

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



**Developing high performance:
The influence of cultural diversity**

Speaker: Bernard Petiot, Creation Studio Director
Editor: Chantal Marcotte, Director's Assistant
International Forum on Elite Sport III
September 9th-11th, 2003



In which way the experience of «Cirque du Soleil» (CDS) can offer Interest in the context of this forum ?

- Share experiences:
 - Journey of CDS
 - My experience as former coach
- Talk about «culture diversity» and the pursuit of human performance in the context of «cirque» entertainment;
- Training at CDS: inspiration and transfer of «knowledge» and «now how» from sport and scientific community

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



Cirque du Soleil's mission statement

- To create, produce and perform works of art.
- To **invoke** the imagination, to **provoke** the senses and to **evoke** the emotions of people around the world.

In the pursuit of its dreams and in its business practices, Cirque du Soleil, an international organization founded in Quebec, strives to be a responsible proponent of change in the community.



Short story

- 18 years old
- Street performers
- Vision:
 - Theatrical and sport marriage
 - The show is the star
- Valuing talent, differences and risk taking

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



CDS now

- 9 shows;
- More than 4 000 performances per year;
- 550 artists;
- 25 languages spoken;
- 30 nationalities represented;
- 6 to 12 year life span per show.

“We aspire to draw inspiration from artistic and cultural diversity.”

Guy Laliberté, fonder and owner

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



Multi... cultural... discipline...

Promoting collaboration and cooperation while coming in with beliefs and understanding from a variety of **knowledge, attitude** and **practical** background

- Sport ... high level... opponents before
- Artistic... theatre...dance...choreography...
- Entertainment technicians
- language

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



Who are they ???

- Artists from various sport and circus background:
 - China Performing Arts Agency: 10% 53 artists
 - Artists with circus arts background: 13 65
 - Artists with non-acrobatic background: 27 134
 - Artists with sports background: **50 248**
 - Gymnastics: 38
 - Acrosport: 30
 - Trampoline: 11
 - Tumbling: 8
 - Rhythmic: 1
 - Synchronized swimming: 7
 - Diving: 3
 - Wheel: 1
 - Skipping: 0.5

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®





Cirque du Soleil's context

- Candidates:
 - More than 75 % of performing artist are athletes from the sports world with no previous artistic training.
- Sport training background:
 - Rigorous and structured;
 - Performance-oriented.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



Cirque du Soleil's context

- Cirque du Soleil's performance environment:
 - Part of the Entertainment industry;
 - Many cultures and expertises coexist;
 - Ambiguity and unpredictability prevail;
 - Show and relationship with the public are paramount;
 - Acrobatic and artistic components are integrated during training.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



A career at Cirque du Soleil: Culture shock!

- Coach-driven versus Self-driven
- Predictability versus Unpredictability
- “Athlete-star” versus “Show-star”
- Performance- versus Audience-
motivated motivated
- Control versus Autonomy
- Cultural versus Cultural
homogeneity diversity





Cirque du Soleil artists' way of life

- Flexible structure;
- Self-initiated;
- Self-regulated;
- Self-managed;
- Self-learning
(i.e. deliberate practice);
- Self-motivated.



Training and performing at Cirque du Soleil



The base of the Training Program

- The theoretical scope of the «competency-based» training approach.



What is “competency”?

- An individual’s capacity to make the most of the **knowledge** stored in his repertoire in order to generate actions, that once activated, lead to a **performance**.
(Brien, 1994)
 - Knowledge: accumulated experience (understanding, know-how and self-awareness) that allows an individual to portray objects, events and to act on this knowledge. It is a latent competency.
 - Performance: a demonstration that highlights the fine tuning of knowledge, skills and attitudes.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®





The Training Program: Key principles

- To create a learning environment that requires the trainee's active participation:
 - The artist shoulders the primary responsibility for a learning process which is:
 - Self-regulated: initial risk and deliberate practice;
 - Self-critical: process and end result;
 - Self-reflective: - assessment as a learning tool;
- reflection upon action.
 - The coach is primarily responsible for providing the conditions required in order for the learning process to occur:
 - Mediation;
 - Accompaniment.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



The Training Program: Key principles

- Acrobatic and artistic components are integrated during training:
 - Includes complexity and ambiguity;
 - Blends different approaches within a single environment;
 - Calls for the interdependency of coaching teams (multi-disciplinary).
- Knowledge and skills are used in a concrete manner:
 - Presentations;
 - Portfolio
 - Creative thread.



