non-English speaking background students: Pacific Islander students, Greek students, Asian, Arabic, Macedonian and Aboriginal students. There are a number of ethnicities in the troupe who were previously, (traditionally), considered enemies before joining the group and started circus training together.

The “audition” process is very interesting and is unique among the school circus programs I have observed. The older boys in the Troupe are responsible for the selection or “initiation” of the younger boys into “Tsirkus Idnina.” The selection process is instigated and carried out almost entirely by the older students. Robert Spanky, a year twelve student at the school who is the oldest member of the troupe and a senior trainer, explains it here:

“Oh yeah...the initiation – we basically like – the more high up guys like me, Nick, George and a couple of others, we see what they can do and we judge them and we go ‘no, they’re not up to performing’ and stuff like that. Like Miss usually asks us ‘is he up to performing?’ and we go ‘no, yes, maybe’ but if they’re just above the ‘good enough’ we go ‘yep, chuck him in – throw him in straight away’...if you keep saying ‘Oh, no, don’t let him do it’ they start thinking ‘what am I doing here’ and they think ‘I’m just wasting my time’ so may as well get them doing something and keep them interested.” (Spanky, R. 2002, pers. comm. 5th June)

The mature attitude of the senior boys is reflected here by Robert’s statements, and in other conversations I had with the senior trainers who recognize the important role they play in the successful running of “Tsirkus Idnina”:

“Basically circus opens the minds of the guys. They used to see me as only one thing...not anymore...they say ‘this is a guy who probably works hard and studies’, I also like to relax and chill out and take things as they come because it’s so much easier that way...I don’t classify myself as a role model. Yeah, sure I do it and I train them and I say ‘do it good, look up to me, keep on going straight and focus’ and all that, but you also have to keep your own identity and focus within yourself...I just do what I feel is right...they’ve noticed what they can achieve and their behavior has gone really good (I’m sure Miss Brown already told you that)...not just with circus – with everything – the boy’s attitude and self-esteem...” (Spanky, R. 2002, pers. comm.5th June)

I watched Robert train the troupe in tissu in the school's squash court – the only space available for aerial work for the students! The atmosphere was relaxed, friendly and on occasion, raucous (to be expected with a squash court full of teenage boys.) However, it was clear that Robert had 'control' via the respect of the younger boys who listened carefully to his instructions and worked on correcting their styles and positions through his directions:

“I really love the boys here. I get their little smart arse attitudes sometimes, but I don't care. As long as I see them progress and see them get better I go 'yeah'. I just love to see people progress when I'm teaching them.” (Spanky, R. 2002, pers. comm. 5th June)

The older boys are not only responsible for the initiation into the Performance Troupe, they write and direct all the shows as well:

“There is a performing troupe and a training troupe. And when they're learning and they finally get to a stage where the older boys in the performing troupe recognize that this person is skilled enough, they invite them to join the performing troupe, and they get together and have their own little ceremony and they get their black t-shirt, the boys do all that. The boys choreograph everything, write everything, organize everything – it's their responsibility...even the music – we have live music for performance and the music is Macedonian although this year we've incorporated the Islander boys, who are now singing. They have to write their own music and it's all about performance so everything has to be from them; writing and performing.” (Brown, S. 2002, pers. comm. 6th June)

Stephanie accredits this ownership; this autonomy, with the changes she and the other members of staff observe in the circus boys everyday:

“Now the boys are great, they're really happy and there's a sense of trust and understanding of the values of other people and also the place is a bit more fun and the staff feel that too. The place has really changed – the boss acknowledges it that it's changed and that's good for everybody.” (Brown, S. 2002, pers. comm. 6th June)

The other changes Stephanie mentioned in her interview include:

PHYSICALLY

The circus program is open to all the students. This means that, unlike football, any student can be directly involved in circus and feel like they genuinely belong. This is a new thing for physical programs at James Cook. The overweight or unfit boys usually begin on clowning, then juggling, then unicycling...then progress to aerial work. No student is pushed beyond his or her physical capability. However, Stephanie has noticed how the boys that become involved in the circus program tend to train on the school's gym equipment and develop their self-discipline in an attempt to achieve their personal circus goals. The boys have to be fit to maintain the level of training they set for themselves; consequently a number of boys have given up smoking and taking drugs in an attempt to improve their training and achievement in circus skills. Particularly in the adagio of group balancing, where the students are relying on each other to literally hold them up and support them.

“The first time I jumped on aerial it was hilarious, it's on video somewhere...I could only just support my own weight which is pretty shocking but I just kept on going, kept on hurting myself, kept on jumping on it, saying 'I can do it! I don't mind this pain.' And eventually I got it, I can do it and I was pretty proud of myself and now I teach the boys. I jump on and climb up it and they go 'what the?' And they don't understand how a guy my size can actually climb up something and they go 'OK'.” (Spanky, R. 2002. pers. comm. 5th June)

SCHOLASTICALLY

All members of the Circus Troupe are placed on behavior contracts. Which state that unless the students maintain a certain level of attendance, standard of work and behavior, they will be removed from the troupe.

This contract was actually the idea of the staff who were in opposition to the school's most “difficult students” being given circus as a privilege. The contract has helped the boys develop their self discipline, and, since Stephanie became Deputy Principal at the school, each contract is slightly different and flexible (she negotiates individual contracts with each performer). She maintains it makes the boys feel more professional and helps motivate them to do the “right thing”. Other scholastic benefits are through an increase in the boys' motivation and the ability to focus on tasks until they have achieved them. They have more confidence in public speaking and are able to manage their time better.

In other words, circus has taught them HOW to learn. The boys from the troupe who were frequently thrown out of classes are now standing up at assembly, receiving merit certificates. Stephanie also reported a drop in truancy rates at the school by the students involved in the circus program.

The circus program also gives students an opportunity to work on related activities in other Key Learning Areas. They can work on their compositions for performance in Music, costume design and construction in Art and Stilt and set construction in Industrial Arts. There is also a film crew that follows the troupe around from performance to performance. The crew is made up entirely of students and they do all the filming, editing, producing and marketing of the films themselves. Circus is helping to link the learning experience for a number of students who previously found school unappealing and not stimulating when placed next to out-of-school activities.

PSYCHOLOGICALLY

Stephanie thinks circus has helped the students gain control over themselves and their environment and consequently have more rewarding relationships.

“They’re happier at home. They are engaging in learning. They are communicating much better. Their anti-social behavior has certainly decreased. Some of the boys were isolates, now they’ve formed friendships.” (Brown, S. 2002. SMH, 10th June)

They are allowed the freedom to express themselves through circus and find out who they are. This is vital for the healthy development of individuals within a school that has traditionally turned out “macho men” and given little credence to creative and performing arts as acceptable “male” activities.

“There are approximately sixty boys who come to this school because of the circus program and it’s not just because they have fun. It’s because they’re valued, and they’re not valued anywhere else in their lives, in any way, just circus.” (Brown, S. 2002, pers. comm. 6th June)

A percentage of the students included in this sixty were living on the streets at the time of this interview, avoiding their parents, friends, etc. And still managing to come to school to train in the circus troupe! Of course, Stephanie acknowledges that these young people are usually the ones attracted to the more “risky” activities – like uni cycle riding and German wheel, but that they are taking “safe” risks in a controlled environment, whilst still being able to push limits and find new boundaries.

SOCIOLOGICALLY

The circus program has changed the face of the school within the local area:

“I think our boys were perceived as ruffians or sort of gangs and violent. Now I hear kids say ‘I’m at James Cook’ and people say ‘oh you’re at the school with the uni cycles, we drive past and we see you riding uni cycles.’ We perform locally too. We are performing at a local primary school this Friday so I think parents definitely, after seeing a performance, they send their boys to the school because of the circus. They realize how rewarding the program is and the perception is that James Cook has this fantastic welfare program at the school and it’s a circus program and it’s changed the way people feel about our school in our local community and in the wider community. The name James Cook Boys High School is in places around the State now because of the way the boys are and when the boys go out to perform they are so fantastic. They are so well behaved, unbelievable.” (Brown, S. 2002, pers. comm. 6th June)

The Principal also acknowledges the positive impact the circus has had on the community’s perception of the school. He told me he has only been contacted by the police about the circus boys once this year...and it was to discuss the issue of whether the boys should wear stack helmets when riding their uni cycles to and from the train station.

“The community are very supportive of circus, they like to come and watch it. When we had our open day here...they were about 500 or 600 hundred people looking at it...it’s nice for the community to see the boys doing something positive.” (Billings, S. 2002. pers. comm. 5th June)

The circus has also created a community or “family” within the school, which has had an incredible effect on the boys involved:

“Some of these boys don’t have families-they’ve run away from home and so this is their family and I think it’s their family because it’s not just about one age group either. It’s like you’ve got the older boys like their older brothers, they look after them and I think that’s important and they’ve got the whole social thing happening too, and they protect each other.” (Brown, S. 2002. pers. comm. 6th June)

“It really is a self-esteem thing, feeling good about themselves...and what’s more, it becomes infectious, because boys now teach boys. All the research is saying it’s good if boys can help their peers.” (Billings, S. 2002. SMH, 10th June)

Stephanie Brown and Steven Billings are in agreement that once the expectations of the students are raised by the community and the staff at the school, then the students will, in turn, raise their own expectations and rise to meet new goals. The circus program has had incredible success within the school's framework, for individuals, their families and the local community. Why then, are there still obstacles to the program?

The main obstacle to the program at James Cook is from the PE staff. Which (as Stephanie is quick to point out) is odd, as they have many of the skills needed to teach circus skills. However, in this situation, the PE teachers believe circus is "stealing" a number of their "star" footballers...this objection is aired under the guise of "circus should not be for the naughty students!" However, as Stephanie illustrated, if the "naughty" students were playing football, they would be encouraged to train and win matches for the school. The objection by the PE staff has gone as far as to prohibit the use of gymnastics equipment and the hall/gymnasium as a training space. Stephanie uses outdoor spaces and the squash courts to train and the boys seem to be oblivious to the objection from the PE staff.

And, as the Principal pointed out, the overwhelming majority of teachers are happy to have circus in the school as it helps create a healthy, happy learning environment:

"Most of the staff are fine because they can see that some of the boys would otherwise be having difficulty – they're happy to come to school, they're happy to be involved in classes because they're getting the positive reinforcements from everybody at school."
(Billings, S. 2002. pers. comm. 5th June)

The students are also invited to train at various aerial spaces around Sydney with professional circus performers. Gavin Wild, stuntman and aerialist, "The Leaping Loonies" and trapeze artist Jeremy White are among the performers who have trained the senior troupe performers so they can, in turn, train the junior members of the troupe.

Stephanie does not have a background in circus, yet is among the most enthusiastic circus advocates I have met. She maintains circus is exactly what she was looking for when writing programs for boys that address issues of masculinity, teamwork, expression, relationships, self-esteem and community:

“Circus encompassed everything. It was about working together and teams relying on each other and about bringing out leadership skills in kids who had never been seen as leaders before. It was learning from other people and respecting other people, it was also networking and the job thing – a career and giving them self-confidence in that key performance element. It was about they have to design and make costumes, they have to learn how to work with each other to make the process happen. Because these kids aren’t used to process, you know, it’s come in and do something and ‘bang’ that’s it! They had to learn how to evaluate that process, it’s also about being tolerant of other people, anti-racism, anti-homophobia. And circus does all of those things...it makes stars of kids who are normally seen as a nerd, a gay kid, a kid being picked on because of whatever racial group it is – you know what I mean? So this way people see what the boys are really like and none of that is an issue, none of those things. And I think the reason circus does this is because it’s fun and these kids don’t have fun in their lives. I think the reason I looked at circus for boys is because boys are told at an early age to grow up and be a man... being creative isn’t the thing because girls are creative, boys play football, be like your old man. And not all boys are like their old man and they need new role models and they get to realize that they are individuals and it’s cool. So they don’t have to do this as a career, but to have the confidence and learn the skills that you learn there... These are all team work too and team work is transferred to business and family.” (Brown, S. 2002. pers. comm. 6th June)

As this quote illustrates, Stephanie keenly promotes circus within school frameworks and has a “vision” for the future of circus in schools. She set out to start and maintain a program for boys in schools that worked at a number of different levels. She wanted to prove that circus could be taught and work as a School Certificate Subject in an ordinary State School, with no special gear, not much funding and no expertise. Just some one who likes kids and is passionate about circus as a tool for change and empowerment. Stephanie has certainly proven that this can be achieved and a number of other schools have seen “Tsirkus Idnina” perform and are keen to start their own circus programs. These schools include: Barham High School in Victoria and Ryde Secondary College in Sydney. The troupe performed at the Sydney South East Music festival at the Opera House in August and is planning a tour of Western NSW and the Riverina next year.

Eventually, Stephanie would like to see a inter school festival – much like the Rock Eisteddfod, but without competition:

“Imagine having district performances, inter-district performances, State performances at the end of the year in a huge circus tent. Everybody comes in, not competitive, there is no competition in what we do but let’s all get together and perform.” (Brown, S. 2002. pers. comm. 6th June)

Stephanie also envisages circus becoming an “HSC subject attached to TAFE, with students doing work experience with professional troupes” (Brown, S. 2002, “Our Schools” St George Edition, May). The circus program is growing in popularity each year, and Stephanie and the students in “Tsirkus Idnina” certainly have the enthusiasm and talent to promote circus within schools and their communities.

CIRCUS WEST – DUBBO, NSW

Dissolving the Stigma

Dubbo is a country town situated in the North West of New south Wales. There are a few local tourist attractions which have put Dubbo on the map, one of which is a Youth Circus – Circus West. (The students have appeared on the cover of the Dubbo City Guide for the past five years!) A Circus School which has successfully operated within the curriculum of Dubbo West Public School for the past eleven years.

The area of Dubbo known as “West” has a reputation for being “rough” and where all the “riff raff are” (“Mum 2” 2002, pers. comm. 29th May). Furthermore, Dubbo West traditionally has a reputation for being a disadvantaged, challenging school; “a stigma that is carried by the staff and students alike” (“Fredericka” Dubbo West- teacher. 2002, pers. comm.30th May), a stigma that is being steadily dissolved by the circus program and School’s performing Circus Troupe.

I visited the circus program in July, 2002 and was amazed and inspired by the number of enthusiastic, talented young people (three hundred on average) who “braved the elements” to train outside, on the oval at recess, lunchtime, sport time and after school...and the community that supported this program.

The circus program was founded by Paul Woodhead, a trained school teacher, qualified gymnastics coach, Deputy Principal of the school and, now self-converted Circus Teacher! The program began in 1991, after Paul had visited Europe to study Human Movement and Rhythmic Gymnastics. Whilst in Europe, he visited his brother, who was working as a Community Liason/Social Worker in Belfast.

The Belfast Community Circus invited Paul to their summer camp in Newcastle, Northern Ireland to teach acrobatics to young people. It was here Paul began to see how effective Circus is as a tool for change and development in young people and their communities.

Upon returning to Dubbo, Paul was asked to work with ten Primary School students with Behavior Difficulties. “Hard Cases” who had been excluded form normal classes and were only working with Paul in a locked classroom. He began to use a circus reward program whereby they were allowed to do things “no-one else was doing” (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May) – Juggling, diabolo and devil sticks...mostly home made. After three weeks, all ten students had been successfully integrated back into the majority of normal classes and the other staff at the school were taking notice of the program. The students continued to be “rewarded” with circus during sport time...and other students began to ask when they could try this “Circus Business?”

Consequently, circus was offered as a sport for twenty kids per term for the rest of that year... the activities grew to acrobatics, balancing and more juggling and Paul was "Going on what I saw in Belfast; I knew nothing then about circus."
(Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May)

The following year, Rotary made stilts for the circus and the students made more juggling equipment. Circus became an activity rostered onto three lunchtimes a week as a structured playground activity; aimed at "kids at risk, loners, ostracized kids, kids who had no idea how to join in on other activities and identified bullies."
(Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May)

The program was so successful, that the school received \$4,500 for the next two years under the disadvantaged schools program; for "welfare work." Then local companies began funding the Circus with donations and grants and Circus West was born! The Circus bought their accommodation (a train and a caravan, situated on the oval) and some more equipment.

Then Paul began a levels program, to help the students set goals and progress safely and carefully, and to assist in the teaching and monitoring of skill areas within circus learning. These areas are: diabolo, juggling, stilts, tumbling, devil stick, rola bola, unicycle, clowning, acrobatics, and balance and spin. There are six clearly defined levels assigned to each circus activity. As students move from level to level, they are recognized at school assemblies and circus training sessions.

After three years, Paul realized there was a need to provide circus training for students after they had left school, but wanted to continue their circus training. So "after-school circus" was developed and with it, "Circus West"; the School's performance troupe. Students must pass a level five in at least one skill area to audition for "Circus West".

In 1998, Paul and Deborah Duffy (an advocate of the circus program at the school) published a book "Circus in Schools" to promote the program at their own school and provide a practical document for the implementation of circus programs in other schools. The book contains useful information needed to run an in-school circus program; from learning how to juggle and stilt walk, through to costuming and performance. The book explains the school's level system and how the students can progress through to the performance troupe. There are also a number of templates for performance contracts and contracts for students and parents contained in "Circus in Schools" (Woodhead and Duffy, 1998).

Since 1994, "Circus West" has performed regularly for Local, State, and National Celebrations. Some highlights include: a series of performances with Lennon Brothers Circus as guest performers in 1999; the Opening Ceremony of the Pacific School Games and the Olympic Games in Sydney, 2000; "Storm Warning 2001" a Circus show sponsored by NSW Storm Water Trust and Dubbo City Council that toured around regional NSW to promote an environmental message and the "face" of Circus West; and numerous other corporate functions, fetes and carnivals in Dubbo and the surrounding region.

These public performances are an integral part of the circus program at Circus West for a number of reasons. The first one being the public profile of the school and its students:

"The major change that affects everyone is the culture of the school – that is the way the school feels about itself. What sort of things does it celebrate success in and how the school is viewed by people outside i.e. parents and the community. Because the school has had and probably still has in certain quarters quite a negative name which has a history of – and it's an anecdotal history – of where the land developers wanted to sell their land and where the papers decided to say where the power is in Dubbo and all that...it's also wrapped up in where the housing commission houses are ...So the major impact has been the culture of the school. People hear Circus West and they think Dubbo West and they put them together and that's positive, the school is actually doing positive things. It's done more positive things than Circus West, but Circus West is out in the open, all the others are in classrooms." (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May)

The school's front office and the school library display all the Circus West newspaper articles and upcoming events and the students are encouraged to be aware of and promote circus within their community. The media portray Circus West as a local, inspirational group of young people and play an important role in dissolving the stigma that has been traditionally attached to Dubbo West Public School.

Of course, it's not just the local media that play an important role in promoting the school's profile; parents are the first people to promote the Circus in the wider community:

“One instance I can remember was last year at Wellington when they were having a show over there. It was for the centennial Big Parade and they had a little spot lit show kind of thing, centre stage and just people you know. I was just among the crowd watching it, you know camera going (obviously), and a fellow standing next to me was just amazed at what these kids could do and I was like ‘Oh, that’s my son.’ And he was just commenting, you know, on how they got together as a group...and it’s funny, I think there was a couple of new girls after that performance” (“Mum 1“ 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

The parents are also keen to acknowledge what circus has done for their children as individuals. In fact, one woman I spoke to traveled approximately two hours to get to circus training after school. Her children; a son in year 7 and a daughter in year 11, have been with Circus West for three years. They are home schooled due to distance but always make an effort to attend after school Circus on a weekly basis.

She told me there are a number of reasons she doesn’t mind traveling each week to bring her kids to circus. These include: regular social contact with other students, scholastic benefits, individual confidence and focus, new skills and their own performance company!

Her children live on a property and mostly rely on each other for companionship. However, circus gives them the opportunity to mix with students from different social, economic and racial backgrounds and form new friendships.

“It’s to say ‘I’m in Circus West’, it means the whole thing not just ‘you’ or ‘you’, it’s everybody. And they like to say ‘yeah, I’m from Circus West – we’re all good’...they support each other as far as applause and revving everyone else on – appreciating each other’s talents...you know a new kid comes along and they’re trying to get on stilts or whatnot and they’re straight in (the other ones) trying to help the new kids.” (“Mum 1” 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

Circus also gives its participants something to write and talk about with passion and enthusiasm: “it gives them something they love talking about and writing about in journals and things like that...and of course any opportunity they get they are looking up info on the internet, checking out different routines skills they can get ideas off.” (“Mum “ 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

She maintains that circus has actually brought both her kids “out of their shells” and given them an incredible increase in self-confidence and self esteem:

“Last year, at the end of the year through school, he actually had to make a speech on their presentation day and spoke in front of about three hundred people, whereas I would have doubted that you get him up there doing that, and he actually volunteered to do it! So I think circus definitely boosts their self-confidence.” (“Mum 1” 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

Circus has also helped a number of students at the school manage their ADD by increasing their ability to focus and concentrate:

“It’s been fantastic...she has taught herself how to focus and concentrate on different tricks and then this has helped her with school in general and helped us at home too.” (“Mum 2” 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

A number of the Circus West students practice their skills at home and some even perform for festivals and private parties as solo or duo acts:

“He got a unicycle for Christmas...we’ve bought all our own equipment and costumes because we have actually done things out of this organized circus, like parades, street theatre, school fetes. Anything like that, any opportunity they get, they perform.” (“Mum 2” 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

All the parents I spoke to were so grateful to Paul Woodhead for continuing the circus program for all the students in the area and believed circus had had a positive impact on their children and the community in general:

“...because we don’t live in Dubbo, we’ve heard stories like you know, how rough it is on the West side of Dubbo. They say ‘I wouldn’t send my kids to that school!’ and I say ‘Are you kidding? My kids wouldn’t be anywhere else!’” (“Mum 1” 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

So how exactly does circus manage to improve the school’s community image and thus relationship and the individual’s self-confidence, physical fitness, scholastic ability and the ability to focus and “persevere?”

“Circus gives individual students the opportunity to turn themselves around, either in the case of a child who doesn’t cause any trouble but has little perseverance and they gain perseverance from juggling for instance. Or a child with ‘in your face’ behavioral problems and they use circus not only as a focus for their energy so their behavior changes but also their status amongst their peers... what they are trying to get is control of something within school, something they can direct and hopefully the spin off is status with their peers and within the system and recognition in front of their peers.” (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May)

As previously stated, circus runs at lunchtimes, sport times and after school one afternoon a week. These three sessions, though they may appear similar at first glance, are in fact very different and essential to the development of circus within the school. One thing they all have in common is safety and the encouragement to take CALCULATED risks. The students follow strict guidelines with equipment and circus learning and (especially since Paul’s recent promotion to deputy Principal) are very aware that they will be removed from the circus program if they participate in any dangerous behavior with each other or the equipment.

All the training sessions are done outside (regardless of the weather conditions) and there are designated areas for each activity. The softest grass area is reserved for stilt walkers and unless the students have reached a certain level they are not allowed to walk without a spotter...all stilt walkers must wear knee pads. There is an area set up with a permanent railing to learn how to ride the uni, confident unicyclists go to the basket ball courts. Acrobats work near the toilet block; easy access to water and the PE mats which are brought out onto the oval for training. The jugglers, diabolo or plate spinners work near the fence, well out of the way of rola bolas or walking globes...who move through the middle of the stilt walkers and the acrobats.

This may sound chaotic; especially at ‘lunchtime circus’ where there can be up to three hundred kids on the oval all training together, and often only Paul supervising the training. However, it’s quite the reverse! The first day I watched ‘lunchtime circus’ I was amazed at the stream of kids that poured from the classrooms, out onto the oval and made very orderly lines at the train and the caravan, waiting patiently for Paul to unlock the doors. The students took gear and handed gear to each other and forwarded to the designated area for their activity. There was no fighting or pushing and students worked together to lift mats and bags and other heavy items.

On one occasion, it began to rain. One whistle blow from Paul and three hundred kids moved to put gear away EXACTLY where they had found it...every single student on the oval moved quickly and quietly to the caravan and waited, in the rain, in a queue, to return their gear and then wait under shelter...hoping it stopped raining before lunch was over.

'Lunchtime circus', though very busy, is often the most rewarding for Paul:

"Lunchtime circus (as you saw today) can be extremely busy...but it's the most exciting because it means every single kid in the school is having a go and that's what makes it really different from the gymnastics I used to do." (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May)

Peer tutoring is also a feature of 'lunchtime circus'. I observed year five and six students readily assisting the younger students with their training and encouraging them to safely take risks and try new tricks. One of the main risks the kids at lunchtime circus are taking is the "risk of ridicule" (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm.. 30th May). Young people are generally afraid of someone humiliating them because they've tried something new. However, at lunchtime circus everyone is actively engaged in an activity of some sort...either learning or teaching, and no-one is judging anyone's behavior; a model learning environment to be involved in! To see this many students working harmoniously, all having fun together and celebrating each other's skills certainly made me wonder where the negative reputation of Dubbo West Public School had come from?

Circus for sport is not as inspiring to watch as 'lunchtime circus' but is equally well run and organized. Not all of the students that are in circus for sport actually selected it – some have been put in there in an attempt to modify unsociable behavior or poor work ethic. Quite often circus for sport is a "recruiting" ground for after-school circus and students often discover they had hidden talents and continue with their circus training.

'After-school Circus', or "High School Circus" as Paul calls it is more self-directed and the students tend to work on specific apparatus (rather than swapping and changing as in lunch time circus) and work on mastering tricks. The high school students have an impressive skill level. I watched in awe as young people with gloves, beanies and heavy coats on (Dubbo in the winter is not particularly conducive to circus training!) tumbled and juggled their way around the oval until the sun went down and they couldn't see the juggling balls anymore! These students tend to add "danger" to the skill their mastering (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May) for example: the students were juggling knives and fire and riding 5 ft high Giraffe unicycles. But Paul was quick to point out that the High School students had come through the Primary School circus program and that he kept a careful eye on their progression and the development of their skills; and that, although risk is an integral part of what makes circus so appealing, the students are always taking careful calculated risks and learning about safety, and how to stay safe in the process.

I questioned Paul about the “gender divide” in the after-school circus program? He explained that girls have traditionally “gone for” stilts to, in his opinion, make themselves “taller and more graceful” – so that everyone notices them. And boys tend to gravitate towards the unicycles and the juggling because it is seen as more dangerous and “hard core.” Both genders participated in the acrobatics; but the gender divide was obvious and unmistakable. However, there appeared to be equal risk taking by the girls who were doing acrobatics on stilts that were 1 metre 25 cm high! There was no obvious rivalry between the boys and the girls. In fact, they were calling out to each other to watch new tricks and readily giving praise and talking about where new tricks might fit into their next show. It seemed more of an unspoken law that the boys rode the unis and the girls walked on stilts. Not a problem as such; more like a “given”.

The students were all keen to show me their new tricks and talk about circus and how they feel about it:

“Some of my friends are like ‘Oh, cool, you can ride a unicycle’ and others just call me a circus freak. I just turn around and say ‘at least I’ve got some talents!’ I’ve got something that most people can’t do and probably wouldn’t even try to do.” (“Student 1” 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

The students told me about their various public performances and which were their favorites. Performing with “Lennon Brothers” was the highlight for some, the opening ceremony of the Olympics for others. All of them agree that their parents are proud of them and support their circus training...(there were numerous pairs of father and grandfather made stilts!) The enthusiasm in the Circus West kids was infectious and I found myself joining in their training and taking instruction in “how to” Circus West style! Once I got involve with the kids – the winter temperatures and wet grass didn’t matter anymore. (The kids assured me that winter conditions were better for training than summer conditions!)

Paul outlined the goals of the school’s circus program as:

“To use the magic of circus to provide a structured activity so the kids have something to do. Then they are less inclined to be causing trouble or being upset with nothing to do. The goals to me are social goals, welfare goals, they’re essentially giving the kids a chance to grow by setting goals themselves, by working on their values, like confidence, perseverance and resilience. Resilience is the new buzz one, but, I mean, it’s there...so to me the goal is essentially a social goal.” (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May)

The social benefits of circus in education are made evident by the program at Dubbo West Public School. Not only by the increased interaction between students across years and socio-economic boundaries, but by the interaction between teachers and students and the school and its community.

“Our school circus can’t survive without community. We have huge support, both systematic and parental, community and within the school itself...the support is very rarely visited upon us in terms of money, mostly its visited in terms of inkind support. That might be free time on radio and T.V. it might be extra publicity – more chances at full colour front page in the newspaper. It might be if I need specialist bolts for the unicycles and I go and see the bolt guy he’ll just say ‘just take them, it’s for you.’ We often have to pay, but it might mean that we get things very, very cheaply, so there is huge community support. Now community support only comes when they can already see that something is working. So while we have been going for twelve years that community support has been building all of that time.” (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 29th May)

I spent my week in the school during school hours and, after hours, had the opportunity to talk informally to the public; hair dressers, taxi drivers, shop assistants and residents about “Circus West”. The circus is well known throughout the community and some of the people I spoke to were not aware that the circus had come from Dubbo West Public School! The ones who were aware of the origins of “Circus West” were proud of the young people involved and thought the group had “done wonders” for the reputation of West Dubbo and Dubbo in general.

It is this interaction which gives rise to a new identity for the school and its residents. As the individual’s self esteem increases; the image and ethos of the school follows.

Virginia Chadwick, who visited the school’s circus program in 1994, was so impressed by the program she was moved to get up on stilts with the students! She was quoted in the Dubbo Liberal as stating:

“I can see the great things it has done for these students in terms of team work, co-ordination and confidence...however you must have people with the commitment and enthusiasm to teach these programs.” (Chadwick. V. in the Dubbo Liberal, 19/8/94)

Paul certainly has these personal qualities and appears to generally like kids and spends time ensuring they try new things and enjoy their school experience. He is very dedicated to the circus program and is respected within the school community for this dedication.

So it is not surprising that the majority of staff support the circus program within the school. There are a number of staff at the school who still have reservations about the program; Paul believes this is because they have a “black and white idea of crime and punishment, different ideas on soft options...” (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May) and don’t see why the circus program should be used as a reward for the “naughty” kids. It is these teachers who would see these students suspended rather than “rehabilitated”, who would rather see students “under control”, rather than controlling space (space here being either their own bodies and/ or the school environment) it is these teachers that are afraid of change and innovation. Paul was quick to point out that these teachers are rare at the school and do not pose a threat to the success of the program within the curriculum.

Another potential obstacle to the program is funding:

“We have to obviously buy gear, replace it, maintain it, get ourselves out and that has been overcome by a series of grants, some sponsorship, school budget – it’s never gone over five hundred dollars per year, and donations from gigs. We regularly do gigs now and they donate reasonable amounts so we are able to keep afloat by that.” (Woodhead.P. 2002, pers. comm. 30th May)

Whilst I was in the school I also saw donations of costumes and fabric, hats and canes, and assorted props. Obviously, it is the apparatus that costs the most money in circus learning and there is a large amount of equipment that cannot be made at home; it must be bought.

The last identified “potential” obstacle to the circus program is risk and its management. Paul has written an extensive Risk Management program that outlines each activity, any risk involved in doing this activity, and the steps taken to ensure this risk is managed and the students’ safety is promoted and monitored at all times. Paul regularly invites members of the education department (in particular the legal branch) to come and visit the school during circus training sessions to observe the program and witness the safety procedures that have been implemented first hand. It seems ironic that “risk” – “the very element of circus that makes it so appealing to young people” is what may eventually drive circus out of schools before it is properly understood and utilized as an education tool. Risk is an essential ingredient of circus, it helps define it and cannot be removed. To do this would remove the “magic” of circus; its essence.

Paul is concerned about the future of his circus program and of circus in education in general. So he is embarking on research into circus in education in other schools (mostly in America) next year. He has been awarded a Churchill Fellowship and his research will take him to San Francisco, Florida, Illinois and New York to observe youth circuses and their education and outreach programs. Then to Leeds to work with Steve Ward, the founder of the National Association of Youth Circuses in the UK. Then lastly to the Belfast Community Circus to examine the program now and see how it has changed from his first encounter with Belfast Circus in 1990 – where his passion for circus was initially ignited:

“There’s a trend worldwide that uses circus to help kids – although circus in education doesn’t have the profile I would like it to have...I really believe that for children to get the most out of something like a literacy program, they have to want to be at school in the first place and circus can help them to get there.” (Woodhead in Dubbo Liberal, 9/8/2002)

Coming from a PE perspective, Paul is passionate about the differences between sport and circus; in particular the potential of circus to reach all students, not just the “jocks”. However, it is easy to recognize Paul’s background in PE when watching videos of previous Circus West performances. The shows are very much traditional circus, with little narrative or artistic interpretation. There is a strong emphasis on acrobatics and adagio and very little clowning and no aerial work (due to training space constraints). However, the shows have a high level of energy and skill and are very entertaining – every student involved with Circus West is enthusiastic, talented and a credit to the program and to each individual’s dedication.

CAMPBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH SCHOOL

“More kids ride unicycles to school than bikes!”

Campbelltown Performing Arts High School is a co-ed school with approximately one thousand, one hundred kids. The school is situated in the Western suburbs of Sydney and was opened in 1954 to cater for the rapid expansion of Sydney City.

Mark McDermott a music teacher, turned circus teacher, began the circus program at the school in 1993 because the existing art forms were not “catering for all the kids.” He felt that the “less academic” kids were being disadvantaged in Drama, Dance and Music and needed a different avenue to explore their creativity and improve their confidence and self-esteem.

I only spent one day in the school, but was amazed at the number of enthusiastic, talented students that take part in the circus program. Walking from the train station to the school, I was already inspired by the number of students riding unicycles from the train station to school. The passing motorists and pedestrians smiling at the young people as they frantically cycled up hills and around signs (no easy feat!). Upon arriving at the school, I made my way through jugglers and twirlers, manipulators and more unicyclists on my way to the front office.

Mark explained to me that more students ride unicycles to school than pushbikes and they are often seen practicing outside more often due to space constraints. However, it is these space constraints that help promote circus within the school and the community – this “visibility” which has helped transform the identity of the students involved in the circus program and thus the ethos of the school. The students train in the quad and inside the hall when it is available; but more often than not, can be seen on the oval before, after and during school - merrily “circusing” and working together as a team.

Circus is available as an elective in year eight and nine and a year ten certificate subject – Circus Arts; A NSW Wales Department of Education school-designed board endorsed course. The course is two hundred hours and is broken up into eight modules. The first one is based on the history of circus and includes:

- Traditional circus versus new circus
- Circus and Community Development
- Circus as sport
- Circus schools; both locally and internationally

The next three modules are centred on clowning (Marks' personal circus history is in clowning – more specifically juggling).

Clowning module 1:

- The Art of clowning
- Developing a unique clown character
- The clown face
- The silent art of mime
- Physical comedy
- Working with your audience

Clowning module 2:

- Comedy magic
- Balloon sculpting
- How to juggle funny
- Balancing Buffoonery
- The magic of music in circus
- The art of walking on stilts

Clowning module 3:

- Clowning on one wheel
- Creating your own comedy act
- Funny business
- Jobs for clowns
- Birthday party clowning
- Being loved, being remembered and being booked

The next four modules are based on general circus techniques:

Module 5 – Circus Techniques 1:

- Balance juggling
- Toss juggling
- Gyroscopic juggling

Module 6 – Circus Techniques 2:

- Inverted equilibristics (acrobatics)
- Stack equilibristics (rola bola, advanced stilt walking and ladder work)
- Rigging equilibristics (trapeze and double trapeze, cloud swing, cradle, slack rope and tight wire)

Module 7 – Circus Techniques 3:

- Vertical vaulting
- Tumble vaulting
- Catapult vaulting

Module 8 – Circus Techniques 4:

- Gymnastic balancing (adagio)
- Forming pyramids (advanced adagio)
- Trampolining

There are five performance descriptors for grading the Circus Arts course:

A: Excellent level of achievement

B: High level of achievement

C: Substantial level of achievement

D: Satisfactory achievement

E: Elementary achievement.

The course has a balance of theory and practical work. However the emphasis is definitely on practical work. I observed some of the year nine and year ten Circus Arts students whilst at the school and their skill level was impressive. In particular the unicyclists; who were going over stairs and ramps, carrying each other on their shoulders, bunny hopping down stairs and cycling FEET FREE! (a trick which would put many professional unicyclists to shame!) Mark explained how he gives his “uni boys” (the unicyclists are all boys!) various videos on tricks and they work together on perfecting them.

There is also a Circus Ensemble, which operates within the school. Entry to this ensemble is by audition only (thirty percent of the school’s intake is by audition to the performance ensembles: Dance, Drama, Music and Circus). This is the most commonly booked ensemble in the local community. Mark explained how it has actually gotten to the point now where he is forced to turn down gigs because the students are too busy. Mark believes the circus ensemble is booked more frequently than the dance, drama and music ensembles because it is “something different” and highly entertaining. After seeing the kids rehearsing, I completely agree with him! The students were actually asked to perform with Stardust Brothers Circus during their September, 1995 season in Campbelltown. The season was a sellout and made the Campbelltown community very proud. This is an indication of the professional level of performance of the ensemble and the support from the community for these talented young people!

This popularity of the circus ensemble is ironic as it is the “lowest common denominator” (McDermott, M. 2002, pers. comm. 7th June) that is attracted to the circus group. By this term, Mark means the students who under achieve in the traditional areas of academic prowess. Why is this “type” of student attracted to circus? Mark maintains it is the risk involved in circus training that attracts the “at risk” students:

“We like to push the boundaries of circus...fire and knives and unicycles...you know – this is very appealing to teenagers. But we have only had three injuries in nine years. We make sure the process is very safe for the kids.” (McDermott, M. 2002, pers. comm. 7th June)

“Whenever we do things like fire we have two extinguishers, a fire blanket plus we have the fire hose handy. So we satisfy all regulations and are quite mindful of kids’ safety.” (McDermott, M. in Sunday Telegraph, 7/8/995)

On top of these safety measures, the students have a former fireman “Dave” come into the school to teach the fire tricks (including fire eating!):

“It is such a great place...whenever I get a new toy in the shop I come down to show them. And when they are doing circus they help each other out and are the friendliest bunch of kids. They interact with each other and encourage each other.” (“Dave” in Sunday Telegraph 7/8/95)

The students are very co-operative and there is an amount of peer tutoring that goes on, but the majority of learning is self motivated and directed by Mark who is an accomplished juggler. He has kept “abreast of the practical matter with the help of professionals and through the school of hard knocks.” (McDermott, M. in Sunday Telegraph, 7/8/1995)

On the day I visited the school, “Ally” a rigger and performer from “Circus Monoxide” – a circus company based in Wollongong, was in the school rigging a new pole and trapeze for future training. Mark thinks it is very important to keep on bringing in professionals and making use of professional performers in the area and abroad (whenever possible) and to establish and maintain a healthy relationship between community/school circus and professional circus “we need each other!” (McDermott, M. 2002, pers. comm. 7th June)

Obviously funding is an obstacle for the circus program as gear is very expensive, but necessary for the program to continue. At the moment the program relies heavily on the money it receives from the school budget and donations from gigs. The school’s executive and other staff members are very supportive of the circus program:

“...it is very much alive, interactive, and there is a real sense of achievement and success there for the kids.” (Anne Round, Head Teacher Performing Arts Faculty in The Sunday Telegraph, 7/8/1995)

And the students? What do they think about Circus Arts being a recognized subject within their school curriculum?

“It is a great release. You have your formal English, Maths and Science lessons and that gets really heavy sometimes, so you feel you just need a release. And this is the best subject.” (Circus Arts Student in The Sunday Telegraph, 7/8/1995)

Campbelltown Performing Arts High School is an excellent example of a working model of Circus within a High School Curriculum. Although relatively young; i.e. nine years old, the circus program has made progress both within the school and its community and finally filled a gap that exists in all Performing Arts Schools' frameworks.

REG BOLTON

Circus in a Suitcase – “The Sacred Wigwam of the Big Top”

Throughout the course of my research, I have contacted circus schools and schools with circus programs, professional and amateur circus companies and various community artists. Every “circus person” I have made contact with, regardless of their location (i.e.; in Australia or overseas) has heard of Reg Bolton and recommended I speak to him about his experience with circus and conduct research into his knowledge and respect for this art form.

Reg Bolton trained as a Primary School teacher at Bristol University in 1969 and has always worked with children. However, he found schools “too limiting” in their approach to education: “in a lot of teaching there is not that chance for a child to find their own way in it” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May) and decided to pursue a career in circus; learning, performing and teaching. Reg’s curriculum vitae reads like a who’s who of circus and he has performed, taught, acted as a consultant, lectured and studied all over the world. Despite his achievements in the professional circus arena, Reg has always maintained his community arts “roots” that he developed whilst working with Helen Crummy in Craigmillar, Edinburgh in the seventies. It was here that Reg first discovered the potential of the arts (in particular circus) to help people discover their real identity and through this process, the identity and potential of their community.

I was lucky enough to work with Reg for three weeks in May 2002. During this time I observed two circus residencies at two very different primary schools. I also observed Reg conduct an in service at a High School interested in starting a circus program, and we visited a primary school which had a highly successful circus program (originated by Reg) in 2000. I also watched “Circus in a Suitcase”. Reg Bolton’s circus company that specializes in “instant” circus performances – which is exactly what I witnessed!

Reg Bolton has been working in schools with his circus “magic” for over thirty years. However, he has only been using a level system for six years. He developed this system with Jo Stevenson, a Primary School teacher, who at the time the system was pioneered, was teaching in a Primary School in Bunbury, Perth. This school had approximately four hundred kids and “a lot of socioeconomic hardship” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th may). Reg explained how the students at this school, though “troubled” were enthusiastic and eager to please! He said they used to run up to him in the playground and yell “Look at me! Look at me! I can do this, I can do this!” As a result of so many eager, talented students, Reg and Jo decided they needed a system whereby students could watch and teach other students. So they developed the Bronze, Silver and Gold system. The students could move through these three levels in a number of areas; including: Circus Kid, Acrobatics, Stilts, Juggling, Tightrope, Performer, Clown, Circus Hand, Trapeze, Devil Stick, Diabolo, Spinning, Unicycle.

Once a student had passed Bronze, they were eligible to test and approve their fellow students in Bronze in the same skill area. Reg's son, Jo Bolton (who also does regular circus residencies in schools in WA), helped Reg develop this system further and now they use a "Circus Success" certificate that has a number of drawings on it that correspond to the specific skill areas. Once the students have passed the levels, they receive either a Bronze, Silver or Gold sticker to place over the picture. There is also a central record of the levels placed in a prominent position around the school e.g.: the front office or library notice board. This levels system works very well in practice and the students are always aware of the skills required to pass certain levels and which student they need to see to help them gain specific skills.

PADBURY PRIMARY SCHOOL

The two schools I watched Reg work in were Padbury Primary School and Gwynn Park Primary School. Padbury Primary School is a relatively small school with approximately three hundred students. Reg was invited to the school by the Principal to do a staff professional development day and the end of term one, 2002. The Principal invited Reg on the recommendation of another Principal in the district. Reg frequently does in service days for staff. He asks the teachers to juggle, walk on stilts, and spin plates, diabolos and devil sticks. At the end of the sessions he asks the teachers to make simple balances and then one big human pyramid. Reg highlights feelings of frustration and annoyance at not being able to do things immediately and then reminds them that that is what they ask their students to overlook/work through everyday. He illustrates circus as metaphor for overcoming fears and personal issues with the fear of failure. He also encourages the teachers to have fun with each other and trust each other! The staff were so impressed with Reg that they asked him to come and do a two term residency in the school with all the students, culminating in a school production at a local theatre. The residency was initially going to be only with "youth at risk" but the teachers said " 'why should only the naughty kids get all the fun', 'which is an odd thing for teachers to say...and they found more money'." (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

I was lucky enough to watch Reg's very first day with the students at Padbury Primary School. We arrived in Reg's station wagon, loaded to the top with his circus equipment, and drove up onto the grass and into the undercover quad (I would learn about Reg's off road theory when it came to circus cars and the carting of equipment!)¹. There were already students there, excited at seeing "the circus" man who was coming! Reg casually opened the door with a big "Hi Kids!" and I felt like I was instantly the sidekick in a clown show. Reg made carting stilts and unicycles, kneepads and beanbags an incredible game, and I watched the number of students increase, all eager to help him unload the car, and set up the "circus area"...or "sacred wigwam of the big top." (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

When the circus "classes" began, Reg started with Year Fours and Fives and worked with different age groups throughout the day. The activities changed slightly depending on the age group he was working with, but not the teaching style. Reg outlined circus swear words at the start of the class: "Hard, Can't, Bad, Embarrassing and No"...and outlined the importance of the correct use of the word "stop" and how this word can save your life sometimes. He also made it very clear that the students were in "the circus now" and must act accordingly! All the students nodded when he said this and obviously had an idea of exactly what he meant. Reg's teaching style was relaxed and friendly and he managed to mix clowning with authority in a manner that is truly unique:

"I have this sort of mythical landscape, ethos, world of circus. That's why I talk about circus swearwords, and I talk about circus attitudes, you know I say 'hang on, you're circus kids now!' Matter of fact I have to get into them they're not clowning around, they're not fooling around, they're doing serious stuff. At the same time they know I'm doing it with a smile on my face or in my voice but that I mean it." (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

The students spent just as much time laughing as they did concentrating and Reg went out of his way to include every student and treat each child as an individual and identify individual strengths:

¹ Reg's reputation for breaking rules and discovering new routes to quads, etc was explained in advance to me by a number of school staff and students. Reg claimed his creative routes aided the unloading of equipment and complied with the "always make an entrance" rule that applies to all circus performers.

“I use different methods for different moments for different kids and different stages of learning. I might say go and look at so and so, other times I’ll explain it and I’m not saying that I’m always right but my instinct is that there are different things for different circumstances...other kids want to analyze it, others I just let them go and do it themselves and occasionally I’ll point out that they are making a mistake...You know people say to me ‘you should write a manual’ and ‘you should have a program’ but that would risk working in a way that suits half the class and doesn’t suit others and reinforces failure and doesn’t give opportunity for learning.”
(Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

The first juggling lesson he gave, he asked all the left- handers to stand up, then told them how talented they were and proceeded to lift each one up on his shoulders in a shoulder balance and get the other students to applaud them!

Each lesson began with juggling (Reg’s background is in juggling and this is his favorite skill to teach) and then moved onto tumbling and then stilts, spinning, balance, etc. Reg began each session with juggling as he maintained it took the most concentration. When he introduced a new activity to the students, for example stilt walking, he would demonstrate the safety aspects of the activity first, and firmly explain that anyone seen endangering themselves, someone else, or the equipment, will go back to class. I did not witness one incident where a student had to be sent back to class in the three weeks I worked with Reg Bolton.

One of the most interesting observations about Reg’s teaching is how he breaks each activity into accessible steps for the students. A number of other circus teachers I observed demonstrate a skill in “copy me” manner. Reg carefully broke down each skill into steps and facilitated the mastery of each step. Consequently, each student achieved something every lesson.

The teachers accompanied their classes to their circus sessions and usually joined in or watched their students learn. The teachers developed a series of educational resources based around circus and shared them with each other. The resources were separated into all the Key Learning Areas and the teachers told me it helped the students process everything they learnt in circus, in the classroom and at home. The school was “circusized” while I was there; there were clown paintings and murals, poetry and story displays in the school’s library and corridors. Students were keen to share stories of circuses they had seen, or their parents had seen when they were kids, and brought in copies of Reg’s books. (Reg’s books include “Circus in a Suitcase” 1983, “New Circus” 1985, and “Showtime” 1998)

Reg worked with every student at Padbury Primary School during the day. During lunch times, he set up “lunchtime circus”. He asked responsible year six students (he picked out students who were responsible and co-operative – not necessarily the most capable) to supervise his gear at “stations” set up around the undercover quad. These students wore vests from the sport shed so they were easily recognizable. Each student came at the beginning of lunch and received instructions about the gear e.g.: “don’t hand out stilts without kneepads and ensure each stilt walker has a spotter”. The year six students selected took their jobs very seriously and it was obviously considered an honor to be chosen to supervise a station.

The undercover quad at Padbury primary School is a central place, easily visible and accessible by all the students and teachers at the school. Reg explained his ideal space to me:

“A space where the children can sit down and whisper to each other or yell as loudly as they like and a concrete area for unicycles which you need and grass for stilts and acrobatics and trees for shade.” (Bolton, R.2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

This space which Reg referred to as the “sacred wigwam of the big top” is made magical by Reg’s attitude towards circus and in turn, the children’s attitude to circus. I watched a concrete, under cover quad transform into a circus arena that, by the end of my first lunchtime at Padbury primary School, contained EVERY student at the school...all engaged in spinning, balancing, juggling, stilt walking, twirling, laughing, co-operating. The teachers who were supposed to be on playground duty came to the quad to find where all the students were. Once they discovered all the students were in the quad, they sat, finished their coffee, and then joined in the fun with their students.

“...it’s a story about the world of circus. It comes back to the space becoming like a circus space. I never really spell out the values that we are teaching, but maybe I should, but quite often I look at it and I think ‘yeah, we’re teaching values’. Actually I was just thinking yesterday, I should bring some bunting and put it up...just to make it a nice space.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

Reg usually spends approximately ten weeks teaching the students circus skills and then rehearses the acts for the “show”; which is performed at the end of his residency. At Padbury Primary School, I witnessed a parent/ teacher circus meeting where parent volunteers came into the school to meet with Reg and some of the teachers to talk about costume and prop design and construction. Reg outlined what acts were going to be in the show and his ideal costumes for presence and practicality. The parents asked questions and discussed the show and Reg was careful to acknowledge parent input, whilst emphasizing that he was at the school for their kids and was not prepared to spend all his time “talking about leotards and sequins!” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

This performance is seen as an integral part of the residency process for Reg:

“I think that the performances are very important...the first five weeks which is purely ‘look what I can do’ or ‘if I do this, I can achieve this’, the second experience is rehearsal where they see me actually getting ideas from them but also encouraging them to come up with their own ideas and actually blend them together, actually making a reality out of ideas; making concepts into a piece. And then there’s the actual performance itself and they are learning about the discipline of rehearsal which is quite heavy stuff, and then the show itself is usually just a wonderful thing that they are going to remember all their lives.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

I did not have the opportunity to see the performance at Padbury Primary School, but have seen videos of performances from other residencies. Reg’s shows are of a professional standard which, when you consider students have sometimes only had eight weeks learning circus, is an incredible achievement.

I made phone contact with the school’s administration assistant regarding this performance and she told me it was a “sellout success!” and then informed me that the circus has continued to train under the supervision of a number of teachers at the school. The circus has had two parent nights since the end of Reg’s residency and has performed at a district education conference. Also, Reg’s books (which he donated to the school’s library) are in constant demand. (Abbott, H.2002. pers.comm.10th Oct)

GWYNN PARK PRIMARY SCHOOL

Gwynn Park is a public school with approximately two hundred students. The teacher in charge of the circus program greeted me on my first day at this school with the statement “this is a very difficult school. We are the second worst school in the state”. The statement was followed by children rushing to the front office to ask where Reg was and who was “on lunch time duty” on that day. The enthusiasm of the students in the front office and then outside, on the oval when Reg arrived was amazing to watch. At least fifty students were there to greet Reg’s station wagon, all jostling for positions to be allowed to move the circus gear to the canteen area and set up the “big top”.

Reg had been at Gwynn Park for a term already and this was to be his second and final term before the show. He was working with the whole school at Gwynn Park also, but there were a number of differences that became evident during my three weeks with Reg at Padbury Primary School and Gwynn Park.

The students at Gwynn Park had a much lower skill level than the students at Padbury Primary School; despite the fact they had had ten weeks with Reg already! When I spoke to Reg about why he thought this was happening, he believed it had a lot to do with the ethos of the two schools:

“The Padbury kids expect to do well, and in a sad number of cases the kids at Gwynn Park expect not to do well.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

Circus, though it was being practiced by all the students at the school, was used as a privilege at Gwynn park that was constantly under threat of removal if any student “stepped out of line.” Reg made a number of attempts to change this attitude while I was working with him:

“What I have found at Gwynn Park they have kept some of the worst kids away from the program as a punishment, which is crazy, that’s the whole point of me being there to give these kids a fresh start, to give them another go. And then a teacher came up to me and said ‘you won’t be seeing so and so, we’ve told him over and over again but missing the circus is the only deterrent I can use so he is going to miss out today’. And there’s nothing I can do about it, you sort of understand it from a teacher’s point of view because those teachers are working on the edge of things a lot but on the other hand, I have been brought in to work with the kids at risk and to give them a chance to have some success and they’re kept away from me!” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

The students at Gwynn Park were more likely to shout out “look at me! Look what I can do!” at the top of their lungs than the students at Padbury Primary School, and more likely to be removed from the program for doing so (I saw this happen while I was at the school!). The students at Gwynn Park also looked at their arms and legs with “awe” after they completed a trick, almost as if they didn’t belong to them. The Padbury students, though impressed with themselves when they learnt a new skill, were less likely to yell out, or stand and stare at their arms in awe:

“Why is this happening? I don’t think it can be me because I am doing the same thing with them aren’t I? The facilities are about the same, the equipment is the same, the technique is the same – maybe it’s the gene pool! I’m quoting a teacher there. By elimination, it almost has to be the teachers and the ethos of the school. The behavior has to be part of it, the fact that you have more kids who are likely to freak out, or do have a shorter attention span but then that is the job of the school at Gwynn Park, to work on the kid’s attention span. And in a way that is why they brought me in and I’ve got no proof of this but it is possible that they are concentrating more when they are still walking than they ever have when they are doing a bit of maths. So it may be amongst everything else we are teaching them to focus on something and we are improving their learning skills.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

In fact, Reg changed his teaching technique to suit the “attention span” of the students at Gwynn Park. He changed activities more frequently and gave the students more choice in their selection of activities, and the amount of time they could spend in one skill area.

The reference to the “gene pool” in the above section of Reg’s interview was given as a real answer by the teacher at Gwynn Park (who was in charge of the circus program for the school) when asked why she thought the Gwynn Park students were not picking up the skills as quickly as the Padbury students. She told Reg and I this theory as the students who needed to take their Attention Deficit Disorder medication had their names announced over the school’s intercom system at the beginning of “lunchtime circus”.

“Lunchtime circus” was also very popular at Gwynn Park Primary School. The year six students monitored the equipment in all corners of the canteen area that was miraculously transformed into the circus space:

“I noticed this little covered area over where they serve snacks and it’s an appalling little place. It’s got a sloping floor, black bitumen, dusty and it’s always covered in leaves and they clean it with one of those little machines that give off heaps of petrol fumes and it leads down to the basketball court. It’s not ideal but we’ve made it our own. Somebody like myself might complain about the space, but children never do, to children space is space and it’s now slightly more magical: it’s the circus space.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

This space was in full view of all the students at Padbury and I watched kids go to the canteen and order food on stilts, as if they had always done this at lunchtime. What was particularly interesting about the circus space being the canteen space is the canteen ladies (mothers) cheering on their kids as they learnt new tricks and watching with pride as the circus kids asked other kids not to drop rubbish in their circus space after they’d finished eating their lunch.

The number of parents involved in the circus committee was smaller than at Padbury Primary, but no less enthusiastic. There were two parents that came to school during the day to help Reg train the kids and learn new skills themselves. (They were working through the levels with their kids). The other parents were responsible for the making of props and costumes for the end of term show. They asked Reg to plan out the show and consequently the costumes in his first term with the students. Reg did so, but told me later how reluctant he was to do this as it limited the children. He explained how a lot of the students would surpass the skill level that he had used to plan the show and will suffer as a consequence. But the teachers and parents insisted, so they could organize the best costumes for their children. Once these costumes are made, it limits that student to one section of the performance only:

“I use the word generosity and I think it’s really important because of what it gives to the potential of troubled youth, particularly victimized young people...the opportunity to give back to society, to themselves be generous because they’re often the victims of other people’s generosity. This time they can genuinely be themselves and just give everything they’ve got, their beauty, their strength, their charisma, their potential and other people will go ‘Oh, wow. Thank you!’ Now that is a rare opportunity for young people to have, to give and that’s the entertainment. Until you have entertained somebody else you have not rounded off the circle, you have not given something back.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

The young people at Gwynn Park asked me to help them more frequently with their training. After the first week, they were hugging and climbing on me, desperately trying to get my attention and assistance. I was not approached by the students at Padbury Primary School, unless at “lunchtime circus”. I was never touched by a student at Padbury Primary School. Reg hypothesized that the students at Gwynn Park took longer to trust him, but when this trust was established, they were far more physically demanding and keen to take physical risks. One student at Gwynn Park, who (I was informed by his teacher) was a “thoroughly nasty child, a very bad kid” was a natural acrobat who could do somersaults and back flips when he arrived at circus. He taught himself to juggle and ride the unicycle and was being awarded levels in most skill areas every day I was there. This “nasty child” who Reg labeled “charismatic and brilliant” was not praised by a member of staff for his achievements in the three-week period I observed circus.

Watching circus work in two very different Primary Schools was an incredibly enlightening experience for me. It became evident that circus works in Primary Schools in a similar manner to how it works in High Schools, but the degree to which it works varies considerably, depending on the individual framework and ethos of the school being studied. The schools where I observed Reg’s residencies can be placed at the extreme ends of the continuum.

MANDURAH HIGH SCHOOL

Mandurah High School is a large public high school (approximately one thousand kids) situated just outside Perth City. Reg was asked to come and in-service the school on circus programs and how to begin a program. The in-service was organized for the Drama teacher, a student Drama teacher completing her practical teaching rounds at the school, the school’s Chaplin, an English teacher and four Drama students.

Reg began the session by talking about circus and how it works. He used his “hand” metaphor (which he outlines in his books) to illustrate his points:

“What I’m telling you know is what I think children need, I’m not a child psychologist, I’m not talking literacy and numeracy, I’m talking mainly about children who start ‘happening’ after the books have been written. Most books about child development stop at about nine years old, I’m talking about after that really. This finger is about showing off, which is about showing themselves to the world, or developing their self image, designing themselves. The big finger, the one that sticks out and always gets hurt, it’s at risk, sticks out from the crowd, sticks out form normal behavior, potentially puts you at physical risk. Every child needs that at some stage. This one here, the ring finger, that’s trust. It’s quite happy to life next to the others. This one here knows it’s the smallest one here, but it’s about dreams and aspirations, a child has got a potential future that is limitless, any child. The next one represents hard work, a child often doesn’t know the difference between work and play and with a lucky worker like me there is no difference between work and play in life in general...if a child is missing any of those it shows, you know if they don’t trust, if they are not dreaming, if they daren’t take a risk, if they’ve no self image, if they don’t know how to work hard, if they never laugh, any of those things can be really weird....and my passion for circus is that they can fill up those gaps, you just lay it out on a plate and you know if they’re short on vitamin C you’d just go for the oranges, if you need iron you’d go for the rocket, so with circus you’ve got the chance of going for the things you’ve missed out on.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

He then stressed the importance of risk in circus and how it is essential to the successful functioning of any circus program. He then explained how the students will be asked to take very “calculated risks” and how a circus program is like a risk management lesson and, in fact, much safer “than your average PE lesson”.

He then asked the participants to try all the activities for themselves before judging how safe circus is. The students and teachers worked together through each skill area and Reg was careful to stress safety factors. Reg spent more time with the students in the in-service, ensuring the students didn’t just feel like “guinea pigs.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

At the end of the in-service, Reg had “question time”, whereby anyone was free to ask questions about what they had learnt in the session or about circus in general. One of the teachers repeatedly queried unicycling and why it isn’t compulsory to wear helmets whilst riding a unicycle? Reg explained how it interferes with balance and is usually optional for schools. He later explained to me that he had seen programs fail because teachers “enforced” the wearing of helmets for unicyclists...as it removes the element of risk and excitement that is often what draws students (in particular boys) to unicycle riding.

The school Chaplin became pre-occupied with “Youth at Risk” and targeting identified students with the circus program. Reg warned of the dangers of using circus as a tool with youth at risk specifically and further stigmatizing this minority group.

He outlined common obstacles to circus programs, including: funding (as circus doesn’t fit into and traditional key Learning Areas so it is difficult to “box”, therefore fund), occupational health and safety (or “insurance” for him) and PE teachers. PE teachers often feel threatened by circus in “their gymnasium” and can oppose activities that they feel “cross-over” into the realms of Physical Education. However, Reg was quick to point out that circus is not Physical Education and should not be confused with this “discipline”:

“Presumably a PE teacher will demonstrate how to shoot a basket, or how to hit a cricket ball and then they will challenge the kids to come up to their standard and most of the teachers I know will desperately try to stay ahead of the standard of the kids and be admired for such.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

Another point of difference highlighted by Reg was that kids were given the opportunity to “entertain” – “give back” to their school, their community, whereas Physical Education failed to give all students this opportunity: “I mean it’s more important to entertain than to win a medal, more important to give than to receive.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

Despite being asked to promote circus and advocate an in-school program, Reg was upfront and honest in all aspects of discussion and demonstration and I asked him afterwards if he thought a successful program would result from his in-service at Mandurah High School:

“I’ve actually got a belief, Sharon, in sowing seeds rather than planting seeds and I scatter the ideas round the place even with a bunch of kids and where you see it shooting, that’s the one you go and water; that’s the one you nourish. Whereas if you pay a lot of money for a pot plant and you put it in a pot and it doesn’t grow, very well maybe the pot is wrong in the first place or maybe it’s the wrong plant.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

Reg emphasized how it was the teacher that made all the difference, and if an enthusiastic teacher took on the circus program, who liked kids and respected circus, then the “seed” had a future.

KENSINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL

Kensington Primary School invited Reg Bolton to their school in 2000 to complete a circus residency and begin a circus program. I visited this Primary School with Reg and was lucky enough to observe the program in action.

Mr. "K", the teacher of year seven, is a keen juggler and took it upon himself to continue the circus program after Reg's two-term residency. He teaches year seven every year and includes circus as part of their curriculum. The year seven students have been doing circus for the last half hour to an hour of every day now since the year 2000.

I watched as the year sevens forwarded out of their classroom and onto the oval. They juggled and unicycled (only the boys rode the unis), stilt walked and twirled, diaboloed and balanced until the end of the day.

Mr "K" explained how the students at Kensington Primary all know they will get to do circus at the end of every day in year seven (assuming they complete all their work) and see it as a real privilege and something to look forward to.

One of the year seven students summarized the school's attitude to circus:

"We get to circus last thing every day if we do all our work. My best friend has to do maths at the end of the day – this makes me laugh and laugh." (Student – Kensington Primary School. pers. comm. 15th May)

Mr. "K" puts on a performance of his year seven circus students at the end of every year and invites the community to come and praise these incredibly talented individuals.

INSTANT CIRCUS

I could never understand why Reg laughed at me when I said I only ever had a few school terms to put a show together. Then he asked me to come and watch his "Instant Circus" at "Secret Harbour"; a housing estate in Mandurah, just outside of Perth City.

I arrived at the local school on a Saturday for their fete. There were rides and stalls and parents selling their wares and lots of very excited kids. Reg explained to me later that places like "Secret Harbour" were springing up all over the outskirts of Perth and they were built primarily to "house" families, not to build communities. Consequently there were no public spaces in "Secret Harbour"; no halls or squares or communal parks. So a school fete was a BIG DEAL and the children were enthusiastic and together!

There were so many people that I was a little worried that I wouldn't spot Reg and may miss the beginning of the show. My worrying was in vain and I saw Reg before I heard him. He was strolling through the crowd on HUGE stilts, towering above the people, inviting the children to come and be in the circus. He pointed towards his "tent" and I went and found a suitable patch of grass to observe his "Instant Circus".

Reg had placed a sign near his "tent" saying "**Suitcase Circus – 11.30 have a go. 1pm rehearse. 2pm show time. BE IN IT!**" And I watched as children followed the "giant" over to his "tent" (pied piper style) and then helped him pull down the marquee the school's council had set up for him (he informed me later – he doesn't do circus in square tents!) and put up a real circus tent – a circular tarpaulin with a central pole, coloured bunting and a circular floor mat. Reg asked the first "loud child" that arrived to be his "spruiker" and he shouted, "Roll up, roll up and join the circus" in between selling chocolates for school fundraising. Reg had an ability for choosing the best students for each skill – I watched in awe as he spotted the natural acrobats and stilt walkers, unicyclists and clowns and proceeded to train and cast for a performance in two hours. He told me the hardest thing about his "Instant Circus" was keeping the parents off the equipment so the kids had full access to all the apparatus.

The show was fantastic and the kids looked like they had been rehearsing for much longer than an hour. The tent was surrounded by parents and teachers, who applauded and cheered their children together. Admittedly, Reg confessed to using a tried and true formula that has taken him years to build, but it did not look staid or artificial at all. In fact, the show had some very spontaneous parts, in particular in the clowning, which Reg said helped him keep on his toes and enthusiastic about every show. Reg played the Ringmaster and used a portable tape player and a microphone to announce events and engage the kids and the audience in the different acts. A large part of the success of the show relied on Reg's clowning and enthusiasm for circus and for kids. I watched him praise the "Secret Harbour" kids, who he had never met, like they were "old mates" and he was genuinely impressed by their skill. Despite the fact that he has been doing these "instant circus shows" for twenty years, the praise still sounds genuine because it is genuine. He told me afterwards he is always impressed by each new child he meets and their individual spirit and flare. The kids, parents and teachers were keen to speak to Reg after the show to find out more about circus and where they could do more of it.

