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Toward best practices in youth worker training for developmental circus arts programs

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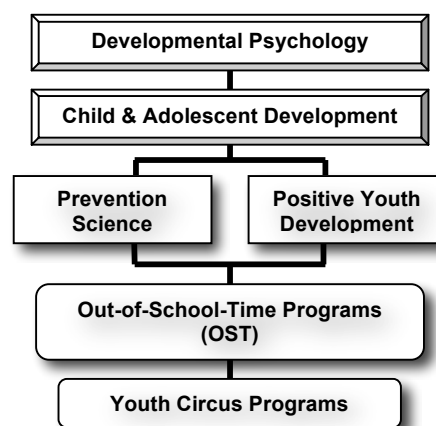
The initial aim of this paper was to serve as a springboard for discussion at an Educator Conference of the American Youth Circus Organization, the nation's only advocacy group for the youth circus sector.

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Introduction

There are countless out-of-school time (OST) programs serving 6.5 million children and youth annually (NIOST, 2009). These programs range from academic support, to the arts, to sports-based youth development programs. In the research and reports on OST organizations, one genre is conspicuously absent: youth circus. While the number of youth circus organizations in the United States is not yet known, tens of thousands of young people are estimated to be participating in youth circus programs to some degree, whether in summer camps, community based organizations, physical education classes, or pre-professional companies (AYCO, 2008). Yet youth circus remains an unknown player on the OST field. This may be due, in part, to the autonomous nature of youth circus organizations. Circus, after all, is a nonconformist art form drawing a high proportion of individualistic, free-spirited people. This is a gift and a strength which does the art form great credit. At the same time, autonomy may inadvertently shield the youth circus movement from potential alliances with other disciplines and the benefits of shared resources. For example, it is not known whether youth circus programs consider themselves members of the OST field or even know that such a field exists. Strictly speaking, unless circus is taught in a school setting, all youth circus programs are OST programs and could, theoretically, tap into the human and financial resources available to the OST industry.

Within the OST field there are two broad approaches to youth programming: programs designed to intervene or prevent negative outcomes in “targeted” at-risk populations; and strengths-based educational or recreation programs that promote positive outcomes in normative, “universal” populations. Youth circus teachers may include program elements from both prevention science and



positive youth development, however they may not be aware that they are doing so or may use different vocabularies to describe their practices. Aligning youth circus programs with developmental psychology and OST best practices may prove enriching to all three fields.

This paper is premised on the assumption that the youth circus movement wants to grow.

Capacity for growth is partially dictated by the number of youth circus workers available to teach or direct circus programs¹. Currently, the youth circus sector has limited capacity for growth in part because a comprehensive professional development system for youth circus workers does not currently exist. One step toward professionalizing the field would be to identify the core competencies that a youth circus worker would need – above and beyond the ability to teach the circus skills themselves – to positively impact many more young lives. While there are 6.5 million young people in OST programs, there are 14.3 million who are not (NIOST, 2009); how many might be served by an increased youth circus presence?

This paper focuses on the nexus of out-of-school-time learning, prevention science and positive youth development, and youth circus which, taken together, point toward a suggested next step for professionalizing the youth circus field, namely articulating a set of core competencies for youth circus workers.

A brief history of Out-of-School-Time learning

Out-of-school time (OST) refers to “the time a child spends outside of the school day and encompasses before school programs, after school programs, and summer camps” (Buck-Ruffen, 2006, p. 1). Stolow (2009)² metaphorically describes the OST movement as a river with three major tributaries. The first stream emerged during World War II when mothers left their home-based work to join the war effort, creating a new need for day care centers for pre-school

¹ Deciding on the terminology for a circus teacher, coach, or practitioner is an ongoing discussion within the youth circus community. For the purposes of this paper a circus teacher, coach, or practitioner will be called a *youth circus worker*.

² David Stolow, Director of Strategic Development at Citizen Schools, Boston MA www.citizenschools.org

children. The post-war return of income-earning fathers restored the status quo such that in the 1960's only one in four women worked outside of the home; however the women's movement of the 1970s prompted a major demographic shift as greater numbers of mothers entered the workforce. The demand for institutionalized child care has continued to rise as the number of single working mothers has grown from 3 million in 1970 to 10 million in 2005 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2005).

