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# INCLUSION AND DISABILITIES IN AND THROUGH SPORT

## Best Practice #4 - France

INSEI - Institut national supérieur de formation  
et de recherche pour l'éducation inclusive

Jérémy Zytnicki

No. 101089892 – IDI4Sport – ERASMUS-SPORT-2022-SCP



## Circus Arts

**Key words.** Please insert 3 to 5 key words that best describe the best practice

1. Adapted circus ; 2. Social participation ; 3. Creativity ; 4. Structured education ; 5. Universal concept of learning.

### 1. Type of Disability

Please describe the type of disability that this practice is focused on. If there is an official definition of the disability in European or National documents please provide it.

Special needs pupils profile:

Pupils with neurodevelopmental disorders (NDD), including autism spectrum disorders (ASD).

- Neurodevelopmental disorders are "a group of conditions with onset in the developmental period. The disorders typically manifest early in development, often before the child enters grade school, and are characterized by developmental deficits that produce impairments of personal, social, academic, or occupational functioning" (DSM-5, 2013).
- Autism spectrum disorder is characterised by persistent deficits in the ability to initiate and to sustain reciprocal social interaction and social communication, and by a range of restricted, repetitive, and inflexible patterns of behaviour, interests or activities that are clearly atypical or excessive for the individual's age and sociocultural context (DSM-5, 2013).

**Sources:**

- American Psychiatric Association, American Psychiatric Association, & DSM-5 Task Force. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental*

*disorders: DSM-5. American Psychiatric Publishing.*

## 2. Organization & Reference

If applicable: Official data of organization, school, club etc. (name, address, email). Please give references such as internet source, homepage etc.

- Circus disciplines experienced a major upheaval in the 70s. The "new" circus, focused on artistic creation, leaving behind the classic model, also known as traditional, which was more focused on performance (Fagot, 2006). The process of "artification" (Shapiro, 2007; Sizorn, 2014) to which the circus was subjected since the 1970s highlights the transition of these disciplines from a practice centred on performance to **a practice more focused on creation and emotion**. In 1978, when the circus was transferred from the Ministry of Agriculture to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, it became a cultural issue.
- On the other hand, circus activities that had been built around the equestrian art gradually lost interest in animal training (Fagot, 2006) for animal protection.
- Professional and amateur circus schools began to spring up for the general public, whereas in the past circus techniques were transmitted from generation to generation.
- Finally, in the 90s, the circus arts were introduced into schools and taught by sports teachers.
- Today, **the circus arts remain at the crossroads between artistic and sporting activities**. They can be taught at school or in circus schools for amateurs.

References:

- Fagot, S. (2006). *Le cirque : entre culture du corps et culture du risque*. Paris, l'Harmattan.

- Shapiro, R. (2007). Art et changement social : l'artification. In P. Le Quéau (Ed.), *20 ans de sociologie de l'art : bilan et perspectives*, tome 1 (pp. 129-137). Paris, L'Harmattan.
- Sizorn, M. (2014). *Le cirque à l'épreuve de sa scolarisation. Artification, légitimation... normalisation ?*. Staps, 103, 23-38. <https://doi.org/10.3917/sta.103.0023>
- Zytnicki, J. (2022). Élaboration de deux ateliers cirque favorisant l'inclusion scolaire des enfants avec un TSA. *La nouvelle revue - Éducation et société inclusives*, 93, 215-227. <https://doi.org/10.3917/nresi.093.0215>

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### 3. Formal/Informal

Please state if the setting refers to formal or informal education (sport clubs etc.).

Circus arts can be part of formal or non-formal education. The practice of circus arts can lead to specific diplomas: <https://www.ffec.asso.fr/se-former/devenir-initiateur-aux-arts-du-cirque/>

For circus activities in the broad sense:

- The Circus Arts Initiator's Certificate (TIAC).
- Certificat d'aptitude aux fonctions d'animateur (BAFA), options "Arts du Cirque", "arts du spectacle", etc.
- The Brevet Professionnel de la Jeunesse, de l'Éducation Populaire et du Sport (BPJEPS), "Circus Activities" option.
- Diplôme d'État de professeur de cirque (DE).

For adapted circus activities:

- Brevet d'Initiateur Spécialisé en Arts du Cirque (BISAC).

- Certificate in social circus:

<https://www.lepluspetitcirquedumonde.fr/ecole-et- formations/formations/certificat-en-cirque-social>

#### 4. Practice summary

Describe what and how was done (regulations of the sport/game/competition/physical activity), please state the specific context of the practice and the sport(s)/game/competition involved.

There are several families of disciplines in the circus arts: **acrobatics** (often considered to be the main discipline), **aerials**, **juggling**, **balancing**, **clowning** and **prestidigitation**.

The sessions are always structured the same way in 5 stages:

1. An explicit presentation of the stages of the workshop and the objectives to be achieved. This is a particularly important time to facilitate the transitions in the workshop and avoid any anxiety that might be linked to unpredictable events. Ideally, this stage is accompanied by images representing the moments of the workshop.

