

THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF AUSTRALIA

Report by PAUL WOODHEAD – 2002/2 Churchill Fellow

To study in-school Circus programs with emphasis on the management and teaching practices, and efficacy of the visited programs in terms of student welfare, performance and physical education opportunities, in the USA and UK.

***We do not stop playing because we grow old,
we grow old because we stop playing.***

“I see impatient, quick to give up students begin to understand that you must persevere and keep working hard in order to progress. I see kids that are angry and confrontational almost magically lighten up when they start playing with the equipment. I see them become thrilled and proud when they succeed in doing new tricks. I see my kids go from being divided and scattered to being able to work together to accomplish challenges and I see them celebrate one another for everyone’s effort. In short, circus arts offers critical life skills including discipline, perseverance, personal responsibility, the ability to work well with others, self-confidence, creativity, and appreciation for life. It is an amazing tool for dealing with youth in difficulty.” Teresa Kochis 2003

“How circus is delivered decide the outcomes achieved.” Kathryn Montgomery 2003

“If you are able to be creative, you can find solutions to any problem.” Annelies Heesakkers 2003

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1. Introduction

Detailing the experiences, findings and recommendations arising from my 2003 Churchill Fellowship to the USA and the UK, this report is written for submission to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia and dissemination within the circus and educational fields in Australia and overseas. The Fellowship allowed me to visit and study youth Circus programs either in schools, or working substantially with schools. In addition, I was able to visit other Circus education programs that work with youth, but not primarily linked to schools.

The initial plan of the Fellowship allowed for visits to eleven programs across the USA and UK, and interviews with the directors and possibly students within those programs. In addition, I planned to visit a small number of programs, three in all, that were not primarily working with schools, as an ambassador for Australian Circus.

As the trip progressed however, many extra opportunities were opened to me through contacts made at the primary centers visited. These were too numerous to enable a visit to all, however I was able to visit, and/or interview directors of, 12 additional programs in the USA, UK, and in the Netherlands.

All of the programs visited are outlined in the Trip Itinerary on page 5.

This trip, the very positive experiences that resulted, and the extensive professional contacts made, would not have been possible without a great deal of support. Chief amongst those who so generously provided their support were:

- The Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia, which provided both the major financial support needed to complete the trip, and the Fellowship itself which is a catalyst for cooperation and friendship in every location I visited;
- Peggy Williams, Educational Outreach Manager for Feld Entertainment (Ringing Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus), for her help with contacts and her untiring support;
- Steve Smith & Beth Duda, Kevin & Erin O'Keefe, Rodney and Susanne Huey, Jackie & Rick Davis, Jim & Noreen Riley, Steve Ward and Kathryn Montgomery, for their generous assistance with accommodation and contacts throughout USA and UK;
- The family of directors, trainers and performers in youth circus, and the wider world of circus itself, for their welcome, their universal goodwill, and their unbridled willingness to share experiences, knowledge, resources and hope for our youth; and
- My family: Anne, Brad, Rachel, Caitlin, Dominic, Mark, Elizabeth and Theo, for their love, support and patience throughout my Fellowship.

2. Executive Summary

Paul Woodhead Churchill Fellow 2003
Assistant Principal and Director Circus West
Dubbo West Public School
East St Dubbo NSW 2830
Ph: +61 2 6882 3086
Fax: +61 2 6884 3439
Web site: <http://www.dubbwest-p.school.nsw.edu.au>
School email: dubbwest-p.school@det.nsw.edu.au
Personal email: pgwoodhead@yahoo.com

This Fellowship was granted to allow the study of in-school Circus programs with emphasis on the management and teaching practices, and efficacy of the visited programs in terms of student welfare, performance and physical education opportunities, in the USA and UK.

My program initially called for visits to some eleven programs in the USA and the UK. With new contacts established, and finances and energy available, the itinerary was extended en route to include twelve more programs, three of them in the Netherlands. My final itinerary included visits to San Francisco CA, Sarasota FL, Bloomington/Normal IL, New York NY, Washington DC and Wilton NH in the USA; Leeds, Rochdale and Belfast in the UK; and Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

Conclusions:

That participants not only achieve growth in physical and circus skills, they also achieve positive growth in: intrinsic values including self-confidence and self-belief; intrinsic virtues including perseverance and trust; and social, group and personal skills including life skills, co-operative skills and creative skills respectively.

That the major issues in teaching and management of youth circus programs are related to: staffing and staff development; the assessment and management of risk; the accessibility of the program to youth at risk; the short and long term management of the venue and program; the appropriateness of the pedagogy employed; and succession planning.

Recommendations:

That circus arts programs be promoted to schools and university teacher education faculties as a vehicle capable of delivering physical skills and attributes, and developing many values, virtues and life skills, acknowledging that circus is a positive alternative especially for those youth deemed 'at risk' in our schools, and looking for an alternative to the more traditional options available.

That the various departments of education, the National Circus & Physical Theater Association (NCPTA), and university teacher education faculties be encouraged to address strategies for succession planning and risk assessment and management in all creative arts and sporting fields.

