

Acroyoga as a pedagogical tool in work with children and young people

A development project supported by the BUPL's development pool

Fritidscenter Ydre Nørrebro

Tatjana t'Felt



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B U P L



INTRODUCTION

This report is about how acroyoga can be used as a pedagogical tool in work with children and young people in leisure clubs. The report is based on a practice-oriented development project at FCYN, Fritidscenter Ydre Nørrebro, where I taught acroyoga for 1½ years. Here I had the opportunity to explore how acroyoga can be used as a tool in work with children and young people. The project has financial support from BUPL's development pool. The project is inspired by practitioner research. The empirical evidence in this report, therefore, consists of my descriptions of experiences and interviews with 12 children.

The report describes what acroyoga is and gives examples of how to use acroyoga as a pedagogical tool in work with children and young people. I also discuss why it is particularly meaningful to use acroyoga as a method in both clubs and schools. The intention is to explore acroyoga as a pedagogical tool and to illustrate how it can contribute to the development of leisure education, as well as to provide concrete examples of how acroyoga can be used in clubs.

Many children and young people experience high expectations in many different areas of their lives, at school, in their leisure time, and their digital lives. They experience a pressured everyday life with many demands and expectations. For some children and young people, this pressure to perform leads to stress. It is a goal of perfection that can be difficult to make up for. For example, many girls are particularly dissatisfied with their own bodies (Børnenes vilkår 2020).

Increased digitalization means that maintaining focus and presence can be a major challenge for many children and young people. Physical play and interaction between children are a constant negotiation, often abandoned because the internet, social media and mobile phones are more appealing.

At the same time, many children and young people today struggle with balance problems of various kinds. In fact, every third child starting grade 0 today has problems with very basic motor skills (Hylten-Cavallius 2015).

There is a need to explore more new ways of creating presence and space in children's everyday lives. Children and young people need tools that they can use to cope with stress in their everyday lives.

Research shows that physicality is important for children and young people's developmental processes (Skovhus & Winther 2019). Movement activities involving touch and body contact can open up stuck patterns and have the potential to prevent bullying (Winther 2017). One study highlights how challenges - which seem big yet are overcome by children and young people - can transform and strengthen their self-perception, if the professionals involved manage to create a safe framework and provide a loving push in a decisive and gentle way. (Maar Andersen 2020). There is a desire to be curious and experiment in order to create conditions for the development of leisure education (Konference om Fremtidens klubtilbud 2021).

A politically adopted benchmark for pedagogical quality in the municipality of Copenhagen focuses on ensuring positive adult contact, strengthening communities among children and young people

and enhancing children's language development. It adds that vulnerable children have a special need for positive adult contact.

Acroyoga is a physical activity that can help children and young people to immerse themselves in their bodies. The method creates a sense of closeness and community and incorporates a number of yoga values that enable positive communication, respect and recognition.

This project will explore whether and how we can use acroyoga as a tool in leisure pedagogical work in order that more children experience positive adult contact every day and have the experience of being part of a community.

Acroyoga is not just a physical practice that strengthens children's motor skills. It is a holistic practice that works with both body and mind. It focuses on strengthening qualities such as balance, courage, bodily confidence and self-esteem in both children and adolescents (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hytén-Cavallius 2019; Winther 2017).

The method is different from the classic methods in clubs. In the classical disciplines, such as football, there are already many established hierarchies that the children use unconsciously (Winther 2017). Acroyoga is refreshing, as it is a new method that no one knows, therefore, everyone is new, and everyone is equal when they start learning it.

In 2019, for the first time, the "Acroyoga for all" seminar brought together professionals from 11 countries to explore how acroyoga is used in educational work with young people in Europe. In Spain, acroyoga is used in juvenile prisons, in Germany acroyoga is used to talk about body diversity, and educators in the Netherlands combine positive communication and acroyoga. (t'Felt, Salet, Chamorro & Bauer 2019): However, research on how to use acroyoga as a pedagogical tool is still lacking.