2. Object discovery. This is a stage where different objects from different disciplines are shown. The aim is to enable the pupils to name these objects, find them in the space and show how they are used. Of course, the practice can also be creative. The aim of this stage is to enable pupils to make their own circus objects.

3. Warm-up and relationship games. During this stage, the warm-up is done in a ritualised way (from head to toe). Pupils can use their memory to recall the exercises that will follow. Relational games are games based on juggling disciplines. E.g. 1: Throw a ball to each other and say the first name of the person to whom you are throwing the ball. E.g. 2: We use juggling scarves to imitate others or divert them from their original purpose (e.g.: a scarf can become a napkin used by a waiter in a restaurant, etc.). E.g. 3: In a circle, pass a spinning plate from hand to hand without dropping it.

4. Choosing and practising the discipline. Pupils are encouraged to practise a circus discipline involving juggling, balancing, acrobatics, aerial acrobatics

(if the hall is equipped with this facility), etc. Depending on the number of activity leaders, choices may be greater or lesser. It is also possible to offer pupils a route or to rotate every 5 minutes; for example, that they can try out all the workshops.

5. Assessment. Pupils are invited to express what they felt during the activity, and what they achieved. This stage encourages reflexivity and metacognition.

While these 5 stages are the basic model for these workshops, they must remain flexible and open; leaders must be open to new arrangements depending on the group of pupils.

## 5. Variations implemented

Please state any kind of useful variations (e.g., concerning settings, age of participants, types of disabilities and adaptations to other sports) of the practice.

### Adaptations:

- These workshops are based on the principle of educational methods developed for people with autism spectrum disorders, in particular structured education, more commonly known as the TEACCH method (Treatment and Education of Autistic and related Communication Handicapped Children). Structured education involves structuring time and space to make it easier for pupils to get information. It involves freeing up the space from instruments that are unnecessary for the exercise, allowing pupils to see the whole gym, and adding visual cues such as pictures, arrows or colours.
- A timetable with images of the activity is also provided and can be seen throughout the activity, to anticipate any anxiety linked to transitions.
- What is essential in each workshop is that pupils are able to discover and practise different circus disciplines; to practise disciplines that allow them to explore multiple motor sensations (vestibular,

proprioceptive, etc.); and finally that they are able to take part in collective workshops based around the circus arts, so that they can experience a moment of participation in social life.

## 6. People involved

Please state organizations and people involved, provide types of disabilities participated in this specific good/best practice. If applicable, be concrete about the different roles of the people involved.

This workshop was designed and produced by the *Cirquonvolution* association from 2011 onwards, particularly in the context of institutions, but the "adapted" or "specialised" circus (Lantz, 2017) exists since the 1990s (*Ibid.*). Since then, it has spread to many French circus schools, but rarely in a truly inclusive way. Institutions travel often during the day to practice circus arts.

### References:

- Lantz, E. (2017). Monde du cirque et monde médico-social: connivences et ambivalences. *Sciences sociales et sport*, 10, 113-140.  
<https://doi.org/10.3917/rsss.010.0113>  
<https://www.ffec.asso.fr/pratiquer-les-arts-du-cirque/cirque-adapte/>

## 7. National guidelines adopted

Please refer to the national guidelines that are met through the practice. Give basic legislation frameworks that can help teachers understand their legal-driven responsibilities towards their students.

- The 2005 law on equal rights and opportunities, participation and citizenship for people with disabilities strengthened accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities. In particular, it introduced new measures such as the Disability Compensation Scheme (Prestation de Compensation du Handicap), which covers the costs associated with disability, as well as the obligation to provide access and education.

<https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/id/JORFTEXT000000809647>

- Recommendation from the French National Authority for Health for working with people with autism spectrum disorders and ensuring greater safety. [https://www.has-sante.fr/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-02/trouble\\_du\\_spectre\\_de\\_lautisme\\_de\\_lenfant\\_et\\_ladolescent\\_recommandations.pdf](https://www.has-sante.fr/upload/docs/application/pdf/2018-02/trouble_du_spectre_de_lautisme_de_lenfant_et_ladolescent_recommandations.pdf)
- Vademecum: Certification complémentaire arts du cirque. <https://eduscol.education.fr/document/45343/download>
- Circular n° 2017-003 du 10-5-2017: Developing an ambitious policy for artistic and cultural education, at all stages of children's and teenagers' lives. <https://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/17/Hebdo24/MCCB1712769C.htm>
- Circular of 16-3-2022: Creation of a circus arts option in the arts sector. <https://www.education.gouv.fr/bo/22/Hebdo15/MENH2208254C.htm>
- Fédération Française des Écoles de Cirque (FFEC): <https://www.ffec.asso.fr/>
- All texts relating to the collective reception of minors: <https://www.jeunes.gouv.fr/organisateurs-ce-qu-il-faut-savoir-sur-les-accueils-collectifs-de-mineurs-217>

## **8. Implications for teachers/practitioners etc.**

Please write any useful implications (what teachers/coaches/physical educators should take into account: safety considerations, equipment needed, support needed) that the practice might have. This may include focal points of the types of disabilities included and how these points were addressed, in terms of the participation in sports.