Dissemination and Implementation:

This report will be disseminated through the web pages of the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust of Australia, Dubbo West Public School, and the NCPTA, the NCPTA national conferences, educational journals and bodies in NSW, Australia and Internationally, and the directors of all programs and association visited whilst on the Fellowship.

The physical implementation of the recommendations will initially occur through Circus West, at Dubbo West Public School, as a model for youth circus arts programs throughout Australia. Ongoing professional contact will be maintained with the programs and directors overseas, building towards exchange programs for both knowledge and teaching professionals.

3. Trip Itinerary (NOTE: *Initial core programs; #Extra-program opportunities)

San Francisco Ca USA Jan 13 – Jan 21

- * Prescott Clown Troup - observation & interview
- * San Francisco Circus Center & Clown Conservatory – observation & interview
- # San Francisco Waldorf School – phone interview

Sarasota Fl USA Jan 22 – Jan 30

- * Sailor Circus – observation & interviews
- * Steve Smith, freelance writer/director - interview
- # Circus Sarasota – observation
- # Ringling Circus Museum – observation & interview

Orlando Fl USA Jan 31 – Feb 2

- # Cirque du Soleil – observation
- # LaVahn Hoh, Professor of Drama University of Virginia – interview

Normal Il USA Feb 3 – Feb 7

- * Gamma Phi Circus – observation & interview
- # Thomas Metcalf School (Junior Gamma Phi Circus) – observation & interview

New York NY USA Feb 8 – Feb 13, Feb 23 – Feb 27

- * Kevin O’Keefe, President American Youth Circus Organisation – interview
- * Circus Minimus – observation & interview
- * Big Apple Circus, Beyond the Ring – observation & interview
- # Cirque du Monde – observation & interview

Washington DC USA Feb 14 – Feb 16

- # Oakview Elementary School – observation & interview
- # Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus – observation & interview

Wilton NH USA Feb 17 – Feb 22

- * Pine Hill Waldorf School – observation & interview

Leeds UK Feb 28 – Mar 5

- * Steve Ward, President National Association of Youth Circus – interview
- * Circus Zanni – observation & interview
- * Skylight Circus – observation & interview

Amsterdam The Netherlands Mar 6 – Mar 12

- # Circomundo – interview
- # Circus Elleboog – observation & interview
- # Cirque du Monde – observation and interview

Belfast NI UK Mar 12 – Mar 21

- * Belfast Circus School – observation & interview

4. Report on programs and interviews

Prescott Clown Troupe, Oakland Ca

“The Prescott Clown Troupe is an after-school circus arts program at Prescott Elementary School of the Oakland Unified School District. Prescott teacher, Aileen Moffitt, founded the Prescott program in 1985. Each year, over 50 Prescott students participate in circus training with professional Bay Area artists. Approximately 15-20 students are able to make the full year commitment and they represent the program at over 50 community events throughout the year”¹

Aileen extended to two schools in 2002, four schools in 2003, and plans to open in a local middle school in 2004. Aileen has also commenced a qualitative research project examining the personal and social outcomes being achieved by this program, a draft of which this author is privy to.²

Interview with Aileen Moffitt: The program is open to all Year 4 and 5 students who must then attend 3 or 4 sessions after school each week. A separate class, ‘Junior Clowns’, is open to Year 3 in the spring. Unexplained absences result in students being “crossed off the roster”, with some room for extenuating circumstances. Concerns with attendance are generally home based, especially in the first year when the program is not so highly prized. As a result of the attendance and ‘accurate self-assessment’ required of students, they are seen by adults to be efficient, dependable and knowledgeable, with exemplary manners. The research points to values like resilience, positive self-image & belief, and time-management skills resulting from participation in the program, which readily transferred to general life experiences.

This program is half funded by the School District, and half by grants and sponsorship attracted by Aileen. The year-to-year stability of this funding is an issue, especially as District budgets tighten and grants are tied to specific program initiatives.

San Francisco Circus Center, Ca

Set up by the Pickle Family Circus in the early 1980s, the Circus Center offers classes in the Circus Arts, Acrobatics in the Chinese tradition, and a one-year course in the Clowning Conservatory. Students in the Circus Arts and Acrobatics are predominately school aged, while those in the Conservatory are adults, many having previously completed drama and mime courses elsewhere.

Interview with Peggy Ford and Jeff Raz: Peggy Ford is the Director of the Circus Center while Jeff is the Director of the Clown Conservatory. Both Jeff and Peggy speak of students gaining greater personal control, resilience, and perseverance through their work in Circus arts. Clowning has also fostered an increased awareness of themselves as individuals, this self-knowledge strengthening the personal values.

San Francisco Waldorf School, Ca

The SF Waldorf School uses Circus within its spatial development program. It was introduced in the last year by Tess McGinley and includes club swinging, acrobatics, and juggling.

Interview with Tess McGinley: After starting with club swinging in 2002, Tess soon expanded her program as the popularity of Circus skills became evident. As in most school programs, time to train is an issue for her. Tess reports that her students have shown more interest in school, an awakening interest in performance, the confidence that comes with that, and the resilience and perseverance that learning new and/or foreign skills/routines requires.