This report describes the experience of a leisure club that has had acroyoga as a regular activity. The project focuses on creating new knowledge about how educators and other professionals can use acroyoga in their pedagogical work with children and young people.

The intention of the project is to explore how acroyoga as a method can be used to create intimacy, strengthen communities and develop language in children and young people.

The report examines how acroyoga can be used as a pedagogical tool in work with children and young people in leisure clubs.

WHAT IS ACROYOGA?

Acroyoga is a special combination of yoga, acrobatics, massage and movement games, where you often need a partner for balance exercises. It becomes a game that creates focus, presence, trust and community (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hyltén-Cavallius 2019).

Acroyoga is a balancing discipline, where you constantly seek to be in physical balance with another human being. Together you seek to create a balance in order to avoid the opposite - being out of balance. This physical equilibrium also leads to a mental attunement, where one unconsciously also establishes a balance on several levels with one's partner.

Acroyoga creates connection through movement, play and joy. In practicing these disciplines, the teacher aims to develop the children's confidence in themselves, in each other and in the adult.

Educators can use acroyoga to give children and young people a sense of their own bodies - not for show, but for physical immersion. Acroyoga can be used as a regular, ongoing or ad hoc activity when you have a moment with a child or group of children.



The five most important values in acroyoga are community/collaboration, trust, fun, respect and presence. Working with these five values can in many ways contribute positively to both the children's own well-being as well as their relationships with other children in general. All exercises in acroyoga aim to develop the ability to use these five values (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hyltén-Cavallius 2019).

Acroyoga is a practice that requires presence, balancing each other. In order to balance each other, one must be 100% present. Often you look your partner in the eye and try to read their body language to achieve balance. In yoga, the eye is said to be the door to the soul. When we look into each other's eyes for a long time, it can create a connection.

Daniel Stern uses the concept of *affective attunement*, which points out that professional educators and teachers need to develop an empathic ability to read and decode the children they

face. The first time a child tries acroyoga, it is usually with an adult. Here the adult can signal warmth, trust and empathy through the body. If the professional does not attune to the child, it can seem transgressive (Skovhus, Winther 2019). As a professional, you should always ask the child for permission to lift it. When a professional lifts the child to his or her feet, the child experiences both physically being lifted and the presence that this full attention provides.

ROLES IN ACROYOGA

There are three primary roles in an acroyoga practice: base, flyer and spotter.

Base - this is the person who lifts the aircraft. In acroyoga, this person typically lies on the ground with their whole back in full contact. In the beginning, it is best for the adult to lift the children. Then the children can also learn to lift each other. It is safest for the largest or strongest child to start out as the base.

Flyer - this is the person who is lifted off the ground by the base. Being a flyer develops the child's balance, confidence and core strength. It is easiest for the smallest child to start flying.

Spotter/helper - this is the person who stands by and helps the aircraft and base if they become unbalanced. The spotter must ensure that the aircraft lands safely in the event of spills (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hyltén-Cavallius 2019).

METHOD

In the following section, I will discuss the project's methodology, which is based on practitioner research.

Indeed, practitioner research can be used to explore the potential of sport to investigate personal and social development processes or to investigate new teaching methods and subject areas that can later be implemented directly in practice (Winther 2013).

Here you research your own practice. It can be a research challenge to research something that you are part of. From a more classical scientific perspective, this can be criticized for a lack of objectivity, but practitioner research can capture new dimensions, ask very practice-oriented questions and bring years of experience to the field. This requires the researcher to work with a high degree of transparency and to reflect on their own position and relationships. One has a double role, being both a practitioner and a researcher. As a practitioner-researcher, one has the opportunity to produce data that is experienced first-hand, saturated and nuanced. One sets out into the world like an anthropologist and explorer (Winther 2013).