“Teachers need to look at the potential of every single child and I’m hoping that is what I do, look for and nourish the potential of every single child. I mean that boy Matthew, that massive boy at Gwynn park – he’s a tightrope walker. He just did it and he got his bronze and I was so glad because he doesn’t want to do any acrobatics, he just sits around suffering. Now if I need him within his hearing I’ll say to some kid ‘yeah, get Matthew, you know the tightrope fellow’ and I’ll give him this little reminder that there’s something I can cherish and appreciate in him.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

After observing Reg Bolton work for three weeks in a number of different “circus settings” I can say with confidence that he looks for and nourishes the potential of individual children and has a passion for circus and young people that is inspiring and infectious.

I can also say treating each child as an individual looks and is exhausting. So why still do it?

“I like doing it and it’s because I’m good at it and that sounds pretty glib but it ties up with something I often elucidate in my theory of the design of life. Ideally you should find out what you are good at and what you like and that’s what you should do...I like doing what I do and I seem to be good at it so that’s why I do it, and that ethos spreads across into the circus in that there is a wide range of activities and the children get to choose what it is they want to do...I’m living what I believe and because I can.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

Reg also explained how the community aspect of his work keeps him motivated to keep going after all these years. He compares his “hand” metaphor of what children need to develop as “healthy” individuals to the wholeness of community; the needs of children can be held against the other hand “community” and they fit together perfectly. Reg believes they go hand-in-hand; the development of the individual and the development of the community. In fact he compares himself to Neil Cameron and John Fox (founder of the Welfare State International) in his “community” motivation:

“So Neil, John and I have enough confidence of our convictions and enjoyment of our process to just carry on despite criticism which we may have had and which I’m sure we will still get. So we all have that in common, we all love working with people and just wallow in the pleasure of being around other people discovering their own creativity and potential. I mean we’re all probably real self-indulgent

fellows who get a real buzz out of helping other people do things.”
(Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

And the children? Why do they enjoy circus so much? What is it about circus that makes it so appealing to young people?

“ It’s appealing because it’s something for you to do and be appreciated for and it’s also appealing that people clap you...there is also a lot of subconscious, symbolic stuff that I’m going into. It’s all about dreams...you go to any traditional circus or any circus really and what you are watching is a series of phobias acted out before your very eyes. Things that would normally scare you witless, I mean there are heights, instability; things that would normally give you nightmares, there is fire, wild animals - absolutely. Things that nightmares are made of and phobias are built on and you get one on top of the other. There’s something about the way circus has evolved that really touches our innermost depths and rather than be victims of it, we’re taking control of it. Circus really is real, when kids are living in such a virtual world now and having such vicarious adventures in Nintendo, this is for real, this is it.” (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

Reg sees circus as a way for young people to gain control over their bodies and not give in to their fears or phobias:

“You are yourself, you are the flesh in which you are living and it’s good to have some control of that and within that and don’t let your weakness, your fear, your obesity, whatever it is, be your master.”
(Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

I watched students become brave in the three weeks I observed and worked with Reg. They worked towards overcoming their fears and phobias, which had come primarily from within them and in the case of Gwynn Park, from external sources as well. It is this process which has inspired Reg to do his PhD in Circus at Monash University in Perth, WA. Other reasons include: personal satisfaction, respect for circus and a the desire to fill the “huge gap” of credible scholarship in this field and as a document that his peers can hold up and say “see, this is why we’re doing circus”: an aspect of service to his colleagues. (Bolton, R. 2002. pers. comm. 20th May)

Working with Reg Bolton for three weeks was an optimum opportunity to see circus working in a variety of contexts with an inspirational teacher and performer whose circus credibility and talent never failed to create the “Sacred Wigwam of the Big Top” regardless of where, when and with whom he was working.

BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL

Clyde Circus

Batemans Bay High School is a large school (approximately 900 students) on the Clyde River, on the NSW South Coast. The School is fourteen years old and its population grows every year. The school's circus program has only been running for 10 months, but is already an effective example of circus working within a school framework to promote change within individuals and their community.

The circus program was started in January 2002 as a result of observed successes of circus skills featured in previous school productions. In 2000, the school produced "The Journey", an outdoor, site-specific piece, loosely based on Homer's "The Odyssey".

This production came about from the participation by the school's Drama teacher, the author of this dissertation, in a two-week workshop at Charles Sturt University in 2000 conducted by John Fox and Sue Gill, co-founders of Welfare State International. It was during these two weeks of learning many celebratory, community theatre techniques that the seeds for "the Journey" were sewn. These techniques included fire-work (fire twirling, fire breathing and fire sculptures), lantern processions, street theatre techniques, big images and puppets, site decoration and optimum utilization and celebration of space. Geoff Perrem, the co-director and writer of "the Journey" has a back ground in abseiling and aerial rigging that led to aerial work being included in the production.

The production involved nearly four hundred students and forty staff members and parents. Any student that asked to be involved was given a role to play in the production: The Drama students acted and directed the show; Music students played the music; Art students made the banners and flags for decoration; Fashion and Design students made the costumes; Industrial Arts students made the armor and swords; Home Science students designed menus and catered for the show's run; Commerce students did our fund raising and marketing; Mathematics students made the lanterns as part of a geometry unit; Science/Agriculture students handled animals used in the production, and History students supplied details pertaining to Roman history.

The audience was taken on a "journey" through the school for the production and treated to a spectacle, the likes of which had not been seen at the school before. The show ran for four nights and sold out every night. The school received three Canberra Area Theatre Awards for the production.²

² Canberra Theatre Awards are bestowed on outstanding theatrical performances within Canberra and the surrounding region. The categories "The Journey" received awards in were best "magic moment", "technical achievement" and "original concept".

The light and sound rigging was all outdoors and left in situ for the whole week. At the end of the production, the staff made the realization that not one piece of equipment had been vandalized or interfered with during the run of the show. There were so many students from different years and social groups involved in the production that they claimed ownership of “the Journey” and as owners, they became keepers. Teachers commented on the “energy” and camaraderie in the school during the performance week and the positive change in the students and their attitude towards their school and themselves.

The school received numerous letters from parents and community representatives after the production congratulating the school on the success of the production and what it had done for their children, and how impressed they had been with “just how different the show was from the normal school productions”. Acknowledgements received noted the diversity of student groups involved despite their history both within the school’s discipline system and the performing arts in general. These acknowledgements commonly commented on the aerial and fire work as highlights of the show. This is consistent with sentiments expressed by the student body with repeated requests by them for more training and opportunity in these areas. This was the stimulus for the development of a circus skills program within the school.

So “Clyde Circus” was born and has been growing in popularity ever since! The program started with ten students and two teachers and now has over one hundred students and six teachers involved with the program. The circus program is comprised of circus for sport, and after school circus.

Circus for sport is run in two sessions – one for seniors and one for juniors and has been full since its inception in term one (despite the twenty dollar fee to participate in this sport). The students participate in circus for sport in the hall and on the oval, sharing the space with badminton and table tennis, who often become the audience as they are drawn to the students walking on stilts and hanging from the trapeze.

This space sharing is recognized as the main obstacle to the circus program. The school’s hall is shared by all of its sporting teams and the community for training sessions, meetings and functions. Consequently, the students are often forced to train outside on the school’s oval and the basketball courts, coordinating training times here as well. These spaces are generally appropriate for training and the students adapt to whichever space they are allocated. However, the weather conditions in Batemans Bay have a tendency to be extreme in the summer months (often reaching the high thirties) and this limits the students’ capacity to train. This jostling for time allocation in the school’s hall is a constant source of consternation. The hall has traditionally been viewed as the “domain” of the Physical Education faculty – the circus program is not seen as a priority in its requests to share this inside space.

Despite this “unspoken barrier” between PE and circus, the PE department constantly requests the use of circus equipment to use in their lessons and in other sport programs and have also asked for assistance from the circus program in purchasing more equipment for training. Funding has been recognized as another obstacle in the instigation of the program, as there has been no initial category for circus within the school’s budget and the Creative and Performing Arts department were hesitant to be the sole financiers of the program. Initial funding was through a one-off tied grant from the parents and citizens association, not associated with the school’s global budget. Box office takings from their performances has so far been returned to the school’s global budget under an in-school policy that prevents fund raising for specific purposes. Further funding has now been approved with an onus of at least a neutral return to the school’s budget.

“After school circus” is on Wednesday and Friday afternoons. Wednesday afternoon is open to any student or staff member in the school who would like to learn circus skills. The session is free of charge and draws eighty students on average. The circus directors have developed a booklet that is based on Reg Bolton’s circus success certificate and is designed to encourage peer tutoring and aid trainers in developing acts. The students train to pass bronze, silver and gold levels in specific disciplines and then approach an accredited trainer who already has that level in the specified discipline to certify them. This session is now entirely run by the students who train each other and engage in autonomous learning. Members of staff supervise the session, but these teachers are only there to observe the students working together to achieve individual and common goals, not to intervene.

The Friday afternoon session is for designated student trainers in specific disciplines to continue with their own skills and develop individual acts. Students become trainers by reaching at least silver level in a discipline and exhibiting an interest and ability in transferring their skills safely and logically to other students. Clyde Circus currently has twelve student trainers and four staff trainers. Each Friday, the first half hour is devoted to a specific discipline e.g.: juggling and then the second hour is to focus on each individual’s preferred skill. The session is designed as such to encourage trainers to expand their skill base, become competent in more than one discipline and become familiar with the Circus’ risk management policy for each skill they are required to teach.

Clyde Circus encourages and funds (whenever possible) trainers to partake in workshops with professional circus companies and then teach these skills to each other. The Clyde Circus director has just returned from a series of workshops with professional circus companies in Australia and overseas, and the other trainers have benefited from their new skills. The student trainers then teach these skills to other circus students, who quickly build on the skills and develop new ideas and acts.

Clyde Circus has had one performance in 2002 and as a consequence, was been booked for three other performances at local Primary Schools and a performance/workshop with some young people from the Oncology unit at Westmead hospital. The trainers aim to turn all these bookings into workshops and performances, as they believe the 'process' of circus is just as important for the trainers and the students as the 'product' is.

The local media have agreed to promote Clyde Circus within the community and publicize the proposed workshops/performances and successes. Photos of the students have already been used to promote the school's image for education week 2002.

Eleven trainers traveled to Tooleybuc Primary School, a small Primary School on the Victorian border, in December 2002. This visit was for a weeklong workshop with the year five and six students, it culminated with a public performance on the Thursday night of the excursion. The ideas for these workshops and performance are based on Reg Bolton's workshops and "Instant Circus" performance – only there was be eleven trainers conducting the sessions, not one.

The trainers who went to Tooleybuc are a mixture of senior and junior students, social groups and over achievers and under achievers. Circus is working as a tool to help these individuals gain an understanding of their physical and thus mental identities, define their limitations and celebrate their possibilities; as individuals and as a group.

The students in Clyde Circus are from such a broad cross section of the school's community that the program has just been given a regional education award for its diversity and success. This award is just a sample of the success of the program. Other staff members (not directly involved in the program) have commented on the interaction between the circus students and their friends at lunchtimes and during social functions e.g.: school socials. Circus is unique in providing an opportunity for vertical, non-discriminatory streaming. School sports and other school representative organizations e.g.: school debating, are generally limited to specific year and/or peer groups.

The rising popularity of circus within the school will be used as justification when applying to the Board of Studies to include Circus Arts as a year ten School Certificate Subject in next year's elective selections at the High School. This popularity will also serve as further justification for continuing workshops and performances with surrounding Primary and High Schools. The trainers are also planning workshops with the circus students at James Cook Boys High School, Campbelltown Performing Arts School and Dubbo West Primary to share skills, ideas and an enthusiasm for circus.

RESULTS OF CASE STUDY

VIGNETTE Circus Programs examined in case studies.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idrina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program has run for four years within a Public Boys High School in South Sydney, N.S.W. • Program composed of Circus for Sport, Circus as a Board of Education endorsed course for years nine and ten and a performance troupe: “Tsirkus Idrina”.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program has run for eleven years in a Public Primary School in Dubbo, N.S.W. • Program is composed of Circus for Sport, Lunch-time Circus and After-school Circus: “Circus West”.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program has run for nine years in a Public High School in Campbelltown, N.S.W. • Program is composed of Circus for Sport, Circus as a Board endorsed elective subject for years eight, nine and ten and a performance ensemble.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Circus in a Suitcase” is a professional Circus Company founded by Reg Bolton thirty years ago. • The company specializes in consultations with schools about in-school Circus Programs and conducting residencies in Primary Schools across W.A. • Reg also produces “Instant Circus” at festivals and fetes for local councils and specific organizations.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New program initiated in 2002 in South Coast Public High School. • Program is composed of Circus for Sport, Lunch-time circus and After-school circus: “Clyde Circus.”

Popularity of Circus Programs.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of students involved in the circus program and in the ensemble grow every year. • Circus became a year ten school subject in 2001. • The boys migrate from other programs (in particular PE programs) to the circus program. • The deputy Principal reported a drop in truancy rates at the school by the students involved in the circus program; there are approximately sixty boys who come to school because of the circus program.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The circus program is still growing in numbers within the Primary and Secondary school. • The circus is on the front cover of the city guide this year. • The circus have made local, inter –state, national and international appearances last year and this year including The Pacific Games and the Olympic Games in Sydney, 2000. • The circus produced “Storm Warning 2001” a circus show sponsored by NSW Storm water Trust and Dubbo City Council that toured around Regional N.S.W. • Every students at the school participates in circus at some point in their years at school, even if it is only the occasionally “lunchtime circus”. • Some students travel for up to three hours to get to after school circus.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circus was made an elective for years eight and nine and a year ten school certificate subject “Circus Arts” in 2001. • The numbers that audition for the circus ensemble have increased every year. • The circus ensemble is booked out for corporate and community functions more frequently than the music, dance or drama ensembles.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reg has had to train his son, Joe, to do circus residency work with him to keep up with the demand for circus in schools in Western Australia. • Reg had to turn back work each week I observed his program due to the popularity of his residencies. • EVERY student in two different Primary Schools participated in lunchtime circus.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program initiated with ten students and two staff members, currently including eighty students and six staff members. • “Clyde Circus” received several bookings from local businesses and community bodies, including Westmead Children’s Hospital • Several enquiries from other schools to run workshops and student devised performances.

The Role of Risk.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students that are attracted to the circus program are identified as predominantly those identified as “Youth at Risk”. • These “Youth at Risk” are usually the ones attracted to the more “risky” activities – like unicycle riding and German Wheel. • These students are taking “safe” risks in a controlled environment, whilst still being able to push limits and find new boundaries. • It is vital that the students perceive circus activities as “risky” and dangerous to maintain the appeal and attraction. • Parents at the school encourage their boys to “migrate” from football to circus so they don’t get injured.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul began the circus program in an attempt to stimulate students with identified behaviour difficulties within the school’s framework. • Students constantly push the boundaries at Circus West to ensure there is always an element of “risk” in their learning. The advanced jugglers were added knives and fire juggling to their routines and the unicyclists were riding 5ft Giraffe unicycles. • Paul has recently completed a comprehensive risk management plan outlining the steps taken to ensure the safety of each student who learns circus.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circus attracts the students who have been identified as “Youth at Risk” with in the school. • There have only been three injuries in nine years in the program. • Circus learning at Campbelltown is about learning how to manage risk and break down potentially dangerous activities into safe, accessible steps. • The advanced students at Campbelltown look for risk in their training and juggle knives and jump ramps on unicycles.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reg is often invited to schools to only work with “Youth at Risk” but insists on working with all the students. • Reg maintains that the further stigmatisation of “At Risk” students through circus negates the purpose of his program and he always works with a cross section of students. • Reg insists that risk is an integral ingredient of circus and cannot be removed. • His philosophy is that circus learning is actually lessons in risk management and how to prevent injury and each step of circus is safe.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circus attracts the students who have been identified as “Youth at Risk” with in the school. • These students are taking “safe” risks in a controlled environment, whilst still being able to push limits and find new boundaries. There have been no injuries in the first twelve months of operation of the program. • The selected student trainers have all had instruction in risk management in accordance with program policy. • Level system in place to encourage students to work towards increased risk taking safely.

Dominant Student Reactions.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A number of the students credited circus with their “recovery” and a reason to come to school. • The student tutors were equally “grateful” to circus and “proud” of themselves. • The photographs that I took at this school frame the students at lunchtime and after school, working together on new tricks and “observing” each other train and learn. • The students were keen to “show” me their skills.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students at Dubbo West were “proud” of each other and “proud” of themselves. • The photographs from Dubbo West and Circus West frame the entire school actively participating in an activity together at lunchtime and then the ensemble “observing” each other learn in after school circus. • The students lined up to “show” me their skills.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The circus students were well aware that they were the most commonly booked ensemble and “proud” of that fact. • They were eager to “show” me what they could do. • The photos I took clearly show an array of talented young people working together on new acts for a new show; sharing a relatively small space with cooperation and respect.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students involved in Reg’s residencies were enthusiastic about circus learning. • The students were very eager to “show” me what they’d learnt. • The students spent as much time “observing” each other learning as they did their own arms and legs. • I managed to photograph this look of “self-awe” on numerous occasions and was a standard reaction across the years at the Primary Schools I visited with Reg.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Though relatively new, the program has provoked it’s students to ask for more training session. The students already have three training sessions a week, with access to the space before school also. • Photos clearly show an array of talented young people working together on acts for a performance; sharing a relatively small space with cooperation and respect. • The students at Batemans Bay High School were “proud” of each other and “proud” of themselves. • The students were very eager to “show” me what they’d learnt.

Utilisation of Space.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Ildnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The troupe use outdoor spaces and the squash courts to train. • The outdoor space that the students train in is the central quadrangle that is accessible to all students and visual to the entire school (staff and students alike).
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students train on the oval throughout the year, despite the extreme weather conditions prevalent in Dubbo. The oval is broken up into designated areas for unicycling, acrobatics, juggling, spinning and stilt walkers. • Although “boundary less”, these areas are recognized by all the students. • The entire student population and one teacher participate in the designated space with order and ease. • The oval is also visible to the passing motorists and pedestrians.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students can be seen riding to school on unicycles, pedaling around the streets and practicing their tricks together on the main street. • The students predominantly train outside due to space constraints; training space includes the oval and outdoor quads. • This space is central and visible to other students, teachers and general public who pass the school grounds.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reg uses whichever available space when he arrives at a school. • Apparatus and centrality for accessibility and visibility.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students are forced to share the “multi-purpose centre” – a space shared by the Physical Education Department, Drama department and various other school and community groups. • These space constraints see the students training outside on the school oval on a regular basis. • The schools oval is a central space and easily visible to staff, students and members of the general public who travel past the school.

Peer Tutoring.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program is entirely run by students. • The senior students train, choreograph, produce and direct all their productions. • Students write and perform the music for the performances. • The senior students select which students should be in the performance ensemble, “initiate” them into the group and monitor their progress.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students who have obtained higher levels in specific skill areas train the other students and recommend them for assessment both in “lunchtime circus” and “after school circus”. • The entire school can actively participate in “lunchtime circus” with only one teacher on official duty and a number of senior students monitoring other students. • The senior members of Circus West spend time after school training and “sharing tricks” with the newer members of the troupe.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students watch and learn from each other and ask questions about specific trick and skills; particularly the junior students who ask the senior students for help.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who have successfully passed levels and train and test fellow students. • Students are “in charge” of equipment at “lunchtime” circus. • Students watch each other and Reg learn and correct their mistakes accordingly.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students who have successfully passed levels and train and test fellow students. • The senior students train, choreograph, produce and direct a large proportion of their productions. • Student trainers receive formal instruction in risk management

Changing the “Public Face” .	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's circus troupe has been invited to perform at local Primary Schools and shopping centres, fetes and cooperate functions. • Observations were recorded from teachers and community members who noticed the boys training together outside at lunchtime instead of fighting each other.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The circus program has slowly been dissolving the stigma and promoting the school within the local community and around Australia. • Circus West is now frequently booked for performances at fetes, cooperate events and ceremonies; including the opening of the Olympic Games and Pacific School Games 2002.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Circus Performance Ensemble is the most commonly booked for external performances (above the Dance, Drama and Music ensembles). • The students who ride unicycles to and from school are exhibiting positive behaviour in public areas that are covered in graffiti and infamous for being “unsafe” .
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reg always concludes his circus residencies with public performances in community spaces. • He encourages parent volunteers to come into the school and see how his program and the school work. • His “instant circus” performances are always in public spaces and promote circus and the talent and potential of young people within the community.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school's circus troupe has been invited to perform at local Schools and shopping centres, fetes, festivals and cooperate functions. • The mixture of students within “Clyde Circus” is unique to the circus program and is promoting a new cross-cultural face of Batemans Bay High School.

Physical Benefits.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The circus program is open to all the students. This means that, unlike football, any student can be directly involved in circus and feel like they physically belong. • The boys that become involved in the circus program tend to train on the school's gym equipment and develop their self-discipline in an attempt to achieve their personal circus goals. • The boys have to be fit to maintain the level of training they set for themselves; consequently a number of boys have given up smoking and taking drugs in an attempt to improve their training and achievement in circus skills. This is particularly so in “adagio” (group balancing), where the students are relying on each other to literally hold them up and support them.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every student can participate in “lunchtime circus”, regardless of his or her physical fitness. • The students learn self –discipline and perseverance through training in the ensemble, and must look after their bodies in order to keep up with the troupe’s rigorous training schedule.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Circus Arts students that I observed trained on the oval and quadrangle outside at recess and lunchtime. This encouraged physical activity in the playground for circus ensemble students and their friends. • The Circus Arts students spent at least two periods a day actively engaged in circus learning.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At both of the Primary Schools every student was actively engaged in circus learning at lunchtime circus • Both Primary Schools we visited have continued with Reg’s circus programs and still include circus as part of their daily routine. • “Instant Circus” is an example of a physical activity that is accessible to all young people at a public event, regardless of their level of fitness.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The circus program is open to all the students. This means that, unlike many other programs within the school, any student can be directly involved in circus and feel like they physically belong. • The students learn self –discipline and perseverance through training in “Clyde Circus”, and must look after their bodies in order to keep up with the troupe’s rigorous training schedule. • A number of the students have begun training at gymnasiums and aquatic centres in order to further advance their circus skills.

Scholastic Benefits.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All members of the Circus Troupe are placed on behavior contracts to ensure the students maintain a certain level of attendance, standard of work and behavior, or they will be removed from the troupe. • Other scholastic benefits are through an increase in the boy’s motivation and the ability to focus on tasks until they have achieved them. • The circus students have more confidence in public speaking and are able to manage their time better. • The boys from the troupe who were frequently thrown out of classes are now standing up at assembly, receiving merit certificates. • There is a drop in truancy rates at the school by the students involved in the circus program. • The circus program gives students an opportunity to work on related activities in other Key Learning Areas.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circus gives the students at the Primary school something to write and talk about with passion and enthusiasm. • Circus makes the students want to come to school and is teaching them important lessons about perseverance and how to channel energy effectively.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The course is an attraction to school for the students who under achieve in the traditional areas of academic prowess. • Circus has been so effective in drawing students to the school it has been approved as a board endorsed course for year ten.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Primary schools were Reg conducts his residencies use circus as the stimulus for a unit across all key Learning Areas. • The schools that continue with circus within their curriculum after Reg has left the school do so because they have observed the change in their student’s attitude toward school and learning.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circus makes the students want to come to school and is teaching them important lessons about perseverance and how to focus effectively. • The circus students have more confidence in public speaking and are able to manage their time better. • The circus program gives students an opportunity to work on related activities in other Key Learning Areas. • The course provides an attraction to school for the students who under achieve in the traditional areas of academic prowess.

Individuality and Autonomy	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are encouraged to find individual strengths and develop whichever path they chose within the circus and related activities e.g.: circus band, costume design, marketing and the circus film crew. • The circus is entirely run by the students and they make the choices about the direction of the circus and future training and performances.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are encouraged to find individual strengths and develop their skills at their own pace; making decisions about when they are ready to audition for the performance troupe.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are encouraged to find individual strengths and develop their own skills for performance and assessment. • The students make decisions about when they are ready for public performances and how they would like to participate.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reg actively treats each student at his residencies as individuals and endeavors to find their specific needs and strengths. • The students are invited to participate in a “circus circuit” when they begin and then choose which area they would like to “specialize” in and perform in the show.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students are encouraged to find individual strengths and develop their own skills for performance and assessment. • The students make decisions about when they are ready for public performances and how they would like to participate. • The students are responsible for much of the day to day running of the circus, they make the choices about the direction of the circus and future training and performances.

	Community Building.
<p>JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student community has been influenced by the “family” nature of circus; in particular the attitude of the senior students towards the junior troupe members. • For some of the boys – the circus troupe is their only family unit and the one place where they’re given credit, support and a “voice”. • The school community reported change and the observation that the school is a “happy place to be” since the inception of the circus program. • The local community now celebrates their local school and actively sponsors and supports the circus program and the participating students. • Local press also promotes and fosters the school’s new image.
<p>DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students travel for up to three hours to train at circus and have social interaction with other students. • The parents and other students talk about the way the kids look after each other as if they were a “family”. • The parents spend time talking and getting to know each other while they watch their children train. • The parents are asked to help plan the future of the circus. • The Dubbo community uses pictures of the circus to illustrate their city guides and celebrate the circus and its achievements in the local media.
<p>CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students train together in class and then choose to train together at lunchtimes. • The circus troupe is the most frequently used ensemble to entertain the community and their achievements are celebrated in the local media.
<p>CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The students at Reg’s residencies all work together and are encouraged to share skills. • The parents of the students are regularly brought into the school for meetings with the teachers to discuss the program and the performances. • The performances are promoted and celebrated in the local media. • Reg’s “Instant Circus” performances are always in public spaces and are made available to everyone. • “Instant Circus” performances are, by their nature, about community and provide an opportunity for people to celebrate the talents of their children and the potential of their communities.
<p>BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The student community has been influenced by the “family” nature of circus; in particular the attitude of the senior students towards the junior troupe members, during training and in other social activities. • The local community celebrates their local school and actively sponsors and supports the circus program and the participating students. • Local press also promotes and fosters the school’s new image. • The circus program has already brought a number of parents together to discuss costumes, props and performances; the direction of the circus. • “Clyde Circus” has done some charity work which gives the students and opportunity to give back to their community.

Psychological Benefits.	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circus has helped the students gain control over themselves and their environment. • Some of the boys in the circus troupe were isolates, now they've formed friendships and their anti-social behaviour has decreased. • The circus students are allowed the freedom to express themselves through circus and discover new dimensions of their identity. • Circus has given credence to creative and performing arts as acceptable “male” activities. • Because of the inclusive nature of circus, each student is valued for his individual talents. • Parents have contacted the school to credit circus with an improvement in the relationship they have with their son/sons. • Students are given the opportunity to perform/ “show off” their new skills; thus improving their self esteem and completing the “cycle” – giving back to their community.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • According to the parents of the circus students, circus has actually brought kids “out of their shells” and given them an increase in self-confidence and self esteem. • A number of the Circus West students practice their skills at home and some even perform for festivals and private parties as solo or duo acts. • Circus gives individual students the opportunity to gain perseverance. • Students can use circus not only as a focus for their energy so their behavior changes but also their status amongst their peers. • Circus helps students control, direct and “own” of something within school. • Circus has helped a number of students manage their ADD through focus and concentration. • Students are given the opportunity to perform/ “show off” their new skills; thus improving their self esteem and completing the “cycle” – giving back to their community.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The circus program has produced a sense of achievement and success in the Circus Arts students. • Circus provides “release” from the intensity of other subjects. • Students are given the opportunity to perform/ “show off” their new skills; thus improving their self esteem and completing the “cycle” – giving back to their community.

Psychological Benefits Continued	
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Due to the nature of circus learning, each student achieved something every lesson. • The students at Gwynn Park frequently shouted out “look at me! Look what I can do!” • These students also looked at their arms and legs with “awe” after they completed a trick. • Circus teachings young children how to focus on something and thus improve their learning skills • Circus provides an opportunity to “trust, dream, risk, show off, work hard and have fun” all of the Reg Bolton ingredients for healthy psychological development. • “Circus touches our innermost depths (dreams/phobias)” and helps us take control of them. • Circus is also an avenue for young people to gain control over their bodies and not give in to their fears. • “Circus really is real.” • Circus gives young people the opportunity to be generous and give back to the community.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Circus has helped the students gain control over themselves and their environment. • Some of the students in the circus troupe were isolates, now they’ve formed friendships and their anti-social behaviour has decreased. • The circus students are allowed the freedom to express themselves through circus and discover new dimensions of their identity. • Because of the inclusive nature of circus, each student is valued for his or her individual talents. • Circus gives individual students the opportunity to gain perseverance. • Students can use circus not only as a focus for their energy so their behavior changes but also their status amongst their peers. • Circus provides “release” from the intensity of other subjects. • Students are given the opportunity to perform/ “show off” their new skills; thus improving their self esteem and completing the “cycle” – giving back to their community.

Circus Tutor Qualities.	
<p>JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An initial awareness of the gap in boys’ education in fulfilling the creative needs of students. • A relaxed, friendly teaching atmosphere where safety is always stressed and maintained. • Enthusiasm and passion for circus. • Genuine respect and a real “liking” of young people. • Commitment to the circus program and its participants. • An understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and it’s essence. • The desire to help people and their communities realize their potential. • Comfortable with the knowledge that the students may quickly become more skilled than the tutor. • A future vision for circus that includes a “Circus Rock Eisteddfod” and a HSC Circus Arts subject that is attached to the TAFE system and work placement through professional circus troupes.
<p>DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A desire to provide an activity to positively channel the energy of “behaviorally difficult” students. • Enthusiasm and passion for circus. • Genuine respect and a real “liking” of young people. • Commitment to the circus program and its participants. • An understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and it’s essence. • A teaching atmosphere where safety is always stressed and maintained. • The desire to help people and their communities realize their potential. • An atmosphere that utilises the magic of circus to provide a structured activity so the kids have something to do and a chance to grow by setting goals themselves and work on their values, like confidence, perseverance and resilience. • A concern for the future of education and circus that includes Tertiary study and research into other youth circus programs in Australia and Overseas.
<p>CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A desire to provide an activity within the performing arts that caters for the “less academic” students. • Enthusiasm and passion for circus. • Commitment to the circus program and its participants. • A teaching atmosphere where safety is always stressed and maintained. • An understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and it’s essence. • Experience in professional and community circus. • The desire to help people and their communities realize their potential.

Circus Tutor Qualities Continued	
<p>CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relaxed, friendly teaching atmosphere where safety is always stressed and maintained. • Enthusiasm, passion and reverence for circus. • Genuine respect and a real “liking” of young people. • The desire and ability to treat each student as an individual with the right to autonomy. • Commitment to the circus program and its participants. • An understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and its essence. • Experience in professional and community circus. • The desire to help people and their communities realize their potential. • Comfortable with the knowledge that the student may quickly become more skilled than the tutor. • The ability to break any activity into safe and accessible steps.
<p>BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relaxed, friendly teaching atmosphere where safety is always stressed and maintained. • Enthusiasm and passion for circus. • Genuine respect and a real “liking” of young people. • The desire and ability to treat each student as an individual with the right to autonomy. • Commitment to the circus program and its participants. • An understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and it’s essence. • The desire to help people and their communities realize their potential. • Comfortable with the knowledge that the students may quickly become more skilled than the tutor. • The desire and ability to treat each student as an individual with the right to autonomy. • A desire to provide an activity to positively channel the energy of “behaviorally difficult” students. • Experience in professional and community circus. • Experience in circus production methods such as rigging, makeup and costuming. An atmosphere that utilises the magic of circus to provide a structured activity so the kids have direction.

Relationship to Professional Circus	
JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular residencies with professional circus performers. • Excursions organized for circus troupe to professional circus shows. • Excursions organized to professional training facilities for senior troupe members. • Professional circus riggers employed to supply and rig gear for circus ensemble.
DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional visits from professional performers for in-school workshops. • Excursions to professional circus shows. • Performances in professional traveling circuses when in the Dubbo area.
CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional visits from professional performers for in-school workshops. • Excursions to professional circus shows. • Professional circus riggers employed to supply and rig gear for circus ensemble.
CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of professional experience in teaching style and references. • Acknowledgement and promotion of professional circus companies touring local area. • Networking for equipment and the exchanging of ideas/theories on social circus and education. • Participation in National and International circus conferences and festivals.
BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occasional visits from professional performers for in-school workshops. • Excursions to professional circus shows. • Use of circus experience in teaching style and references. • Networking for equipment and the exchanging of ideas/theories on social circus and education. • Participation in National circus conferences and festivals.