Sailor Circus, Sarasota Fl

Sailor Circus, now in its 54th year, was started as an extra-curricular gymnastics program. In the five decades since inception, the program has expanded to include a wide range of traditional Circus events from juggling to flying trapeze, moved into a permanent facility, and toured throughout the USA and internationally. They attract students from Sarasota School District schools aged 8-18, in Years 3 to 12.

Interview with Susan Loffler and Patty Chapman: Susan is the Director and Patty the Assistant Director of Sailor Circus. Both ladies have backgrounds as performers in circus, and both have family members involved in Sailor Circus.

Management and teaching issues dominated the interview with a great deal of time spent on risk management, program construction, administration and funding, and management of trainers. The circus is in a transition period, moving from a traditional and oral management model to one based on written protocols for administration, teaching and risk management. This change process has been hastened by a gradual replacement of retired professionals with parent volunteers acting as trainers, and by greater administrative interest in the Circus by the Board of the School District. The program caters for a wide range of students, but all students must have substantial parental backing (behavioural & academic contract, and volunteer requirements), and must also maintain both attendances at training and minimum academic standards at school. The latter is altered or waived for students-at-risk in an effort to allow participation. Both ladies listed affective outcomes as prime goals for the program and for the leeway given to students-at-risk. These outcomes included perseverance, resilience and trust, and improved self-image, confidence, and esteem.

Interviews with students of Sailor Circus: I interviewed 12 students, ranging from Grade 3 to Grade 12, and with between one and nine years of experience in the program. All students mentioned the concept of ‘family’ when talking about the circus. This was especially so when speaking on reasons for joining and staying in the program. ‘Family’, according to these students, implied support and trust, and was different from ‘just’ belonging to a team.

Steve Smith, Sarasota FL

Interview with Steve Smith: Steve Smith is a freelance writer/director based in Sarasota. He was the Dean of Ringling Bros Clown College from 1985 to 1994 and has clowned professionally since 1971. Steve’s work with students was in the Clown College, and in a theater school in which he lectured. He has ongoing contact through Clown College Alumni events, and through conferences. Students go into circus for the immediacy of the vitality and imagination of Circus, essentially because it’s fun. They take out of it lessons in life. There is the immediate tangible result of the physical risk taken, a forward somersault for example, but there is also the often-unseen result of an emotional risk taken.

This risk, which is not always a cognitive experience, comes from exposing yourself to your peers, and indeed to yourself. It is what teams, ensembles, and the ability to work and play with others is based on. But out of it, and with the role of the teacher as a conduit, comes the learning of how to get along with others, work together; co-exist as a team, take and indeed share focus, and know when to get out of the way.

Thomas Metcalf Lab School, Normal IL

The Junior Gamma Phi Circus has sessions twice a week after school. The program is open to all Year 3-8 students of Metcalf School. They train on a wide variety of equipment, from floor (cylinder, juggling, acrobatics & adagio) to aerial (trapeze, web, ladder & hoop). While Dr Romance oversees the session, and does teach, tutors from within the Gamma Phi program do most of the instruction. All 150 students in the program participate in the end of season performance, normally to a theme.

Interview with Dr Thomas Romance: The issue that will have greatest effect in the future is that of succession. Dr Romance will be retiring in the near future and as yet, there is no apparent succession plan in place that may place this program at risk. Other issues discussed included the management of risk and the maintenance of equipment. The former is managed within the school’s normal first aid protocols, but there is an issue with the maintenance of equipment. A great deal of the equipment is procured by Dr Romance locally, or actually made and then maintained by him, again relying on his time and energy. The actual day-to-day management of risk in the gym is also an issue because of the sheer numbers of students and tutors.

Interviews with students of Metcalf School: I interviewed eight students from grades 3 to 8 during a normal Wednesday afternoon training session, and a Thursday PE class. These students ranged from first year circus members to seasoned performers. While their view of what they were getting out of Circus was generally limited to the skills they were training, they did acknowledge that perseverance and performance qualities were being acquired.

Gamma Phi Circus at Illinois State University, Normal IL

Gamma Phi Circus has been operating at ISU for some 74 years and in 2003 will be presenting its 67th annual performance. Gamma Phi is initially open to all students and staff at ISU in the fall semester. Over the academic year, the early numbers are trimmed through two audition processes to arrive at the final performance company of about 60 – 70. The performances have a heavy aerial flavor, but also include ground acts such as unicycle, juggling, clown and adagio.

Interview with Dr Jerry Polacek: Apart from the production of this year's performance, the coming retirement of Dr Polacek after ten years of directing the program had prominence. There was in this case, direct succession negotiations occurring with the university, but as yet no decision on the form of succession had been announced. Risk planning and management are addressed through audition and performance limits for performers, and the use of set accident and injury management protocols. The use of Act Captains has greatly alleviated Dr Polacek's workload, while also increasing the sense of belonging and control amongst the students.