The project has worked with a phenomenologically inspired approach to research. This approach includes an openness to corporeality and is about the fact that our bodies are always part of our lifeworld, and it is through bodily experiences that we understand the world (Winther 2013). As a practitioner researcher, it can be difficult to translate bodily experience into language, as movement is a sensory and ephemeral experience, and a linguistic description is not the experience itself. Here is a brief description of the project's data collection.

Practice narratives: In this project, I use the method of practice narratives, which focuses on significant moments, emotions, crises and personal processes experienced in the field of practice. They are present subjective descriptions (Winther 2013, Idun Mørch 2008). Practice narratives are written in text boxes.

Interviews: In addition, I conducted interviews with 12 children who all participated in a 12-week acroyoga course at the after-school club. All interviews were conducted and filmed in November 2021. I made an interview guide and improvised from it (Bitsch Olsen 1999). I conducted the first 6 interviews. The children were involved in the whole project and also helped with the interviews. At first, they were just curious and sat nearby or were interviewed. Then they started to comment a bit and come up with additional questions. At one point they were so involved and motivated that it was obvious that they interviewed each other themselves based on the interview guide. I sat next to them and could ask additional questions based on the situations that I wanted to have further elaborated on. Quotes from interviews with the children are in italics.

Film: Film offers a special opportunity to explore sensuality and lived experience, as film provides many nuances and insights into children's experiences (Winther & Berg 2021). Together with the children, we also filmed the lessons and their acroyoga flows during the last two weeks of November. The children subsequently helped to edit these films. This resulted in 10 short films in which the children tell about their experiences with acroyoga. There are links to the films in the report.

Quantitative data: We chose to take a picture of all the children in the club. I asked all the children to write their name, class and three things they liked about the club. There were no predetermined response options. 111 children responded. There are two sources of error; first, I stood at the entrance in Skodsborg street and asked all children who entered the club for three days, but there was also a badminton activity in the club room in Nørrebro hall. So the children who went to badminton did not answer. We can assume that a large proportion of them would answer either that they like badminton or the Nørrebro hall. Therefore, the answer for badminton and the Nørrebro hall is not accurate. Next, I asked the children to write three things they liked. 25% of the children answered that acroyoga was among the three best things in the club. It is possible that it influenced them that it was me who asked them. But the children's answers still give a clear picture that acroyoga has very quickly become a very popular activity in the club.

Subsequently, an electronic membership survey was sent to all members of the club to highlight which activities club members valued most, as well as to explore children's ideas for improving the club offer. Unfortunately, acroyoga was not a response option for some year groups and a limited number of children responded to the survey. There were 20 responses from Year 4 and 5 responses from Year 5, a total of 25 children responding across the two-year groups. The children answered the following question: 'How happy are you with the following current activity in the leisure center on a scale of 1-10, where 1 is the lowest (not at all happy) and 10 is the highest (very happy)? '

8 children out of 25 answered 9-10 to acroyoga. That's 32% of children from 4th and 7th grade who are very happy with acroyoga. In addition, it was possible for the children to write a free text response with suggestions for improvements in the club.

Analysis: Afterwards, it is important to use a "double vision" to reflect on and create a distance to these data, so that the data created are analyzed and interpreted in relation to relevant theoretical concepts. In the analysis and discussion phase, I have used the empirical data to select keywords that are meaningful in relation to the problem statement and connect it to relevant current theory. Then, both the practice narratives and the interviews are interpreted in the light of the chosen theory. As I am often a participant in the situation being described, I have often discussed significant moments with colleagues on an ongoing basis in order to gain professional sparring and a more nuanced understanding.

Theory: Throughout the report, I will review and discuss the relevant theory that can help to illuminate how we can use acroyoga as a pedagogical tool. Here I draw on the theory of professional competence (Winther, 2017), and on the concept of meaningful experiences "a red zone experience" by Mie Maar (Maar 2021), as well as on flow theory (Ørsted Andersen). The theory will be presented throughout the report.