By the late 1980's, a second stream of the OST river emerged in response to a national crime wave and the growing need to provide safety for young people while parents were still at work. The perception of the "urban super predator" and a rise in gang membership drove the need to get inner-city youth off the streets and into safe, supervised activities.

In the late 1990's a third stream arose out of the educational standards movement as well as the drive to improve standardized test scores. Little (2009) writes that in 1998 the U.S. Department of Education launched the 21st Century Community Learning Centers with the goal of delivering quality afterschool programs, and its subsequent reauthorization in 2002 targeted academic enrichment and related educational services. Little goes on to note that today, OST programs are increasingly tapped to boost academic outcomes in underperforming students, particularly those from low-income and minority populations. Together these three tributaries -- the need for child care, the need for safety, and the drive to improve academic outcomes -- have merged to define the OST field of today.

Federal, state, and private funding have grown in support of OST programs with the federal government investing \$3.6 billion in 2002 (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). The benefits of OST programming for young people have been well noted: youth who attend afterschool programs make healthier lifestyle choices, show improved academic performance, benefit socially and developmentally, and engage in fewer risky behaviors (NIOST, 2009). While efforts have

concentrated on academic outcomes associated with afterschool programs, formal evaluation of personal and social benefits have been less rigorous (Durlak & Weissberg, 2007). Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003), citing Halpern and others, caution against using youth development programs solely for academic ends:

[There is a] growing pressure on after-school programs to become handmaidens to the schools. Providing youth, especially those who are behind academically, with more of the same by extending the school's curriculum and approach to the after-school hours robs them of the chance for the more appropriate, rewarding, and development-enhancing opportunities and supports advocated by those in the youth development field. (p. 96)

Little (2009) notes that improvements in academic performance appear to be correlated not only with extra time spent on schoolwork but with structured, fun, and engaging enrichment activities that promote youth development.

The concept of "development-enhancing opportunities" is fairly new, having been born out of the positive youth development movement of the 1990's. Before we look at how youth circus programs provide appropriate, rewarding, and development-enhancing OST opportunities to young people, let's look at positive youth development in context.

Prevention Science and Positive Youth Development

One current view of youth development defines it thus:

Youth development: A process which prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them to become socially, morally, emotionally, physically, and cognitively competent. Positive youth development addresses the broader developmental needs of youth, in contrast to deficit-based models which focus solely on youth problems. (National Collaboration for Youth, 1998)

In light of this holistic concept it becomes increasingly difficult to imagine a time when development was regarded more as a time of deficits than as a time of assets. Traditionally,

inquiries in psychology had focused on three aspects of practice: things that go wrong (psychopathology); efforts to understand why things go wrong (pathogenesis); and the search for ways to fix what has already gone wrong (psychotherapy) (Cowen, 1994). But in the late 1980's and early 1990's, developmental psychopathology spawned a paradigm-shifting theory concerning human resilience to misfortune, and a "psychology of wellness" began to take root as a new construct in the field (Cowen & Work, 1988), so new in fact that until then the word "wellness" had not appeared in the psychological literature (Cowen, 1991). A new research discipline called *prevention science* was forged "at the interfaces of psychopathology, criminology, psychiatric epidemiology, human development, and education" (Coie, et al., 1993, p. 1013). According to Coie (1993), the objective of prevention science is to prevent illnesses before they can occur, or to moderate their severity, by assessing the relationship of risk factors (variables related to mental health problems) and protective factors (conditions that increase resistance to risk factors) to a given disorder. The study of risk and protective factors informs the ways that prevention interventions are designed. In time, psychopathologists conceded that "building on adolescents' strengths and promoting competence ... are important prevention strategies to protect against emergent psychopathology" (Cicchetti & Rogosch, 2002, p. 15).

The shift away from a psychopathological mindset to one of prevention brought new advances to social psychology, however even prevention science was still a problem-focused paradigm. This prompted Pittman (1992) to utter the now famous adage, "Problem-free does not mean fully prepared." She later added:

As it becomes clear that not only is it the case that "problem-free isn't fully prepared" but that "fully prepared isn't fully participating"-- it is possible that young people on the margins -- especially those fifteen and older -- will remain there. (Pittman, *Balancing the equation*, 2000)

Pittman (1992) went on to outline three basic tenets of what would soon be labeled positive youth development (PYD):

Preventing high-risk behaviors is not enough. Our expectations for young people must be high and clear. Second, academic skills are not enough; young people are engaged in the development of a full range of competencies (social, vocational, civic, health). Third, competence, in and of itself, is not enough. Skill building is best achieved when young people are confident of their abilities, contacts, and resources. This means that young people need to be nurtured, guided, empowered, and challenged. They have to be engaged in constructive relationships with peers and adults. Youth work, I think, is fundamentally about supporting youth development: building broad competencies, meeting the broad needs just described. (n.p.)

