

Letting Your PE Classroom Become a Circus!

University of Michigan Annual PE Day

December 2nd, 2011

1:10-2:10pm

Colleen McIntee

Kalamazoo College PE Instructor,

U of M Secondary MAC program Student, 2012 Cohort

Introduction:

My background is in circus arts. I taught at Kalamazoo College in the PE department a new class that involved two aspects of circus arts I love- partner acrobatics, and aerial acrobatics.

Started in college at the Cirque du K, Circus Club of Kalamazoo College

Got internship with all female aerial circus troupe, Aerial Angels- still train and perform with today.

Have since worked (in teaching and performance) for Starfish Circus- non-profit residency youth circus camp run by Aerial Angels, Detroit Flyhouse, PAL Sailor Circus in Sarasota, FL, trained at New England Center for Circus Arts in Brattleboro, VT, and started a community outreach through circus arts program in Kalamazoo called Circus in the 'Zoo.

I now aspire to teach physical education, integrating circus arts into my practice. My goal today is to give all of you tools you can use as physical educators to integrate circus arts into your own classrooms to the benefit of all your students- and to have fun and be safe!

Youth circus is expanding all over the country right now, and the Midwest is a little behind! The American Youth Circus Organization is a great group that advocates for youth circus and provides resources to participants, teachers, performers and more.

www.americanyouthcircus.org. *(See reference section at the end of document for all resources).*

What IS circus arts? Clowns and elephants?

Can include object manipulation tools: juggling, poi, diabolo, rolla bolla, hula hoops, scarves

Can include aerial acrobatics: fabric, trapeze, hoop, corde lisse (Spanish web), cloud swing

Can include physical body performance: partner acrobatics, contortion, hand balancing, clowning, creative movement, dance.

Why is it good for PE?

A fun way to integrate noncompetitive activities into the PE classroom!

Creativity and fitness combined to increase strength and flexibility

Unique and fun

Something for everyone

Satisfies NASPE standards: (especially 2, 5, 6)

Don't I need equipment?

Many activities can be done without equipment, see "physical body performance" above.

Many pieces of equipment can be made cheaply at home! Juggling balls: tennis balls with rice in them, covered by two balloons. Hula hoops out of irrigation tubing, a fitting, and colorful tape.

Wooden handstand blocks.

Warm up activities:

Silly brain/body exercises:

Thumb up and point at it with pointer finger of other hand! Switch! No guns!

Mini floating hot dogs, hamburgers! Use peripheral vision, look beyond hands!

Nose/ ear squeezes. Hands on knees while seated. Left hand nose, right hand to left ear, hands back down to knees, and switch (right hand nose, left hand to right ear).

Human mirror game:

Students work in pairs and focus on 1) movement in space, 2) levels, and 3) being silly! One student begins as the leader and the other student mirrors their actions. They switch a few times, and eventually no one knows who the leader is, but movement continues together. Debrief: talk about picking up on signals from another person, noticing change, and responding to another person's movement.

Change 3 things game:

Students work in pairs and silently study each other while facing each other for 15 seconds. They then turn back to back and change three things about their physical appearance, return to face their partner, and discuss what is different. Debrief: talk about how important detail is when working with partners in acro (or even when working on a team). Being able to notice if a person is acting or looking different (even if they don't communicate it to you) than you recall can help you be a better partner or teammate.

Movement suggestion game:

Students work in teams of 4-6 to create a situation, shape, or object that the teacher prompts them with. Students have 10 seconds to get into position cooperatively, making sure everyone has a role and that they have a cohesive plan of how they will execute the challenge. Some of this is intuition, but a great deal is communication. Some examples of prompts could be: spaghetti and meatballs, Eiffel tower, popcorn, bubbles, campfire, plane, bicycle, roller coaster, a group of giants, a group of babies, dirt.

Balance awareness/ shifting (eyes opened, then closed, two feet and one foot):

Students stand with feet shoulder width apart, feeling contact between all four corners of their feet and the earth. Shift weight while keeping a straight body to toes, without peeling heels off the ground, and shift to heels without pulling toes off the ground. Do this side to side and in both circular directions, with eyes open at first and later closed. Talk about weight distribution and body position, center of gravity and how important it is to be aware of these things when trying to find balance with yourself and others. Repeat exercise quickly while standing on one foot (eyes open and closed). Talk about muscle memory and training the stabilizing muscles in the ankle and feet to "catch us" when we are about to lose balance.

Main Lesson:

Partner Yoga sequence:

Circus grip! Holding at wrists, with forefinger trailing up towards elbow.

Leans: 4 variations (straight back, arching back, lifting legs, removing a hand), squat and cross arms, steeple, revolved steeple, box. Mini backpack, standing forward bend (while back to back and circus grip), double down dogs (we did not do this one in the workshop), straddle flow (with circus grip, leaning back and forth and connecting the breath with the movement = exhale and

fold, inhale and raise). Squatting on tip toes plus raised straddle balance pose (a conditioning exercise we did not do in the workshop, one student squats but is on raised toes, other student is sitting but raising legs while in a straddle. Students balance fingertips together and hold for 15 seconds, switch).

Partner Acro moves:

Leans with variations, stacking tables, thigh stand/ flag.

General Practice:

Stack the bones, stay engaged, communicate! Work in sequences and start low! Give clear short instructions while students are performing the move. Example: “hips up”, “tuck the booty under”, “plank body”. Make them feel safe! Positive reinforcement, acro superstars!

Spotting technique:

Work in groups of 4, head/neck, trunk priority, appropriate touch.

Acro Presentations: 1

Levels, movement, tell a story. Entrance, present, style, exit. Students should use at least 2 moves from what they learned in the lesson to incorporate into their routine.

REFERENCES:

www.americanyouthcircus.org (National circus community, tutorials, events, etc.)
www.simplycircus.org (Great overall resource)
<http://community.simplycircus.com/tutorials/index.htm> (Tutorials section on skill areas)
<http://www.renegadejuggling.com/> (Equipment)
<http://necenterforcircusarts.org/> (Training)
<http://www.detroitflyhouse.com/> (Training in Detroit, MI)

Bersma, D. & Visscher, M. (2003). *Yoga games for children*. Alamada, CA: Hunter House.

Holt/ Hale, S. (2010). *Children moving: A reflective approach to teaching physical education* (8th ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.

Heller, C. (2004). *The aerial circus training and safety manual*. Parker: National Writers Press.

Peterson, L. & Newman, P. (1997). *Kids take the stage: Helping young people discover the creative outlet of theatre*. New York: Back Stage Books.

Nemer, J. & Sauer-Klein, J. (2008). *AcroYoga flight manual and dvd*. San Francisco, CA: AcroYoga.

Spolin, V. (2000). *Improvisation for the theatre: A handbook of teaching and directing Techniques* (3rd ed.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press.

Sugarman, B. (2001). *Circus for everyone: Circus learning around the world*. Shaftsbury, VT: Mountainside Press.