PRACTICAL FRAMEWORK

This section deals with the practical framework of the project.

Introduction in open space: The first part of the project was an introduction to acroyoga. This took place in an open space, where all children who came by could choose to join in. The establishment of a mobile-free hour every day from 14:00 to 13:00 for a period contributed to many children participating in activities and games and moving more.

Acroyoga was offered outside in Nørrebro Park, in the club's large movement hall and the courtyard. It was not a planned activity with a fixed start and end. It was often part of a movement room, with many choices, where the children chose what activities they wanted to do that day. In the park, there were often opportunities for round ball, king games, slacklines, werewolf games, football, acroyoga or free play. A circle of 8 yoga mats was always laid out, when 7-10 children sat on the mats it was a sign that they were ready. In the hall and in the yard this repertoire was often supplemented with many tik-tok dances, catch games and stickball. It was non-committal and part of several games. At the same time, because of Corona, there was a rotation in the club, with each class in one area for a week, so that all classes got around to the creative workshop, the hall, the computer room and the park. The combination of open spaces and a forced rotation meant that every child in the club either tried acroyoga themselves or watched their friends do acroyoga.

12-week program: In order to provide opportunities for immersion, the leisure club offers a series of compulsory programs in which the children commit to participating throughout the programs. The second part of the project was a 12-week Acroyoga course in the club, in which 12 girls participated. This course took place in the "acroyoga room" on the 3rd floor. The development project mainly deals with this 12-week course. Parallel to the 12-week course, there was once a week an ad hoc class where the children participated ad hoc. In this group, both girls and boys participated. The 12-week program had a new theme every week. In the team, children trained with children. During the extra hours of the club, there was the possibility of 1-1 acroyoga between a child and an educator.

Weekly day for research: Every Wednesday I had time to do research and was free from other tasks. This weekly research day provided the opportunity for interaction between practice with a lot of children, and time for contemplation and reflection. In the beginning, I was alone on those days. Out of a strong desire for child involvement and participation, the children started to come and join in when they had time off from school.

Children's involvement: The project emphasizes a high level of children's involvement. The children started to participate in showing exercises to the group, in doing interviews, in filming and in editing the films. Eventually, the children joined on a regular basis every Wednesday afternoon and the research day turned into a joint film editing session.

Anonymity: The 12 girls who took part in the 12-week program are all in the films and are referred to by their own names. The girls' parents have of course given their consent to this. The girls themselves have created an Instagram profile to show what they have learned, and they are clearly proud to be part of the project. Therefore, I have chosen to write their real names. All other people in the project are anonymous.

Delimitation: Without going into detail, I will mention two phases that were originally part of the project.

1. Parent partnership: the project had as a sub-goal to create a parent partnership through acroyoga.
2. Coherence - also in transitions: The aim was to explore how this cooperation can contribute to a safe and good transition. Due to unforeseen challenges, we chose to limit the project to the actual work of Acroyoga with children in the club.

HOW ACROYOGA CAN BE USED AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL

In the following, I will explore and illustrate how acroyoga can be used as a method in pedagogical work with children and young people in leisure clubs. I will discuss existing knowledge about acroyoga, the theory of pedagogical work and the empirical evidence with practice narratives and interviews.

FUN

"Acroyoga is better than Tivoli! If I feel sad, I can just come here to the club and do acroyoga with you and I'll be in a good mood again." Hannah 4th grade

Acroyoga is fun. Play is an important part of acroyoga. Often, when you have done acroyoga, you feel like you have been playing the whole time. Play is also a big part of an after-school club, therefore acroyoga fits well into after-school clubs. Play can be part of the warm-up and part of the acroyoga poses. It allows children and adults to immerse themselves in an advanced balancing game

The project shows that very often children are present at 17:15 when the club has to close the room where Acroyoga is held because both children and adults are having fun and have forgotten the time. When you have fun together, you forget about time.