By 1998, the Search Institute launched a research endeavor into resiliency, protective factors, and youth development to articulate and promote core health-enhancing elements; these were compiled into a framework of forty developmental assets to be used as benchmarks for positive child and youth development (Leffert, Benson, Scales, Sharma, Drake, & Blyth, 1998).

Continued work in this direction has yielded the Five C's of Positive Youth Development³ (Lerner, Almerigi, Theokas, & Lerner, 2005) and the Partnership for 21st Century Skills framework for building essential skills as citizens and lifelong learners (Framework for 21st Century Learning, 2004).

Regarding the impact of PYD programs in out-of-school-time learning, findings from two meta-analyses indicate that young people benefit in multiple ways, including increases in positive behaviors, decreases in negative behaviors, and improvements in academic outcomes in some programs (Durlak, et al., 2007). In fact, Roth and Brooks-Gunn (2003) cite the somewhat surprising finding that programs using a PYD approach appear to be more effective at preventing problem behaviors than prevention programs whose explicit intention is to prevent those behaviors. The authors go on to affirm the role of PYD which, in contrast to many

³ PYD's 5 Cs: Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, and Caring – leading to a sixth C: Contribution

prevention programs, provides youth with supportive environments in which they experience personal empowerment.

Youth circus programs vary widely in the level of skills they offer and the degree of developmental practices they bring to their teaching, however prevention and PYD are at the heart of the overarching youth circus philosophy, either explicitly or implicitly. Because youth circus is often considered to be inherently developmental, youth circus workers frequently notice positive developmental outcomes in their students without having explicitly targeted developmental outcomes in their teaching. Yet despite their conspicuous absence from the literature on positive youth development and out-of-school-time programs, youth circus programs serve thousands of youth nationwide and across the globe and have done so for several decades⁴. This next section aims to shine some light on youth circus to bring it out of the shadows.

A brief history of youth circus

Ott (2005) defines *youth circus* as “circus created and performed by youth, as opposed to an entertainment devised for youth” (p. 4). *Youth* in this case refers to young people across the spectrum but especially pre-teens and adolescents; and *circus* refers to the genre known as “New Circus,” a countercultural phenomenon of the 1970s (Ott, 2005) that parts from traditional circus in several key ways, such as its lack of animals, its accessibility to persons of ordinary ability, and its adaptability to any community group by any population (Bolton, 1987; Woodhead & Duffy, 1998). The New Circus movement evolved out of grassroots community projects as an innovative and somewhat subversive art form which, because it had no history or tradition of its own, was initially regarded with skepticism by the traditional circus profession (Ward, 2008).

⁴ The All American Youth Circus and the Gamma Phi Circus, founded in 1929; Sailor Circus, founded in 1949; Circus City Festival, founded in 1958.

Common to youth circus practice worldwide are three fundamental elements. First, the physical skills that serve as the basis for all youth circus activities are unique to circus: juggling, acrobatics, equilibratics, clowning, and aerials, to name the key domains. Secondly, youth circus is by definition non-competitive, departing from the team-versus-team tournament model found in sports, and the access-by-audition model of elite performance arts groups, in favor of the “troupe” model where youth participate in the spirit of “all for one and one for all.” And thirdly, true to its grassroots heritage, youth circus radically includes young people of every age, athletic capability, body size, socioeconomic status, academic standing, race, gender, and religion (Bolton, 2004; Davis, 2005; McCutcheon, 2003; Ott, 2005; Ward, 2008; Woodhead & Duffy, 1998).