	Obstacles to Successful Circus Programs.
<p>JAMES COOK BOYS HIGH “Tsirkus Idnina”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As circus is difficult for school executives to “box” it is hard to allocate funds for circus programs. • Circus is equipment intensive. • The circus equipment must comply with school safety standards and is therefore usually expensive • Circus is often seen as a reward system for the identified “risk” students limiting their access to it. • Staff who would rather see students “under control”, rather than controlling space³. • PE teachers losing “free rein” on “their” gymnasium/ hall. • PE teachers losing their “star” footballers to the circus program. • A realistic understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and risk management.
<p>DUBBO WEST PUBLIC SCHOOL “Circus West”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As circus is difficult for school executives to “box” it is hard to allocate funds for circus programs. • Circus is equipment intensive. • The circus equipment must comply with school safety standards and is therefore usually expensive. • Circus is often seen as a reward system for the identified “risk” students limiting their access to it. • Staff who would rather see students “under control”, rather than controlling space. • A realistic understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and risk management.
<p>CAMBELLTOWN PERFORMING ARTS HIGH</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As circus is difficult for school executives to “box” it is hard to allocate funds for circus programs. • Circus is equipment intensive. • The circus equipment must comply with school safety standards and is therefore usually expensive. • Circus is often seen as a reward system for the identified “risk” students limiting their access to it. • Staff who would rather see students “under control”, rather than controlling space. • A realistic understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and risk management.
<p>CIRCUS IN A SUITCASE “Reg Bolton”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As circus is difficult for school executives to “box” it is hard to allocate funds for circus programs. • Circus is equipment intensive. • The circus equipment must comply with school safety standards and is therefore usually expensive. • Circus is often seen as a reward system for the identified “risk” students limiting their access to it. • Staff who would rather see students “under control”, rather than controlling space. • A realistic understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and risk management. • Insurance for conducting in-school and community circus workshops/performances. • Circus being misinterpreted and performed or taught without understanding and/or respect.
<p>BATEMANS BAY HIGH SCHOOL “Clyde Circus”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As circus is difficult for school executives to “box” it is hard to allocate funds for circus programs. • Circus is equipment intensive. • The circus equipment must comply with school safety standards and is therefore expensive • Staff who would rather see students “under control”, rather than controlling space • PE faculty losing “free rein” on “their” gymnasium/ hall. • A realistic understanding of the risk factors associated with circus and risk management. • Circus being misinterpreted and taught without understanding and/or respect by untrained staff. • Trivialisation of the importance belonging to the troupe has on students.

³ The term “space” refers to both the student’s own body and the school environment.

RESULTS DISCUSSION

The majority of literature relating to circus (particularly circus in education) tends to be historical or purely informative e.g.: which programs exist where and for what purpose. However, there is a large body of literature that examines adolescents, youth culture and education in Australia and the ever increasing gap in the demands and needs of young people and the service currently provided by Australian schools. There are a number of new problems emerging as a direct result of the pressures and challenges faced by adolescents today, and though some of the problems are derivative, many of the ways in which young people “deal” with these problems are new and, in many instances, more destructive than previously established “coping strategies”.

The successful circus in education case studies outlined in this paper and the coalition of emerging themes and recurring situations and results provide new “coping” strategies that clearly illustrate the need for innovative programs within the education framework. The circus programs examined: James Cook Boys High School “Tsirkus Idnina”, Dubbo West Public School “Circus West”, Campbelltown Performing Arts High School “Circus Ensemble”, Reg Bolton “Circus in a Suitcase”, and Batemans Bay High School “Clyde Circus” are all practical examples of the circus process evoking change in individuals, their culture and thus community. This discussion also includes Belfast Community Circus in a number of sub-sections, as it is an excellent example of a working community circus that exists outside an educational framework.

The literature previously written on successful circus programs by authors: Reg Bolton, Bill Blaikie, Paul Woodhead, Belfast Community Circus and Steve Ward outlines the various benefits of circus as a tool for aiding the healthy development of young people. These benefits can be categorized under the following headings: physical, psychological, scholastic and social. There are further studies on the benefits of community activities that involve autonomy, cooperation and empowerment by various community artists including: Helen Crummy, Neil Cameron and Welfare State International.

However, there is a gap in the literature on circus in education as to how circus actually attracts young people and how it works. The circus programs examined in these case studies all depend on the nature of circus and its essential element of risk for their continued success. It is this principal - the ethos of circus; its “magic” and allowance for new interpretations (in institutions that rely heavily on rules) and, most prominently, this element of “perceived danger” that needs to be further explored. Reg Bolton has certainly illuminated this connection in a number of his writings; however, it needs to be extrapolated in the context of modern youth culture and the growing need for innovative and stimulating programs within an established education framework.

SUPPLY AND DEMAND – THE NEW SCHOOL MARKET

Young people, like any consumer, will vote with their feet where education is concerned. As outlined by Cram and Germinario:

“ Today’s children are growing up in a very different environment shaped by a culture heavily influenced by multimedia and an ever-increasing pace of activity. The novel brain of today’s student is attentive and will focus on sensory input that is rapid, emotional, pleasurable and of short duration. By comparison, school is seen as dull, non-engaging and much less interesting than what is outside of school. Educators can either decry the changing brain or adjust to accommodate these changes.” (Cram and Germinario 2000: 26)

Cram and Germinario advocate the need for new and innovative programs in schools to keep up with their ever-changing market – young people! And to successfully compete with the “modern culture in which students spend the majority of their time.” (Ibid: 27)

Circus is one such program that has been presented as lowering the truancy rates of the schools where it is practically functioning and provide new stimulation for an ever changing market. The popularity of the programs can be measured by the increase in numbers over a period of time; particularly at “Circus West”, in Dubbo, where the program has been successfully operating for eleven years and is still growing in size! This is a clear indication that circus is attracting students to a Primary School which competes with five other Primary Schools in the region. Some students travel for up to three hours to train with the troupe at Dubbo after school and participate in performances.

The school offers “Circus for Sport”, “ Lunchtime Circus” and “After School Circus”. During a two-week observation period in the school, EVERY student at the Primary School participated in “Lunchtime Circus” at the same time. The school’s performance ensemble has performed at local, inter-state and international occasions and continues to be consistently booked for community and corporate gigs.

This is also the case with the Campbelltown Performing Arts High School’s Circus Performance Troupe. The school has a number of performance ensembles for their different arts disciplines and the circus troupe is booked more frequently than the other groups. The circus program has been growing for nine years and now has to hold external auditions for its elective subjects and troupe due to popular demand by the local young people.

There have also been similar requests by some students at Batemans Bay High School for a Department of Education Board of Studies endorsed course to be run at the School in "Circus Arts". The program is only one year old but has consistently grown in size over that period of time from ten to sixty participating students. The group already has four bookings for festivals and corporate gigs next year, one booking to work with young people from the Westmead Hospital Oncology Ward and plans to tour to two other schools to workshop with students and produce group performances.

The most elucidating example of circus providing students with alternative stimulation is at James Cook Boys High School in Sydney. This school (according to the Principal) had a reputation for violence and very high rates of truancy. Both of these things have dramatically decreased since the instigation of a circus program 4 years ago. There are now approximately 60 students that come to school specifically for the circus program! There are also a number of students that have "migrated" from other programs e.g.: football, to circus because they see it as more demanding and more fun. The school runs "Circus for Sport", "Lunchtime Circus" and "Circus Arts" as a board endorsed course for years nine and ten and is still growing in size.

These four schools are all in very different geographical and socioeconomic areas, yet circus has worked as a tool for keeping students actively engaged in their learning in all four educational settings. All of the schools reported an increase in attendance by the students involved in the circus program and improvements in many other areas relating to their education and development as individuals and community members. Circus is a program that has students "voting with their feet" and literally choosing to come to school and participate in an activity that provides a large variety of physical, psychological, scholastic and sociological benefits.

There is an apparent absence of literature analyzing the immediate and longitudinal effect of in-school circus programs on truancy rates and overall academic achievement. The case studies including in this research have provided short term, anecdotal evidence that allude to adherence with the research into the need for innovative programs within schools. However, there is a need for a long term study, not only on truancy and academic effects but other related welfare and esteem benefits for students involved in such programs.

PHYSICAL BENEFITS OF CIRCUS

Literature tells us that Australia is facing serious health problems that are directly attributable to poor eating habits and our new sedentary life style. Media releases, public opinion and research documents all concur in the alarming rapid decline in the overall physical well being of Australia's younger generation. The report "Australia's Children – their health and well being" (AIHW 1998:170) identifies several contributing factors that have also been highlighted in major print media tabloids. "The factors contributing to this alarming increase in obese children are: food intake, time spent in front of the television or computer games, less participation in school sports and after school sports... because of single parent families and our new litigation "climate" which is not providing sufficiently challengingly playground equipment." (Sydney Morning Herald April 15 2002: 3) "The latest statistics showing that nearly one in five boys and one in four girls is overweight or obese (very overweight)." (Sydney Morning Herald May 26 2002: 20).

Other factors contributing to the poor physical health of Australian young people include: depression, anxiety, drug and alcohol abuse (including medication used to treat behavioral and learning problems in young people) and self esteem related issues. (Australian Children – their health and well being. AIHW 1998: 60)

Circus combats the majority of these problems in a number of different ways. Reg Bolton's Circus Residencies for example, involve every student in each school at some stage during his two terms (two school terms being the average duration period of a residency). Every single student at each Primary School we visited (three in total) participated in circus learning at lunchtimes. The teachers on duty had to remind the students to eat their lunch before the end of their break because they were so engrossed in circus activities. They were showing each other their skills to each other and coming together to work on "acts".

Many theorists have emphasised the importance of physical movement and play for children (particularly at a Primary School age). Lowndes paraphrases this sentiment well, "Their own bodies are perhaps the only objects which these children can manipulate and shape easily. Through expressive movement they can enjoy the power of creation." (Lowndes, 1970: 10)

Bolton worked with every student at the schools he visited, regardless of their level of physical fitness and kinesthetic awareness. Circus is unique as a physical activity in this regard in that there is a "role for everybody" in the circus and where some students might have a flair for juggling, others might be plate spinners or trapeze performers – and these roles are of equal weight and prestige within circus learning. Everyone felt comfortable enough to participate and contribute in a physical activity which improves inner and outer balance, co-ordination, stamina, flexibility, strength, timing, reflex ability, laterality and mind tracking. (Sugarman, R. 2001: 100)

It is also interesting to note that in all three Primary Schools there is still an avenue for circus learning during lunchtime and some class time, despite Bolton's residencies having finished six months ago. The physical activity at lunchtime that was accessible to EVERY student is still in demand.

The other schools listed above all have performance troupes that train at separate times to "Lunchtime Circus". The level of training varied at all four schools depending on how long the students had been training but the perseverance, determination, self-discipline and fitness levels were all features of the ensembles and have a number of connected benefits.

The boys at James Cook Boys High School use the school's gymnasium to help prepare them for circus training. According to Stephanie Brown, the school's Deputy Principal and circus coordinator, a number of the boys have given up smoking and taking drugs in order to keep up with the physical demands of training. Furthermore, as illustrated in the discussion of the popularity of the circus program at this school, a number of the James Cook Boys "migrated" from football and other sports to the circus program at the request of their parents who believed circus was a physically safer program than football.

A number of the students interviewed from the school also reported that this migration was due to the nature of circus i.e.; being less competitive and having less rules – they were able to interpret the physicality of circus for themselves and express themselves in new and exciting ways. It is impossible to get circus wrong. It is possible to be very wrong in other physical endeavours. The literature on human kinetics, in particular the Schmidt books examined and used currently in the training of physical education teachers in New South Wales has entire chapters on "victory" and "getting into your opponent's mind." (Schmidt, 1991)

The text also emphasizes the difference between motor skills and cognitive skills, but illustrates that they both involve "top down" learning with the most important role being that of the coach. However, circus allows young people to learn cognitive and motor skills at the same time and from the "bottom up." There is room for interpretation in circus and more than one way to learn a skill. This contrasts with many physical education skills which involve hierarchical, linear, egoistical learning which is not appealing to all young people within an education framework. Students can very quickly become more skilled than their teachers in circus and enjoy their new found freedom in physicality and other areas of personal development.

Circus is a fun and safe way for young people to be physically active, thus improving their self-esteem (Drever, P. 2002: 15). It is through this physical, kinesthetic learning, circus can help young people become aware of their physical self, its potential and its limitations. They learn to trust their own bodies and the bodies of those around them. They develop their self-esteem, self-actualisation and thus validate the individual. Fensham and Collinwood argue that it is this level of physical activity that leads to “the creation of a new self, with a theatrical vibrancy that can also be real” (Fensham, 2000:15) and furthermore “lets us know we are alive.” (Collingwood, 1997:12).

PSYCHOLOGICAL BENEFITS

Psychologists identify the Cartesian dualism of the ‘experienced’ self and the ‘projected’ self and the alignment of these two entities as essential to a healthy self-image and the development of adolescents (Santrock, 2001: 43). How can circus help ensure the “real” and “ideal” selves are in alignment during adolescent development?

Circus can be a useful tool in providing young people with an accurate perception of their physical ‘real’ self and provide them with the avenue to make choices about its successful utilization and development, thus improving their chances of developing a healthy self esteem. Also, as previously mentioned in “Physical Benefits”, circus activates motor and cognitive skills at the same time, thus providing mind and body holistic learning, as opposed to mind or body. Which may lead to transfer of learning across the spheres of the mind and body, and higher levels of success in others studies and social situations.

The circus programs provide each individual with a learning opportunity. Commonly observed responses included students watching their arms and legs with awe and amazement as if their limbs belonged to someone else. This look of “oh my goodness – did I just do that?!” is about young people learning to accept, push and celebrate the possibilities of their bodies and their potential (and of course their personal perception of what circus actually is – which will be examined in detail later).

The students typically learn a circus skill in steps. Reg Bolton sets his circus learning up like this purposefully so each student accomplishes something each lesson. When a step is missed or not mastered, they tend to go back to a previously mastered step to get the same “buzz” from their original reaction to their body’s achievements. Watching students learn circus, it is easy to see how they become attune to their bodies and learn to correct physical mistakes in logical steps in order to master new skills. Not all students learn to correct these mistakes at the same time obviously, but this is irrelevant in circus, as students are encouraged to learn at their own pace and in their preferred skill area.

The motivation for learning comes from within the bodies of these young people. Adolescent psychologists (Piaget and Erikson in Santrock, 2001: 43. Lowen, 1987)) suggest that young people, in an attempt to gain control over their bodies, will create a physical image for them selves which ranges from the clothing they wear and adornment to other, more “risky” behaviors i.e.; drug abuse. However, circus learning moves the awareness and motivation for action from the projected ‘image’ to the ‘real’ body. Students engaging in circus learning quite often become so absorbed with their own physical self they forget who is watching and focus entirely on their physicality. Until a skill is mastered of course – when the need to show this new skill off overrides any previous perception of ‘image’. And, unlike Drama and other activities that students engage in at school to express themselves – Circus is real (Bolton, pers. comm. 2002). The learning is authentic, as is any display of skill. Circus cannot be disguised as anything else and is a direct reflection of the performers ‘real’ self, capabilities and successes.

The literature on adolescent psychology (Piaget, Elkind and Erikson in Santrock, 2001: 43. Lowen, 1987. Rogers, 1950.) also suggests, this alignment of the ‘real’ and the ‘projected’ self improves the self-esteem of young people who achieve it e.g.: the students who participate in the circus program. In the results table entitled “dominate student reactions” the words “pride” and “show” emerge as common among the students and this illustrates how once the students begin to accept their body and what it can do, they align their ‘projected’ and ‘real’ selves and want to ‘show off’ their new skills and became outwardly proud of themselves and each other. In every program I visited (including Belfast Community Circus) the students were eager to show me their new skills and equally as eager to introduce me to their fellow circus performers and tell me about their “specialties”.

At James Cook Boys High School, the Circus Troupe includes students who compose and play the music for the shows and film, edit and market the circus’ videos. This provides avenues for gaining or expanding skills in marketing, sales, account keeping and the associated responsibilities. The boys also have complete control over the artistic direction of their circus and so circus has helped them gain control over their bodies and their environment (this connection will be further explored in the Sociological Benefits of circus). Circus has given credence to creative and performing arts as acceptable “male” activities in this school and this was a gap that, according to the school’s executive, was preventing a large number of the boys from being able to express themselves and the ones that did (through art and drama) were often ostracized by the other boys and found it hard to “fit in”. A number of parents have contacted the school to speak to Stephanie Brown (staff circus coordinator) to credit the circus program with an improvement in their relationship with their son at home and a decrease in previously established “anti-social” behaviour.

Parents from Dubbo West Public School had also contacted Paul Woodhead (the director of Circus West) to credit the circus with an increase in the self-confidence of their children and an improvement in various personality/behaviour disorders, including ADD. A number of the students from the circus troupe also perform at fetes and functions outside school as well.

Perhaps the most pertinent example of students being able to give back to their community is through the work of Reg Bolton. Bolton tends to accept residencies in “disadvantaged schools” and maintains that the children in these schools are often the “victims of other people’s generosity” and are rarely given the opportunity to give something back to the community. It is this chance to be generous and “show off” and have people thank them for their “energy, talent and charisma!” (Bolton, 2002) Bolton also insists that each student is treated as an individual throughout their circus learning and recognises that not everyone learns circus the same way.

This has implications for teachers and their relationships with learners. Contemporary young people no longer exhibit an automatic respect for authority, nor can their role in this relationship be predicted to be passive. There is a growing expectation that they will have some control over their development. A say in what, how and when they learn. In this assertion, the teaching environment cannot be static. It must become a balancing act in itself to provide the freedom, challenges and respect needed to succeed, as well as providing a shaped environment where these values can be reciprocated between the teacher and learner. Failure to recognize these principles may lead to young people taking control of their development to the detriment of themselves and their communities.

This autonomy and individuality is a common theme running through all the in-school circus programs that I observed. As previously discussed, there is a role for everyone in circus and these roles are of equal value. However, it is not just the individuality of circus that produces psychological benefits, it is the fact that the students are given the choice as to which circus skill they would like to specialize in. And within James Cook Boys High, Dubbo West, Campbelltown Performing Arts High and Batemans Bay High the students are given the chance to decide what learning they would like to do, when they are ready for public performance and then develop their own acts (the James Cook Boys write, direct and produce their own shows). It is this autonomy that helps make circus so unique and so successful. Rarely are students given the freedom within schools to make regular choices regarding their bodies, their schools and their education; thus their identities. As Reid states “schools are unique social institutions based on middle-class foundations, where the teacher-student relationship is a form of institutionalized dominance and subordination” (Reid, 1986:53). Circus programs give young people the opportunity to make choices about their roles within their schools and their communities.

Furthermore, the circus programs examined here all have peer tutoring systems whereby students who reach a certain level in a specific skill are then eligible to train other students in that skill. All peer tutoring was supervised by staff (for safety and insurance reasons) but the young people at the schools were more than capable of running the training themselves. Batemans Bay High School's "Clyde Circus" is now almost entirely run by eleven senior students who are recognized trainers of the circus. These students develop acts in conjunction with performing students, and then produce the public workshop designs and performances (see case study for further details of the student training system).

Peer tutoring is recognized as an optimum learning model by educationalists (Cole and Chan, 1990), but rarely utilized within a school framework. Reciprocal learning is also an observed teaching method that reoccurs in circus training. The reciprocation process keeps tutors in touch with the feeling of not always being an expert, thus ensuring equality and the "family ethos" remains intact. Circus is a program that is ideal for this system due to its holistic nature – "a role for everyone!" Batemans Bay High School's student trainers are a combination of very different socioeconomic and academic groups. Both under and over achievers come together, to train students and work towards a common goal.

SCHOLASTIC BENEFITS

Obstacles to circus programs will be examined later in this discussion. However, it is important to note that circus is often accused of being inappropriate in a school context and irrelevant to modern education – a number of field observations report teachers stating circus is generally a waste of time and a hindrance to 'real' education.

This held belief stems primarily from the risk and folly associated with circus. Circus is sold to the public on its virtues of the perception of danger and the ideal of a perennial exuberance. These virtues are seen by some teachers to hold no place in an educational setting. This suggests such teachers need to be educated themselves on the reality of risk and its management and the benefits of happiness in education.

However, after observing circus programs and reading the relevant literature about circus in education, it becomes evident that the scholastic benefits of circus are just as relevant and beneficial as physical, psychological and social repercussions of these programs.

Tim Durick, in his article “Circus in Education”, outlines how circus not only teaches students to learn through doing but also how to “learn how to learn” (Durick, 1993: 3). He sites the educational model of theorists Peter Forrester and Brian Cambourne when outlining the stages of circus learning: “engagement, exploration, transformation, presentation and reflection” and concludes that circus students, through self-guided exploration, “own” the knowledge and therefore the power, a valuable tool for improving self-esteem and attitude towards learning and school in general. Circus follows an uphill spiral of growth, rather than a hierarchical, linear model of learning that relies on teachers having the all the knowledge and consequently, all the power.

Sugarman also praises circus learning in that it is “difficult” and teaches young people discipline, focus, effort, persistence and the ability to move beyond failure. “Circus learning provides an authentic world in which the individual controls his or her actions.” (Sugarman, 2001:13)

There is an amount of literature on current education practices which criticizes the increasing emphasis on product and an apparent decline in educational and creative processes which draw out knowledge – as opposed to “stuffing it in” purely to achieve results. (Gelb and Buzan, 1991. McEntengart, 1991. Hunter, 2001. Ward, 1991. Hatton, 2001. Trowsdale, 1996.) Circus is, by definition, about process and teaches young people about self-guided process learning that the above research has shown is essential for the development of independent thinking, well adjusted adults who can overcome their fear of failure. A fear which has stemmed from traditional methods of education which are about getting the right answer to please authority (Gelb and Buzan, 1994: 96).

Reg Bolton’s model of the “superman effect” (Bolton, 1987: 60), is similar in analysis, in that he credits circus with young people overcoming their fear of failure and instead, teaches them how to overcome personal reservations about their ability and set goals and challenges for themselves and then reach those goals and surpass their personal expectations.

The Primary Schools used in this study that had experienced a Reg Bolton Circus residency all reported a number of scholastic benefits. Including an improvement in the attitude towards learning across all KLAs by pupils in the circus program and an improvement in the general atmosphere of school. The teachers at the schools had used circus as the stimulus for their lessons in the KLA’s and were sharing ‘circus resources’ with each other. The schools were ‘alive’ with circus and the children reported looking forward to coming to school in the morning and having fun.

The students at Dubbo West also use circus when they have to write or talk about a topic with enthusiasm or passion in various KLA’s and believe the circus program has given them more self-confidence when they have to give speeches in Social Studies subjects. (Personal Communication, Dubbo, 2002).

The circus students at James Cook Boys High School are placed on behaviour contracts when they enter the troupe and this contract helps them maintain a certain level of attendance and academic achievement. The school has also reported a decrease in the level of violence in the playground and truancy rates are also decreasing proportionally to the popularity of circus within the school.

All of the schools report that their circus programs are very popular with traditional “under-achievers” or young people identified as “at risk” (this trend will be further explored in the discussion section entitled “The Nature of Circus and the Role of Risk”). Consequently, it is a program that these students engage in, succeed in and have their status raised within their peer groups, the school staff bodies and consequently these students want to succeed in other areas within the school. Success breeds success.

James Cook Boys High School and Campbelltown Performing Arts High School employ Circus Arts as a board endorsed course up to school certificate level and have plans to further expand circus within the school’s curriculum. Batemans Bay High School plans to have “Circus Arts” within their curriculum framework by 2004.

Batemans Bay High School already utilizes other faculties within the school in circus performances: Art (costumes, set, etc), Music (live music accompanies all circus performances; as in James Cook Boys High School), Commerce (marketing and production), Industrial Arts (props, set, stilts, costume and event design; design and technology), and Home Economics (for catering).

Reg Bolton further suggests the Social Studies models that provide possibilities for learning:

“The history and actuality of circus is a model of Multi-Culturalism and co-existence. It is a universal art form with an ancient and diverse pedigree. To study its history and contemporary development is to see the world in microcosm, its variety, its challenges, and its ever-changing view of itself. Circus offers scope for debates on issues such as inter-species relationships, race, high art/low art, risk, child exploitation, management, truth in advertising and much more. In Social Studies, circus is both metaphor and reality.” (Bolton, 1999: 14)

The evidence on the scholastic benefits of circus is not conclusive and though there is some literature acknowledging the scholastic benefits of the arts in education (Trowsdale, 1996. Bagshaw and Halliday, 2000. Neville, 1989. Hare and Boston “Arts for the Sake of Success”, 2001) the evidence on the benefits of circus specifically is at best anecdotal. There is definitely enough qualitative research to support the scholastic benefits of circus to warrant further longitudinal research into its long term scholastic benefits for participating circus students.

So, far from being irrelevant to modern education and out of place in schools, circus has the potential to assist students in all aspects of academic learning. It can provide a model for the process required to achieve in schools and “own” knowledge and can help students actively engage in all aspects of school life, not just circus. Physically, psychologically and scholastically, circus can improve individuals’ awareness, attitude and ability to succeed within an education framework. Of course, once the individuals within an institution are working to their maximum potential, this reflects on the institution as a whole and on the community within which it exists.

SOCIOLOGICAL BENEFITS

Jim Ife and Helen Crummy both emphasise the importance of autonomy and the individual discovery of identity if the ideal community model is to work (Ife, 1985: 90, Crummy, 1992: 239). Limerick and Nielson emphasise the importance of an ideal community model working within a school framework:

“...the analysis of these writers indicate the potential inherent in mutually supportive relationships between schools and their communities. Where relationships engender caring between people, a sense of solidarity, and a feeling of ‘belonging’, an ethos may be created which nurtures the social and emotional needs of participants and which may assist them in their individual quest for self-realisation and an enhanced sense of identity.” (Limerick and Nielson (eds.), 2000: 73)

Circus, by its very nature, is about community. It is impossible to make a circus on your own. It requires cooperation and support – not competition and all of the circus programs examined in this study can be defined as community circus. “Community” because anyone and everyone is invited to join these circus programs. Regardless of skill level, age, group, etc and once an individual becomes a member of the circus – they become a member of that “family” and consequently enjoy all the benefits that coincide with belonging to a supportive environment which encourages people to safely experiment, explore and enjoy their new discoveries.

The circus programs at James Cook, Dubbo West and Batemans Bay all celebrate their family ethos and the students openly discuss what it feels like to belong to another “family”. The boys from James Cook High School even have an initiation ceremony when a new boy is selected for the troupe and they “guarantee” the safety and well being of their new members in all aspects of school life. The older members of the troupes at the three schools mentioned above socialize with the younger troupe members at social functions and in the playground; creating a climate which crosses a number of previously established taboos within most school frameworks. At Dubbo West, because of the isolated nature of some of the students living in the country, the circus students often car pool with each other, which means that their parents are, in turn, forming new bonds within the community.

The best example of this ‘coincidental’ bonding that I witnessed was at Belfast Community Circus in Northern Ireland. The group has monthly meetings to discuss the direction of the circus with parents, students and teachers. For a number of these parents, it is the only time Catholic and Protestant individuals communicate with each other; it was also the place where parents decided what costumes they would be responsible for making. Consequently, these meetings meant religiously contentious people were meeting to make leotards and stilts on weekends and after work – through their children’s attachment to the circus.

Reg Bolton’s work in disadvantaged schools also provoked parents that wouldn’t normally socialize, to come together to work on costumes and props for their children involved in the circus program.

In all the programs discussed here, parents, tutors and students came together to discuss and decide on the future direction of the circus. Crummy used this idea of community decision making to change the identity and “public face” of a number of housing commission communities in Scotland. She maintained that as people feel more and more “divorced from the people who make the vital decisions” it is vital they find the “key to unlocking the creative energies lying dormant in their communities and use them to improve the quality of their lives.” (Crummy 1992: 12)

Furthermore, according to Baz Kershaw, this kind of community driven performance is coherently radical and necessary for community development and helps to create collective agency, self-determination and responsibility to each other; thus celebrating such values as: equality, justice and freedom. (Kershaw, 1999: 219)

Welfare State International and Neil Cameron are also long time advocates of community art for the reasons listed above. Community Art is certainly not a new idea and community circuses exist all over the world because of their many benefits, their radicalism and their celebration of the popular traditions of the working class: "Carnival, feast of fools, fairground, mummers plays and circus." (Coult and Kershaw 1983: 1)

Circus gives a communal voice to people that would normally consider themselves to have little weight in the democracy of any school. It offers a new avenue for young people and their families to become directly involved in the functioning of the school to which they are connected and enjoy a power that was previously out of their reach.

The circus programs have also given power to their school communities in other ways: most predominantly by changing the "public face" of the school. All of the circus programs have supplied their schools with the stimulus for positive publicity within the local media and enjoy sponsorship from local businesses. The most illuminating example of this is in Dubbo, where the school is located in an infamously "bad" part of town (according to the school's executive, other staff members, parents and various other community members – see "dissolving the stigma" for relevant interviews).

The Circus Arts students from Campbelltown Performing Arts High School ride their uni cycles to and from the train station and can be seen juggling and rehearsing in the main street waiting for buses and rides to and from school. The circus program at Dubbo West has seen their troupe perform at local, interstate and international occasions (including the opening of the Pacific School Games and the 2000 Olympic Games) and the cities tourist guide is covered with pictures of the local circus troupe. The parents of the circus students openly credit circus with dissolving the stigma that has previously surrounded Dubbo West Public School. Circus is cross-cultural, apolitical and exists outside of any language or socioeconomic barriers that restrict audiences of other performance mediums. Everyone can experience, interpret and enjoy a circus, and it is largely this aspect of circus, which helps ensure its continued success and popularity within communities.

All of the students in the programs use public spaces to train and practice, both outside the school grounds and inside the school grounds. This is the nature of circus. It stems from the idea of street performance and though most of the students are aware of this, many of them are forced to train in public spaces through problems with “space”. None of the school’s in this study has an allocated circus space as the executives of the relevant schools have no idea which space to allocate for training. Circus does not belong in Drama rooms and circus does not belong in Physical Education Gymnasiums...so where does it belong? The students tend to train outdoors in undercover quads and on school ovals. Occasional extreme weather conditions will see them asking for an indoor space to practice. But more often than not, these circus students will be on the oval, training through the seasons and showing off to passers by – be they other students, staff, or members of the public who can see the oval or quads. A positive note is that this visibility may be one of the initial reasons students become involved in circus programs.

This problem of identification of circus within schools has its benefits. By training in public spaces that are very visible and very accessible, circus becomes something that is not elite and “off limits”; it is open to participation from anyone who can see it and therefore experience it. But more importantly, the students that are participating in the circus training have, probably for the first time, transformed their school space into a circus space! A space for learning, trying new things, sharing, celebrating and having fun! Students take control of a space – their space that has previously been surrounded and controlled by rules and boundaries – usually stipulated by adults who rarely actually use the space themselves.

Circus gives young people the opportunity to take control of many “spaces” with identities which have been previously primarily forged by external influences; in the case of their bodies as space - mass media, public opinion and peer pressure, or, in the case of their school as space - teachers and department committees, etc. Of course, young people will always try to control these space with their own methods e.g. drugs, eating disorders or, in the case of school spaces, graffiti and vandalism, but circus provides them with a healthy alternative for gaining control over what is rightfully theirs anyway.

It is important that circus is a communal activity because of the risk involved in displaying circus skills; skills that we have already established are “real” and cannot be disguised as anything else or their performers as anyone else. These students are putting themselves at the huge risk of ridicule by their peers by their utilization of public space, which raises the question of “why do it?” Taking control of these public spaces and demonstrating raw skills that involve a display of the physical self is an area shrouded in mystery and secrets and taboos by adolescents.

It is this “control” that gives power to individuals and groups that were previously powerless. The literature suggests that individual autonomy gives rise to community building and changing the public face of communities. The observations of the circus programs and their positive impact on individuals and their communities concurs with the literature, proving circus is one such “artistic” program that unleashes hidden “creative energies”.

THE NATURE OF CIRCUS AND THE ROLE OF RISK

The nature of circus has been briefly examined above in the context of what it is about circus that attracts young people to it and makes it so accessible and effective for communities. Circus is creative and allows for artistic interpretation, it is exciting and new, and crosses cultural barriers that limit the participation and audiences of other performance mediums. Circus, as illustrated by Bolton, is real, and cannot be disguised as anything else...and circus makes young people look at their arms and legs with ‘genuine wonder and awe.’ This response is deeply seated in the individuals’ perception of circus and is documented in the literature. The notion of circus and its appeal to a wide cross section produces this wonderment at one’s own ability to juggle for the first time, or hold an adagio pose. A wonderment that is unlikely to be experienced in the kicking of a soccer ball, or tackling someone to the ground.