Interviews with students of Gamma Phi Circus: I interviewed 6 performers, all students at Illinois State University, a number of them also being Act Captains. As university students, these performers had a more fully developed idea of what they were gaining from their involvement in Circus. Their responses were generally within the context of Gamma Phi as a family, offering all within it acceptance, friendship and support. With that, developed life skills such as confidence, perseverance, self-belief and inter-personal skills.

AYCO & Circus Minimus, New York NY

Kevin O'Keefe is the founding President of the American Youth Circus Organisation (AYCO). In addition, Kevin as the artistic director of Circus Minimus, organizes and conducts after-school classes in circus arts; in-school residency programs; and summer programs for specific communities. Kevin is a professional clown performer, and was an instructor and director at the Big Apple Circus School for five years.

Interview with Kevin O'Keefe: The major issue when working in youth circus in residencies is that of attempting to maintain a balance between control and chaos. There was a need for children to have the freedom: to provide input to the program; to be heard; to be encouraged; and to be celebrated, but also to be safe. Each performance should be unique to that group of people. It should include the 'spontaneous' and be "their gift to Circus".

All too often, youth circus is not very different from adult circus, a little less skilled, but presented in much the same manner. Minimus performances are often highlighted by "unrehearsed moments" of magic, moments that would not appear in professional shows. It is these moments that differentiate youth circus. Because of these, parents are often gaining "a glimpse of their child's future" and are led to wonder, "Where is this part of me I see in them, the part that takes risks?"

Big Apple Circus Beyond the Ring®, East Harlem - New York NY

Frank Sellitto runs three elements within Big Apple Circus Beyond the Ring®: after-school classes in JHS 99 in Spanish Harlem, and several other modified classes; in-school residencies of two/three weeks; and a the “Expert Student Troupe”, drawing proficient Beyond the Ring® performers from the after-school program at JHS 99, who then perform outside the school on client request. All students perform in the final spring production for Big Apple Circus Beyond the Ring®.

During my two visits, there were seven tutors/trainers working with about 45 students. Of those tutors, three were alumni of the program, and the other four were professionals working part-time with Big Apple Beyond the Ring®, all working collaboratively with Frank.

Interview with Frank Sellitto: Frank outlined the three elements to provide context, but did say that the primary aim of the after-school program was the self-esteem of the students. Self-esteem could be synonymous with our term, ‘student welfare’, which would then include values/concepts such as “perseverance, resilience and courage” (my words). **Follow-up interview:** Later, we examined files of teacher, student and professional surveys and reports based on the school residencies. Frank’s overview indicated that the students gained a lot out of the residencies, but this result was often hampered by institutional or personal obstruction or inflexibility within the school and its staff. This severely hampered Frank’s ability to maximize student outcomes.

Interview with Will and Javier: Will and Javier are both alumni of the program, and now staff within it. Will is from Spanish Harlem, but both men strongly identified with the community during the interview. Both men opened with statements attributing “life saving” status to the influence of Frank and the program. The program provides Harlem youth with a chance to prove them selves, to “stick along” and to “roll with the punches”. They also suggested that the program put pressure on participants to succeed, as failure was really a choice to give up. Those that did stick along, learnt to value life, to be non-judgmental of others, and to develop confidence and patience. The major pedagogical and management issues included collegiate support, an understanding of kid’s issues, the need to warm-up comprehensively, dedication of teachers and that the program needs to be a challenge for the students.

Cirque du Monde, The Bronx – New York NY

Cirque du Monde, sponsored by Cirque du Soleil (and local social care agencies) works with kids-at-risk, using circus arts programs as a medium to affect personal & social change. Cirque du Soleil has set up many of these around the world after the first in Montreal. Teresa Kochi and Ben Johnson set this program up, at ‘The Point’, in The Bronx, last September.

Interview with Teresa Kochis: Due to a lack of time at the end of the New York visit, this interview was conducted via emails afterwards. Teresa is the program director and is working with a group of about 45 pre-teen children in groups of 10-15. Teresa is involved in starting another class for teens later in the year.

Teaching issues include staff/student ratios and the impact larger ratios have on the quality of teaching possible, leading to the very real concept of burnout and lapses in discipline, both risk management issues. These are further impacted by the at time inconsistent attendance of the students.

Within the international scope of Cirque du Monde, institutional communication, the most appropriate location of the programs for the community, and the economic fragility of non-profit organizations are management issues to be considered. That said, “... Cirque du Monde is an excellent organization to work with. Cirque has provided stability and inspiration ...” and a philosophy that “...is manifested in the vision of their outreach program as well as the way they treat their employees.”³ As my opening quote of Teresa on page one of this document illustrates, Teresa has seen many outcomes achieved by children within her programs. Among these are confidence, perseverance, pride in achievements and group social skills.