Youth circus is an international movement that has become increasingly organized in Australia, the United Kingdom⁵, and Europe⁶. In the United States, the American Youth Circus Organization (AYCO)⁷ was founded in 1998 to “promote the participation of youth in circus arts” (AYCO, 2008), and it produces biennial national circus festivals and educator conferences where trainers and youth come to share and showcase circus skills and professional best practices. Represented at these festivals are youth circus programs that serve a spectrum of youth populations which, for the purposes of this paper, can be organized into two broad programmatic areas: educational and recreational circus arts; and Social Circus.

Social Circus

Youth circus is no stranger to social service and has been a vehicle for supporting at-risk and marginalized youth for decades. Noted for his contributions to community circus, Dr. Reg Bolton (1945-2006) was a tireless champion of circus as “a significant developmental

⁵ Arts Council of England: <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/artforms/theatre/young-peoples-participatory-theatre/projects-and-events/youth-circus/>

⁶ European Youth Circus Organization (EYCO): <http://eyco.org/>

⁷ www.americanyouthcircus.org

experience for young people” (Bolton, 2004, p. 1).

Bolton was present at the First International Round

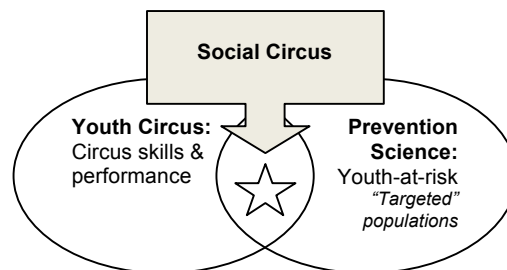
Table of Circus and Social Work in 2002 where

representatives from twelve countries drafted the

Charter of the Creation of the United Nations of Social

Circus:

This confederation [of social circus] is dedicated to cooperating to produce social transformations using circus arts as a tool. The members of this confederation are moved by the conviction that circus is an educational instrument of emancipation and economic development. We also believe that circus is a particularly efficient means of communication. It operates as a magnet for disadvantaged groups and clearly demonstrates its potential for social change. (from Bolton, 2004, p. xxiv)



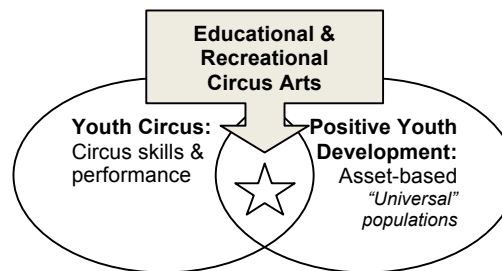
Five years later, a second gathering of Social Circus professionals from six nations⁸ took place to draft a charter for an International Network for Social Circus Training whose mission was “to provide leadership in the area of Social Circus Instructor Training” (International network for social circus training, 2007). This document declares Social Circus interventions as a means for aiding youth who are at-risk, excluded, or in difficult circumstances “to recover their dignity and self-confidence” (p. 3). Among the articles of the Network charter is a call for continuous training leading to accreditation, certification, or a diploma as a Social Circus Instructor; the nature of such a training and the criteria for instructor certification are two of the many tasks that the Network aims to operationalize.

While Social Circus addresses trauma and adversities in young people’s lives, it is also concerned with building resilience against such adversities through the promotion of psychological strengths. Here we touch on a strengths-based approach that is frequently found in educational or recreational youth circus programs.

⁸ The United States was not represented at either Social Circus meeting.

Educational and Recreational Circus Arts

Generally speaking, educational and recreational circus arts programs serve a “universal” population of young people who tend to have more protective factors in their lives and are therefore at lower psychosocial risk than those served by Social



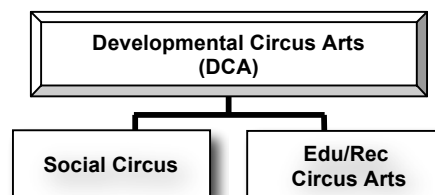
Circus programs. Perkins and Noam (2007) define community youth development programs as environments that intentionally provide sustained, positive relationships between youth and adults and that build life skills and leadership competencies. Educational and recreational circus arts programs frequently share these hallmark qualities by enabling youth to become counselors-in-training, mentors, and coaches.