Stoddart’s book “Rings of Desire – Circus history and representation” examines the perception of circus within our culture and how this affects our attitude towards circus performances and circus learning. She maintains it is so contradictory in its nature; at once a “craft, an art and entertainment”, that its appeal lies in its ability to exist outside our complete understanding, in a place “shrouded in mystery, secrets and taboos” (Stoddart, 2000: 10). Mullet states “Circus can reject mainstream culture and embrace it” (Mullet, 2001: 10). Bolton maintains it is the “parade of our deepest phobias, fears and dreams before our eyes” (Bolton, 2002 pers. comm.) and Ward, who believes it is the “magic of circus” that makes it so appealing to young people:

“The magic of circus still exists. This is a phenomenon that is rooted within all of us. It is held within our folk memories. I have experienced children who have never seen a Circus Performance, either live or recorded, who have been enthralled by the idea of circus alone.” (Ward, 1991: 23)

The literature seems to concur that there is a “magic” in circus, a wonderful contradiction that appeals to the nature of young people, as they themselves exist within a contradiction of sorts; particularly adolescents who are both the products and producers of modern culture (Hunter, 2000: 28). Young people are told not to take risks by the authority figures, yet cannot learn without a certain amount of risk taking.

Circus is risky! As illustrated by Stoddart:

“Circus is, above all, a vehicle for the demonstration and taunting of danger and this remains its most telling feature. Physical risk taking has always been at its heart; the recognition that to explore the limitations of the human body is to walk a line between triumphant exhilaration and, on the other side of this limit, pain, injury or death.” (Stoddart, 2000:4)

And it is this essential element of risk that all the circus tutors included in this study have an understanding of and a respect for. Each program has a risk management strategy and a peer training system which ensures each student learn their self selected skills in logical steps, steps that are always supervised by a trainer who is previously experienced in the risk management of that discipline.

Circus, by its very nature involves an essential element of risk, however, it is also very safe; another magical contradiction in circus that makes it so popular with young people (and their parents). It is ironic that the Physical Education teacher at James Cook High School is against the circus program as he thinks it is “too dangerous”. However, a number of the boys have migrated to circus, from football, at the request of the parents who believe football is too dangerous and “circus is better for their boys.” There has not been a single injury in the circus program at Batemans Bay High School or at Campbelltown Performing Arts High School. Reg Bolton insists his circus residencies are actually lessons in risk management and prides himself on his “clean track record” when it comes to his circus students and safety.

Yet students are constantly finding new ways of pushing their circus skills to include risk. The advanced juggling students in “Circus West” involve fire and knives in their juggling routines and the unicyclists ride five-foot high “giraffe” unicycles. According to the staff supervisors of the programs at the schools included in this study, it is vital that the students perceive what they are doing as ‘risky’ in order to maintain their engagement and the program’s popularity. The risks encountered in circus are apparent and as such, they are approached critically and thoughtfully. This is not so in many sports, where the risk is often ever present and far less predictable.

The literature on risk tells us that this need that adolescents have to take risks is almost innate and is something teenagers have always done (Gonzalez, 1994). They take risks for a number of reasons:

“...1) take control of their lives; 2) express opposition to adult authority and conventional society; 3) deal with anxiety, frustration, inadequacy and failure; 4) gain admission to peer groups and demonstrate identification with a youth sub-culture; 5) confirm personal identity; and 6) affirm maturity and mark a developmental transition into young adult hood.” (Jessor and Jessor in Gonzalez, 1984:1)

Other authors that maintain the necessity of risk in the development of adolescents include: Chicken and Posner, 1998. Lupton, 1999. Davis in Sugarman, 2001. Jensen, 1998 and Bolton, 1999; who maintains circus is a perfect tool for teaching young people how to take safe risks thus fulfilling one of the main purposes of childhood: “risk taking in childhood is how we learn.” (Bolton, 1999: 15)

Adolescents need to take risks. However, the risk taking behaviour that young people engage in today can be very dangerous, potentially fatal in fact. Circus can channel this desire to take risks into healthy, safe activities ensuring young people are still experimenting with thrills and risk taking but doing it in a very authentic and healthy way. (Davis in Sugarman, 2001: 171)

The results table titled “The Role of Risk” illustrates the pattern of identified “Youth at Risk” being attracted to circus programs within schools (see Report no.9. Standing Committee on Education, Community Services and Recreation, 2001, for definition of “Youth at Risk”). Obviously it is not only “Youth at Risk” that are attracted to circus programs, but all of the schools in the study report a high proportion of their members fall into his identified category. “Youth at Risk” are generally young people who engage in risky activities, therefore it follows that circus would be an attraction for these students.

Other young people that fall into this “risk” category are often at risk because of a number of external influences that are outside their control. The literature tells us adolescents often take risks to assert authority and attempt to gain control over their bodies and their lives. Circus is one such risky activity that helps young people gain control over their bodies and their environment. Mike Maloney, an Australian founding member of Belfast Community Circus, believes it is this aspect of circus that helps the young people in Belfast (who permanently live in an “at risk” state) gain control over themselves and their environment. (Maloney in Sugarman, 2001: 101)

However, as argued by Dwyer and Win, 2001, by identifying young people as “Youth at Risk” we quite often further distance and stigmatize them, thus increasing their minority status. Bolton emphasizes the importance of circus being for all students, NOT just the “naughty ones” and is often forced to speak to Principals about circus being used as a privilege for well-behaved “naughty students” (which can be taken away at the teacher’s will) or circus only being funded for the “Youth at Risk” within a school. He will only teach a cross section of students, as he believes this is the ethos of circus – “a role of equal importance for everybody”. Observations at Bolton’s residencies indicate that the students that have ‘mixed’ during circus learning are more likely to ‘mix’ in the classroom and in the playground; thus removing the ‘gap’ between the identified “Youth at Risk” and the other students.

So this illusion of risk and danger is an essential part of what attracts such a cross section of students to circus, including “Youth at Risk” – a group of students which are noted for their absence in extra-curricula at school. When in reality, students are trying and staying in circus because they feel they can safely take risks in a “family environment” which is supportive in all the areas of circus; all the areas they enjoy benefits: physical, scholastic, psychological and sociological.

THE ROLE OF THE CIRCUS TUTOR

The teacher supervising the circus training is vital to the success of the in-school circus program. In our current climate of litigation, there is increasing pressure on teachers to ensure the physical safety of all students involved in physical activity. A circus teacher must be able to maintain a safe training environment, whilst still being able to maintain an element of risk, danger and freedom. This can only come with knowledge, understanding and respect for circus.

Each school included in this study enjoys a relationship with resident professional circus in their area and circuses that tour to their areas. Even Bolton, who has many years experience as a performer in professional circus, recognizes and utilises the talents of other circus professional to support the industry, and to inspire awe and excitement in his pupils.

The supervising teachers at James Cook, Campbelltown and Batemans Bay frequently arrange professional circus performers to come and rig equipment and run in-school workshops for students. This relationship is important for two main reasons. It supports the circus industry; an industry that is growing and smaller, regional companies are finding it increasingly harder to compete with larger, corporate companies; like Cirque Du Soleil (Bolton, pers. comm. 2002). The relationship also fosters that “magic” (see Ward above) that inspires young people and encourages them to challenge themselves and set new goals.

There are not many areas within schools where teachers have to employ professionals to tutor their students. And, as illustrated in the literature (Bolton, 2002. Dwyer and Wyn, 2001. Ward, 1991. McEntegart, 1992. Hatton, 2001. Durick, 1993. Neville, 1989 and Sugarman, 2001) teachers don't like to be seen as having less knowledge than their students – it inverts the power base that our education system is based on, and places the teacher in a new position. All of the teachers interviewed in this study were aware and comfortable with the knowledge that their students were constantly becoming more skilled than their teachers and in-turn, tutoring other circus students.

The circus teacher must have an understanding of the nature of circus, in particular the element of risk (as discussed above) and the freedom of personal interpretation in circus learning. In Physical Education, there is one way to do a forward roll successfully. In circus, there are several. Physical education teachers were identified as obstacles to successful circus programs by all the circus teachers interviewed in the study. Not only for space reasons (e.g.: “their gymnasiums”), but because circus is often mistaken as the Department of Education and Training sanctioned type of physical education. In fact it is closer to the Creative and Performing Arts faculty; due to its creative nature and the performance element that is also an integral part of circus.

Staff members who do not have an appreciation of circus ethos and the role it plays in the education of the young people involved in the program, can ruin circus. At Batemans Bay High School, a number of staff view the circus program as trivial and “silly”, which is almost as hazardous as trying to impose a series of strict rules on circus learning. A number of staff at each school examined see the circus students outside, riding unicycles and walking on stilts and “panic” because these students seem to be “out of control” (pers. comm., Woodhead, Dubbo. 2002). However, these students are very in control; control of themselves and of their school spaces – which is a new experience for many staff and this sort of radical change is not encouraged in institutions based on tradition and rules (see table titled “Obstacles to Successful Circus Programs” for evidence on recurring patterns in staff reactions).

Circus tutors must genuinely like young people, as many of the students involved in the programs are identified as “Youth at Risk” and are placing themselves at the further risk of ridicule – staff must be aware of this and can't use this advantage to manipulate or control young people. The circus tutors at Dubbo West, James Cook, Reg Bolton and Batemans Bay High School are all undertaking further study into the area of circus and its utilisation as a tool for helping young people and their communities. This is testament to the respect these tutors have for young people, circus and its potential within educational frameworks.

Circus tutors must also be able to acquire funding through the appropriate channels as circus is equipment intensive and all equipment must comply with Department of Education safety standards. As the school executives interviewed in this study are unsure as to what circus actually is and where to “place it”, i.e.: in Drama, Dance or Physical Education, they are usually reluctant to fund it. Circus has a reputation for being dangerous and unpredictable – not qualities traditionally welcomed by schools’ executives. Therefore, circus tutors must be willing and able to “put the case” for circus with risk management plans and program outlines that will convince the people who formulate budget allocations of the credibility of circus. This can be an exhausting and ongoing task, that is fuelled only by the reward of students’ reactions to their circus learning and their various performance achievements. There are no formal department rewards for students or teachers of circus in education...yet.

CONCLUSIONS

PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES:

A number of principles and practices can be drawn as conclusions from the discussion of the results examining the in-school circus program case studies.

The principles include:

- 1) Public performance is an essential part of any circus program.
- 2) Circus is real.
- 3) Circus is equipment unique and this equipment is necessary.
- 4) Circus tutors need special personal and professional qualities; most importantly passion, enthusiasm and respect for circus and the innate abilities of young people.
- 5) Training spaces must be public, easily accessible and visual to all staff and students.
- 6) Circus programs must have access to professional circus performers and teachers.
- 7) The “magic” of circus must be maintained by staff and students within the program.
- 8) Safe risk is a necessary.

The practices include:

- 1) The establishment of a levels system within the program; primarily for training and risk management purposes. Level systems also in the development of acts for performances.
- 2) Peer tutoring is a progression of circus programs that fosters benefits for students in a number of areas.
- 3) Circus skills are broken down into safe, accessible steps for circus students.
- 4) A safe and friendly “family atmosphere” is maintained at all times within the circus training and performance space.

- 5) This training space becomes a circus space and as such, becomes property of its performers and “magical”.
- 6) Cross sections of students are attracted to and encouraged in all circus programs.
- 7) Students are encouraged to be autonomous and set challenges for themselves and their circus ensemble

The evidence discussed above is based on post-hoc longitudinal data and has given rise to these principles and practices; thus the building of a theory has ensued. The theory of how and why circus works within an educational framework.

Without a managed longitudinal case study from which to draw categorical data it is difficult to make definitive statements regarding circus being solely responsible for the benefits discussed here. However, the evidence suggests that these principles and practices of the successful circus programs have given rise to the physical, psychological, scholastic and sociological benefits outlined in the results and discussed above. It is apparent that circus does in fact work.

The focal points of this project are consummate: The notion that “circus works” in the development of young people is difficult to dispute in light of such prominent supporting evidence. The formulation of theories as to how and why it works are set out above. And the identified benefits of circus in the divergent educational settings in which it is currently applied appear undeniable. While post hoc study has provided the necessary data to draw these conclusions, a longitudinal case study established to test these principles and practices can only benefit the acceptance of circus as a vehicle of educational and social advancement.

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APPENDIX ONE

Interview with Steve Billings (B)– Principal at James Cook Boys High School:

S: I'll get you to outline the school first please. How many kids – socio-economic area, etc?

B: 600 boys, no one big mix, Macedonian, a lot of Asian kids, they're probably the biggest group, Arabic speaking, you've got Australians, a lot of Island groups coming over here, still some Greeks and other middle European, so that's the boys. We do Year 11 and 12 Co-ed.

S: Tell me why you promote circus as a program within the school?

B: Well its not so much promoting circus, it evolved out of a "Machismo" program idea. The school had been traditionally a very strong sporting school, being "macho" is not necessarily what boys should be all about, so it was really about breaking down stereotypes and one of those was with two teachers who came and saw me here and said "look we'd like to do some other sorts of things like cartoon drawing, aerial performance, and all these alternate activities that boys could be involved in" and so through it all the boys have done all those activities that they wouldn't normally have access to. One off the things you mentioned was socio-economic. This is not a very wealthy area, we draw form a lot of units, a lot of mobile people so they're in and then they're out, so the idea was lets give them the opportunity to be involved in things that they really like. And so they've had those type of activities. There's been music, dance, drama, aerial performing, a number of those things. Each year there's been a change of focus; this year the focus has been aerial performance, "legs on the wall" type stuff, they've been doing rock climbing and all these activities got together and I thought "There's a common theme there of performing and aerial work", so we thought "why not try a unicycle?" So the unicycles were bought and the kids got on the unicycles and we have some very, very good musicians we wanted to score the whole thing and play. The Industrial Arts department got together and made the stilts and the sets and the Graphic Arts department drew a lot of stuff, so its all contained here at school and basically its all grown into a circus so that's how its evolved.

S: What do you think it is about circus that makes it so appealing to these boys?

B: It's definitely different. It's also something they can achieve at. Some of them aren't academic as such, we still have the academic stuff, but for some of these boys that's not their bag. Some of them are footballers, but they also realise that there's a lot of dangers and some difficulties in that, so the circus has been a natural progression for their athleticism and their gymnastic ability.

S: I've talked to some of the kids here that are involved in the circus and some of the other staff, and they've noticed changes in the kids. Perhaps it's because of the contact? Perhaps it's because of the self-discipline? Do you see any benefits?

B: Yes there is. I think its because they're being praised for what they're doing. There's a sense of self-worth which is often missing; sometimes they're families can be dysfunctional, sometimes they're looking after younger brothers and sisters, so they themselves don't get a lot of reward, there's just a lot of responsibility. And so this is a way to say "Listen – you've got talent! WE praise you for this talent. Your talent!" I was there last year when they performed in front of about 300 or 400 hundred people here in the north of Sydney and they were just so excited when everyone stood up and cheered and clapped and screamed.

S: Excellent. Were there any reservations about doing circus from the staff?

B: Oh, occupational Health and Safety, they fall off their bike sin the playground – the kids on unicycles. We actually had to take the unicycles out of the playground because they were going all over the place. The police were up there saying "look its wonderful, but if you're going to ride in the middle of Kogarah you'd better have a helmet on!" So I mean there's been community consultation...there's a been a few drawbacks too, but there's far more positives.

S: Are the staff very accepting of it?

B: Oh the staff are fine because they can see that some of the boys would be having difficulty – and now they're happy to come to school and they're happy to be involved in classes because they're positive reinforcements from everybody in the school.

S: The parents?

B: More than happy. One of the standard stories is that one about one of the kids who has been part of the program fro 3 or 4 years now and his parents still credit circus with changing their son and 'he's just a wonderful boy' and he was having huge problems. We were on the seven thirty report last year with one of our really difficult year twelve boys, we didn't know what he would say – tell the world if you like on Channel two – that the program changed him from someone who had no interest in school, couldn't care less and gave him something to focus his ability on. Being part of the troupe had completely changed his focus. He owed the school more than he could ever tell us. We didn't even prompt him; we could not believe what he had said.

S: This is what I was hearing form the boys yesterday that I was interviewing – its almost like someone has given them a script?

B: Yes, but we haven't!

S: It's just how they feel and it's so great that they can say that and express themselves. How is the circus program being integrated into the school's curriculum?

B: Well we actually run it as an approved study in years 9 and 10 and it's also a sport. Now if they want to do circus they just take it as one of their electives – so its just accepted as another sport.

S: Excellent. How has it been accepted/ integrated into the community?

B: The community has been very supportive of it, they like to come and watch it. When we had our open day here, we had channel ten news and weather. They were all here, about 500 or 600 people all around the quad looking at it. They don't complain to the police nearly as much about the boys on their unicycles around Kogarah, so I suppose for them its been nice to see the boys doing something positive.

S: So its influence their perceptions?

B: I think it has.

S: Excellent. Do you believe the process – the learning process or the performance product is more important?

B: The process. As sits turned out the final product is quite exceptional, even I am amazed at how good it is – but I've always believed the process was the important thing and if they didn't succeed it didn't matter because they were doing something they liked and they were working on it, but the fact that they have succeeded and they are so good is a bonus. It's a plus.

S: Would you like to maintain the circus program in your school and would you recommend circus to other Principals?

B: Yes, of course I would. But the thing is it's an evolving thing and in five years there might not be a circus, the kids might be involved in something else. There might be some other things that we look at that the boys might be good at and the circus doesn't meet their needs. But right at the moment, with the boys that we have, the way the circus program has evolved – the circus is the right thing for the next couple of years. We'll always have "Machismo" and we'll have alternate structures for beliefs and we'll have programs that challenge stereotypes – but I'm not sure we'll always shave circus.

S: Have you mentioned the circus program to other Principals before?

B: They just can't believe it, they're blown away and when they see it, the Principals first see it, they can't believe that either.

S: Which is interesting – is that the perception that its circus or is that the perception that boys won't be able to come together and achieve?

B: A perception that boys are, you know, couldn't put all that together – must be something going on...And maybe its because we don't expect as much from boys – so once you raise the expectations (which we've tried to do) the boys amaze you. So hopefully it's raised, well its certainly raise dour expectations and hopefully it will raise other people's expectations – not just from the boys.

S: So when you say "our" do you the staff body in general?

B: Yes.

S: Oh great, and certainly raised the kids own expectations of themselves.

B: That's right – certainly did – they start to achieve at a level you didn't expect them to.

S: I had these boys yesterday, the older boys, saying we write it, we direct it, we do this, we do that, we encourage the younger kids, then the younger kids saying the older boys help us, it's like a big family. I mean its amazing stuff! You must be very proud and happy with the program.

B: That's right and none of it is scripted, promise! Its just how it has evolved.

APPENDIX TWO

Interview with Stephanie Brown (F). Founder and coordinator of the Circus Program at James Cook Boys High School:

S: OK Maybe if we just start with an outline of the program, how long it's been going, the Brown history, how you got involved?

F: Oh, that's a long story.

S: That's OK I've got both sides of the tape and new batteries...

F: The machismo program itself started in 1989 and the idea of it was to encourage boys into the Creative and Performing Arts to improve self-esteem. It encompassed a whole lot of other things there was dance, drama, music, there was visual arts. A whole lot of different areas and it was about work shopping with the boys, and they had male mentors, and they were like at the top of their field and they'd come and workshop the boys and what they always had to come out with was a performance or an exhibition at the end of it. And that was done wither during a music lesson or art lesson, and sometimes whole day workshops or 3 day workshops and that was done over a year. At the end of that year there was a performance in the circus tent, where some boys had learnt circus skills, some boys had learnt dance, and some had learnt acting, drumming or singing or whatever and they'd put the whole thing together and perform in the circus tent.

S: That was in 1999?

F: Yes, in 1989 I began the program called Book's Culture which, when I came here from a country school, I'd been at co-ed schools, and I'd worked on boy's programs – self-esteem programs and I'd also got boys involved in the Rock Eisteddfod because I really believe that boys need that opportunity to express their emotions in a positive way. So I set things up in country schools. When I came here to an all boys school, I realised that there is nothing happening for boys, that really needed to have something that boys could express themselves and channel their energy and learn focus and also just an opportunity for them to feel happy. I think the suicide rates were phenomenal and that sort of thing, and I'd also had some students in the country who had suicided so that really worried me. I came here and was confronted by all these boys who were being put down because they were involved in the arts and they were being harassed, never encouraged, to do them as a career which I thought was really sad. I wanted to try and network them into careers, so there was this huge empty space really that needed to be filled with role-models, activities, with networking for careers so that's what I set about doing. So 1999 that began the whole idea of it. I called it "Machismo" because I wanted to draw attention to the fact that it doesn't make you a lesser version of masculinity because you're creative.

S: That was 1999?

F: Yes. So it was perceived as a 'cool' thing to do. So the boys who were normally harassed and bullied because they were creative, suddenly became the heroes of the school and it changed the whole tone of the perception of the school. This school has always had the perception of being a strong sports school – everyone has to play footy to be cool, it's not like that anymore. I

wanted to get away from that. I wanted to support the boys in my Art and Music classes. I wanted to show the parents that there are males out there who do this as a career and are very successful. So that was the idea of bringing successful males in.

S: So your background then?

F: I'm an Art teacher.

S: So why circus?

F: I've always been involved in performance so even though I'm an Art teacher my forte has always been performance. I've written, directed, performed and choreographed lots of performances. So whether they're dance or whether they're theatrical or whatever they are I've always valued performance. I think it's a really crucial way of lifting someone's self esteem. It's that whole feeling that you get when someone responds to what you've created, what you've done and that's what "Machismo" is all about. It's about giving that feeling, and that feeling can then carry on and impact on other parts of your life, which it does. If you can feel good about yourself in one way, then hopefully it will carry on – it impacts on relationships you know, your family, close friends, the people that you work with

S: So, I'd to know about the socio economic area of the school, feeder area, reputation of the school etc. Before I ask you about the circus and if it's working.

F: OK. Well Kogarah has the highest rate of domestic violence in NSW, most of the kids experience some sort of violence at home therefore they bring it to school. Some of our students have been arrested for violent crimes outside of school and they are the boys involved in the troupe.

S: The troupe being the circus elective in Years 9 and 10.

F: And also the circus for sport. So when I say troupe it actually encompasses about 60 boys. We have 80% non English speaking background and our population varies. We have a lot of Pacific Island students which is strange – our demographics have really changed this year. Up till the end of last year, we had a lot of Arabic kids and that's changed over this year so a lot of Pacific Islanders now. I still have Arabic Kids, Macedonian, Greek kids a lot of Asian kids from very different sorts of backgrounds, not very many Koori kids, 2 Aussies only I think we've got...?

S: And the actual name of the circus is Macedonian?

F: It is, all the older boys are Macedonian, they named it and they came up with the logo and it means "Circus of the Future". The music – we have live music for the performance, and the music is Macedonian. Although this year we've incorporated the Islander boys – who are now singing. They have to write their own music and it's all about performance, so everything they do has to be from them. All the Macedonian music they write themselves too and they perform it.

S: You mentioned that the school had a bad reputation ...

F: Yes it has had a bad reputation. I think that, this is my fifth year, I had a year out working for the Premier – this school has changed so much since the beginning of the program. I remember saying to a couple of the teachers not so long ago, my first experience on coming to the school was on canteen duty and it

was continual fights – like really full on, not just one or two people fighting, full on brawls. These huge fights out the back of the school, lots of anger, lots of tension, homophobia was rampant and just this feeling of insecurity I think. But now the boys are great, they're really happy and there's a sense of trust and understanding of the values of other people and also the place is a bit more fun and the staff kind of feel that too. The place has really changed – the boss acknowledges it that it's changed and that's good for everybody.

S: What are the other benefits of circus within schools, within education?

F: I think it's got a range of different benefits; there are some really, really small things happen that we see. We can see that every single one of the kids that I've ever had, you can see them change with two weeks of starting the program, every one of them. So some of those things might be simply this – one of my boys, the seniors came up to me and said "you know Miss Brown, I was never able to get up and do one of my speeches for English. I couldn't to it and I'd just rather get nothing for my assessment. I started circus and the first speaking task I had, I could actually get up and do it and it wasn't even a problem, it wasn't even an issue."...that sort of thing you know.

S: Great, yeah.

F: To kids who would normally be thrown out for fighting, just sitting outside the classroom, to suddenly achieving in class, getting merit certificates, feeling like they are valued. I had a staff member come up to me this morning saying "Adam has been working really hard, he's handing in all these assignments, he's really changed". I had a father come up to me at Parent-Teacher night and give me a hug which is really bizarre and say "thank you for returning my son to me, he's a different boy, he doesn't hit his mother anymore, we share things together now. You can talk to him, he's happy and there's only one thing that changed in his life and it's circus so it has to be that". I had another mother ring me in tears 'cause we had a film crew here, so the circus troupe has a film crew that travels with them, those boys learn film making and they record things as they go along. One of the boys in the film crew has had a very unhappy life, he's moved here from South Africa and all he ever wanted to do was be a film maker and he's been involved with the film crew and he's now working for Channel 10, he's got himself into the North Sydney film course which is difficult to get into. He's been going out on location shoots everywhere all over NSW, and has the opportunity to do lots of wonderful things and very happy and successful, he finished here at Year 12 last year. His mother rang me last year and said "thank you – he never ever would have had this opportunity without you!" He deserves it, 'cause he's a really lovely boy and his sister has cerebral palsy and he looks after her and now he has a career ahead of him so it's about career options as well. Some of the other kids, because they go on contract, it is a behaviour contract, and I guess I was in two minds about that, at first I didn't like the idea of it, but I was almost forced into it. I thought if I don't have some sort of contract for these boys to go on, the rest of the staff would say "they're impossible – get rid of them!" I thought if I could go to the staff half way and say "OK here's a contract that I've negotiated with the boys, if they do these things, these things are the consequences". They're going through a process and I think they do need to have that themselves, that they

have got something that they are working towards for self discipline. So they have the contract, and I mean even the contract has flexible options within it. But going on that contract also has changed them because they feel like they're a bit professional.

S: Because they're performers now?

F: They are performers, and also the troupe itself – there is a performing troupe and there is a training troupe, and when they're learning and they finally get to a stage where the older boys in the performing troupe recognise that this person is skilled up enough, they invite them to join the performing troupe, and they get together and they have their own little ceremony and they get their black T-shirt – the boys do all that. The boys choreograph everything, write everything, organise everything – it's their responsibility

S: Is that the older boys – and is that amazing for you? Do you just sit back and watch?

F: I love it, it's great – I just let them do it. And always because of the multitude of performances I've been involved with, I'm always thinking "well hey...something is going to go wrong here". But do you know, the first performance we had, and it was only a couple of days after we'd learnt something, nothing went wrong. What they did was very basic but nothing went wrong. We've had performances (like quite big performances) and we've traveled around NSW with our performances too, and it's amazing how they seem to be able to ad lib. They cover up for each other, they will clown their way out of something if they make a mistake, whereas before they had such low self esteem that they would actually – in the first couple of performances where they made a couple of blues - they would just drop the unicycle and walk off, or they'd throw their hands up in the air, or they'd go "f this!" now they don't.

S: They cover up for each other. Oh it's wonderful that you have the faith in them to be able to do that – lots of teachers don't.

F: And that's what is important, that they see that I allow them to take responsibility and that they learn if they make a blue it's OK because it's a performance. As long as you learn to carry on and you don't spit the dummy and walk off. Now they just come off and laugh and say "OK let's get going" and to me that's such a valuable lesson to be able to pick up and keep going.

S: Yes that's fantastic.

F: Because that's a life lesson.

S: Wow... Ok, I'll go on to my next question and it's about risk and I was going to ask you about teachers and risk and the importance of that, but I think what you've just described is probably the ultimate risk that teachers have to learn to take - which is having faith in young people. How important is the risk element of circus for these boys? Or just the fact that they're taking risks with their physical selves, is that what's appealing?

F: That's why I pursued circus, so when I came back from doing the piloting for a year, I realised that circus was the key element that had worked wherever I'd been, so I decided to come back here and just do circus because that encompassed everything. It was about working together and teams relying on

each other and about bringing out leadership skills in kids who had never been seen as leaders before, never. It was learning from other people and respecting other people, it was also about networking and the job thing – a career and giving them self confidence in that key performance element. It was about they have to design and make their own costumes, they have to learn how to work with each other to make the process happen. Because these kids aren't used to process you know, it's come in and do something and bang that's it. They had to learn to evaluate that process, it's also about being tolerant of other people, anti-racism, anti-homophobia. And circus does all of those things and you can knit in the music, the live music, you can knit in the dance and it makes stars of kids who are normally seen as a nerd, a gay kid, a kid who is being picked on because he's one of the few of whatever racial group it is – you know what I mean? So this way people see what the boys are like and none of that is an issue, none of those things. And I think the reason circus does that is because it's fun, and these kids don't have fun in their lives and I think the reason I looked at circus for boys is because boys are told at an early age to grow up and be a man. "Don't cry, get a job, you're going to have to support a family, get a real job!" Being creative isn't the thing because girls are creative, boys play football, be like your old man. And not all boys are like their old man and they need new role models and they get to realise that they're an individual and it's cool. And there are many roles, many different versions of masculinity and whatever they are it's cool and they need to be successful at whatever that is. So they don't have to do this as a career, but to have the confidence and learn the skills that you learn there. I mean juggling isn't just throwing a few balls around, neither is aero acrobatics or acro-balance. These are all teamwork and teamwork is then transferred to business or family. These boys are having better relationships with girls because they have learnt to express themselves, they are confident but not over confident. I mean sure when they were a little bit younger they had that exuberance that you see around then, but when they get a little bit older they are understanding that the things that they do, the actions that they take impact on everything else and everybody else and that's because of circus, circus allows that to happen and that's why I stuck with it and that's why I think this program should be offered to all schools then linked up, networked. Imagine having district performances, inter-district performances, State performances at the end of the year in a huge circus tent, everybody comes in, not competitive, there is no competition in what we do - but let's all get together and perform. Imagine like a school spectacular, imagine that for circus and that's what I'm working towards, it's going to happen.

S: Fantastic I'm there!

F: It's going to happen, I'm going to make it happen.

S: On a physical level too, do you notice with the boys that they actually gain control of their own bodies? I'm really interested in circus as a vehicle for controlling the body.

F: Oh yes, it's all about self-discipline, it's about being fit, and although the kids that we have come to us because they're not into traditional sport so you get the kids who are overweight and they will come in on the side. They won't come

straight in and go “oh aerial stuff - that’s good”, because they know what they’re capable of, so you can start them on clowning. A lot of them come in and they’re happy with clowns, they might start unicycling, or juggling. Get them in on that level and they’ll get fit; they’ll go unicycling so they start getting fit, and then they start doing everything and that’s what has happened to the boys. They are so fit now.

S: Are they proud of their bodies? I don’t necessarily mean that in appearance sense, I mean with what they can do?

F: Oh absolutely, and also the fact that they’re taught that they have to be responsible for warming up. They go to the gym during the week and they’ll work out, they’ll look after themselves because they know that I’m always saying to them “boys if something happens in this program, if someone gets seriously hurt, it gets shut down”. Simple as then, they can’t go roaring in like maniacs leaping about all over the place, because that’s how injuries happen. And they all know that very well because a lot of them are footy players and they get injured at footy and I have a lot of them now, they come in from footy, their parents saying “we don’t want them playing football now cause they’re getting hurt”.

S: Only a matter of time heh?

F: Every week - shoulders, collarbones you know, legs everything. So safety is really important. I think the risk thing – I think the kids view circus the whole risk thing is what tickles their fancy. That’s cool and you’ve got to offer them that sort of a challenge, because these are the kids or my kids are the skateboarders, the ones who do graffiti, not so much surfing but those sorts of kids who push it to the limit. The bikes – that’s why they like the unicycles, they do stunts on unicycles. We have stunt bikes as well, we’re having some built for us and I think that some of the boys, not all of them, want risk taking activities, they want to push it to the limit and they can do that safely in circus without them realising it, because they still think they’re being really risky, but they’re actually being very safe. I mean that boy Reece that’s just come back to us, he came up to me and he sat there and he said “Oh I’m not so confident this time” and I said “That’s OK. You don’t have to do it now you can sit and watch and when you feel ready we’ll start one step at a time”. And that’s good for him, that he can just sit and watch until he’s ready and no one is going to say “get out there and have a go” which is the sporting attitude, like you go out there and you have to achieve this, which is not what it’s about. As long as he is engaging in it on some level, and he’s watching the others – they are role modeling for him, and he needs that, because he’s been on the outside for a long time – he’s been living on the streets and now he’s here and you can see he is like “OK, OK ...”

S: Taking it all in?

F: Yes, but I’ll get him on a unicycle next and that will give him a little bit of confidence to go all out. But you’ve also got to make sure of all your safety things too, otherwise it won’t happen at school. I mean the staff here...

S: That’s what I was going to ask next - about obstacles that’s my next thing – can you go into those? I know you’ve got some fantastic stories about obstacles?