Oakview Elementary School, Washington DC

Jim Moyer ran the program at Oakview for 31 years before his sudden death in 1999. During that time, circus skills were offered as a part of the PE syllabus, as an after-school activity for talented students, and as a countywide program, again after-school. Since Mr. Moyer's death, an ex-student of Mr. Moyer's, Cathy Henry has been attempting to run the program in her spare time with assistance from others. At present, none of the staff or students of Oakview take part in the program. Most of the circus students are home-schooled, coming into Oakview two evenings each week.

Interview with Cathy Henry: The major issue was initially resurrecting the program after the death of Mr. Moyer. This has now changed to the very maintenance of the program at Oakview as the school itself has little to do with it. Staffing of the classes is difficult for, while Cathy is happy to be there and teach, work does interfere and at times delays her arrival. The parents who come in with their children assist with the setting up and striking of the training gear, but Cathy does the bulk of the teaching.

Insurance has become a major issue for the company now that they no longer have the sponsorship of the school, to the extent that some events are excluding them because of inadequate coverage. The outsourcing of gym time by the school has also resulted in hall booking clashes that are presently disadvantaging the company.

Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus, Richmond Va

Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus is the premier touring circus in the USA. It is billed as the 'Greatest Show on Earth' and is a traditional circus company. I had the opportunity to view the performance by the Circus' Red Unit in the company of Peggy Williams, their national Educational Outreach Manager. Afterwards, I was able to interview Peggy, and Susanne Huey, the risk management officer for the Feld Inc, the owners of Ringling Bros and Barnum & Bailey Circus.

Interview with Peggy Williams: Peggy Williams was the first female clown to graduate from the Ringling Clown College, and then to be employed as in a Ringling Circus. She continues to create history in her approach to Circus in Education, flying four days a week across the USA, supporting teachers and students with Circus based material for classroom and performance programs.

To Peggy there is an unquestionable magic about the place of Circus in children's lives. Stories of personal and social growth in children coming from involvement in Circus programs thrill, but no longer surprise Peggy. The unique nature of circus and its ability to cater for such a range of abilities and personalities continues to engender perennial involvement and success for children.

Interview with Susanne Huey: Susanne initially made a very positive assessment of the risk management plan used by Circus West at Dubbo West PS, and extended that to the process used by the Australian Gymnastic Association, which I outlined. Susanne then went on to enumerate the major issues with which her unit at Ringling had to deal. These included: safety and reliability of the rig used by contracted acts; the immediate management of injuries for performers and traveling staff; long term management of Work Cover issues (treatment, pay, act viability, etc.); and the public safety of indoor venues used for performances (this is not a tented show).

Pine Hill Waldorf School, Wilton NH

After being delayed two days by 40cm of snow in New York and 60+cm in New Hampshire, I had the privilege of visiting this program, founded and run for the last eight years by the Spatial Dynamics teacher at Pine Hill, Jackie Davis. I was accommodated by her lovely family, Rick her husband, and her two daughters, Erin and Ellie. During my four days at Pine Hill, I was able to see the final production of 'Hilltop Circus' for 2003, see the dress rehearsal of the 'Flying Gravity' show for 2003, and interview all of the year 7 and 8 students, in addition to Jackie.

Interview with Jackie Davis: In concert with the Eurythmy teacher Volker Frankfurt, Jackie teaches movement education to grades 2-8 at the school, following Rudolf Steiner's educational philosophy. The major pedagogical and management issues include the tracking of student achievements and how they fit in with the Waldorf curriculum; the management of training space, which is limited at Pine Hill; and the management of physical risks, from "prophylactic" management through to treatment protocols for injuries.

In terms of student outcomes, Jackie separates them into physical and relationship levels. In the former, students are achieving physical abilities like manual dexterity, rhythm and timing, spatial awareness and balance, and physical attributes like flexibility and strength. On a relationship level, students are learning skills in communication, organization, leadership, and group dynamics, especially in decision-making processes.

Interviews with students: I interviewed 50 students within their year 7 and 8 classes, and another 12-15 high school students who are members of the Flying Gravity Circus. Many of the 7 and 8 students expressed reservations about Circus as a compulsory school activity, but after the year (or two for the Year 8 students), there was a general feeling that Circus was fun and cool, mostly because of its unique nature. In terms of results, many students spoke of belonging to a group, of cooperation and trust that were necessary in the development of their performance pieces, and of the perseverance and confidence they gained because of their work.

Skylight Circus, Rochdale UK

Jim Riley founded Skylight Circus in 1988 to "find new and exciting ways to use circus in performance, education, community work and training for professionals."⁴ The circus runs programs: in its Rochdale center aimed especially at 14 – 29 year olds; as long-term outreach programs in 'satellite' centers in the greater Rochdale borough; as local 'regeneration programs' for youth at risk on housing estates, in community centers, in schools and in-house; and as specific purpose outreach programs ranging from one hour testers through to 12 week residencies. All of these programs, and the administration to support them, are funded by grants from local council and national bodies, to private benevolent organizations/corporations.