Youth circus workers often wonder where to draw the line between a Social Circus approach and a strengths-based educational or recreational approach since there is considerable overlap. A chief consideration lies in the relative number or severity of risk factors present in the lives of the young circus participants: one practices Social Circus with a targeted group of youth coping with greater or more numerous psychosocial risks; while educational or recreational circus arts is generally (but not always) used with a universal population of youth at lower risk in relation to protective factors. However, human nature can seldom be so conveniently categorized. In fact, many programs may fall in the middle and are likely to serve youth from both camps. (Coie et al. (1993) propose that combining targeted and universal populations may be the optimal choice for interventions, for the lower risk youth in a combined program will positively influence the program environment to the benefit of the targeted, high-risk youth. Reciprocally, Coie adds that programs that reduce maladaptive behaviors in high-risk youth may positively impact the larger population who will feel less stressed as a whole, creating a better learning environment.

When doing circus work in Australia, Bolton reportedly refused to segregate the high-risk youth to avoid further ostracism of a group that was already marginalized (McCutcheon, 2003.)

Developmental Circus Arts

Developmental circus arts (DCA) is coined here as an umbrella term wherever circus is a vehicle for the growth and benefit of young people; Social Circus addresses needs on one end of the spectrum while educational and



recreational circus arts address needs on the other, with plenty of interplay in between. The term *developmental* refers to intrapersonal change over time in at least three interrelated domains: the physical, socioemotional, and cognitive domains (Berk, 2007), and the degree to which a program will explicitly foster growth in these domains. Thus, broadly speaking, a *developmental circus arts program* (DCAP) is a micro-ecology in which the process of acquiring circus skills and creating performances cultivates positive outcomes across multiple domains.

Within a given developmental circus arts program there are two general programmatic areas: the circus skills and performance elements; and the non-circus elements. Youth circus practitioners are experts at teaching circus skills and creating performances, and they have guided young people in this area for several decades. However current conversations in the field increasingly focus on the second programmatic area, namely the need for a framework for training youth circus workers in the non-circus aspects of their work. One step in this direction would be to identify core competencies, independent of actual circus skill knowledge, that youth circus workers should know in their delivery of circus programs for young people. Because most youth circus programs operate in OST, core competencies needed for youth circus workers will likely share similar properties that have been identified by youth workers in out-of-school-time and positive youth development settings.

Core competencies for youth circus workers

As stated above, in order to provide a developmental framework for teaching circus arts, youth circus workers need to know two sets of knowledge: circus-based expertise for teaching circus skills and producing circus performances⁹; and an understanding of how to work with young people as youth circus professionals within a community.

The National Collaboration for Youth defines youth development core competencies as “the ‘demonstrated capacities’ that form a foundation for high-quality performance in the workplace, contribute to the mission of the organization, and allow a youth development worker to be a resource to youth, organizations, and communities” (National Collaboration for Youth, 1998).

The increase in the research, policy, and practice of positive youth development over the past two decades provides many resources from which to draw in formulating best practices for youth circus workers. One of the earliest efforts to construct a working definition of *youth development* identified two themes: the basic needs of young people; and the assets that young people need for successful participation in adolescent and adult life (Pittman & Wright, 1991):

Youth Basic Needs	Youth Competencies
a sense of safety and structure	health/physical competence
a sense of belonging/membership	personal/social competence
a sense of self-worth/contributing	cognitive creative competence
a sense of independence/control over one's life	vocational competence
a sense of closeness/relationships	citizen competence (ethics and participation)
a sense of competence/mastery	

For this paper, a search was undertaken to find existing lists of core competencies for youth workers that related to Pittman and Wright's identified youth needs and competencies; the lists would then be compared for common elements and outliers, and the common items would be

⁹ How to teach circus skills is not within the scope of this paper. There are as many ways to teach circus as there are instructors and organizations!

consolidated into a master list for the consideration of youth circus directors in the United States (as well as abroad, if requested).

Six sources of youth worker core competencies were identified (see Appendix for websites):

- **Achieve Boston**, organized in 2001 to build a professional development infrastructure for youth workers (Achieve Boston, 2004);
- **Academy for Educational Development (AED)**, a non-profit organization dedicated improving conditions for the underserved (Academy for Educational Development, 1996);
- **Department of Youth and Community Development**, founded in 1996 to administer funding to community-based organizations in New York City (DYCD, n.d.);
- **Harvard Family Research Project**, founded in 1983 to promote the wellbeing of young people, their families, and their communities (Harvard Family Research Project, 2005);
- **Youth Work Central**, which partners with The Medical Foundation to promote the BEST Initiative, a youth worker certificate program (Youth Work Central, n.d.);
- **National Collaboration for Youth**, a member-based coalition of youth development supporters (National Collaboration for Youth, 1998).