The learning environment...

- The coach accompanies trainees throughout their experience as part of the learning process:
 - The coach acts as a mediator between the content and the trainee:
 - Significant goal;
 - Cognitive strategies;
 - Reflection;
 - Developmental.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



The learning environment...

- A learning environment which focuses on the artist rather than the content:
 - Takes the artist's needs into account;
 - Supports the artist as the primary responsible party for his training;
 - Acknowledges previous experience and knowledge:
 - Ensures that the coach/trainee relationship is characterized by maturity;
 - Recognizes individuality and cooperation;
 - Recognizes that there are different manners in which to learn that call upon various methods of representation, practice, feedback and content juxtaposition.



The learning environment.

- Accompanies the trainee throughout his learning experience (representation, development and application):
 - The term “accompaniment” refers to the “teacher/trainer metaphor” as suggested by Mérieu and quoted by Develay, 1992:
 - The accompanying mediator is the connecting link between the content and trainee;
 - He supports, guides, counsels, takes care of needs, obtains information, creates the learning environment and its activities while remaining alert with regard to the learning process. In other words, he “coaches” the trainee.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®





Acrobatic and artistic coaching: An integrated approach

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL[®]





Source of Inspiration

The field of **expertise** development to elaborate a coaching approach and training environment.

Ericsson's take on the development of expertise

- More than 10 000 hours/more than 10 years.
- **Deliberate practice** (self-regulation):
 - Deliberately set to go beyond previous performance;
 - Relatively short in duration but requiring effort and a high degree of intensity with regard to concentration (cognitive intensity);
 - Context and outcome-specific (i.e. final performance).

Stages of expertise development

- **Introduction:**
 - External support:
 - Starting at a young age;
 - Providing a learning environment which is structured and managed by the coach;
 - Having lots of family support.



- **Transition:**

- characterized by decreasing scaffolding of environmental supports and increasing of apprenticeship arrangements that offer guided practice and foster self-monitoring, the learning of self-regulatory skills, and the identification and discrimination of standards and criteria of a high level performance.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



- **Self-regulation:**

- the conditions of deliberate practice are arranged so that performers can obtain feedback on their own performance and so that appropriately challenging situations are available or can be designed. There is a very selective use of external support with the performer calling upon performance, situations and the advice from coaches as required.

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®



Types of expertise

- Routine expertise: reliable attainment of specific goals within a specific field.
- Adaptive expertise: ability to respond appropriately to a situation that contains a certain degree of unpredictability.



Recognizing and creating tension between

SPORT
SIDE



ARTISTIC
SIDE

EXPERT

NOVICE

CONTROLLED

EMOTIONAL

predictable

variable

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL®



The deliberate practice learning environment

- Random practice;
- Variable practice;
- Critical analysis;
- Video modeling;
- Video feedback;
- Delayed and reduced feedback;
- Questioning.



Follow up, modulation and negotiation

- Managing teams and providing guidance;
- Managing conflicts;
- Briefing and debriefing sessions;
- Recognizing efforts and initiatives;
- Expressing emotions.





The influence of cultural diversity

Conclusion

As it relates to the «performance» pursuit:

- Cultural differences
 - as an opportunity to learn
 - As an opportunity to alternate between;
 - Strengthening beliefs as well as
 - Searching for competitive alternatives to existing beliefs

CIRQUE DU SOLEIL ®