F: Biggest obstacle, and I've never let obstacles stand in my way, I always find a way around them. I don't hit anything head on that's why I introduced circus as a sport. It's easier, get it going, get some support and then slot it into Year 9 because then it's in the curriculum. What do they do, it has to go for two years and then those kids need to do something to go with so they have to do it for their HSC. I think sometimes, like with everything else, you have to get some runs on the board, with some kids to get the support. And that's what I had to do. I think that first up, even if a handful of them can see that some of your kids are behaving better, truancy rates are dropping, the students are feeling, especially the ones who have maybe not got great lives outside of school, if they can see that there's been a small change. If parents, if you can get parents ringing the principal, that's a good scorer.

S: Brownie points?

F: You bet, so sometimes you have to start gently and let it happen and let it come back with the kids and they can see a positive impact, then going to start getting things happening. I was really sneaky, I just did it quietly and that's how it worked for me. Lots of obstacles, you always get, cause I set it up in Colleges schools. OK, so when I go to the College Schools, I talk to the girls first and I say "this is a boys program" and I say "you know you girls can do anything" and they know they can. Girls have the confidence to do anything and I say "how many girls have got brothers, boyfriends or mates or whatever who know would benefit from something like this? That they'd like to see feel happy?" And all the girls go "yes", course they do and I say "well that's what this is about. It's about us as females supporting the males in our lives to feel happier and healthier and it really is about male health and mental health". So for me it's very much a suicide prevention program and the girls immediately identify because we all know, we all have brothers or boyfriends or fathers and grandfathers. We all have men in our lives and we want to see them healthier and happier. I think that the girls instantly agree if it was set up as a co-ed program the girls really do takeover, because they have the confidence for that and the boys tend to stand back. We do have a couple of extroverts who are already very comfortable with their bodies, the stronger ones, they'll jump in or the ones who have been inherently supported in the creative arts by their families. They have lessons, they do drama or they do art and it's OK, they're the kids that will step out. This program allows for the gifted and talented, as well as the kids who aren't very physical at all – I've also got the special education kids in it. I've got five special ed. kids in the circus troupe and it's open to everybody in Years 7 to 12.

S: I'm interested in what the staff's perception of circus is. Do you think that people think it's a bit strange, a bit "freaky?"

F: It's a joke – I went to an Executive meeting – you'll like this little story. I'm actually head teacher, Creative Arts, went to an Executive meeting last year and the circus troupe was just getting going, and the boys had just finished their first set of skills – huge excitement. My executive meeting was on Thursday morning, so it was after sport on Wednesday afternoon and I was saying thank you at that meeting to the TAS staff who had assisted to build the stilts with the boys so I was just saying thank you, you know. Then the head PE teacher turned around

and said “gee wouldn’t it be really funny if we could light those stilts up while those kids were on them, then we’d really see some stilt walking wouldn’t we! If they were on fire!”

S: What did you say?

F: I said “I beg your pardon?” and he said “well they’re all a bunch of clowns anyway, we’d be better off if they were out of here” and at that point I got up and walked out, because everybody laughed they thought it was a great joke. The PE staff are very threatened by it which is really silly because they have actually got the skills to teach it, and they’d have so much fun so it’s a shame. But every school is different.

S: So they haven’t recognised the benefits with regard to truancy behaviour and the contract working?

F: They have, they know.

S: Which is why they’re threatened by it?

F: But they also don’t want to teach those kids, so they would actually be happier if those kids were gone. Except the funny thing is - those kids are also the top footballers, so if it was the other way around, and they were still doing their football, they’d be doing everything they could to hang onto them.

S: What about – you mentioned kids were getting Merit certificates and basically learning “how to learn”. Have the Maths, English and Geography teachers noticed any change?

F: Yes they have, very much so. It was great - I had an English teacher walk all the way over to my Art room to a boy who was standing outside my room, walk up to him (and he’s one of or probably the worst student for schoolwork) and say “Adam has been fantastic this year. He has handed all of his assignments in, he’s so good in class, he’s on time, and he wears his uniform. I just wanted to tell you that in from of Adam because I want you to know that I’m proud of him” and she shook his hand and she said “I’ve been giving him Merit certificates and I just think it’s fantastic what’s happened with you Adam”. Now Adam isn’t always on track, he has his blowouts, but both his parents are heroin addicts - so it’s hard for him but he really has changed, so he’s engaged in learning other things. The boys hate going to Maths because the Maths teachers are the ones who go “sit down, be quiet, be like everybody else!” And they find that hardest to, do but they are trying and that is acknowledged, they do go there, they do try. But you know you always get the staff who, no matter how hard the kids try, they find some way of getting at them and they just push and push at them. I think it’s just a matter of getting runs on the board; the circus program is the reason all these boys are here. There’s about 60 boys who come to this school because of circus and it’s not just because they have fun, it’s because they’re valued, and they’re not valued anywhere else in their lives, in any way, with anybody, just circus. I had a grandmother ring me this morning and say “the only reason Reece is coming to school is because of circus”. The other Deputy came to see me about one boy who has just been suspended, his mother rang up and said “please, please don’t take Jez out of circus. I know about his contract, but Jez is only here, it’s the only reason he comes to school is for circus, it’s the only thing he lives for” – so there you are that’s what you’re getting.

S: That's marvellous. There's a quote from Circus Belfast which I love, which is about people gaining control over their environment, their immediate environment being themselves, the community. Do you think rings true where you are?

F: Of course it does, absolutely. I mean everything that you see with these boys makes you realise that they are capable of controlling situations, that they can say "no I'm not going to do that" and they are buddied off for that reason, so that if one of them wants to truant, the other one can say "no. Let's go and see Miss Brown - we can't do that", or if they're getting yelled at, they feel that they have goals and they have control and circus gives them that. And I think that transfers to everything else in their lives, whether they make that decision to actually go home in the afternoon. That then impacts on how they interact with their parents, and hopefully they're doing some sort of schoolwork at home, and the other thing that I think circus creates that not a lot of other things do create is a family. Some of these boys don't have families, some of have run away from home, and so this is their family and I think it's their family because it's not just about one age group either. It's like you've got the older boys, like their older brothers, they look after them, and I think that's important. And they've got the whole social thing happening too, and they protect each other. If someone is having a bad day, they'll come and see me and say "so and so is upset" or they'll look after each other. So yes, I totally agree with that. It's a very special thing circus and I sometimes feel disappointed and a bit frustrated that it isn't valued and some of the staff see it as a bit of a joke. Oh not so much now, because they see what it's done and what it's done for the school too, but they used to see it as a bit of a joke, "oh circus - we have circus, how embarrassing". But when we have the TV cameras come in and when people make a big deal about it they'll quite happily sit back and go "that's our school!" Oh when they go off to conferences and people say "oh you're at that school where the circus is – aren't you?"

S: Which is great.

F: Doesn't the boss love it!

S: OK that very nicely brings me to my last question. It's about community perception - has circus played a part in the community perception of the school?

F: Oh definitely, oh gosh yes. I think our boys were perceived as ruffians or sort of gangs and violent. Now I hear kids say "I'm at James Cook" and people say "oh you're at the school with the unicycles, we drive past and we see you riding unicycles". We have a sign that says we are performing at ... and we perform locally too. We are performing at a local Primary School this Friday. So I think parents definitely, after seeing a performance, they send their boys to the school because of the circus. They realise how rewarding the program is, and the perception out there is that James Cook has this fantastic welfare program at the school, and it's a circus program, and it's changed the way people feel about our school in our local community and in the wider community. The name James Cook Boys High School is in places around the State now because of the way the boys are and when the boys go out to perform they are fantastic. They are so well behaved, unbelievable. We were at North Sydney Girls High School

where we were told “oh you’re only James Cook High School, oh you’re the entertainment, would you go backstage where you belong”. Imagine what those boys were like and then they held us off for an hour before we performed while they finished eating. We’d been waiting for four hours and those boys were still sitting there, unicycles at the ready, faces painted, wigs on, all that time waiting, not being fed. So we rushed out and got them food and they were perfect, and then those people see how these boys behave when you take them out and that gets back – you know they rang the boss and said “are they your best kids, are they your talented kids?” And that’s great and I say to them “you are role models for all other boys who have lives like yours. Aren’t you lucky that you are so special, you are so good at what you do, so go out there and promote it” and they do. It’s just fantastic when other people see them the way I do, so many people outside the school who don’t know anything about their background walk up to them, and I can just stand there and go “they are fantastic!”

S: If circus is done in schools across the State – do you think it will lose it’s magic? Will it still be special?

F: Oh no way, it will become so much stronger and so much more special. We’ll get more funding. I’d like to think we could get corporate sponsors on board, think what we could do. No way, it would be stronger, I mean footy is dying, we need something else for these kids to do and circus is it.

S: Brilliant – that’s marvelous.

F: Our boys are starting, so I’m going to go over there to the other staff. I’ve already given them our video on “Machismo” and what it does. They came over here with the intention of running “Machismo” as it was before circus, with workshops and they’ve seen what the circus is and how easy it is to get it going, they’re in. Malvina, which is now Ryde Secondary College, they’re doing it – it’s a co-ed school so they’re doing it with girls as well. We went over there for a performance last year for their Year 8 Welfare day, so the boys went over there to perform and they did aerials, they did everything and it was just so much fun and they were just completely sold on it, so they’ve already started. It’s popping up all over the place now, but it would be great to have a coordinated approach to it - but I’m working on it. All I wanted to do is to prove that circus as a School Certificate subject can work in a normal State school, with no special gear, not much funding, no expertise, that if it can work like that, it’s going to work anywhere. And you don’t have to have anybody special there at all, just someone who is passionate about it and the rest you can work out, and that’s what I’m trying to prove with this and it’s working. So I think if I can prove that, I’m proving gender equity are behind it which was a hard sell, they’re supporting me. Inter-district Arts support it through funding, what we need to do then is say this program is available for anybody to use, any school, boys or co-ed and away they go they can just do it. So by the end of this year, I’ll have done the program and evaluation so people can just take the program and then they can do it. That’s how it’s going to work, so then it’s all done properly. And then they get all the numbers of people, they can access people like Jeremy and Gavin

S: The trainers, yes?

F: And by then I hope to have connected up with enough other circus troupes, so I'm going to set all of that in place so it's all done properly, and that will happen next year.

S: Well good luck with it all. Sounds amazing!

APPENDIX THREE

INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT SPANKY (R) – senior student and circus tutor from James Cook Boys High School.

S: Tell me about the history of you, the circus and James Cook.

R: Well I started when I was in Year 10 in '98 - which wasn't really much. Gavin Wild came in and did some work with us boys and we didn't do much, but from there I kinda liked it. I liked what we did hanging from the ceiling and just mucking around and having fun. Then in 2000 we did nothing at all cause Miss Brown wasn't here and the program basically dropped – just went nowhere and in 2001 got back up. I was one of the main guys that said "let's do circus! I want to do circus!" and like I said "Miss... Miss I want to do fire", and she goes "Oh, OK" cause she wasn't too happy about it, but I started doing fire with a fire stick, then did a few performances and then got further into fire. Started doing fire twirlers and got into heaps of aerial work with Gav. He taught me everything I know - he's just so good at it.

S: He's a champion guy – he's really good.

R: He's just the best.

S: So what sort of aerial work have you been doing?

R: Well I'm mainly focussed on tissu. I'd like to learn a bit on the trapeze (which I don't always like cause it hurts too much), some on the cloud swing, but I'm not that good at it, it's mainly the tissu really. Most of the aerial work I've done has been with that really and at the moment I'm just teaching the younger boys the basics, what I've learnt, passing it on really. Then they get to learn to present it and make it look good. Then I try and teach the boys to think for themselves, try to figure out their own tricks, cause that's what I had to do so I may as well pass that on too.

S: So performances – do you remember your first performance – were you nervous?

R: Well we had our first performance under the Big Top, but I don't include that as my first performance. I include that as my worst performance.

S: Why is that?

R: 'Cause I basically abseiled down on a rope, ran onto the stage and did a forward flip off a mini tramp and I don't include that as circus. My first performance was at a camp thing for North Sydney Girls. It was like some peer support or mediation thing for some guys and girls and we rocked up and started. And someone in the crowd said "give em fire, give em fire", so it was pretty shocking – all I did was just turn the stick and wave it from side to side. But I got better at it cause I don't like the tricks I know I want to learn new ones and get better and better at it. It's very addictive, you get addicted to what you can do and what more you can achieve. Basically I'm a big boy and guys didn't think I could do aerial. The first time I jumped on the aerial it was hilarious, it's on video tape somewhere – I want to destroy it. I could only just support my own weight, which is pretty shocking, but I just kept on going, kept on hurting myself, kept on jumping on it saying "I can do it, I don't mind this pain". I can keep going and

eventually I got it, I can do it and I was pretty proud of myself and now I teach the boys. I jump on and climb up it and they go “what the?” Any they don’t understand how a guy my size can actually climb up something and they go “OK.”

S: You don’t have tissu here do you?

R: Yeah we do, it’s down at the squash courts.

S: Could you show me some stuff this afternoon?

R: I’ll try to - I’ll show you some stuff. They’re just some basic tricks nothing special.

S: I can’t do it, I’m sure you’re much better than I am.

R: If you can support your own weight and you can climb a rope you can do it. Basically it opens the minds of the guys. They see me as one thing, they say this is a guy who probably studies a lot and works hard. Yeah I study a bit, I don’t study much I just like to relax and chill out and take things as they come, because it’s just so much easier to do things. It just opens the guy’s minds up so much. Like they’ve noticed what they can achieve and their behaviour has gone really good like Miss Brown’s probably told you. Just with everything circus – boy’s attitude to self-esteem. For my first performance I was shaking something severe and then you hear the crowd start going fire, fire and then something in you just goes “oh my goodness I love this!”

S: Yeah!

R: A tingling feeling through your body and you just enjoy it so much and want to do more and your confidence just boosts. If people don’t like it, they don’t have to watch it, that’s what I say but I just keep going and going.

S: What do your friends think that don’t do circus?

R: They call me the clown, I’m classified as a clown.

S: But they respect you for it?

R: They don’t really mind, when I do fire and I’m practicing, the guys go let me have a try, and they hit themselves in the back of the head and when they do the butterfly they scone themselves. It’s quite funny actually I get a good laugh out of it. But yeah, they support me, they don’t mind it.

S: What about your folks?

R: Oh they love it, it gets me doing things. They’ve probably noticed my attitude too like building self-esteem and stuff and confidence in doing things and things like that. They don’t mind it - they probably enjoy it the most. They’re a bit worried but that’s it.

S: And you mentioned too with perseverance with aerials – it taught you how to persevere with things.

R: It’s taught me – one of Gav’s favourite sayings – “no pain, no gain”. If it’s so painful - you’re doing it right. I just hate that saying, you get used to it. If you do it once and you get the motion of it and you do it again and you figure out the technique and what you’re doing wrong and the pain starts to gradually go away bit by bit cause you’ve gotten used to it basically. It’s just a lot of fun and with perseverance – you know, just keep going and going.

S: Some of the boys that I've talked to in Year 7 and even younger, they really look up to you as their mentor, that's really nice. Is that pressure on you, is that hard sometimes?

R: I don't, I go about as I really am. I don't classify myself as a role model. Yeah sure I do it and I'm there and I say "do it good, look up to me keep on going straight and focus" and all that, but you also have to keep your own self esteem and focus with yourself. With me I'm a different person, different attitude. Sure you can make me a role model but I don't classify myself as a role model I just do what I feel is right.

S: With the younger boys...when you guys see what they're up to performance standard then you invite them to join the performance troupe – is that basically how it happens?

R: Well we just probably chuck them in the deep end that's what we do – it's pretty bad I suppose. I did really shocking for that first performance – I really want to get better, I think that's the main thing. I just taught a guy a bit of fire to get him just twirling and stuff and Miss Brown didn't like him doing it that much and didn't support him about it. So we couldn't really let him do it at a performance cause he wasn't very good. There was another guy ...

S: Maybe dangerous too?

R: Yeah it's just way too dangerous. Like when I do it I don't think of the danger I just think of the sound, it's just fun!

S: I'm a twirler I should have brought my sticks, you could teach me some tricks, I could teach you some tricks, we could have a twirling session.

R: We do have a stick down in the art room.

S: So you throw them in the deep end. I was asking about the initiation that's what Nick called it yesterday?

R: Yeah the initiation – we basically like – the more higher up guys - me, Nick, George and a couple of others, we see what they can do and we judge them and we go "no, they're not doing it...it doesn't look good, they're not up to performing" and stuff like that. Like Miss usually asks us is he up to performing and we go "no, yes, maybe", but if they're just above the good enough we go "yep chuck him in."

S: Throw him in?

R: Throw him in straight away, if you keep on saying "oh no don't let him do it", they start thinking "I'm not good enough, what am I doing here...I'm not getting any better!" And they'd probably just drop out and there's no point and they think "I'm just wasting my time", so may as well get them doing something and keep them interested.

S: Why do you think it's important for young people to do circus? I mean you play footy as well. How are they different? Why is one better or worse than the other?

R: Footy is more of a macho thing– "look at me I can tackle someone". I can take out someone twice the size of me, tackle them and bring it on and circus is more friendlier. It's more about communication, guys working together and

keeping it tight and thinking “we can do this, we can pull off anything we want to do”. With footy it’s just more violent.

S: Competition?

R: There’s competition in circus but not as much.

S: Which do you prefer if you had to choose?

R: Oh circus for sure.

S: Why is that?

R: Because it’s friendlier, you meet more people, it’s not as aggressive. With football when you are on the field and you take people out and they’re starting to get aggressive. With circus you do some tricks and people come up to you and go how do you do that? And you go “you do it like this” and this and you go “how are you going, what’s your name?” You start chatting and get to know them; you get along with people. I prefer circus so much, I just love meeting different people

S: Excellent. Do you think circus has changed the perception of this school within the community? Do you think people see James Cook High any differently now?

R: Personally I wouldn’t know cause I say I do circus and they say “where do you do it?” and I say “at school” and they say “oh my goodness - they’ve got it as a program?” Some people go “they’ve got it as a program - I don’t like that!” But other people go “oh that’s really good for boys”, encouraging and stuff like that. So I say “yeah it’s really good, builds up confidence in boys” like I really promote it.

S: So you haven’t heard from your parent’s friends, like when you guys were on the news, no one rang up the house, oh they’re on the news?

R: Oh well I’d messaged all my friends “I’m going to be on the news, watch it!” When I was on the news my parents watched it and they said that looked good and people go see it and say “that looks really good, I like what you do. I don’t mind that too much.”

S: So what kind of name does it have in the community – this school?

R: I wouldn’t know

S: You don’t know what people think cause you’re living in it not outside it?

R: I’m living mostly in Arncliffe so I don’t really discuss between parents and student’s parents and stuff, I don’t know them that well.

S: Do you think it’s a good school?

R: I love this school. Like my nephew – he just came over from WA and they were going to send him to Kogarah and that’s one of the worst schools to send him to. Because he’s a big Aussie bloke and like as a big Aussie bloke I got picked on a bit at James Cook, but if you were at Kogarah with all the Lebanese, not to be racist, but they would just pick on you something severe. So I said “No! Send him to James Cook!” The main reason why he was going to Kogarah was so he could look after his little sister, but I said send him to James Cook. It’s got so many more facilities and I can look after him for the year that I’m here and I can have circus boys look after him if he needs any help after that and he can

say hello to his little sister over in her school after school and stuff. So he can always keep in touch and so that's the main reason he's at James Cook.

S: Miss Brown said you may come back next year and train because you finish this year don't you?

R: Yes for sure I really love the boys here. I get their little smart arse attitudes, but I don't really care. As long as I see them progress and see them get better I go "yeah!" I just love to see people progress when I'm teaching them.

S: What do you want to do then? Something with your circus after that? Do you want to be a teacher?

R: Not really. No, I don't mind teaching with something I love but I want to do sports injuries. I love dealing with people, helping them with what's wrong with them and making them feel better. It's like circus when you work teaching someone and you see them progress, with sports injuries you rehabilitate the person and you see them progress into what they should be.

S: Some sort of healing? That's interesting, so you're effectively using circus for that now. Helping people progress, feel better about them selves.

R: I just love helping people – making them laugh

S: That's great. Thank you so much for talking to me – I think you're doing amazing things here.

APPENDIX FOUR

Interview with Paul Woodhead (P) Founder and coordinator of the circus program at Dubbo West and Circus West.

S: OK. Let's begin. How important is risk in the learning of circus?

P: I think it's integral, I mean it's the whole point for many of the activities, if not all the activities. There's a different kind of risk, the very real risk for most of our kids I think is the risk of ridicule. The risk of someone humiliating them, because they've tried something and not done well. And because everybody is trying at circus and there is so many different related things, I mean it's just so busy out there that there's very little chance that someone is going to say "oh you can't do that very well at all" and in fact, it's not as pervasive as I would like to see it, there is a lot of peer tutoring that goes on. It's subtly changed over the last, oh I don't know, five years or so, there used to be a huge amount of it - because it's what we put the most amount of time into developing. But as the range of things has expanded, more and more of our time as in staff time is taken up with assessment of kids and keeping track of where things are, and perhaps that's something we need to look at. The other one is physical risk, actual risk of injury and obviously there is with the gear that we have, although everything carries a risk, but the ones to me who take the highest risk, are the kids who get onto unicycles and to some extent drum, because that leads towards globe walking, though it's not terribly risky – it's not very flash so not a lot of kids jump on. A lot of the boys, the risk takers, they gravitate to unicycle and take on the risk there. The girls tend to go more towards either acrobatics or stilts, and while the risk is lower, they put the risk in themselves by trying riskier moves particularly on high level stilts. They go down on to the ground; they try to find different ways of getting up, they try to find different ways of just pushing the edge of balance you know. The High School Circus kids tend to go for risk by taking the skills that they're working in, either in juggling and manipulation in particular, and adding danger to that, so juggling knives instead of just juggling clubs or juggling with fire. They quite like the idea of fire and taking poi and going into fire, otherwise they're a pretty staid lot - they sit back and talk...High School Circus is very different.

S: I don't think I asked you this one the other day about the goal of Circus Belfast – the quote. Mike Moloney says the goal of Circus Belfast is “the empowerment of people over their environment”. How do you feel about the quote and do you agree with what he says. How much of that applies to Circus West?

P: I agree with the quote as far as Belfast is concerned. From what I have seen it's all about living in a place that has a great deal of social abrasion going on although it's localised. I've been to Belfast a few times and there are many places where you don't even have a hint of the troubles.

S: What about here, is it relative to here at all, empowerment over environment?

P: I don't know...I guess the environment comes in if perhaps it's one of the factors that motivates them to come to school, but I don't consider that power over the environment. I don't think the kids here are gaining power over environment, they might be gaining power over a social environment, or a culture in which they work and that would include things like peer assessment. So I think perhaps what they're trying to get is control of something within school, something that they direct, and hopefully the spin off perhaps is their status with their peers, status within the system and recognition in front of their peers - because they all are recognised with awards.

S: And perhaps recognition within the community as well, as far as perception goes, of West Dubbo

P: I doubt that's a goal of ... might be a goal of circus, not necessarily a goal of the kids – but certainly a goal of circus.

S: That's my next question, what are the goals of the circus program here are?

P: It's hard, there are some fundamental goals - for instance to provide a structured activity so the kids have something to do. They are then less inclined to be causing trouble or being upset with nothing to do. The goals to me are social goals, welfare goals, they're essentially giving the kids a chance to grow by setting goals themselves, by working on their values, like confidence, perseverance and resilience. Resilience is the new buzz one, but I mean it's there. Courage to either overcome the risk that they're taking on the gear, or to overcome the risk of public performance. So to me, the goal is essentially a social goal. It has a wider goal that is only partly realised and that is to encourage other people to do circus in schools for the same reason. But that's the reason I do it - I like working with kids, so my goal is to enjoy my time here.

S: Is there a separate goal of Circus West as a performance company as opposed to...

P: Just an extension of the first one. Circus West has two goals – one is to provide an opportunity for kids with the skill level to perform outside, and the second is, I guess, to spread the message - to show other schools that this is a good thing to have in your school.

S: OK, while we're talking about goals – you were talking about doing further research yourself. What would the goal of that research be?

P: Within three specific areas. The welfare benefits in terms of student confidence, perseverance, persistence, and the effect it has on their place in the school, so that's the first one. The second one is the effect it might have on performance within the school, so it might be the kids who would normally go into performances as against musicals for instance, or into specific groups like choir, or dance or a band or something. So is there a difference, does it make an impact on performance in school that otherwise would not be there? And the third thing is related to the sporting program of the school. If circus is in the school has it had an impact on how the school, as in teachers and students, use sport, has it had an impact on the number of kids who are otherwise disengaged with say traditional sports. Has it had an impact on how the community views the

school program. So to me it's had a big impact here, particularly on kids who are not inclined to be in traditional sports, because they're either not capable, they don't get selected, because their behaviour keeps them out, those sort of things.

S: OK Last question – how is community or school circus different from other circus and how do you perceive the relationship between them? Do they need each other?

P: Community and school circus to me are two different entities because community circus lives out in the community.

S: OK well let's just talk about school circus.

P: Well school circus can't survive without community. We have huge support, both systemic and parental, community and within the school itself with support for our program. And the support is very rarely visited upon us in terms of money, mostly it's visited in terms of inkind support. That might be free time on radio and TV, it might be extra publicity – more chances at full colour front page in the newspaper. It might be if I need specialist bolts for the unicycles and I go and see the bolt guy he'll say "just take them, it's for you". We often have to pay, but it might mean that we get things very, very cheaply, so there is huge community support. Now community support only comes when they can already see that something is working. So while we have been going for twelve years or so, that community support has been building all of that time. Now it was there in the early times in the guise of local Rotary Clubs, Service Clubs helping us out. We would go and say "this is the program this is what we want to achieve, can you help us?" And they would, it's now often that people will come to us and say "we have this would you like it?" So for instance, twice this week we've been given bags of costumes. People call up and they say "I have this I think it would be good for you", in the past it's been a company would come to us and say "we have a budget for some sponsorship – would you like some sponsorship?" And we said "well gladly!" And that was in the terms of \$2500 per year, the biggest one of course was Council and Environmental Protection Authority came to us and said "we've seen what you do, would you like to work with us and we will obviously spread this great deal of money around". So that helps, and of course it goes vice versa, our place in the community is enhanced because of all this. More and more people know what we are doing here.

S: I guess what I meant with the other question, the other part of it is do school circuses or circuses within the school framework need other circuses like Ringling Bros, Moscow Circus, Cirque du Soleil?

P: I think they need them for two things, they need all of those circuses for the magic of circus to keep on going, you need to have that sort of thing. But the other thing, the more day to day, but the more exciting thing is I think that often times when those circuses come they workshop our kids for nothing. So we go down every day and with one of them Lennon Bros, we actually performed with them. It would be madness right now with all this insurance stuff going on but at the same time representing the school...

The others Moscow and Cirque du Soleil, they're in a different sort of class and I doubt that they would workshop any of our kids or give free tickets out and that sort of thing. But all of the traditional Australian circuses that come through, they

do, they quite willingly give their time to come and visit our kids, watch a program, do some coaching, let our kids have free seats and that sort of thing

S: Wow that's fantastic!

P: It's a nice little buzz and we make sure that the kids who are working the hardest here, kids who put the effort in, they're the ones who get to perform.

S: We need them then; do you think they need us?

P: They don't need circus west right now, what they do need is programs like Circus West hopefully will eventually build into like Fruitfly, like Cirkidz all the youth programs that are building up, we'll eventually get to the point where have kids going into tertiary level work in circus or auditioning for places with Lennons or Circus Oz and things like that, in which case it's very healthy for them to have us, and that well may be part of the goal of why they work with us. I think they work with us because they're nice people too.

S: True. Thank you for your time Paul. Good luck with your study.

APPENDIX FIVE

Interview with Mum 1 (M1) and Mum 2 (M2)– parents of students in the Dubbo West Performance Troupe:

S: OK. So your kids are how old? They do the circus program?

M1: This year a son in Year 7 and a daughter in Year II. Several years ago Paul brought a group of primary kids down and did a workshop with our kids and my kids thought it was just great and they've walked on stilts ever since.

S: So they are both stilt walkers – they have stilts?

M1: Corey he's actually riding on the unicycle now, he got a unicycle for Christmas.

S: Oh good, so he doesn't have a favourite he just likes all of them?

M1: He actually hasn't been on stilts now for a while though they're still there if he wants to. Yeah we've bought all our own equipment and costumes because we actually have done other things out of this organised circus like parades, street theatre, school fetes. Any thing like that any opportunity they can get, they perform.

S: So how long does it take you to drive in?

M1: Just under two hours it takes us.

S: So you come all that way into circus. You must believe that it works for your kids.

M1: Yeah, I think it's great and the other reason is it's their social contact for the week, a regular thing for them too, cause they actually study at home. With our school they have camps and things on where they all come in which is great, and they all went through the soccer stage, and netball, girl guides and scouts and that was costing a fortune travelling everywhere for that so I thought well now they're going to pick one thing – and they picked circus and they're really happy with that.

S: Do you think they like it more than guides and scouts?

M1: Yes I think they do.

S: Why do you think that is?

M1: I think because it's something different and because I think they feel like it's something a bit special cause they can do something that a lot of other people can't. It's not like soccer or football or whatever, I mean masses of people can do that. Whereas if you get on metre high stilts and start roaming around you stand out.

S: Yes, you stand out. I'm so lucky you two are here that I can interview circus parents. Have you noticed any changes in your kids since circus. Are they more confident in their bodies?

M1: Yes, I think they probably are, especially with Corey the youngest one, the routine that he was performing last year with his rola bola his was a solo whereas most of the others were a group. So he out front you know centre stage on his own and I think at first it was a bit daunting, unnerving for him, but it's brought him out of his shell, like last year at the end of the year through school he actually had to make a speech on their presentation day and spoke in front of

about three hundred people, whereas I would have doubted that you would get him up there doing that, and he actually volunteered to do it. So I think it boosts their confidence, even Gemma she's not as quiet as she used to be. I'm not saying she's noisy, but she's even coming out of her shell a little bit.

S: What about in his schoolwork? With his reading and writing and things like that? Is he more into that because of circus, or it hasn't affected that do you think? Has it helped him to concentrate, is he more disciplined do you think?

M1: See we need a lot of self discipline the way we do school anyway, they have pretty structured ...

S: Cause it's home school of course.

M1: Yes it's home school anyway so in a way they needed to have that. I think it has helped in ways I mean it also gives them something to talk and write about in journal writing and reports and things like that you know ... we did a performance in such and such so along those lines I think it has and of course any opportunity they are looking up info on the internet checking out different routines and skills they can get ideas off. And of course we're off to Moscow circus tonight.

S: Me too, I can't wait – I must be the only person in Dubbo without free tickets tonight I think everybody else has.

M1: Me too, I didn't get free tickets.

S: I think if you had a poster on your window you got free tickets.

Anyway-you said they've made heaps of friends through circus. Are they friends that they wouldn't have had otherwise like they've just made them through circus?

M1: Yes, different social group. Yeah and all the kids I think they are nice kids you know what kids can be like, adolescent, they can be a bit itchy and what not. But I don't know they just seem a good bunch of kids.

S: Yes they seem like a nice bunch of kids, I've been here for a week just looking at the lunchtime circus out here and it's just marvelous to come out and see them all doing circus and I said to Paul (must have been Tuesday - when it rained?) I've never seen so many kids move so fast and do exactly the right thing at the same time in my life. You know the rain started and Paul went "OK gear inside" and hundreds of kids picked up everything no problem dusted themselves off, toddled over packed it away neatly in the boxes and off to class and I was going "Wow!" They're just really motivated and self disciplined to do the right thing and share with each other and be respectful of each other and that was really nice.

M1: That's another thing I've noticed like the kids are keen to help each other here. You know a new kid comes along and they're trying to get on stilts or whatnot and they're straight in the other ones and help them

S: So they're not so much competing with each other, they're more helping each other whereas in another sport ...

M1: They'd be a bit more competitive,

S: They'd want to be the best, they'd want to be number one goal kicker or whatever it is?

M1: Yes! It's to say I'm in Circus West, it means the whole thing not just "you" or "you" everybody and they like to say "Yeah, I'm from Circus West, we're all good". It's a joint effort I mean someone might excel in the acro a bit more than something else, but when they're on show they're pretty good and they support each other. And they support each other as far as applause and revving everyone else on appreciating each other's talents.

S: I've noticed every since I've been here, just through – I had to go to a Chiropractor on Monday and a taxi ride, and at Thrifty when I was dropping off the hire car that I drove to Bathurst in, people speak of highly of the circus and I didn't realise that Dubbo West, like there's this perception with West Dubbo – circus has really changed that for a lot of people. It really lifts the public profile, the community profile – a lot of people are really proud of the circus as belonging to Dubbo. Do you know what I mean? Have you found that having kids that are involved in the circus? Do people come up to you and go that was a great show, or well done, do people approach you?

M1: One instance I can remember was last year at Wellington when they were having a show over there it was for the Centennial Big Parade and they had a little spot lit show kind of thing, centre stage and just people you know. I was just among the crowd watching it, you know, camera going obviously and a fella standing next to me was just amazed at what these kids could do and I was like "oh that's my son". And he was just commenting you know on how they got together as a group and it's funny I think there was a couple of new girls, or one new girl actually came after that.

