

HOW TO SET UP A MASTERCLASS FOR CIRCUS SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS?

By Steven Desanghere

The following model has been followed by Steven, Wolfgang and Katja for the three administrative Masterclasses in Hannover (Governance), Amersfoort (Human Relations) and Hay-on-Wye (Daily Operational Administration), that all took five days. These Masterclasses were organized between December 2016 and April 2017.

MODEL AND TIPS FOR SETTING UP A MASTERCLASS

*The first half day is used for **general introduction**: icebreakers, getting to know each other's name and background, expectations, needs and expertise we can share, group agreements, objectives of the Masterclass, hand signs, etc. The objectives being Training, Information and Skill Sharing, Helping to Create a Resource Center, Networking, etc. We apply **Collective Learning through Problem Posing** and for this to happen we create a **Safe Learning Group** where Learning from each other is maximized.*

*In the afternoon we went a bit deeper on some **general topics**, for instance by using the **spectogram** (discussion exercise with two axes drawn on floor – every axe shows an answer for one of the two questions asked – e.g. “I totally Agree”-“I totally Disagree”, with all possible space between the two extreme answers).*

*By the end of day one, we form **BUDDY GROUPS** (pairs), that re-form every evening*

to check on each others learning process, feelings, observations, struggles, etc.

We end every day by a **FINAL ROUND**, where participants can share one of their highlights of the day.

By the beginning of the second day, we present the first draft of our '**emergent week-agenda**', based on the study of all the **information NEEDS and OFFERS** of the participants. These Needs and Offers are put **on different post-it notes** the day before.

During the week participants are asked to kickstart certain themes where they have some experience in, and they can propose energizers or other exercises.

We make sure every participant has the chance to **present her/his local circus project** for 5-15 minutes.

By the end of the final day, we let people **evaluate the Masterclass** by writing down their remarks on five different big topic-papers.

We make sure there is an interesting **Social Agenda** for those we are interested in it, as well as an artistic performance if possible.

Different methods that we used during the week: Open Space Technology, Handsigns, Buddy Time, Plenary group and Working Groups, Individual presentations, theatrical group presentations, language group discussions, papers on wall, post-its, powerpoint and other projections, colored hats, circus material, creative thinking (De Bono), Mindmaps, constructing a book list, games list or web info list on the wall, creating a FB group or GoogleDocs to share documents and pictures afterwards...

Some topics that were discussed in one, two or all Administrative Masterclasses: Circademics, Physical Literacy, Systemic Thinking, Status, Key Elements for Life Long Learning (Non-Formal Education), The Hand of Bolton, European Circus networks, Effective Team work, Effective Meetings, Working Structures, Criteria for Artistic Evaluation, Emotional and Physical Safety, Admin Software and Databases, Change and resistance in your team, Strategic Planning, Internal and External Communication, Human Resources, Motivation, Leadership, Networking and Partnerships, Social Circus Projects, Public Relations, Conflict and Non-Violent Communication, Social Media, Funding, Pedagogical and Artistic goals, Benefits of Circus education, Mainstream and Margins, Holacracy, acquiring and maintaining a circus building or tent, ...

THE METHODS WE USED WERE:

In the seminars we tried out methods that can be helpful in general for teambuilding and in our case to find out the principles of „How to run a circus school“

a) Working together

- >open space method
- >Working groups
- >Individual presentations
- >Coloured hats
- >Theatrical group presentations
- >Language groups
- >Buddy time
- >Using circus equipment

b) Collecting results

- > Constructing a book list
- > Papers on wall
- > Post its
- > Games list or web infolist on the wall
- > Pictures (Diashow)

c) Presentations

- > Mindmaps
- > Power point and other projections
- > Booklists
- >Facebook groups

d) Literature on masterclass methodologies

- > Facilitating
- > Energizers
- > Intervision
- > Management
- > Communication
- > Human resources

TOPICS FOR THE MASTERCLASSES:

A. GENERAL AIMS: Mission and vision of the circus schools in Europe

- > The Hand of Bolton
- > Social circus projects
- > Pedagogical versus artistic goals

B. BENEFITS OF CIRCUS EDUCATION

- > Circademics
- > Physical literacy – read: [Physical Literacy – The_Impact_Circus_Arts_Instruction-2](#)
- > Circus as part of cultural education

C. WHAT CAN HELP YOU PROFESSIONALIZING RUNNING A CIRCUS SCHOOL

1. Systemic thinking (www.systemicthinking.com)

Systemic thinking is a simple technique for making sense of challenging situations and developing simple interventions for transforming them.

We had a look at 13 possible interventions and found them easy to practice in working with it in challenging situations, like conflicts in the team. Look at it, if you have a conflict in the team and don't know how to get out of it. It will help everybody who wants to give people help. Also, read [Asking the right questions](#)

2. Holacracy

Holacracy is a self management practice for organizations (www.holacracy.org).

We found out that this system empowers people to make meaningful decisions in pursuit of your own circus schools purpose. With it you can discover a way of working that follows the principles of good circus teaching practice (see the Hand of Bolton). It is about:

- Agile organizational structure
- Efficient meetings and formats
- More autonomy to teams and individuals
- Decision making process

If you follow the link you can improve your daily practice. It is also possible to attend seminars held in different European countries in English, German, French and Dutch.

3. Knowledge of status and role

This is all about nonverbal communication. Everybody, who is leading a team has to be aware of his or her status and role. But how can you improve? We found a good method in improvisation theatre. If you are interested to go deeper, just visit an Improvisation Theatre course or read Keith Johnstone's: *Improvisation and the theatre* (1981). It is available in different translations. Also there is a free download of the full text in the internet.

Divided into four sections "Status", "Spontaneity", "Narrative Skills" and "Mask and trance" the book sets out the specific techniques and exercises, which Johnstone has found useful and most stimulating. The result is both an ideas book and a fascinating exploration of the nature of spontaneous creativity.

4. Life long learning in Europe

During all three masterclasses, we focused on the eight key competences for life long learning and the competence profile for trainers in the European youth work, which are:

1. Communication in mother tongue
2. Communication in foreign languages
3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology
4. Digital competence
5. Learning to learn
6. Social and civic competence
7. Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship
8. Cultural awareness and expression

And their emphasis on:

- > Critical Thinking
- > Creativity
- > Initiative taking and problem solving

- > Risk management
- > Decision taking
- > Managing feelings in a constructive way

The outcome was, that through youth work in circus we are able serve all these key competences. Youth work in the circus field traditionally is international and fosters the competence in foreign languages by the way. Students learn a lot while exchanging Youtube videos and being active in the social media. Even the mathematical and the competences in science and technology are an outcome of circus, because there is a stage to manage and it has a lot to do with a big variety of technical equipment. The emphasis on critical thinking, creativity, initiative, risk assessment, decision taking and management of feelings is part of every little circus project elsewhere in Europe. But we discovered an important key competence missing: The physical literacy. (see the chapter "Physical literacy")

For more information read the study *The eight key competencies for life long learning* (Hendrik Otten, Yael Ohana, salto-youth.net).

- > Change and resistance in a team
- > Strategic planning
- > Leadership
- > Motivation
- > Non violent communication

D. PRACTICALS

- > Admin software
- > Networks in Europe
- > Partnership
- > Social media and its use
- > Funding
- > Tents and buildings

To elaborate on possible Masterclass Methodologies, there is some really interesting literature on Facilitation, Energizers, Intersession, Management, Communication, Human Resources, etc.



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