Each of these organizations worked independently to identify youth worker core competencies during various summits with professional youth workers and youth work advocates. While the lists were created independently of each other and had differently named categories or descriptions, there was remarkable agreement between them regarding the types of competencies youth workers ought to possess (see Appendix for tables of consolidated youth worker core competencies). By consolidating the six lists together, the resulting master list suggests eight core competencies for youth circus workers to evaluate for their own professional practices:

Suggested core competencies for youth circus workers:

1. Youth development

Knows relevant theory of developmental stages and the principles of positive youth development.

2. Program and activities

Designs or implements curricula to promote development across multiple domains (physical, socio-emotional, and cognitive).

3. Professionalism

Youth worker understands and represents role as professional.

4. Cultural competence

Respects diversity, practices inclusion.

5. Youth involvement

Includes youth as empowered decision-makers, partners, and leaders.

6. Caring relationships

Develops positive relationships with youth; guides toward positive behaviors.

7. Safety

Ensures physical and psychological safety.

8. Community partnerships

Recognizes connections with families, schools, and civic organizations.

Competencies 1-3 (youth development, program and activities, and professionalism) were named in the lists from all six summits; five out of six summits named competencies 4-6 (cultural competence, youth involvement, and caring relationships); and four out of six summit lists named competencies 7-8 (physical and psychological safety, and community partnerships). There were also two outlier competencies that were only identified in one summit that had no matches from other summit lists: Program Management; and Environment. (See Appendix for the competencies from the six summits.)

At the AYCO Educator Conference, the tasks will be: to review the list; to convene small group discussions around the suggested competencies; to come to consensus on the non-negotiables; to add any competencies not on the master list; and to discard or alter competencies that don't apply to the youth circus sector. The new list will be presented to the AYCO Board of Directors as a peer-recommended document.

Once core competencies for youth circus workers are identified, each youth circus organization would then choose whether, and to what degree, to adopt them into their program practices and staff training. Note that the autonomy of each youth circus organization is respected because the core competencies would be recommendations rather than regulations; each organization would define, for itself, its own ways of meeting the competencies according to its unique situation and local needs. Thus, while establishing core competencies would help to professionalize the youth circus sector, having individualized indicators for those competencies would help ensure the creative autonomy that is so important to arts organizations.

Conclusions and future action

The field of youth circus is at a crossroads. The prospect of defining core competencies for youth circus workers touches on the tension between nailing something down and keeping it free. In Australia, the National Institute of Circus Arts (NICA) offers a university degree in circus arts yet is conflicted about identifying the qualities needed in a circus arts trainer:

We actually don't have qualifications to be a social circus trainer; people usually get work because of their experience. ... Yes, there is a push for competencies but there is also a push the other way as circus is always something that has been passed on in a non-academic way. In fact one of the reasons it works as a community cultural development tool is because it is about being "other." After all, we want to run away from main stream life to join the circus... But yes, there is a move towards competencies. (A. Ousley, personal communication, May 21, 2009)

In Germany, where social circus is supported at the state and federal levels, the umbrella organization of youth circus (Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Zirkuspaedagogik) has been hard at work on security, health, and qualification standards since its conference in November, 2008:

Circus workers in Germany up until now work after their own concept. It varies from circus to circus. ... We have now about four different places where you as an instructor can have training in Social Circus. But since they all vary in their curriculum they cannot be state approved. So our next step is exactly what you are writing about – having a

“set of core competencies” that do not vary from town to town and circus to circus. ... But we are very close; our conference was very successful. (R. Backofen, personal communication, May 20, 2009)

Here in the United States, circus has a long way to go to be recognized as a legitimate developmental tool for young people. Out-of-school-time programs and funding are increasingly driven by evidence-based practices, and if developmental youth circus programs are to go to scale here they will likely need to be grounded in theory, research, and evaluation. Proponents of an evidence-based approach will welcome such practices, but others may find definitions and competencies confining in a field that is by its nature unconfined.