Interview with Jim Riley: The balance between being a Circus Arts organization that also does youth and community work, and being a youth organization that uses circus as a tool for personal and social development, is a dichotomy for Skylight Circus. Currently, the majority of Skylight's funding and work is with youth, using circus as a tool for personal and social development. This is not an issue for Skylight, but it is for fund providers like the Arts Council of England. Skylight considers itself a Circus Arts organization, intending to increase their performance and training profile as part of their current company development. The ACE, who now sees Skylight as an "Arts", not just a "Youth" organization, has accepted this.

There is a strong adoption of the NAYC Code of Practice at Skylight, and the use of Risk Analysis Plans. The latter are in general use, but especially so for specific events.

NAYC & Circus Zanni, Leeds UK

Steve Ward founded the National Association of Youth Circus 1994 out of a 1993 UK Conference of Youth Circus. The NAYC instituted the first UK Code of Practice for people working in youth circus, a code that was later adopted by the current Circus Forum. As a voluntary organization, and because of funding and time limitations, the Association finding it difficult to develop further and is now functioning under the umbrella of the Circus Forum.

Circus Zanni, also started by Steve Ward, began in and works out of the Cardigan Center in Leeds. Zanni offers: weekly training sessions in the Center; one-off and holiday workshops for Leeds City Council; one-off summer workshops for private and community organizations; international exchange programs; after school clubs; inter-generational projects; and a soon to be, parents/toddlers summer program.

Interview with Steve Ward: Steve is a High School drama teacher and does most of his circus work in his own time. UK youth circus is presented with a number of issues, chief among them being educational, pedagogical and management ones. There is reluctance for educational institutions to show acceptance of Circus, in terms of logistical and class time, teachers and funding. This could in part be because of the limitations placed on schools by the prescribed national curriculum and a lack of consistency in the standards of what constitutes a qualified Circus teacher. The dichotomy between an expert practitioner and an expert teacher, as in many fields, has not yet been accommodated.

In the management of youth circus, risk assessment, child protection procedures and protocols, management of space, accessibility in terms of numbers, ages and interest groups, and the status of Circus organization for funding bodies are the major issues having to be confronted by directors and administrators in the UK youth circus today.

Students are gaining by being involved in Circus, in terms of physical skills, physical abilities, social skills and creative development.

Circus Elleboog, Amsterdam Netherlands

In its 54th year, Circus Elleboog offers both circus arts programs, and social development programs that use circus arts, to the community of Amsterdam. Circus performance programs, that source from Elleboog's home space in the city center, are seen in city festivals, community and school events, and as cooperative events with commercial bodies. Elleboog also runs a number of personal and social development programs in the city, at a new space in the Southeast with the Surinamese community, and in Amsterdam West with the immigrant community from Surinam, Turkey and Morocco. In addition, Elleboog hosts a program, run by Cirque du Monde, in its city space

Interview with Aad Kuin: Aad Kuin is the managing director of Circus Elleboog. Elleboog has, "Firstly, activities that children can undertake themselves; secondly, Elleboog's own Funfair and Circus performances; thirdly, activities resulting from the opportunities Elleboog offers to educational institutions; and fourthly, projects Elleboog sets up in co-operation with various organizations and, increasingly, with businesses."⁵

Circomundo, Amsterdam, Netherlands

Set up by the Board of Elleboog and Annelies Heesackers in October of 2002, "Circomundo is an art and knowledge center in which people can be brought together on an (inter)national level to exchange ideas and inspire one another. A center where the social, pedagogical, creative and artistic possibilities that the circus has, can be nourished and can be carried out to others."⁶

Interview with Annelies Heesackers: Annelies was the Artistic and Managing Director of Circus Elleboog until October of 2002 when she left to form Circomundo. Annelies provided a summation of a major research project done in 1999 that examined Circus Elleboog's results on its 50th anniversary. These were grouped into effects in personal skills, personal values, social values, organizational skills and values, intrinsic values like performing for an audience and putting together an act, and results of parent/child participation.

According to Annelies, the four most important issues in youth circus pedagogy are personal growth, social growth, creativity and growth in physical skills and abilities. While Annelies listed these in order of strength according to her beliefs of fifteen years past, she now believes that creativity and trust are the most important.

The circus especially meets the needs of teens, as long as the trainers have circus skills and are able to work with them. Circus often gives teens a result they can be proud of, one that shows their uniqueness and difference, and allows them to see themselves in a society that includes their language, interests and music.

In terms of management, time for trainers to receive instruction themselves, cooperation between circus and educational institutions, and professionalism in management are the major issues needing attention in youth circus.

Cirque du Monde, Amsterdam Netherlands

Cirque du Monde operates in five continents and over many countries. The program in Amsterdam, hosted within Elleboog, is one of these. Amsterdam is also the base of the European Operations Office of Cirque du Soleil. The program at Elleboog targets homeless youth or youth living in difficult social circumstances. These are often street dwellers or squatters in Amsterdam. The latter are also termed “urban nomads” (by the people involved in the program). The participants I saw in class were generally in their twenties.