Children's involvement

Children's involvement contributes to making it fun for children. Children often know best what they think is fun to do. So it's easy to ask them what they think is fun. The challenge is that there are many different children and many different wishes. The children were involved in many decisions during the 12-week program. For example, after two weeks Andrea, aged 9, suggested that all children should wash their feet before doing acroyoga in FCYN. The children discussed Andrea's suggestion, voted on it, and now it is a rule in the acroyoga room that you have to wash your feet.

At the acroyoga course in FCYN, each workshop ended with each child choosing one thing they wanted to do with the adult. This way each child gets to choose an exercise that they find fun or exciting. This is inspired by the capoeira tradition of mastery, where students practice most of the time with each other, but often get to play a game with their master at the end.

Alternatively, the teacher can ask all the children at the end; what did you think was fun today? This gives quick feedback and a running picture of what the children think is fun. This does not mean that you should only do what the children think is fun. As a teacher, you often have a goal for a workshop, but it is important to always have some elements each time that the children think are fun, as it increases the energy of the group. Helle Winther writes that all children need to meet a professional who listens to their sensual and emotional language. One way the professional could listen to children's language is by feeling the energy of the children's group. If the group's energy is getting a little low, a fun shared game, or a fun two-on-one game, can lift the energy and bring the group back together. (Skovhus & Winther 2019)

When you have fun, it's contagious. I am passionate about acroyoga. It's contagious. The girls here tell me how they can always persuade me to do Acroyoga with them:

How is Acroyoga in your club?

Troy: That's good. It's close and it's easy. And it's not just once a week. We can always ask you can't we do a little acroyoga. Often you can do a little acroyoga with us. Because you love it, you're easy to convince.

How can you tell I love it?

Troy: You always have workout clothes underneath your work clothes.

Karla: I can tell you care a lot and you're a good learner. You really know a lot about it.

Petra: The smile Tatjana makes is also really characteristic.

The interviews show that they can clearly feel when the adults are passionate and happy and that this commitment rubs off in a positive way.

What is the balance between having fun at acroyoga and fooling around so much that it disturbs the other kids practicing? One challenge of having kids from different grade levels is that the younger kids goof off more, and the older kids have a wider attention span. The 6th-grade girls know more and want to practice more. While some of the 4th-grade girls have some days where they just goof off and laugh a lot.

In a leisure club, there should be room for both contemplation and silliness and laughter. Acroyoga is a discipline that has both the fun, playful element and at the same time actually requires enormous focus and concentration. Sometimes it can be difficult to create space for both in one room, especially when the children are of different ages. I decided to create a free zone in a smaller room next door, which we called the "silly room", where the kids could always go in and have a good time and fool around a bit if they needed to.

[Watch the film "Acroyoga is fun" where Petra, aged 10, talks about Acro yoga.](#)

Summary

Acroyoga can contribute to the educational work of the club as it is a very fun activity for both children and adults, bringing energy, focus and presence.

TRUST

It is the responsibility of the professional to create a safe environment where children can have fun with games and acroyoga. When we feel safe, we start having fun. Having fun is one of the main goals of acroyoga, but above all we want everyone involved - children, young people and educators - to feel comfortable with each other (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hytén-Cavallius 2019; Castellsague 2015).

It is very popular to try acroyoga with an adult. However, the project has shown that it is important for children to learn to base each other fairly quickly. Both because there can easily be a long queue of children waiting for their turn to do acroyoga with the adult, and because through acroyoga the children get to know and trust each other better.

Trust is a quality that is established slowly through positive experience. As professionals, we cannot force any child to trust us. Trust grows and it comes very quickly when doing a shared activity such as acroyoga. Only by listening to each other, by giving space, by creating a space where everyone feels comfortable, do we build trust (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hyltén-Cavallius 2019).