Two potentially helpful caveats come to mind as this paper draws to a close. First, should the youth circus sector feel its creative impulses threatened by standards and definitions, it could include *creativity* as one of the core competencies. Numerous ways to operationalize such a standard could be explored, including perhaps the provision that youth circus workers share an independent creative project – art, music, dance, writing, circus – at a given professional development session. The second caveat is summed up well in this insightful statement from the first page of a Core Competencies for Youth Work Professionals document: “These competencies are designed to be used as a tool to guide the professional development of the youth work professional, NOT as a barrier for entry into the field” (DYCD, n.d.).

The field of developmental circus arts may find itself enriched by adapting lessons learned from social science and the OST profession. The creative minds who venture to integrate these fields will undoubtedly ensure that youth circus preserves its right of artistic freedom. The creative integration of youth circus, developmental psychology, and out-of-school-time learning may prove to be the best scenario for millions of young people who have yet to experience the positive impact of a developmental circus arts program. ✎

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APPENDIX:**CONSOLIDATED YOUTH WORKER CORE COMPETENCIES FROM SIX SUMMITS****Six sources of youth worker core competencies**

1. Achieve Boston	<i>Achieve Boston Competency Framework.</i> (2004). Retrieved April 21, 2009, from Achieve Boston: http://www.achievetoboston.org/downloads/framework.pdf
2. AED Center	<i>AED core competencies for national youth-serving organizations.</i> (1996). Retrieved April 19, 2009, from Youthwork Central: http://www.youthworkcentral.org/images/AED_competencies.pdf
3. DYCD	<i>DYCD core competencies for youth work professionals.</i> (n.d.). Retrieved April 19, 2009, from NYC Department of Youth & Community Development: http://www.nyc.gov/html/dycd/downloads/pdf/core_competencies_for_yw_professionals.pdf
4. HFRP	Harvard Family Research Project. (2005). <i>Exploring quality standards for middle school after school programs: What we know and what we need to know: A summit report.</i> Cambridge, MA: Author. http://www.hfrp.org/
5. Youthwork Central	<i>Youthwork Central school age childcare and youth worker basic competencies.</i> (n.d.). Retrieved April 19, 2009, from Youthwork Central: http://www.youthworkcentral.org/images/boston_basic_comp.pdf
6. NYDIC	<i>National Collaboration for Youth. (January 2004).</i> Youth development worker competencies. Retrieved May 3, 2009, from http://www.nydic.org/nydic/library/publications/ncypubs.htm .

Youth Development core competencies are the “demonstrated capacities” that form a foundation for high-quality performance in the workplace, contribute to the mission of the organization, and allow a youth development worker to be a resource to youth, organizations, and communities.

-- National Collaboration for Youth, 2004

**Youth Worker Core Competency #1:
STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT & POSITIVE YOUTH DEVELOPMENT (PYD)**

(6/6 alignment)

1. Achieve Boston	Child & youth development; understand stages, special needs, competencies, and positive youth outcomes.
2. AED Center	Ability to articulate relevant theory about youth's physical, emotional, social, and cognitive processes; peer group relations & sexuality; risk & protective factors of youth development.
3. DYCD	Knowledge of principles & practices of child & youth development and ability to use knowledge to achieve program goals.
4. HFRP	Positive youth development: youth ownership and voice encouraged; program is assets-based; high expectations for all students.
5. Youthwork Central	Stages of development for children & youth: Understanding the stages of development for children/youth, both expected and atypical behavior.
6. NYDIC	Understands and applies basic child and adolescent development principles. Interacts with and relates to youth in ways that support asset building.

**Youth Worker Core Competency #2:
ACTIVITIES, PROGRAM, AND CURRICULA**

(6/6 alignment)

1. Achieve Boston	Activities/curricula: promote life skills & enhance phys., cog., social, & emotional development of all children & youth including special needs.
2. AED Center	Demonstrate capacity to plan & implement events consistent with needs of youth and in context of available resources.
3. DYCD	Ability to effectively implement curricula and program activities. Ability to foster academic and non-academic skills and broaden participant horizons.
4. HFRP	Programming, activities, and opportunities: reflect the needs and wants of youth, families, and schools. Well-planned. Different from school.
5. Youthwork Central	Structuring activities: Understanding how to plan, carry out, and assess activities.
6. NYDIC	Adapts, facilitates, and evaluates age appropriate activities with and for the group.