Talk with Amandus van den Elshout: Amandus runs the program for du Monde, as well as a number of programs for Elleboog. He is a theater director by profession and came to Circus (and Elleboog) for its youth work and unique nature. Amandus stressed that “... these homeless have many deep secrets, and while they make them strong as individuals, it also gives them great energy. The step to take is to keep the vitality of the individuality, but to also work with the group.” I saw this happen as one would take the warm-up, one the organization of the apparatus, and one the organization of the lunch that followed class. Circus did not give these people the venue to necessarily work out their ‘secrets’, but it did give them a social context in which to express their individualism and to join in a group exercise that culminates in a public performance.

Interview with Susan van Esch: Susan is the Social Affairs and International Co-operation Co-ordinator for Cirque du Soleil in Europe. She has an oversight of all established Cirque du Monde programs in Europe and South Africa, and a significant role in the development of new ones. Cirque du Monde is one of Cirque du Soleil’s eight outreach programs.

“Cirque du Monde is an intervention tool aimed at promoting the personal and social development of youth in difficult situations. The circus workshops are an opportunity for marginalized young people to forge new ties with society.”⁷ It gives them a springboard to a new stage of their lives. This may mean reconciliation with their family, admission to a detox program or even a dawning interest in an occupation or profession. However, above all it is an opportunity for a positive personal experience, which can act as a catalyst in terms of self-esteem and identity.

Cirque du Soleil evaluates each Cirque du Monde site per series of workshops. These evaluations are used to be able to see where the project is and to set plans for their future series of workshops. Next to that, a research project to do a comprehensive evaluation of the results of all programs has been set up with the University and is still in progress. Because of this, early qualitative research done with Circus West in Australia was of some interest.

The training of the Cirque du Monde instructors has become a major push, covering skills in both circus and youth social work. To enable this, and the positive sharing of experiences, Soleil organizes different training sessions each year and brings instructors together for conferences and workshops.

Belfast Community Circus School, Belfast UK

Mike Moloney and Donal McKendry started Belfast Community Circus in 1985 with support from the Arts Council of Northern Ireland. It was a community circus group that moved around and worked with disadvantaged groups within Belfast. The circus school moved into its own permanent space in 1999 and formed the Belfast Community Circus School.

The school offers a range of programs including: Outreach programs running about seven workshops/week in centers and schools across Northern Ireland and the border counties of the Republic of Ireland; two programs supporting the formation of community circus programs in Portadown and Lisburn; tailored programs to meet the needs of particular clients, such as day/week and one week residency programs in schools; and co-curricular Circus in Education programs newly initiated in Down High School and St Vincent’s Center.

Interview with Will Chamberlain: Will is the Director of the Belfast Community Circus School and has worked with the school for six years. Will expressed concern over the move of circus into education, worried that with the move circus could become a compulsory part of a school's curriculum, the compulsory nature being anathema to his concept of circus.

The major management issues facing Belfast include: the recruitment of trainers with an understanding of both circus and youth work; the balancing act the Director must play between the creativity of staff and the need for bureaucratic organization and goals; and the management of resources, again a balance between the needs of the creative staff and the administration.

In teaching, Will's thoughts revolved around two major issues: the well being and health of the youth in the programs, examining safe practice and physical, emotional and social support; and the variety of teaching methodology required because of the varied contexts within which the school offers programs.

Interview with Ian Hall: Ian is the Director of Youth Circus at the Belfast Circus School and has teaching, teacher development and supervisory. Within the organization, and especially as it grows larger, the major issues of setting direction and policy, maintaining organizational consistency and promoting an openness within the organization need attention. These issues, and the manner in which they are addressed, have a profound impact on the quality of the trainers and their work, and on the very strength of the programs delivered.

This delivery of programs is in turn impacted by a number of issues including: The skill level of the trainers and the fact that this needs to be raised; The training of the trainers, especially in teaching methodology; and the relative gender imbalance in the ranks of the trainers with too few female trainers being available.

Interview with Kathryn Montgomery: Kathryn is a full time outreach team leader. She is instrumental in the development of the residential program at St Vincent's Center and Down HS and the 'Circus of Wonders' program in which a number of teenagers travel to Australia (NICA) to train, and return to Belfast to train others.

The manner of delivery of Circus programs is fundamental in the success or otherwise of a Circus program and its aims. This requires teachers with high-level skills who are able to inspire children, and the time and skill progressions to encourage peer educators who may then be extended into industry access.

In management terms, several issues arise from the particular context of Belfast. These include the insurance of the mini-bus, that restricts driver access and therefore access to communities; the relative imbalance of females in leading roles within the organization; the need for development of policy and skills required to more fully train the trainers; and the need for openness in the organizational structure as the School grows ever larger.

5. Conclusions:

These conclusions are drawn from: Observations of programs; Interviews with directors, staff and participants; and early analysis of qualitative data collated and processed using as a tool, Constant Comparative Analysis. Because of space restrictions, only major data trends are presented. A more detailed analysis, and a narrative account of the Fellowship will be available in the future.