Circus activities can be practised in circus schools, but also in schools and specialised institutions. There are different levels of supervision, both human and material.

Human supervision:

- In specialised institutions, educators are trained to support students with difficulties and can help the circus teachers during the workshop.
- In circus schools, it depends on whether the workshop is inclusive or not. If it is inclusive, it does not really require any additional adaptation, apart from the circus teacher's knowledge of the specific characteristics of the pupil with an ASD. In this case, it is absolutely essential to listen carefully to what parents have to say. If the workshop is not inclusive, pupils are generally accompanied by specialised educators with other pupils from the institution. These classes generally take place in the afternoon at the circus school. Adaptations are then made according to the special needs of the pupils.
- In schools, sports teachers may be alone or accompanied by an "Accompagnant des Élèves en Situation de Handicap" (AESH), a professional who supports pupils with disabilities in schools.

#### Equipment:

- The courses offered in specialised institutions generally do not allow the full range of circus activities to be explored. The classrooms are not always suitable or equipped, which involves a real preparation in advance if the instructor wants to structure the place and the space where the activity takes place. The instructor must also prepare the equipment he or she intends to bring with him or her and the equipment he or she wishes to leave between sessions.
- The courses offered at a circus school make it easier to prepare the instructors who are already on site, such as all the protections, nets, mats (hard or soft, etc.), etc.
- In schools, the differences are particularly significant, it depends on whether or not the school has chosen to invest in specific equipment.

## 9. Innovative resources, materials, methods etc. used

Please refer to the resources, materials, methods etc. have been employed. Strategies for creating an inclusive environment, prioritizing accommodations for students with disabilities, forming/refining accessible facilities, equipment, and assistive technology. Please include techniques for adapting sports activities to meet the needs of students with disabilities, such as modified rules, specialized equipment and assistive devices.

- Use of time and space structuring.
- Use of images to facilitate communication and the expression of choices (choice boards with several images) with non-verbal pupils, to clarify instructions, but also to help pupils take ownership the different circus disciplines.
- The images help them to visualise the exercises and associate the images with the words.
- Other images which shows people in action in different disciplines are also used, as well as demonstrations by the instructors.

These different arrangements, which contribute to the inclusion of pupils with autism spectrum disorders at school, benefit to all young people, according to the Universal Design for Learning. What can be useful for pupils with autism spectrum disorders can also be useful for other pupils.

## 10. Communication and collaboration strategies

If applicable, describe strategies for collaborating with other educators, parents, and students to ensure that everyone is working together to create an inclusive environment.

Circus instructors have little contact with parents. However, they work very closely with specialised educators, psychomotor therapists and teachers. Educators ensure the safety of the pupils during the exchanges, but also during the circus activities. They can also practice in order to better understand the different sensations provided by the circus disciplines.

## 11. Evaluation and/or reflection methods

If applicable, state how teachers planned to know, to what extent basic goals were met. That is, give any kind of evaluation practices, self-reflection methods, forms of data collection, post-event documentations and follow-ups. Also, report any positive feedback and reinforcement given to students with and without disabilities to encourage and motivate them to continue participating in sports.

### ASSESSMENT:

- Integration into the group and social participation.
- Recognition of objects and their use from one session to another.
- Creativity based on the objects used.
- Agree to try new disciplines where sensory experiences are not necessarily usual.
- Progress in the disciplines: learning the techniques of juggling, balancing, acrobatics, etc.

## 12. Training pathway for teachers for integrating this good practice

Please provide 5 to 15 practical tips to teachers of sports for implementing the proposed good practice. Ensure that tips: 1. refer both to formal and informal settings 2. contribute to the awareness of educators for the needs of students with disabilities 3. take into account the environmental/architectural and attitudinal barriers (such as inaccessible sport spaces, equipment needed, support provided), 4. provide individualized adaptations 5. Provide social and emotional support by encouraging social interaction and peer support 6. Provide positive reinforcement to motivate them to continue participating in sports and to develop their skills and abilities.

- Adapt to each pupil.
- Suggest exercises without imposing them.
- Use multimodality to help pupils understand the instructions: visual (pictures, showing the exercise to pupils, pointing, etc.),

auditory, facilitate tactile exploration of the different objects used during the circus workshops (juggling equipment, balancing equipment, bouncing equipment such as the trampoline, etc.).

- Explain transitions verbally or by showing images to avoid transitions that are too abrupt.
- Adapt language: more concise, sometimes slower.
- Structure space and time.
- During inclusive activities, explain to all the pupils the use of pictures, timetables and all the objects used.