When there is trust between the educator and the children, it is possible for the educator to create an incredible variety of activities with the group. When there is trust, we can help each child grow to his or her full potential. When we ask a child to fly with us in acroyoga, i.e. put and balance on our feet, we are also asking the child to trust us. Trust is something we build together. To build trust we need to create a safe environment where we are allowed to make mistakes and try again (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hyltén-Cavallius (2019).

The interviews show that the children who participated in the 12-week program feel that acroyoga is a safe space for them:

Why do you come to acroyoga? I find it enjoyable, fun and it also makes me feel more confident. I'm not the type who dares to do many things. But when I go to acroyoga I feel I am in a safe place where I can do everything I can, even if I make mistakes.

How is it safe to acroyoga? Because there are a lot of nice people. And sometimes at school, you can't show that you're making mistakes. Amani, 11 years old

The quote shows that the child feels that the acroyoga class is a free space where it is fine to fail and try new things. Today, there is a lot of pressure on children and young people to perform. That is why it is important that we as professionals create these free spaces where it is legitimate to make mistakes and not be perfect. Amani also says that she gets more confidence by going to acroyoga.

Trust exercise 1: Children basing adult

If the child is strong, it is a fun exercise that the child bases the adult. I, as the adult, show that I trust that the child might be able to carry me and that they will look after me. The children love it. If successful, the child can use it to show other children that they can trust the child too.

The two new girls are from 5th grade and they have a hard time lifting each other in the airplane. They keep falling and are losing heart. I call Andrea S. from 4th grade. She is short in height, slim and mega strong. She has a lot of technique and can now lift most kids her age. I ask Andrea S. to lift the two new girls, but the girls look at Andrea suspiciously. It is obvious that they don't think Andrea can lift them. Then I say; look Andrea can lift me. I get ready and carefully lay down on Andrea's feet. First attempt we tip over a little to the side. But we try again and we find a balance. We talk to three while we are balancing together. Then I turn around and smile at the 2 new girls and say: "Look Andrea can carry an adult, she can carry you too". Now they want to try with Andrea. It goes fine.

It is clear that the older girls only trust Andrea when she shows that she can lift an adult. The interviews also show that this is one of the children's favorite exercises.

It's fun to base an adult. It's great to feel that you can base adults too. Karla 10 years old

Yes. That's the BIG test. You have to carry Tatjana, and then when you've done that, you're one of the strong ones. I can carry you for 10 seconds in belly basing. Petra 10 years

Trust is first trust in ourselves and then trust in others. By practicing acroyoga, children learn to trust their own bodies and strength, and they establish trust in the others with whom they practice. Another way to build confidence in acroyoga is to practice blindfolded.

It was a lot of fun to train blindfolded. .. You can really feel that you trust each other a lot. Troja, 12 years old

You really have to have a lot of trust in each other... You could kind of feel a different kind of communication when you couldn't see. There is a kind of trust built, ok now she puts the weight on that leg, she does it. Karla, 12 years old

[Here you can watch the film acroyoga is about trust, where Troja and Karla talk about acroyoga.](#)

Summary

Acroyoga as a method can contribute positively to a leisure club by strengthening the children's confidence, partly in themselves, in each other and in the educator with whom they train. Then the children can use the confidence they have gained in their acroyoga training in the club to take with them into life.

The children experienced the 12-week acroyoga course as a safe space where it was allowed to fail.

FRIENDSHIPS

Collaboration and teamwork are central to practicing acroyoga. The majority of the exercises in acroyoga are about cooperation. The children learn to carry each other and to support each other. In other sports, you can practice with a partner without sharing your good tricks, but in acroyoga you can't get better alone. It is only when you are good at listening to each other and working together that you can do the acroyoga poses. The groups of children who are good at working together become role models as they show concrete results in their practice. This motivates the other children to emulate the groups that cooperate.

The project shows that while children learn to move together, coordinate and support each other, they also establish close bonds and friendships.