That children, and adults, join circus predominately because it is seen as fun/cool and for its different or eclectic nature. In addition, they are attracted to the opportunity to learn new skills, the sense of family and belonging, and the opportunity to perform for family, friends and public. That participants not only achieve growth in physical and circus skills, they also achieve positive growth in intrinsic values, intrinsic virtues, and social, group and personal skills. The secondary categories and the comparative themes, into which I have assembled them, are:

Intrinsic Value Growth = Self-confidence, Self-belief/worth, Self-image/esteem & Self-knowledge

Intrinsic Virtue Growth = Perseverance, Trust, Responsibility, Resilience, Tolerance & Courage

Society Level Growth = Life skills, Socio/cultural consciousness, Respect for self/others/gear & Communication skills

Group Level Growth = Co-operative skills, Friendships, Teamwork & Belonging to circus/school

Personal Level Growth = Performance interest/experience, Attitude to school & results, Creative skills

That the major issues in teaching and management of youth circus programs are related to: staffing and staff development; the assessment and management of risk; the accessibility of the program to youth at risk; the short and long term management of the venue and program; the appropriateness of the pedagogy employed; and succession planning.

That all programs reported consistent and strong indications of positive personal and social, and in some cases cultural, growth in their participants. While not necessarily claiming a direct causal link, there was little doubt in the minds of directors, parents and senior students of what circus was offering and achieving in their youth. This strength of conviction also supported the benefits for youth at risk, the support of whom many of the programs have as their central mission.

That the success of most if not all of the programs visited relies on the charisma and magnetism of the director for their life energy. Both AYCO and NAYC reported on programs that had gone to the wall because of director retirement or burnout. Evidence of proactive succession planning was scant although the issue was raised in some form within ten of the programs visited. Succession is an immediate concern in a number of programs in which Directors have announced or are actively considering retirement.

That risk assessment and management are major issues in all programs, but the approach taken to deal with both varied widely. A number of programs relied heavily on the oral circus tradition of knowledge and common sense passed down through generations. Those programs within schools invariably used the general accident report protocols of the schools. The management of risk in the UK was most advanced on paper with the formulation of the Code of Practice by the NAYC, but I'm not sure of how widely it is used in practice.

That the quality of staffing, their management, and the use of appropriate pedagogy are all issues of concern. Staff with circus, youth work and teaching abilities, and possessing a rapport with youth are greatly prized and sought. Those staff are concerned about communication with, and recognition by, managers, and the balance between creative and organizational goals. Appropriate pedagogy was raised as an issue by many programs, especially those working with teenagers and youth from disadvantaged, at risk or minority backgrounds.

That this report be disseminated through the web sites of the Churchill Trust, Dubbo West Public School, and the NCPTA⁸, the NCPTA national conferences, educational journals and bodies in NSW and Australia, and the directors of all programs visited whilst on the Fellowship.

6. Recommendations:

That circus arts programs be promoted to schools and university teacher education faculties as a vehicle capable of delivering physical skills and attributes, and developing many values, virtues and life skills.

That this promotion acknowledges that circus fulfills many physical education, sporting and personal development program requirements, and that when used in concert with more traditional approaches is capable of achieving positive growth in all three fields.

That this promotion acknowledges that circus is a positive sporting and personal development alternative for those youth deemed 'at risk' in our schools, and for those looking for an alternative to the more traditional options available.

That the various departments of education and the NCPTA, in consultation with teachers and directors of circus arts programs, be encouraged to develop strategies to support succession planning in schools and youth programs that will then promote continuity in leadership, teaching and direction. That these strategies be made available to other arts and sporting programs concerned with succession, programs like school bands and specialist sporting teams.

That the approach to risk management by the NSW Department of Education and the Australian Gymnastics Federation, and under development by the NCPTA be recognized for its quality, and its ongoing development encouraged.

That the early efforts of the NCPTA towards a Safety Code of Practice for use in Circus and Physical Theater be encouraged and supported, particularly in the area of youth circus programs.

That the at times disparate training opportunities for youth circus teachers in Australia be coordinated in a way that allows for the maximum accessibility and participation by both circus professionals who are teaching, and educational professionals who want to teach circus.

That representation is made to university research staff for support of further qualitative research into the results expressed in this report and in support of master and doctoral thesis currently being presented in Australia and the United Kingdom.

That, while recognizing and celebrating the quality and diversity of programs visited in the USA, the UK, and the Netherlands, Australian youth circus programs be lauded for their quality, their organization and the proactive approach that has been taken to education, risk assessment and management, and professional and collegial support.

Paul Woodhead
Churchill Fellow 2003

¹ Program Flyer 2002 ©Prescott Clown Troupe

² The Prescott Clown Troupe: *What Difference Does it Make?* ©Aileen Moffitt 2003 work in progress

³ email 5.4.03 from Teresa Kochis

⁴ Skylight Circus Arts flyer © 2003 Skylight Circus

⁵ *circustheater* Elleboog booklet © 1994 circustheater Elleboog

⁶ email 5.12.02 from Annelies Heesakkers to the circus community

⁷ Cirque du Soleil's Social Action © Social Affairs and International Cooperation Department

⁸ NCPTA – the National Circus & Physical Theater Association of Australia