

Exploring Children's Experiences in Circus Club

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Introduction

As children spend the majority of their weekdays at school, it is important that there are a wide variety of movement opportunities that align with their broad interests. In an encouraging shift from sport-centered offerings that often dominate school physical activity programming, circus arts is an increasingly popular movement option in physical education and recess/afterschool contexts. Circus has been found to be an optimal way to develop physical literacy and the introduction of circus arts programs in schools has resulted in increased physical literacy outcomes for children and youth. Additionally, student voices are essential in shaping understanding of movement opportunities, furthering a deeper sense of ownership, confidence, and motivation in their physical literacy development.

Keywords: Circus Arts; Child and youth health and development; Kinesiology; Physical education; Physical literacy; Circus club; Intrinsic case study; Confidence; Motivation; Social engagement; Creativity.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to understand the physical literacy experiences of elementary school children who participated in circus club.

Methods

Circus club is a lunch-time program at an elementary school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The program is run by a physical education specialist, and it strives to provide students from grades 3-8 a non-sport movement opportunity. An intrinsic case study method was used to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences in circus club. Three data collection tools were used: field notes on participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and the write, draw, show, and tell (WDST) method. Data analysis was done by using Braun and Clarke's six step reflexive thematic analysis.

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Results

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 students enrolled in grades 4-8, and four completed the optional WDST activity. Using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis procedures, three themes were identified: (i) "I know I am getting better": Enhanced confidence and motivation through challenge, (ii) "Learning together": Collaboration and social engagement opportunities, and (iii) "Just be creative": Empowerment through choice and creative freedom. The findings highlighted how physical challenge, collaboration, choice, and creative freedom enhanced the participants' confidence, motivation, and social engagement.

Conclusion

Circus arts provided a unique opportunity for students to develop various aspects of physical literacy including confidence and competence, shown through positive challenge, as well as motivation, social connection, and creativity. The study also illuminated valuable insights into the participants' perspectives, highlighting the importance of their experiences in shaping their understanding and engagement with physical activity.