



Benefits and Impacts of Learning Circus Skills

Greentop has a 15 year track record of using circus arts as an educational tool to enhance lives and bring about positive social change. We believe that circus can be a transformative experience with a range of impacts and benefits.

General Points

Learning circus skills is great fun, which encourages people to engage in the activity. This makes it more likely that people will join in and it also means participants will find it more memorable and enjoyable.

Learning circus skills gives people valuable experiences that can have a positive impact throughout their lives:

- having poise and concentration under pressure
- doing something you never thought possible
- mastering a skill through trial, error, and plenty of practice
- creating something out of nothing and seeing it come to fruition
- Working together in a co-operative way to bring about something big and special that you could never do by yourself

Supporting Learning & Links to the National Curriculum

Learning or teaching circus skills in an educational setting can have many benefits in terms of educational outcomes. For example, learning the skills themselves, how the circus activity affects the students and how it enables them to subsequently acquire knowledge.

Learning circus skills is an excellent, fun, class activity offering many links to National Curriculum areas such as physical education, performing arts, science, art, music, literacy and numeracy. Learning circus skills:

- Helps students develop patience and persistence
- Provides a model for co-operative learning
- Reminds us that challenges can be fun!
- Stimulates imagination and higher order problem solving
- Improves the abilities to focus and concentrate
- Can be seen as a performance art or a sport
- Can provide a good, levelling activity to have in breaks that leave students relaxed and more open to learning
- *“Cross-lateral movements actually improve the nerve communication between the two sides of the brain” C. Hannaford PhD*
- Larger equipment such as stilts, pedal-goes and unicycles require balance and control of the whole body, activating the vestibular system, waking up the brain and preparing it to take in new information

- *“Studies show that movement and stimulation of balance helps attention disorders and improves reading”* C. Hannaford PhD
- Pupils will experience pattern, sequence, timing and rhythm through the use of coloured equipment and the rhythmic movement of their arms in manipulating the equipment through set patterns, stimulating both the logical-left and creative-right hemispheres of the brain
- Although they admit to a lack of scientific data supporting their observations, several teachers and administrators recently have reported that they've seen students' schoolwork improve after the kids learned to juggle
- Juggling provides a series of sequential problems that require the student to:
 - calm down
 - pay attention
 - listen analytically
 - observe critically
 - focus on one activity at a time
 - plan a learning strategy
 - go step by step
 - stay on task
 - screen out distractions
 - manage their muscles to act appropriately and with the desired results using successive approximations
 - persevere through a series of minor failures (drops)
 - analyse final results of the process
 - Incorporate the newly learned activities into a larger pattern of complex learned activities that can be demonstrated and taught to others
- Juggling is a limitless, cumulative, branching model which teaches creative problem solving through direct experience and enhances creativity by offering intrinsic and extrinsic reinforcement with every gain in skill.
- It can, therefore, help young people develop their understanding of the processes of learning. This process can then be applied to other areas of learning. Through developing participants' confidence about their ability to learn and achieve, they are more likely to access other forms of learning later on.
- Kinaesthetic and Physically active learners will love to learn juggling especially. If you introduce juggling breaks/intervals into your regular studies/school day, then you will see these types of learners improve academically (these learners can be among the ones with biggest behavioural problems).
- Persistence/Perseverance - When you juggle, you inevitably drop. The student will move past these drops by persevering with the tricks they are working on until they conquer it. All of a sudden, drops/mistakes don't matter. They are just a stepping stone to success!
- Circus skills can provide a model of how to achieve excellence in any area through repeated efforts, reviewing progress, taking carefully considered risks to improve performance. This can be useful to counter what can be an increasingly risk-wary generation, particularly in the physical realm but in others also.
- There is evidence that juggling can be particularly beneficial to people with dyslexia, dyspraxia and ADHD.

Social Skills

- Students, who take part in juggling workshops, will find that they want to teach others their new skills. They will encourage each other and form friendships.
- There is plenty of scope for co-operative work as, with only a few basic skills, pupils can work in groups to choreograph presentations and develop performance routines.
- Juggling gives students a way to communicate with one another through co-operative work on group tasks, by sharing and teaching skills to others, and by monitoring their fellow students' advancements. When jugglers who have just learned a trick, try to teach someone else what they have learned, they can potentially show more empathy towards the new pupil than any seasoned juggler could provide! Performing in front of an audience is another method of communication, and this can help students overcome stage fright, fear of public speaking, and improve confidence also.
- This can help to raise the social status of individuals within a group.

Physical

- Circus skills workshops can provide a good, enjoyable context for improving general fitness and muscle tone; they can make exercising enjoyable and help build stamina.
- Skills such as diabolo, plate spinning and juggling with scarves, beanbags or balls improve hand-eye co-ordination, concentration, manipulation, throwing and catching skills, ambidexterity, encompassing both fine and gross motor control and are excellent cross lateral exercises.
- If you play any ball sport, learn how to juggle. Juggling is a neuromuscular skill that can have a profound impact on your sport. Among other benefits, juggling improves: Ambidexterity, Hand-Eye Co-ordination, Depth Perception, Peripheral Vision, Neuromuscular Balance, Quickness under Control, and Concentration.
- Circus skills also help develop rhythm and timing, flexibility, and reflexes.

Emotional

- Learning circus skills can create a sense of achievement and boost in self-esteem. It can be a great confidence builder! Basic skills can be learned very quickly and most people will find that they can do something that they previously thought was 'impossible'. Once the impossible for them has been achieved, they can then have a different outlook on life where suddenly things are much more achievable!
- When students can get up and perform successfully for adults or other students, self esteem soars.
- The non-competitive element can be beneficial also.

Regeneration and Community Building

- Setting up projects to learn circus skills can also effective deeper social problems such as crime through engaging and distracting young people who might otherwise be engaged in destructive tendencies. The perceived danger of circus skills make our activities very effective at reaching young people who are disinterested in many activities and disengaged with school. Also this can help to address behavioural problems through enabling people to focus on one activity and building their confidence.
- It has an excellent social function in that it brings together many people that would never have met.

Business, Team and Organisational Development

- Juggling develops teamwork/teambuilding, as it is a social activity that requires and develops friendships and trust. As students work towards putting on a performance, they may find themselves working closely with other performers.
- Juggling develops individuality - people can choose to perform their own solo spot.
- Circus skills can be a basis for discussing communication, balancing priorities, risk taking and its role in achieving excellence, innovation.

Progression routes - Further and higher education and careers

Initial training can lead to opportunities to develop highly specialised skills in order to:

- Become a self-employed artist or work for top class companies such as Cirque de Soleil
- Become a skilled tutor in one of the circus schools of the UK or abroad
- Work on a wide range of community and regeneration projects throughout the UK
- Training and performing can also be undertaken abroad, with the added benefit of travel
- There are a high number of circus artists for whom the traditional educational route to employment was not successful e.g. people with dyslexia. Circus can provide them with a meaningful and fulfilling career.

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