S: From that performance?

M1: Yes, she'd seen the kids there and started to come, but they're not here anymore.

S: Yes I just noticed that people in the community speak really highly of the circus, as something really positive from the school and from the community, which I think is really important. What about you, have you got comments?

M2: I think it's lifted the stigma from the school because we're 'westies', and they reckon all the riff raff is on the west side but there's riff raff all around.

S: I'm staying on the west side and the family I'm staying with is lovely.

M1: Yeah, because we don't live in Dubbo we've heard the stories like you know how rough it is on the west side of Dubbo. They say "I wouldn't send my kids to that school" and I say "are you kidding my kids wouldn't be anywhere else!"

S: I think they're lovely kids here I've had a ball since I've been here.

M1: I mean you know you walk into some schools and you've got that, you know you feel it - atmosphere, some schools you walk into and there's a cold hard type feeling. You walk in here and it's... you know...positive.

S: Do you want to tell me about your kids? I'd love to hear more about them. How long have they been doing circus for?

M2: Oh Justine's a veteran, it's about 7 years, she started in Year 4.

S: Wow, and she's still doing it?

M2: A lot of them dropped out when they went into High School, but she stayed with it because she's got a friends here-like friends who've got kids that go from Year 10 right down to Year 4 so she mixes with a wider range of ages.

S: Which is probably good for her?

M2: She mixes better with the younger ones.

S: And she's never been tempted by guides or dancing or soccer?

M2: No certainly not dancing, she's not the petite little dance type of girl. Unicycle suits her I think. She would have liked to play soccer but didn't quite get into the team this year. If she would have made it into soccer- she would have done both, because I'm 20 kms out of town.

S: Right so you drive in?

M2: Yeah. So for me to drive around all these things all the time I'm just never home. So she does one thing and circus is just straight after school so she just does it and then we go home, that's it.

S: I think it's funny that you say that she'd never be a dancer but she's a unicyclist. Like you get any dancer on a unicycle and they'd fall off straight away - I'm telling you now. It's one of the hardest things you can do, there's no undervaluing unicycling, it's really difficult. Out of all of these things it's probably the hardest thing to learn how to do well.

M2: She's always been a bit of a tomboy doing a little bit more of the physical stuff, not like a ballerina type of thing. Circus has been fantastic! She has taught herself how to focus and concentrate and focus on different tricks and then this has helped her with her school in general and helped us at home too!

M1: My children aren't of the petite physique either, but it's sort of in-built in them they love to perform. I can remember before we moved out this way, Gemma did main stream school up to Year 5 and she was in the dance group, she was in the recorder group and she was in the choir and performed all around the place. Our neighbours at the time had a couple of kids at the time round their age and they were putting on productions like costumes – whole things cause they just love this type of thing. So that's another reason why I make the effort because they really enjoy that sort of thing, they sort of missed out on a lot of that with doing this instead so we make it up this way.

S: And have you noticed a change in your kids through circus?

M1: As I said it's quietened her down, given her something to aim towards, she's got to practice, you know Paul's word is law. Every parent who comes through her says they've never known a guy who could get fifty kids to sit down and shut up in two seconds, like he does. He just says that's it, so that's it.

S: So self-discipline, a bit of focus do you think?

M1: He gives them something to aim towards and she's proud to be in it.

S: So sort of through that pride maybe self-esteem for the kids, is that part of what it does for kids?

M1: Yes, I think so, a confidence booster, raises their self esteem for sure. I can remember him saying look you guys are here because you want to be here, you don't have to be here as in school where it's sit down, be quiet and listen you

know, put it that way to them. I mean sure they come here and learn skills and practice routines but it's still up to the kids to rehearse and practice and fine tune all this at home during their own time as well – otherwise they won't get into the show

S: Yeah right, so is that motivation for them as well to get into the show?

M1: They went to Sydney, we went down there for the Pacific School games just before... they tested out the olympic site, then they went down there for something else... there was a big thing on for Education Week and they performed in the same place. It's only up to Year 6 but because the kids that stay on which they really like to do, they've all grown out of their costumes, so we've had to update costumes to a bigger size.

S: Is it good to be involved, like when you can't perform, is it good to make the costumes and things because it's a kid's circus isn't it or do you guys perform?

M1: No we just pick up the pieces at the end.

S: Ahhh...a very valuable job!

APPENDIX SIX

Interview with students (Stu1, Stu2 and Stu3) from the Dubbo West Performance Troupe:

S: How long have you been doing circus?

Stu1: I have been officially with Circus West since Year 4 which would be about 6 years.

S: And what do you like to do?

Stu1: I do unicycle.

S: Is that what you do in the show?

Stu1: Yes I do unicycle in the shows and last year I also walked on the barrel for storm warning.

S: And do you like it?

Stu1: Yes it's fine.

S: Why do you like it?

Stu1: I guess it's kind of hard really, it challenges your self. When I first started I wasn't very good but over the years... just determination got me better, and yeah... it's fun.

S: And you are going to keep going?

Stu1: Yes I could probably end up in one of those famous circuses I reckon.

S: Is that what you want to do?

Stu1: Probably...yeah.

S: Have you ever been tempted to do any other sports or anything?

Stu1: I did want to do soccer, but I didn't really make the team so I just stick with unicycling and circus.

S: You must be good at it if you're in the company, I know it's difficult. You have to audition and get accepted into the company. I saw the video – I saw you in the video-you were great.

Stu1: Thank you, yes just a lot of determination will get you good and just challenging yourself with new things like trying out new tricks that you see other circuses do and just whatever, make up your own tricks and stuff like that.

S: OK lets see a few...excellent!!!! What do your friends think of you doing all this unicycling stuff?

Stu1: Well some of them are like – “oh yeah cool!” Just cause you can ride a unicycle and the others some just call me a “circus freak” and I just turn around and I say “at least I got some talents. I got something that some people can't do and probably wouldn't even try to do!”

S: I bet they couldn't ride that.

Stu1: No.

S: Not without busting themselves. How big is it 5 ft?

Stu1: 5ft yes, when I was trying to learn I actually busted my lip open I smacked myself in the face with it, that hurt but I just kept on trying.

S: How big was the one you were just on before?

Stu1: Oh 20 inch. I learnt on the smaller one when I was in Year 3 and just gradually got up on the higher ones and then when I was in Year 5 or Year 6 they

let me on this big one and I was really shaky at first but I gradually got it with his help and then he let me ride by myself and I was just like “yeah – I can do it!”

S: And you’re going to get the monkey mount thing down so that you can do it in the show next year?

Stu1: Yeah, I had it down before but I just stopped doing it cause I was too busy trying to learn what I had to do in the Acts for one of our performances and I kinda just lost it...

S: So... you going to get back into it?

Stu1: Yeah I have to get back in the swing of it, get back to practicing it try more tricks and new stuff.

S: Do you want our attention is that what’s going on? He’s doing all these dances behind you. So how long have you been in circus west?

Stu2: I’ve done circus for three years, but I’ve actually been doing stilts for 4 years.

S: And what do you think of the stilts, why stilts why not unicycle, or juggling or acrobatics? What’s so good about stilts?

Stu2: I just like stilts, like when I was living down in Goulburn they had hand held stilts they were a bit different to the ones we’ve got here, they were about 60cm high and you had to jump up to get on them, I probably remembered them from there.

S: And so stilts are your “thing” you don’t want to try the other equipment?

Stu2: Well I have started unicycle, but I can’t really do that properly so I’m still working on that sometimes.

S: And what is it about circus that’s so much fun, what is it that makes circus good? Why aren’t you out doing hockey or soccer?

Stu2: I do do hockey.

S: Do you, which one do you like better?

Stu2: They’re pretty much even, circus is just something different. You don’t get to do it every day.

S: What do people think when you tell them that you do circus, that you walk on stilts and you perform in circus west?

Stu2: They just usually go “WOW! What do you do, how do you do it?” That sort of stuff.

S: What about you, same for you. What do people say, do they call you circus freak, or do they think it’s really good?

Stu3: Most people think it’s good.

S: And what about the people in Dubbo, what do they think about circus, what do you think the community thinks about it?

Stu3: I think it’s fairly good because usually when you’re doing a performance all the people usually stop and watch and everyone claps at the end and they’re all happy about it and that.

S: Do you think they’re proud of it, the community is proud of it?

Stu3: Yes I think they’re proud of it because not many other places have anything like it so it’s something different.

S: What about your parents, what do they think about you guys doing stilts? Do they think “we hope they don’t hurt themselves.” Are they proud of you?

Stu3: My mum is fairly proud of me because she knows I always try my best in everything I do and she’s happy that I just wanted to do something different.

S: Most people love it when they get on stilts because they’re taller than everybody.

Stu3: People get there and they go “Oh I’d never do that, no don’t think I would...”

S: It’s good fun when you get into it.

Stu3: Yeah, except the only thing is like when I get on my tall stilts, which are like a metre twenty five, last year in a show these little kids they look up at you and then they take off crying.

S: Cause you’re scary. Do you think it’s changed you as a person being able to walk on stilts and do circus stuff?

Stu3: Yes. ‘cause I’ve become a bit more confident with performing and that, overall I was a bit freaked out by heights but once I started going up high on the stilts it’s gone now.

S: Excellent you’re obviously very good at it. This girl waving at us over here can dance on stilts too.

Stu3: Yes she’s really flexible, she can do acro on stilts, she does tumbles on the ground, she does handstands, she does all sorts of stuff.

S: Oh right, which is interesting I don’t think I’ve ever seen anyone do acro on stilts. You have to do a routine on them, you said you have to do routines to get into the company.

Stu3: You’ve got to be able to show off your skills.

S: What kinds of things do you have to do?

Stu3: You’ve got to be over Level 3, so you’ve just got to show off any skills that you have to him and if you’re under Level 3 and you show off as much as you can and someone who is Level 5 can’t show off very much he’ll give the place to the Level 3 person if they’re more capable of showing their skills.

S: So what do you do like front kicks, back kicks, side kicks?

Stu3: Anything you can.

S: What can you do on stilts?

Stu3: Well I can jump, kick, balance, really anything you want to, just as long as you try your hardest.

S: Yes right, excellent, and you’re learning?

Stu3: Yes, I can do stuff outside my level.

S: So why don’t you go for the next level, what do you have to learn to go up to the next one?

Stu3: I’ve got to learn to step across and squat and I’ve got to go up on higher ones.

Stu2: She’s got to go on the 55cm ones.

S: Oh OK, I’m sure you’ll get there – don’t rush it.

Stu2: Maybe you can get a pair of stilts like mine, I’ve got a pair at home that are one metre 25.

S: Yes? Did you buy those?

Stu2: No my grandpa made them for me.

S: That's great...whew a metre twenty-five?

Stu2: Mum originally said one metre and then I go a metre twenty five please? First I asked for a metre fifty and she said "No". It means I've actually got the highest stilts here. I did stilts with the real circus when they were here.

S: Tell me about it, who did you perform with?

Stu2: Ringling Bros, we could ask my mum but I think it was Ringling Bros.

S: Hang on a moment we've got Kristen getting up on stilts, whoa do that again. I've never seen anybody get up on stilts before off the ground like that-that's great!

Stu2: There's a couple of ways of doing it.

S: Have you got bloomers on or something like shorts? OK I'm going to take a picture of you doing that, if that's ok, so I can take it home and say to my students "learn to do this".

Stu3: Do it in like stages.

S: No hang on, my camera didn't work.

Stu3: Do it at the start, then get her going up.

S: OK. That was brilliant! Thankyou! Tell me more about the circus.

Stu2: OK we think it was Ringling Bros two performances, where we were doing it was like a ditch right and every time we went over it one of us would either stack it or nearly stack it and it was just crazy. But with people cheering you on in the background, you don't really care it just energises you, you just go with it and it gets you to go that extra bit better.

S: Thankyou. Everybody. This has been great hearing all your stories and seeing you perform.

APPENDIX SEVEN

Interview with Mark McDermott (M) – Founder and coordinator of the circus troupe at Campbelltown Performing Arts High School.

S: Can you please tell me about the make up of the circus ensemble?

M: Sure. We started circus in 1993 because the performance ensembles were not catering for all the kids. We have circus as a board endorsed course for years nine and ten and circus for sport and the circus kids train at lunchtimes. 30% of our intake is also by audition only. And this includes the dance, drama, music and circus ensembles.

S: What do you mean by “not catering for all the kids?”

M: Well, circus caters for the lowest common denominator – not necessarily the most academic kids – its more likely to attract youth at risk within the school – there is a place for everyone within circus – not just the ‘clever kids’.

S: Is circus popular within the school?

M: Yes...the program is growing every year and we are booked more frequently than the dance, drama and music ensembles.

S: Are the community supportive of the program?

M: Yes, very. The community regularly come and watch our gigs and we get lots of community and corporate bookings.

S: The circus is definitely part of the school culture here. Its wonderful to see the kids riding their unicycles to and from school and training together in the playground. What do you attribute that to?

M: Yeah...more kids ride unis to school than pushbikes. The staff are very supportive of circus and my background is in circus – I’m a clown and a juggler and the kids all know I still get work in the industry. They support each other and I get professional trainers in aerial work and unicycles, to come in and workshop the kids.

S: So you think its important to use professionals?

M: We defiantly need each other...We use monoxide a lot. They’re great. And the kids respond really well to outside trainers.

S: How important is risk in the success of your circus program?

M: Risk is important. We like to push the boundaries of circus...fire and knives and unicycles...you know-this is very appealing to teenagers. The kids perceive circus as very dangerous, but it is actually very safe. We make sure the process is very safe for kids. We have only had 3 injuries in 9 years and the students are very mindful of each other when they train.

S: I can see that. Its great to see so many young people training together in such a small space! Thank you for your time Mark.

APPENDIX EIGHT

Interview with Reg Bolton (R) – founder of Circus in a Suitcase:

S: We might start with the circus program at Padbury and the program at Gwynn Park. Just the logistics to begin with – how long you’ve been there for?

R: The Padbury one strictly nine weeks because it happened to be a nine week term and partly because of that I went in last term and did a show for the whole school to introduce myself and I did a staff in-service. I had already done one for the teachers, nothing to do with circus really we just wanted to do a nice warm fuzzy get together with teachers. Out of that they all said that they would quite like to see more of me, just at the end of last term I think it must have been. In Gwynn Park I think it was originally meant to be a one term, and it was meant to be only for kids at risk, but once again I went in and did a talk and the other teachers all said “oh we want that! Why should all the naughty kids get all the fun?” They literally said that, which is a strange thing for teachers to say. And they jiggled around and found some more money, and I turned up there one day a week, and I’ve already done one term, so what are we in now, term 2. Actually because I was overseas, I did 6 or 7 weeks of first term and then all of this term which is nine weeks, and then it’s going to sort of bleed into third term because they want a show. It came about simply because of a conversation on the phone. He never told me exactly what he wanted, it was the last day of term - I think it was, or was that Gwynn Park? Quite often they get me on the last day of term when the kids are all gone and the teachers have got to stay behind when they’d rather be shopping, but there’s an obligation.

S: Is that part of the structure?

R: Yes, I let them all juggle. I get them all juggling and I highlight, or I get them to highlight their feelings of frustration and annoyance. Particularly, you know when I see someone get really mad, I say “so... is this right - you feel that this is difficult and useless?” And they say “yes, that’s about it”. So I say “well, that’s what most kids get at some stage every day, every class”. Because I work with balls first, then scarves, they get success with scarves, then they get further and further into the realms of failure - which is the way most things are structured. Yes you can, until you can’t. Well I don’t do that, I say maybe you struggle a bit and then you can, and then I also introduce the other stuff. I maybe put one teacher on stilts, and I’ll often do a human pyramid at the end if I’ve got a couple of small enough teachers who can climb up, and it’s the buggers at the bottom who are doing all the work, and they all have a laugh about that, it’s fairly light hearted.

S: OK just quickly can you outline the bronze, silver and gold system; where it came from, how it works and the purpose of it?

R: It started about 5 or 6 years ago in a Primary School in Bunbury. A teacher named Jo Stevenson, who co-incidentally is now the principle at Gwynn Park. She was Year 7 teacher at that school, that’s a school with lots of problems about 400 kids, a lot of socio-economic hardship, strange behaviour and I

wandered about at lunch time, and there were hundreds of kids running up to me and saying “look at this, I can do this, look at this”. Almost overnight we decided that we would do this levels of scales - things have three different levels which are called bronze, silver and gold. They’d all go for their bronze in the first place, once they got silver they were then allowed to give bronzes and it was so easy. I just found a few girls who had been involved with gymnastics and I’d just send these kids over to see Rosemary and Jenny you know and off they’d go. Jo at that time made great big clunky badges, because we had a badge machine, and the kids came to school weighed down with these great big badges on their jumpers, which was nice while it lasted, but it was a bit impractical. We have used it ever since in almost every other situation. I remember at the circus school where I had the same kids every year and they just got better and better and the kids themselves tend to laugh at it after a while.

S: Which school do you personally enjoy more?

R: Out of these two? I’m getting less enthusiastic about Gwynn Park. Possibly because I’ve trained myself to the ten week unit. And I feel it is a ten week unit and at ten weeks it’s justified for me as a visitor. Once I go beyond that, it sometimes get a bit worn out, in fact any kids who really don’t like it they’re not going to like it any more, they’re going to like it less. And if there are any teachers who are a bit iffy about the program, they’re going to get more iffy about it, and the individual progress of the children has slowed out - the graphs have leveled. You know the exciting bit is in the acceleration that happens in those first ten weeks, in those first two weeks above all, levels out at about week 3 so I guess I’m enjoying Padbury more but only for that reason. I’m very, very fond of those kids at Gwynn Park, and you know you only have to have success with one kid and the whole day is justified. I use it with juggling, think of it as a cliff most people are down at the bottom of the cliff and they look up the top and it’s a juggler and they’re down below. And it’s lovely just helping up that cliff and they’ve become a juggler and they look down at the bottom of the cliff at the others and say “you know you’re a dirty rascal – I can juggle!” But then they turn around and look the other way and look across this bloody plateau and there’s just an infinite landscape of peaks, and that is not it there’s more to go, but that first bit is exciting. Then after that there’s a different type of skill application and you’re in that landscape, because you’re with your children all the time, also because you’re with High School children and because you’ve got kids who have volunteered to do it, and they will keep scaling these other little peaks and interesting features on the plateau.

S: What are the main differences?

R: Of the two schools?

S: Yes, your perceptions?

R: Yes...mmm... the Padbury kids expect to do well, and in a sad number of cases the kids at Gwynn Park expect not to do well. There are some sort of subversive learners, I think, who are finding with circus I’m actually giving them the opportunity to do well at something. Padbury is made easier by the fact that their learning environment is better it’s less disrupted by the behaviour of some kids - where at Gwynn Park you do get very real problems. We saw this

yesterday at Padbury with that little kid with the blonde hair, he didn't want to do, wasn't going to do it; suddenly he's doing it and laughing. You know he'll keep up this "don't want to do it" for a little while, because it's a little weapon he's found, and at Gwynn Park there are kids who have found that that works really well. What I have found at Gwynn Park, they have kept some of the worse kids away from the program as a punishment, which is crazy, that's the whole point of me being there to give these kids a fresh start, to give them another go. And then a teacher came up to me and said "you won't be seeing so and so, we've told him over and over again but missing the circus is the only deterrent I can use and so he's going to miss it out today". And there's nothing I can do about it, you can sort of understand it from a teacher's point of view, because those teachers are working on the edge of things a lot, but on the other hand, I have been brought in to work with the kids at risk and to give them a chance to have some success and if they're kept away from me – it won't happen.

S: So how are the teachers with this?

R: Well... we seem to have at Gwynn Park a bit of a resignation to the fact that they are the second worst school in the State, but on the other hand at Padbury – see I don't get to know the teachers very well you know. I see them at the beginning but they're just a group of adult faces smiling occasionally, looking inquisitively and doing what I ask them to do.

S: But you're not there for the teachers – right?

R: No, I'm not there for the teachers. Occasionally I'm aware that one teacher is really joining in, and another teacher is really not and so I go "oh yeah, it's that teacher" and I'll give her a big smile because I know that she is really into it, and others I'll go "oh it's that teacher" and I'll just ignore her and work with the kids.

S: How is the environment of the two schools different? How important do you think the physical space is where you work? Is that important?

R: Yes it is important, at Gwynn Park I made a choice there from the newer covered area. To me it was too big, it was huge and we weren't really enclosed. It has a low wall around it and the kids were forever jumping over it - which is against the rules. Then I noticed this other little covered area over where they serve the snacks and it's an appalling little place. It's got a sloping floor, black bitumen, dusty and it's always covered in leaves and they always clean it out with one of those little machines that give off heaps of petrol fumes, and it leads down onto the basketball court. It's not ideal but we've made it our own, somebody like myself might complain about the space but children never do, to children space is space and that space is now slightly more magical, it's the circus space. So I'm quite happy with that, and I've sort of become resigned to these covered areas now. At one school I was at, I had an indoor space it was outside the school hall and it was so nice. Any time I wanted the children to sit down and we could whisper to each other or yell as loudly as we liked and a concrete area for unicycles which you need and grass for stilts and acrobatics, trees for shade – that's ideal.

S: It's like when they come to the car and they take out everything and they lay it down where it is supposed to be. Is that done on purpose?

R: I suppose I've evolved that. I have this sort of mythical landscape, ethos, world of circus. That's why I talk about circus swearwords, and I talk about circus attitudes, you know I say "Hang on! You're circus kids now!" Matter of fact, I have to get into them they're not clowning around, they're not fooling around, they're doing serious stuff. At the same time they know I'm doing it with a smile on my face or in my voice, but that I mean it. Then I teach them about the word "Stop" in circus, how it can save your life. It's a life and death word, it's not life and death when I tell you to stop juggling, but we really respect the word "Stop". But it's a made up story about the mythical world of circus. And it comes back to what you are saying about the space becoming like a circus space. I never really spell out the values that we are teaching, maybe I should, but quite often I look at it and I think "yeah we're teaching values". Actually I was just thinking yesterday, I should bring in some bunting and put it up and the kids will say "what's that for?" And I'll say "that's just to make it a nice space."

S: What makes a good circus teacher?

R: A good "me" or "you"?

S: Yes, a good me or you?

R: Infinite patience which is just a gift, it's a God given gift. You know the patience to do lesson one a million times. It enables me to be a better teacher, whereas if you don't have it, you've got to fake it up or you've just got to grit your teeth and do it. Some teachers do that; you know some teachers just want to be doing the advanced work. You have to have eyes in the back of your head if you're going to be an effective one. Look it's a difficult question to answer because in a way you're asking me to describe myself and that naturally assumes I'm a good circus teacher, and there are probably other ways of doing it. OK let's look at it another way...how can I be a better circus teacher? If I bettered my skills myself I'd be better, I'm not a very good juggler, but on the other hand a good circus teacher in this current time I think, right now as I said to you the other day we're in a golden age, I think must be quite evangelical, must be driven. I'm doing my PhD, you know, I'm trained not to be evangelical, you know I'm trying to a bit more objective.

S: Yes right...

R: I'm not sure if I should, or whether I should actually be preaching the good word. A good circus teacher has got to be totally committed to what they're doing otherwise they'll get out of it. You see that too, you see a teacher in the wake of a residency is really 'gung ho' about it but within a year it just gets too hard. He or she just gets dragged down by the inertia of the other teachers. It doesn't mean that they are a bad teacher but it means that they're just not continuing teaching circus. What would make good circus teachers is some circus training and some good circus resources, and some good circus credibility.

S: For your program, your teaching style for each school, have you modified it or changed it consciously? Because I've noticed some

changes - I'm just wondering I'm wondering if you've changed your method on purpose.

R: No I haven't set myself up to do it, and yesterday, as you probably noticed, I made up every class as I went along. But I did warn you right at the beginning that that is my teaching method. I didn't even remember what I did with the Year ones, I had to think - what did I do with the Year ones yesterday? I knew I wanted to do something imaginative, could I get away with that with the other kids? Well with the other kids, I haven't got any younger kids anyway, I've only got from Year 4 upwards at Gwynn Park.

S: There's a lot more clowning happening, when you're teaching the younger kids, they spend the whole time laughing, from when they get there till the time they go.

R: Do they, that's nice, that's not bad is it – that can't be a bad teaching technique?

S: Definitely not bad...

R: And I enjoy it as well, I don't feel that I'm there entertaining them, I feel that I'm there sharing pleasure with them, which is a real treat for me. And yes, I get a bit more serious with the older kids. Did I go from Year 1 to Year 6's yesterday?

S: Yes you did.

R: I think ... I wonder if I fall into the same trap as all the other teachers at Gwynn Park. I assume the kids have a less than normal attention span and I may spend less time on an activity with them and then shoot on to the next thing. I suppose, juggling particularly, you hold them for as long as you can. I mean juggling needs a bit of... it is hard work and after juggling it's almost like a bit of a reward for having concentrated for that long. Most kids are not going to carry on juggling, not at that age. I mean some of them will, as you saw some of them come up to you and say "can I keep juggling?" Which is lovely... And I'll probably do longer on juggling at Padbury than I do at Gwynn Park, but on the other hand - we're further on at Gwynn Park and there are other things to be done. You know, I can usefully send a couple of these little 'rat-bag' kids off to the unicycles, partly to get them out of my hair, and partly because I know they need to put in the play hours, they're more flexible. So I don't know... I'm not consciously, I haven't planned a different structure for each one, but as you can see I'm fairly flexible.

S: As a response to the kids – yes I can see that. Ok, what about obstacles, if any, identified in the circus programs in either school.

R: Well one of the biggest obstacles, as I've said at Gwynn Park, is keeping the worst kids away from me. I operate on the same principles as I have in community circus - I am the servant of this particular community, this school community. I'm doing what I've been asked to do, I'll whinge about it from time to time you know straight up to Carmen, but I'm not going to whinge too much because I'll make her feel bad, I'll make her feel as if she's wasted her time and money. So I make the best of it, I'm also going to do this other show -I'm going to do a six day residency working with the whole school and put together a show with about eighty kids in it. You know, do some workshops with each class, you'll

see another way of working and a lot more kids have a lot more fun. There's limitation of time of communication, see you've found out so much more about Padbury than I have because you've had time to talk to the teachers. At other schools I've insisted on about 45 minutes a day of dot time where I've caught up with teachers, or maybe I've instigated another activity, a democratic way of working out what we're going to put into our circus, or T-shirt design or poster design, things like this. Whereas at Padbury it's just wall to wall kids.

S: Yes one after the other.

R: It's a decision you make you know, I could just insist on it which means one less class.

S: OK...you talked a little bit about the performances then. How important are they to you, to the kids to the teachers? Versus the process...

R: I think they are very important. I didn't used to; when I first started working on things like this it was back in 1970 we never ever performed. Kids never performed, we would do professional shows, Annie and I would do professional shows every year, twice a year. So kids would just come for the experience of improvisation, play making. It wasn't until I did circus, that I found that there was something missing. I still believe that, I don't think kids necessarily need to act drama, because acting drama is pretending, whereas performing circus is not pretending. So there's two almost separate experiences that children are getting out of a program like this ten week one. One is the first five weeks, which is purely "look what I can do", or "if I do this, then I can achieve this", the second experience is rehearsal - where they see me actually getting ideas from them, but also encouraging them to come with their own ideas and actually blending them together, but actually making a reality out of ideas making concepts into a piece. And then there's the actual performance itself and they are also learning about the discipline of rehearsal -which is quite heavy stuff, and then the show itself is usually just a wonderful thing that they are going to remember all their lives, just the experience of the lights going out, they get to wear glorious costumes and makeup. And I remember telling somebody after one of those big shows somebody said "oh that's the best show our school has ever done!" It's important, it's really traumatic because if you have a bad experience like that, and once or twice it's happened. Once or twice I've had a kid who just can't handle it and they have cried. One kid blamed me for it because I was fairly abrupt backstage and I was just...you know, for one little moment one kid was sort of letting me down on something and I said something a little bit harsh and it was way too harsh for her at that moment and she was just heartbroken. So was I of course, that I could have caused that, and the other time it was just some little kid who was freaking out.

S: Two people crying out of all those shows that you have put on, that's a pretty good track record. I get one every time I do a show - I usually get more than one.

R: Yeah, I suppose it is. It's not a bad thing to aim for, 'cause the experience for the kids is much more important than the experience for the audience. The audience are going to love it anyway.

S: How important is the parent/helpers, the involvement of the community?

R: In the years when I only did community circuses, not school stuff, it was totally vital. You know if it didn't have that it wasn't going to continue. Sometimes these things go on, sometimes they fade away. In the school context it's still very important, but I feel that I don't give it enough importance. I'd love to give it more. At Gwynn Park I met this committee of ladies who are going to do the sewing and men who are going to do the scenery. But given the time that I've got, I'm not going to spend much time with them. I tend to tell them that as well, I tend to say "look you're not going to see much of me because my time here is for your children, I don't want to mess you about" I mean they want to start making the costumes right there and then. Carmen was a bit worried about this as well. But I said "look... I absolutely cannot tell you now who is going to be wearing which costume", but I said "look I know we need a few more leotards and so on - there's something for you to go on with". I don't know if there is any intention for the circus to go after I've gone or not, no-one has mentioned it and I'm not in a position to want it either because I'm still doing a PhD. If I was a freelance worker, I might actually encourage some schools to carry on - partly to provide some work for me and partly for other people. One of the High Schools, in fact it is one of the worst High Schools in NSW I was told - The Drama teacher stayed on for 2 or 3 years and the music teacher and a lot of the parents - that circus stayed in the school for ten years after I'd left. New Drama teachers come in, they went through two other Drama teachers since Barbara, who was there with me, and they'd come out of College and all they knew was to do with Drama so who needs unicycles, but the kids said no we do circus here, and the kids just 'beavered on', and it took 10 years to wipe out that circus and in the end, they worked really hard to wipe it out. Parents actually of the younger kids would phone me up and say "Reg the Drama teachers are saying we can't do circus" and I'd have to have a quiet word with them. I was very encouraged by that and in 1986, I popped back in there and a whole lot of kids didn't know who I was, didn't want to know who I was. I was just another visitor looking at the circus, you know the following year. So parents sometimes can keep it going but parents disappear when their kids disappear.

S: What about that situation with the stilts?

R: Oh that's fairly rare, as you know working with circus, it's fairly rare that out of the blue some kid says "oh year my dad can walk stilts", like that kid yesterday his dad is a lion tamer, he's about to go off to Africa to get some more lions

S: And he's got scratches on his arms from playing with the baby lions!

R: That's a Year 1 kid - isn't that beautiful. So you get kids saying "oh my dad used to work in the circus" and you just say "oh yeah?" And that's it. And then one of the teachers says "this guy used to do stilts", and then he turns up at the staff meeting and he's getting on my stilts and wandering around the playground. I have to spend 5 minutes of tactful time "saying can you do it my way 'cause that's the way I've taught the kids". On balance - he's an asset that fellow.

S: And one of the other ladies that helps take the plate spinning - it's having an amazing effect on her, you can see she's loving it – it's very important to her, being able to share that with her son

R: Oh she's loving it and her son is really coming on. I mean there again, she's the one who tells me he's a dummy. I'm telling her that he's not.

S: OK million dollar question – why do you believe the students at Padbury are picking up the circus skills more quickly than the students at Gwynn Park?

R: Why is that happening? I don't think it can be me because I am really doing the same thing with both of them aren't I? The facilities are about the same, the equipment is the same, the technique is the same - maybe it's the gene pool! I'm quoting a teacher there. By elimination it almost has to be the teachers and the ethos of the school. The behaviour has to be a part of it, the fact that you have got more kids who are likely to freak out, or do have a shorter attention span but then that is the job of that school at Gwynn Park, is to work on the kid's attention span. And in a way, that is why they brought me in and I've got no proof of this, but it is possible that they are concentrating more when they are stilt walking than they ever have when they are doing a bit of maths. So it may be amongst everything else, we are teaching them to focus on something and we are improving their learning skills.

S: Is it unusual? I mean you talk about it as if it is unusual and I know that you have got lots of experience working with young people...

R: It is a bit, it's the slowest school I've worked at in a while. I mean we've got no kids riding unicycle really. I mean we've got a couple of kids who can just about make it. I mean we've got that exceptional boy Robert and it's been 10 weeks and he can just about ride across the gym but he can't do a standing start. Now every other school within 10 weeks, you've got at least half a dozen kids doing free mounts and a series of tricks on the unicycle. Individually again, Robert you see... he just taught himself to juggle, you want a back-flip, there it is! You want a somersault, right - there it is and he went for his gold. Doesn't seem to give a stuff, and we've been told on good authority that he's a "thoroughly nasty child". Have you heard that one? "He's a bad lot that child?" He is charismatic and brilliant, and it may well be in the context of that sort of schooling and that sort of treatment, that's the only way to treat the school. I mean I don't know I can't come down too heavily cause I don't know the whole story. It may be that some of the kids at Padbury do gym, although not many said they do, but the acrobatics is not much different is it?

