

Abstract

Encountering contemporary circus

Exploring arts-based research methods to understand the embodied learning of contemporary circus students.

The dissertation is based on empirical work which was carried out in three periods of two weeks spread out over the course of a school year at the *Circus Performer Department* at the Academy of Untamed Creativity (AFUK) in Copenhagen (Denmark) with six participating contemporary circus students. An initiating curiosity was to understand the embodied learning of the students and for this purpose it turned out to be necessary to develop research methods in order to provide such an insight. Therefore, the research question of the study is: How can arts-based research methods be developed with the purpose of providing insight into the embodied learning of contemporary circus students?

A narrative and embodied arts-based methodology was developed, followed by methodical exploration and development. The methodology is recurrent in the entire research process: In the meeting with the students as well as in the processing, analysis, and dissemination of their narratives. Four inter-connected approaches were developed: A sensuous approach, a visual approach, a narrative approach, and an audiovisual approach. Each approach manifests itself with different accentuation in different parts of the research process. Furthermore, two analytical models related to the interview material and the audiovisual material, respectively, were developed. The results are connected to and aim to contribute to arts-based educational research as well as research on embodied learning and humanistic and social science research on circus.

The conclusion is that a narrative and embodied arts-based methodology opens up a variety of possibilities for studying embodied learning as well as for disseminating written and audiovisual narratives. The developed research methods seem suited to provide insight into embodied learning as they are created to accommodate this group of young people who have chosen an embodied arts-based education. The developed methodical approaches provide insight into the embodied learning of the contemporary circus students by finding and emphasizing phenomena like embodied encounters, exhaustion, struggle, and freedom.

The developed methodology and the methodical approaches may be applied to research on, among other things, circus, dance, movement, and sport, as well as other practices where the body is central. Furthermore, the results of the study may be relevant for research in other educational/learning contexts, e.g. skilled trade or professional bachelor programs.