Youth Worker Core Competency #3:

PROFESSIONALISM

(6/6 alignment)

1. Achieve Boston	Professionalism: understanding one’s role in the organization; professional boundaries; professional advancement.
2. AED Center	Demonstrate awareness of self as a Youth Development Worker. Demonstrate capacity to collaborate with other community agencies and youth-serving organizations.
3. DYCD	Ability to behave professionally.
4. HFRP	Staff: Show mutual respect; qualified with appropriate training; behavior & rules; effective program practices; ongoing PD.
5. Youthwork Central	Professionalism: Understanding the worker’s job & role in the organization, professional boundaries, and professional self-care.
6. NYDIC	Works as part of a team and shows professionalism.

**Youth Worker Core Competency #4:
CULTURAL COMPETENCE & DIVERSITY**

(5/6 alignment)

1. Achieve Boston	Cultural competence: understanding differences; inclusion principles & techniques.
2. AED Center	Demonstrate respect for diversity & differences among youth, families, & communities.
3. DYCD	Ability to promote an inclusive, welcoming, and respectful environment that embraces diversity.
4. HFRP	-
5. Youthwork Central	Diversity: Understanding differences and inclusion principles and techniques.
6. NYDIC	Respects and honors cultural and human diversity.

**Youth Worker Core Competency #5:
YOUTH INVOLVEMENT & EMPOWERMENT**

(5/6 alignment)

1. Achieve Boston	Building leadership & advocacy: Community leaders, share expertise. Also help children, youth, & parents build their own leadership and advocacy skills.
2. AED Center	Demonstrate capacity to sustain relations that facilitate youth empowerment. Demonstrate capacity to develop peer group cohesion & collaborative participation
3. DYCD	Ability to deliver leadership, team building, and self-advocacy skills among participants.
4. HFRP	-
5. Youthwork Central	Youth workers as community resources: Understanding the importance of empowering children, youth, & families as members of their community.
6. NYDIC	Involves and empowers youth.

**Youth Worker Core Competency #6:
CARING RELATIONSHIPS (and behavior)**

(5/6 alignment)

1. Achieve Boston	Building caring relationships/Behavior guidance.
2. AED Center	Demonstrate caring for youth and families.
3. DYCD	-
4. HFRP	Human relationships: Staff relate to participants in positive, nurturing, and consistent ways; support development of all participants.
5. Youthwork Central	Building caring relationships: Understanding trust, communication, respect, empathy, & identifying assets. Managing behavior: Understanding how to prevent and deal with behavior/expectations.
6. NYDIC	Communicates and develops positive relationships with youth. Demonstrates the attributes and qualities of a positive role model.

**Youth Worker Core Competency #7:
SAFETY: PHYSICAL & PSYCHOLOGICAL**

(4/6 alignment)

1. Achieve Boston	Safety/Health & Nutrition: Understanding how to maintain personal health & safety, prevention, crisis, CPR & First Aid.
2. AED Center	-
3. DYCD	Ability to comply with applicable safety and emergency requirements. Ability to promote responsible & healthy decision-making among all participants.
4. HFRP	-
5. Youthwork Central	Safety issues: First aid & CPR, understanding how to maintain personal health safety.
6. NYDIC	Identifies potential risk factors (in a program environment) and takes measures to reduce those risks.

**Youth Worker Core Competency #8:
COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS:
Families, Schools, & Civic Organizations
(4/6 alignment)**

1. Achieve Boston	Workers as community resources; know how to identify community resources and partner with other organizations Families & Schools: partner with families, partner with schools
2. AED Center	Demonstrate capacity to work with community leaders, groups, & citizens on behalf of youth. Demonstrate capacity to collaborate with other community agencies and youth-serving organizations.
3. DYCD	-
4. HFRP	Family, school & community partnerships; collaborations with civic organizations
5. Youthwork Central	-
6. NYDIC	Cares for, involves, and works with families and community.

Youth Worker Core Competency #9:

Outlier Elements

(1/6 alignment)

1. Achieve Boston	Program management: Having an accountable practice of program management enhances quality & promotes efficiency
	Environment: planned learning environment fosters involvement; space design; shared spaces; promote inclusion.
2. AED Center	-
3. DYCD	-
4. HFRP	-
5. Youthwork Central	-
6. NYDIC	-