S: No.

R: In fact, I think the acrobatics at Gwynn Park is slightly more advanced, I think you've got more overweight and stiff kids at Padbury that need a good shakeup, and you've got more physically uninhibited kids at Gwynn Park who will give it a go. Juggling – it's not a huge difference even though they've had three weeks more. What was that one thing that we saw that was really remarkable – that was juggling wasn't it?

S: Yes juggling. I mentioned to you yesterday about trust and perhaps learning to trust and let go – with adults?

R: Yeah trusting environment, trustworthy environment. I think that theory of yours is right. There is a series of weeks of getting to know each other, I mean that one little kid, that little clown kid at Gwynn Park - Beth I think her name is. She's the little girl who said to me last week "You get on my nerves!" Now whatever that means to a nine year old, it means something quite important that she can say that to me. It may mean more that "you invade my space once too often", or it may mean "I am uneasy around men", it may mean a million things, but the fact is that she said it to me and it's put me on my guard.

S: Probably doesn't happen very often?

R: No it doesn't happen very often no, but it's put me on my guard. I was probably a little bit on my guard before that child, now I'm doubly on my guard that I don't in any way offend or hurt her, threaten her - but at the same time I'm not going to put her behind a glass plate or ignore her. I find myself more and more going back to my own primary school days and trying to look at what I was like and what the other kids at my school were like. I wasn't really aware of anybody being utterly stupid although there must have been some. If I analyse it now, I think I saw them as either a threat, a friend or somebody who had some good toys somebody who had a nice sister or whatever. And I never really looked at myself in those days. I was a smart little bastard and I was as naughty as hell and some teachers appreciated me and some teachers hated me and of course I did much better for those teachers who appreciated me, I was great and to them, I was the perfect student. To the ones who did not like me, I was nothing but a pain in the ass - which is why I'm a bit down on teachers. They've just got to look at the potential of every single child and I'm hoping that that is what I do, look for and nourish the potential of every single child. I mean that boy Matthew, that huge square and round at the same time, that massive boy at Gwynn Park – he's a tightrope walker. He just did it and he got his bronze and I was just so glad because he doesn't want to do any acrobatics, he just sits around suffering. Now if I need him for anything within his hearing I'll say to some kid, "yeah get Matthew, you know the tightrope fellow". And I'll give him this little reminder that there's something that I can cherish and appreciate in him.

S: OK moving on from Gwynn Park and Padbury I may return but on a general level - how many in-school residencies have you done and what usually happens afterwards?

R: These sort of typical one term and sometimes two term ones I've done about 12 or 15 I think, but there are other schools where I've done once a week programs like High Schools for example Methodist Ladies College, Presbyterian Ladies College, Catholic Colleges where I go in one case Year 9 dance classes for 4 or 5 weeks. Each is kind of different depending on the situation I find myself in and the activities of the teachers. At Corpus Christie I see the kids four times, the first two weeks we go through everything, the second half of the third week I rehearse a show, the fourth week the kids come down from the Primary School, the adjoining Primary School and I enjoy that I think I have a lower mental age

than most people I think I have a mental age of about 7. I'm good at High Schools I think, but I just personally have more fun at Primary School level.

S: Mandurah High School – just generally what happened and if you have any reservations about that kind of program?

R: My main reservation about that is I don't think that they've got the critical mass to get it working, but I didn't tell them that cause you can't, they pay me to come in and encourage it.

S: So they asked you to come in?

R: Yes - and just help them get a circus program up. I've actually got a belief Sharon in sort of sowing seeds, rather than planting plants and so I scatter the ideas around the place, even within a bunch of kids, and where you see it shooting - that's the one you go and water - that's the one you go and nourish. Whereas, if you pay a lot of money for a pot plant and you put it in a pot and it doesn't grow very well, maybe the pot is wrong in the first place or maybe it is the wrong plant. In other words, if you said "right this is what is going to happen at this school, at this time" it can often be a costly mistake and so going down to Mandurah even though they asked me to go down there and they're going to pay me to do it and I'm not going to say "no", I feel that it is a bit of a seed and I really don't know if it is going to grow or not.

S: Do they usually grow? What usually happens as a result of Teacher In- services?

R: They usually do, but sometimes they don't last long. There's never really a disastrous effect of that, you know, if it does just fade away. Sometimes they are apologetic to me, you know if they see me in the street, "sorry about the way things turned out Reg". But I say "no problem."

S: What do you see as ideal for a PD/In-service for teachers?

R: If a school really wanted it – oh gee – look, I think a one term residency which again might be one day a week, which incorporated with the students a series of four or five specific learning classes like we had at Mandurah, where we had 4 students was it and 3 adults - but imagine half a dozen teachers and maybe a dozen students, learning together but those dozen students know that on this particular after school session, it's for the teachers and they are just guinea pigs. They feel very good, to have four or five classes like that where you could really go through all the techniques, and you could sit down and plan with them the structure of the circus, whether you're going to have any sort of levels scheme, how many shows you are going to plan ahead of time, whether it's a sub-committee that plans the shows, make some simple rules. Once you've got the rules it's easy but if you haven't got any rules it's tricky. But if you can say to every child, almost every action, the parent, or the teacher, even the child explain to it you know "I'm going to have to touch you here and here". OK - easy no problem at all, it's been explained, bang, bang. That's why – Insurance you've got to deal with that, finance – whether you're going to charge for shows, whether the circus should be a separate entity, see if it can apply for it's own funding, how much publicity you want. I would still be inclined because of my nature to do the seeding thing. Maybe talk with Manual Arts to see if it's a go, maybe see if there's still a single sewing teacher in the world – talk with them. The Librarian,

and really take that time lay down some fertiliser, so that the seeds have got a chance.

S: Even then if the ethos of the school is very much as it was as Mandurah - if we're going to have unicyclists, they're going to have helmets and knee pads.

R: I throw it all open for discussion. I am actually a person who can take on an issue as in One Wheel a unicycling magazine – where it is publicly canvassed and discussed and you'll see that after a lot of rational argument the Association has come down in favour of leaving it optional, even in their unicycle lacings, because on balance - one of things they're doing is absorbing that instinctive foolhardy risk taking of adolescents, where we'd rather they be doing this where they've got access to an ambulance if they need than climbing trees or fences unsupervised.

S: Circus in a Suitcase and what I saw, was that normal, is that what usually happens when you turn up to a school fete or festival?

R: Yeah well the point I made at the end of it and it happened there, it wasn't one of the best gigs – it wasn't that bad either. The first kids that turn up often set the tone for the whole thing and I just let them ... you know I'm quite happy to see what is going to happen today. On that day, a few girls turned up, wandered around on stilts for the first half hour and then when I'm asked where the Circus is going to be this time I say "well look we're going to be over there and I need some help putting the tent up". I get a spruiker going fairly early remember that little kid who was selling the chocolates? Well I just gave him the microphone let him sell his chocolates. Then I put on a bit of circus music and got him to make my announcements from time to time and he was just great. And then it was about an average sort of show Sharon. You saw what happened, you saw these kids that turned up, they rode the unicycles, put the stilts on wrongly I had to shout across to them occasionally, may or may not have nicked a few bits of equipment, generally speaking nobody nicks anything which is a miracle really.

S: And you didn't want to use a marquee?

R: No I like my little tent. Normally I do a pole-climbing act I just forgot it this time. Normally you need some really tough little wiry kids, they go up and they do that little Chinese thing with their hands out and I get four of them and I call it this human shish kebab, and you know it hardly needs any rehearsal. If one kid can do it well I just say look you chose 3 other kids and I tell him this is how we do the act. And I'll tell you how I do that actually because you didn't see it. I say you are the tent inspectors and as soon as I mention the word tent inspectors you guys march in, you march around the ring and you stop in front of me. And I'll ask you who you are, and you tell me you are the tent inspectors and you've got to check the tent poles. I'll stand in front of this one as if I'm hiding it, you go in and you check all the tent poles and then when you come back to me I say "right which one of you is going to climb it?" and they say "we all are!" Then I'll say "yeah - but one at a time!" And they say "No! All at once!" And then I look really worried and I say "what happens if you all climb up and it falls down?" And they say "that means it's not safe" and then I've got this little bit of music and I press a little button and it's a thirty second fanfare long enough to get four kids

up a pole and then once they're up there I say "OK you guys - no hands" and everyone claps and I say human shish kebab or kids on a stick.

S: A lot of the parents of the kids who are in the show were standing way back. Why is that? Is that usual?

R: No it's unusual, that's because the marquee was there. Sometimes I get a rope and another set of bunting between the poles here, I noticed there were two or three little boys, 8 or 9 year old boys who kept overlapping in and out and they made the whole thing look a bit ragged. So I was aware of that and normally it's a little bit tighter.

S: Oh it was great! I was just a bit more curious about the audience response?

R: Yes sometimes I get huge audiences (shows picture), this is years ago in Esperance - that is someone else's tent right there. That's a few years ago also in Darwin

S: Right.

R: (Shows picture), that is a very small child in a gorilla suit.

S: Which kind of circus teaching do you find more rewarding? Is it in school residencies, the PD's, is it the teachers and the planting of seeds or your instant circus?

R: The first thing – just working in the schools, getting to know each child even though I don't even know all their names and seeing them make real progress over the ten weeks, yeah that's the best thing for me. Probably not and I've cut down a lot on the "make a circus" sort of gigs, because I've cut down on everything and I'm only taking just a few and I'm mainly doing it just to keep my hand in and I'm charging more money for them now, so maybe I'm just pricing myself out deliberately. And sometimes I've come in and done a ten week residency without really telling the teachers what I'm doing, and so I've had no help from them at all, they've just looked over my shoulder. Mind you, in the case of these teachers, it's probably down to me for not giving them the opportunity of stepping in. One of the qualities of the residency which I always try to emphasise is that I'm not imposing on the teachers, you know they've got enough on their plate anyway.

S: Why do you do it? After all this time and all these kids and schools and instant circuses and PD programs why are you still doing it?

R: It's because I like doing it and it's because I'm good at it and that sounds pretty glib but it ties up with something I often elucidate in my theory of the design of life. Ideally you should find out what you are good at and what you like and that's what you should do. Jobs that you are no good at, or some people do jobs that they are good at but that they don't like doing or both, you know they don't like it and they're no good at it and you know the amount of bad service we get from tradesmen, beaurocrats or whatever, you've got both of those things they're no good at it and they don't like doing it. I like doing what I do and I seem to be good at it so that's why I do it, and that ethos spreads across into the circus in that there is a wide range of activities and the children get to choose what it is they want to do. You didn't really see it the other day in that one of but if I'm

doing that sort of show where I'm there for a week or there for a whole day in a school you'll get some children who don't want to perform but they are very happy to keep a list and be my stage managers and they're always there by my hand, or they will want to sort out the tapes or they'll want to play the drums, or they will want to tidy the costumes and it's because they want to do it, and they are probably going to be fairly good at it. And that's why I'm doing it because I'm actually living what I believe and because I can.

S: Why is circus so appealing for yourself and for kids?

R: It's appealing because it's something for you to do and be appreciated for and it's also appealing that people clap you. I mean you do it and people look at you in awe and say "aren't you marvelous!" I'm talking about the children not for myself but there is also a lot of subconscious, symbolical stuff that I'm going into now. I mean it's all about dreams and I won't go into it too much now. But as I've written about before, one of the things is you go to traditional circus or any circus really and what you are watching is a series of phobias acted out before your very eyes. Things that would normally scare you witless; I mean there's heights, instability things that would actually give you nightmares, there is fire, absolutely things that nightmares are made up of and phobias are built on and you get one on top of the other - that may not be the case for the children's circus, but what I'm saying is that there is something about the way circus has evolved that really touches our innermost depths and rather than be the victims of it we're taking control of it. I haven't looked hard enough at how that effects children and that's what I'm looking at, but I'm totally convinced that there is really deep currents.

S: Totally changing their physical shape as well and as you said overcoming this thing which is...?

R: It really is real, when they are living in such a virtual world now and having such vicarious adventures in Nintendo, like this is for real, this is it. I've told you about the big 6 things haven't I?

S: In your book yes.

R: I'll give them to you now - there you are, there's my hand. I use this both in my own memoir and also if I'm giving a public talk. What I'm telling you now is things I think children need, I'm not a child psychologist, I'm not talking literacy and numeracy and stuff, I'm talking mainly about children who start happening after all the books have been written. Most books about child development stop at about nine years old, I'm talking about after that really, what it seems to me that children need before that and after that. Showing off which is about showing themselves to the world, or developing their self-image, designing themselves. The big finger, the one that sticks out always gets hurt, it's at risk, sticks out from the crowd, sticks out from normal behaviour, potentially puts you at physical risk. Every child needs that at some stage. This one here the ring finger, that's trust that is quite happy to live with the others. This one here knows it's the smallest one here, but it's about dreams and aspirations, a child has got a potential future that is limitless, any child. The next one represents hard work, a child often doesn't know the difference between work and play and with a lucky worker like me there is no difference between work and play and in life generally, there's not

much difference between work and play, if you enjoy your work or if you can play hard you know it's usually apples. But decreasingly now children are given opportunities to do some real good physical hard work a few blisters, a few aching muscles. There are the main 6 things that children do need. Now if a child is missing any of those it shows, you know if they don't trust, if they are not dreaming, if they daren't take a risk, if they've no self image, if they don't know how to work out, if they never laugh, any of those things can be really weird. A kid missing a few of those... and my passion for circus is that they can fill up those gaps, you just lay it out on a plate and you know if you're short on Vitamin C you'd just go for the oranges, if you need iron you'd go for the rocket or whatever. And so with circus you've got the chance of going for the thing you've missed out on. Now you look at those things and you put it against the other hand and the other hand represents circus. And what is circus if not showing off, taking risks, a community trusting each other, dreams symbols, bloody hard work and clowns, humour and the two hands face each other so perfectly that the potential the very nature of circus the needs, my perceived needs of children fit each other so perfectly, I think I've got it made, I could just do the hands...?

S: You could!

R: So that's the long and short answer.

S: Looking at the Rings of Desire book and the three main definitions that she comes to when she is talking about circus, craft, art and entertainment.

R: Well you've read that book better than I have. OK I start with the craft then I do the art, then I do the entertainment. That's the three sections of my residency, pure craft at the beginning, then art which is actually making the show then the entertainment is presenting it.

S: Which one is the most important?

R: Which is the most important? Which can we do without? You could do without ... you could not do without the craft, although I did. I did without the craft on Sunday, no craft at all was there, that was just entertainment. A bit of artful entertainment, but then I've already done the art to some extent in the past by actually planning it and bringing all the gear. Could you do without the entertainment? The other thing I think is really important in circus is giving back to society. I got into big trouble at the Circus conferences when I was over there, because once or twice I used the word 'generosity' and I think it's really important that it gives the potential of troubled youth particularly, victimised young people to give back to society, to themselves be generous cause they're often the victims of other people's generosity. This time they can genuinely be themselves and just give everything they've got, their beauty, their strength, their charisma, their potential and other people will just go "oh wow - thank you!" Now that is such a rare opportunity for young people to have, to give and that's the entertainment. Until you have entertained somebody else you have not rounded off the circle, you haven't given something back.

S: What do you think the children think they are getting art, craft or entertainment?

R: At the moment I think most of those children think the same as I do, certainly High School children think in terms of craft, think in terms of learning technique. Once you start designing the show then they start thinking of it. I mean you saw those kids yesterday doing entertainment. I said “I want a beginning, a middle and an end” and they had to turn it into their art, shaping the show and they didn’t quite realise the potential entertainment until they did it as a performance. So they actually had it all in miniature in one lesson yesterday. She is right to have analysed those three things, but you can analyse anything, but some of them really don’t know at all, some of them think I’m just an incursion. Some of them think I’m just some sort of funny uncle - like are you going to pay this clown? Others like the ones who rebook me like ten years later, which is what happened here, realise that I am somewhere carrying you know like Frodo and the ring some sort of answer to Life, the Universe and everything like I’m carting it around with me and this might be the time to bring out the ring and slip it on my finger. So different teachers have got different concepts, and even if I did persuade everybody that circus is what they need, I’m just going to leave them frustrated and that’s why I’m saying that we’re in a golden age at the moment, pretty soon everybody is going to want one. There will be people teaching how to do it and like every other thing it will become a little bit banal. It will start being done badly.

S: The whole way when you are teaching and you are throwing yourself into pyramids and doing demos and creating spectacle and magic the whole way along. Is that part of what makes learning a forward roll in circus different to learning a forward roll in PE? What makes it so different?

R: It may just be a personal thing to me in that I like doing it, but and some PE teachers might do that – I’m not sure if it’s appropriate in PE because presumably a PE teacher will demonstrate how to shoot a basket, or how to hit a cricket ball and then they will challenge the kids to come up to their standard and most of the teachers. I know they will desperately try to stay ahead of the standard of the kids and be admired for such. The PE specialists in these schools, it’s very attractive for a little kid to see such clean, expensive shoes, such white sox and such golden hair on the legs and that they are so good at T-ball and basketball and they know somebody who plays for the Dockers, they are heroes and now hang on where am I getting to because I myself am setting up as some sort of hero because I’m the bloke who can do it, and I’m always fun to be around and a car full of goodies. So PE teachers sort of equate... look it’s basically because I’m suspicious of what PE teachers teach. You know they teach about winning and losing although they try not to. The reason they are PE teachers is because they were good at T-ball when they were kids and they’ve gone on to do PE and they’ve come out as winners. I haven’t got golden hairs on my legs you know I’m short and I don’t think I’m a roll model.

S: Hmm...that’s interesting...

R: Although you do get some kids, some kids say to me “Reg when I grow up I’m going to do exactly what you do”. And I say “what is that?” And they start talking about the car, a car full of gear. And I say “well make sure you get it right”, but really what I do is and then I start talking to them about the design of life. What

I've done is I've found out what I like and what I'm good at and I do it the best I can and I say "that's what you should do!" Role model like that is all-right, but I'm certainly not a role model at T-ball, that sort of narrow field of Physical Education.

S: How is it different a forward role in circus and a forward roll in PE?

R: OK, also I have less rules, I have stupid rules sometimes, I have simple rules and what I'm doing with the handprints is saying there are ways of getting it right. Nobody is going to win a gymnastic medal if they've been taught by me but they can entertain and there is a difference. I mean it's more important to entertain than to win a medal, more important to give than to receive, that's the difference.

S: Is there a perception in their mind if they believe if they've doing it for circus, that they will not necessarily do it differently?

R: If another teacher tells them that they've got it all wrong, but then that happens to me as well. You've got some kids coming in and they doing these little 'flicky' sort of gymnastic moves, little acrobatic things before they start, and that's all-right, it's quite showy, I don't really make a big deal about that. What I do make a big deal about is this one where they do the forward roll and then they hold their feet in you know in order to get up. In the very early stages it's quite a good little hint for sort of coming forward but they don't need to do that any more once they can do the forward roll, and it's a bit like the trainer wheels on a bike you don't need that kind of stuff any more, it's much more important to bring your hands out, open to the audience. So yes there is a difference.

S: Just getting down to the coaching stuff and I'm talking about that horrible book that I was reading, have you found that any one method is more effective?

R: No I use different methods for different moments for different kids and different stages of their learning. I might say "go and look at so and so", other times I'll explain it and I'm not saying that I'm always right, but my instinct is that there are different things for different circumstances. Other times I'll face them and I'll say "just copy me" and I do tend to with some aboriginal kids to say "look at me and copy" because my experience is with traditional aboriginal kids is that's how they learn, they learn by copying. Other kids want to analyse it, others I just let them go and do it themselves and occasionally I'll point out that they are making a mistake, like they are rolling the wrong way. You know people say to me "you should write a manual and you should have a program". You would risk working in a way that maybe suits half the class and doesn't suit the others and reinforces failure and doesn't give opportunity for learning. I worry that, even yesterday when I was doing the backward rolls there were at some stage fifteen kids standing around doing nothing, when I was doing like one forward roll at a time and I kept that pretty short and I gave them the option of not even being there, going off and doing something else. If I had to teach every child a forward roll then I need to rethink it. I don't have to teach every child a forward roll. If I was there long enough then I might, I might even manage it in most cases in that class, I might find myself with a spare period and I might say "right all the children who can't do forward rolls over here" and I'd give them another little go. Then I'd start telling them little stories, doing the techniques this is backward rolls I'm talking about. I think a backward roll is a very important maneuver and a few

seasons ago, there was a goal umpire at Subiaco who for some reason was in front of the line when the score went and he looked back like that, he walked back to see if the goal was going through the posts and somehow he tripped fell backwards did a backward roll and come out of it with his fingers out – it was a classic and I think in the same game somebody was bundled off into touch or whatever they call it in footy and again did a backward roll you know just to survive and these particular images were remembered by a lot of the kids. I say if you're going backwards you have a choice of either falling flat on your back and banging your head or rolling.

S: Whether you do it consciously or not – one thing is never more important than the other thing. Like a throw or a catch in diablo is not necessarily more important than a backward roll or getting up on stilts. Safety is always important but as far as skills go nothing is paramount like is the most important thing.

R: No it's not, in fact that is at odds with my circus training. Most circus training is acrobatics is the main thing – get your handstand right, rolls are almost understood that they have to be perfect. Then from that you will gradually become a great circus performer. Which is absolutely true if you want to become a great ballet dancer you have got to get your hands and your points and your movement you've got to get it right. They are the building bricks that make great circus performers. I'm not out to make great circus performers. If you ask a group of kids what's the best thing about circus you'd get so many different answers which reflect their own personality and if I'm doing my show which you still haven't seen, is the one you know the instant show where I just take kids, or my kinder show where I don't prepare anything but I come in with a big box of circus stuff and I put up a blackboard and I write down all the things they tell me and I discover the things, I discover the juggling balls and they tell me about juggling, and I discover the stilts and at the end of that they send me the letters and they say my favourite bit in the circus was ... and they're all different. Some kids loved it when the gorilla jumped out and scared somebody; some kids loved it when Jimmy stood on my shoulders or when you fell over. Whereas in a lot of teaching, there is not that chance for a child to find their own way in it.

S: This is a little bit unrelated but when I looked back on my notes I realised I didn't ask you with the juggling and the kids, the really difficult bit for them is the letting go of the balls, like the throwing the balls. Do you think that is because they are obsessed with this I must catch everything, I'm scared of failing, or is it just that throwing is harder?

R: There are a few things. One is general tidiness; another is the concept of juggler - a juggler is someone who can catch things, well as you and I know a juggler is somebody who can throw things well and then the catching looks after itself. It's the throwing that is important. Another one is the pure hassle of picking them up, I think that's all it is.

S: OK I was just curious because I was watching them, and it seems to be the biggest thing when they are juggling – I didn't want to let go of it. Mike Maloney's quote which I mentioned to you. "The goal of

**circus Belfast is the empowerment of people over their environment”
– how do you feel about it. What do you think about it and do you agree with it?**

R; Well I'm not sure what the word empowerment means as I said to you this morning. I mistrust the word empowerment because when I worked in the city there in the Department of the Arts, when I was the Community Arts Officer and this was in 1989-90, and most of the community arts funding seemed to be going for projects that involved empowerment of people and bugger all was going to artists and so if you wanted to do a workshop with a lot of chairing techniques and a lot of butchers paper you'd get your money. But if you were just an artist who had a hunch or if you wanted to employ crazy artists you'd have a job getting your money. Now I was suspicious of that because generally speaking who were doing all these other workshops looked like 'wankers' to me who could be absolutely anything that could just as easily be in the insurance industry and artists who I thought we were existing for on whose backs we were riding as beurocrats to whose genius we were parasites weren't getting paid. So I was doubtful about it and I really agonised about it and I said "William I know what this is about, this empowerment is empire building, it means that so many more people, neighbourhood people, neighbourhood organisations are joining our club, they're getting their clipboards and their butcher's paper and they're being told now you are empowered, you have been empowered to hold discussions and to apply for grants. You are in our club, our club is now bigger, we are still at the top of it you are at the bottom of it and you are empowered". So there was a lot of bullshit around that word and so I'm still a bit suspicious of it, I'm not quite sure what it means. Now going back to what I also said earlier today about the theory – education, child development – in that children are seeking something, are driven by something and not as Freud said "sex", but in fact "power". Power is a word that has all sorts of evil connotations but it's about having and not having powre i.e. you want to have what you don't have. And I think it's perfectly reasonable that children should be after some sort of power and so coming around to what you were saying and Mike's quote – empowerment of the child within or above?

S: Over their environment...

R: I'd more say within their environment because otherwise it does seem like domination. It's a bit like the missionaries going to Africa, having the power over the Dark Continent. I'm not saying there's a big thing between me and Mike, I'm sure it's just a fairly off-the-cuff comment and I don't think we differ in our philosophy, but if you have to put it in words I'd say it's a bit of a "self empowerment within your environment", so within it then you don't feel like a victim or a powerless person.

S: Is environment a big part of circus?

R: Well your physical, bodily environment yes. You are yourself, you are the flesh in which you are living and it's good to have some control of that and within that and don't let your weakness, your fear, your obesity, whatever it is be your master. I like the little environment that I produce with my little tent. It's a little magical place and I've written elsewhere and I will write again about the magic,

'sacred wigwam of the big top' – yes that environment is very magical and very important. But there is a bigger thing and it's another gig I may have to give up if I go to New York but they're having a students for sustainability national conference and it's happening here in July. I've just offered to do a whole lot of circus workshops for them because I think there are very big links between conservation and sustainability and circus as opposed to many other recreational activities.

S: That sound interesting.

R: Well the one to talk to is Mike Finch at Circus Oz. He talks about not only sustainability and specifically permaculture as his conceptual framework for circus. He's very interesting to talk to about that. It's interesting you know when kids go out into the forests what do they love? Drumming, twirling, juggling, devil sticks things like that. There are not that many circus people who are into jet skis, 4-wheel drives and destructive and self-destructive stuff so the environment support is there on many levels.

S: How is community circus different from other circus and what is their relationship and status? Do they need each other?

R: No. Real circus doesn't need community circus. It can be argued it does better without it. I had this argument years and years ago when I wrote my first book 'Circus in a Suitcase'. One of the circus people I spoke to said "you are giving all our secrets away", to which I argued "no I'm not I'm actually informing people and so they now know the difference between good circus and excellent circus and also bad circus - so bad circus had better watch out!" Which was a kind of veiled criticism of the person who had asked me the question – it sort of implies that if you're scared of this, it means you're doing bad circus. And I also said "that you're going to get a lot more people coming to circus now, now that they actually know about it". I'm not sure whether that has actually happened, like for instance the University of Western Australian Juggling Club is all mathematicians, computer nerds, engineers who would never go to a circus in their lives, because they're so smug that they are sure they know it all. Occasionally I have taken a group of kids from a community circus to a circus and they come out and say "but - there was no stilts!" It didn't match up to what they thought circus was going to be. So I am a little bit self-critical now about this thing that community circus is good for a circus. They don't need it at all, they do thrive on their upperness and their transgressive image and they're probably better when nobody knows what they are. Certainly Cirque du Soleil thrives on an ignorant audience, they are the same people who are made to buy soft drinks or any product. They also fall for the same sort of publicity Cirque Du Soleil uses which is no different from Barnum. I mean it's the art of humbug and I am sort of de-humbugging circus, which is not a very good thing for circus people. The other way around – does community circus need circus? No it doesn't. I do – I survive in both worlds, but some young people can learn so much from doing circus in their community, which may be the school, you know education circuses as a recreation, they may learn so much from that without ever going to a real circus, then they go to one and they are disappointed. So they don't actually need each other. It's very strange that they are in my opinion two independently

existing universes and I'm very, very happy to have a foot in both. I would love people to be aware of both but they don't need to.

S: Interesting. You talked about your PhD research – what are the goals of it?

R: Goals of my PhD?

S: Goals of the research.

R: OK. I'll answer that by saying why am I doing a PhD. There are three or four reasons. One is I'm 56 years old now and I could just fade away and if I just get a bad leg or get accused of child molesting or any one of other reasons that could stop me from doing it, I'll just drift away and that will be that and I'll just go on to something else. So for my own personal satisfaction I want to put a keystone on my arch to hold the whole thing together and end with a 'bang'. Another reason is that I want to use some long words before I forget them all because I've spent the past 30 years using short words to short people, my brain is going a little big soggy so I want that intellectual challenge for myself. Another one is I thought I might enjoy being among young, smart people mainly university students, in fact seeing them walk around with Coca Cola in their ear, drinking from a mobile phone you think hand on there's something funny going on here. But I'm finding some very stimulating people among the graduates and a few of the under-graduates so I mean I'm just enjoying the process of going to university, waking up and thinking "oh yeah, I read for a living and chat to people and think". That's my job, so it's an indulgence, and possibly as an adjunct to that what am I doing for other people? There's still a huge gap, a lack of, some credible scholarship in the field that we are working in. You are doing a lovely job I think and hopefully I'll do a decent job and so people who follow us would then be able to hold up the McCutcheon Thesis and the Bolton Thesis and say "look guys - there is some reason for this". So it's an aspect of service to the colleagues, to the peer group.

S: Thank you – what an answer. We sort of touched on reservations.

Reservations – do you ever have maybe I shouldn't be doing this, maybe I shouldn't be putting this out into the universe and when you talked about circus, you said you've got a foot in both areas.

Sometimes do you think oh this is the wrong thing, I shouldn't be doing this?

R: Day by day you have reservations about some things but generally speaking no Sharon. Generally speaking I am so confident that I am on the right track. If I'd ever had any reservations at all I'd have had them about 10 years ago but enough work came along to keep me going and I still enjoyed it you know getting up every day and going and doing circus. Now when we're beginning to approach some sort of critical mass and now the conference circuit has started and you know the last year as you know I've been to Europe and America and other places interstate – I don't know how many times, I've lost could and generally traveling as an invited and presumably respected person obviously the time has come and if I did have reservations over the last 10 years bloody good job I didn't act on them. And so now I've got none at all. Occasionally I've got little bits of self doubt and humility creeping in but not enough, you know I've still

got that self esteem problem of having way too much and I'm still going to be a bit hard to stop.

S: Links between what you're doing – because I've seen all these pictures of you and Neil Cameron and I know you started in the same place. Links between what you are doing and the work of Welfare State and/or Neil Cameron.

R: I don't know Welfare State's work enough, although I told you about my 10 years link with John and out of the blue he asked me to direct a show and I had to say "no I'm going to immigrate to Australia to-morrow". So links between us – if you're not careful it comes back to what I was saying to you earlier in the shed about generosity. This controversy I had with what I consider the real missionaries – the people who are doing circus in South America and all these other places. They hated it when I used the word generosity. I was talking about the generosity of the young people – the fact that they got the chance to give something back but they thought I was talking about missionaries being generous. They hated it, number one because they hate missionaries, and number two because they have this nagging subconscious fear that they are missionaries themselves, which we are. It's one of the 5 things we spoke of and I noticed this first of all when I was working with young Aboriginal kids in detention centres that nobody ever, apart from maybe their girlfriends and their mother and maybe their footy coaches, says to them "you are a bloody wonderful person. Thank you for being young, charismatic, strong and courageous". Normally people see them coming and say "oh it's those black kids, let's cross the street". Circus gives the opportunity for them to be young, charismatic and courageous and for everybody to clap and do it and so there for once they've got an opportunity to give straight back, and so I use the word generosity for that and maybe I should come up with a better word but that was the context and that was the concept that scared the other people. Now Neil I know from his earliest background had a hang up about being so privileged. I won't say too much about this because it is probably too personal and he may not agree with it. He made a conscious decision to go from one of the poshest schools in Edinburgh to one of the worst adventure playgrounds and sink himself into that sort of work. From that he saw his opportunity in theatre and performance and rather like I've done, he's linked together all his best qualities and he's run a design of life which includes having a wonderful partner now with whom they can be generous, which Neil is. Fundamentally Neil is one of the most generous people I know, but like me and like most of us he's also self-indulgent and he can get away with one under the guise of the other. But the ultimate thing is that he's generous – hundred and thousands of people – audience members – have got so much out of the opportunity of working with Neil and he can use the art for doing it because he has always had this profound belief in the Arts. He has become thoroughly disenchanted with community arts as it has become taken over by the grey forces. The same grey forces that threatened John Fox in Welfare State and he just shrugged them off. You know he had that bad review in the Community Arts magazine for his book – which one is still going? I think the book is more read than those magazines ever were. So Neil, John and I have enough confidence

of our convictions and enjoyment of our process to just carry on despite criticism which we may have had and which I am sure we will still get. So we all have that in common, we all love working with people and just wallow in the pleasure of being around other people discovering their own creativity and potential. I mean we're all probably real self-indulgent fellows who get a real buzz out of helping other people do things.