Those you play with, you are friends with. Legekunst

Having a 12-week program where the same group of children meet in their club to practice acroyoga has a huge impact on that group of children. All children who participated in the project report that they have made new friends through the acroyoga class. They have made new friends across classes and across schools. It is as if the joint activity cancels out the age difference and the children make friendships across grade levels.

Acroyoga allows children to experience a practice that is playful and requires everyone to work together. It creates a positive community.

*There's a lot of togetherness, you're not at fault for making mistakes in front of others.
Troy, 12 years old*

What's the fun of acroyoga? You make new friends and you use your body in a new way. You build trust in each other. Karla, 12 years old.

THE DREAM OF THE PERFECT PARTNER

Acroyoga is a partner practice where all exercises are about balancing with a training partner. You never practice alone - in acroyoga you always need a partner. This has the great advantage that the children are forced to work together, and the project shows that all children experience making new friends when practicing acroyoga.

But the project also shows that the need to have a partner also leads to ongoing negotiations. It was as if they all longed to have the ideal partner.

Some children quickly find a regular training partner. This is often two children in the same class who know each other before the program starts. It is an advantage if the child who is the base is either 10 centimeters taller than the other or is physically strong.

Regular trainers develop a more nuanced understanding of each other's abilities and limits and are often able to do more complex series of exercises together more quickly. Some children report that changing partners is annoying:

I have many different partners. I train with Amani, Zeniab and Andrea. Sometimes it's just nice to have a regular partner. Anna, 10 years old

I'd say so... I can just see how annoying it is to keep changing partners. Also, when new ones come all the time, and then you have to start from scratch instead of having a regular partner. Andrea 9 years old.

Some children see training with new partners as an opportunity to make new friends:

I train with everyone, that's why I make new friends every time. ..I feel it's cool when new people come and try it. Then you get to know new friends too. Noura 10 years old

Many children report that they feel safe when the adult takes responsibility for group formation:

I'd rather you do the groups. If I pick the group, I'll just pick the ones I know. When you do the groups, I'll make more friends. Noura 10 years old

The project also shows that there is a group of children who find it difficult to find a permanent partner. Several of the children who did not have a regular partner at the start of the project were a little concerned that they had not found the "perfect" partner. This can develop into an unrealistic dream parallel to the dream of BF best friends. One girl in the team tells us:

I don't have a regular partner. That's fine with me. But it might be a little annoying. There's never anyone you just go straight to. You just have to stand and wait for someone to walk over to you. Petra, 10 years old

Research shows that the idealized dream of "the best friend" can be almost impossible to live up to.

"For some young people, the almost mythical ideal of the 'best friend' becomes almost impossible to live up to. These young people experience a lack and an emptiness because they do not have the best friend they dream of but are constantly searching for. This can also mean that they do not value the relationships they already have." (Bruselius-Jensen, M., Sørensen, N. U., & Nielsen, K. T. P. (2021 s.25).

In acroyoga, the perception of being without the perfect regular practice partner can risk children feeling that they are not living up to the ideal of doing acroyoga at the level they think they should. For some children, this may mean that they feel alone and outside the bonding that children who have a regular partner experience.

Here, the professional must take leadership of the group and create a space where all children have the opportunity to experience that they are part of the training community. This requires supervision and authority, while at the same time respecting and listening to the children's own wishes. It is a very fine balance between ensuring that children who are without a training partner are included in the training community, and at the same time giving space to those children who have found a training partner to develop their relationship.

I recommend that all children, even those with a regular partner, practice with several children. You can have a primary partner, but everyone trains with several children so that the children get used

to the fact that the group formations are dynamic and the training groups (often of three children, a base, a flyer and a spotter) are open and not closed and fixed.

Some of the older children were very resourceful and inclusive. While they had a regular partner, they were always open to having other children in their group.

A girl with special needs, who was emotionally unstable, participated in the 12-week program. The girl enjoyed acroyoga and was very happy a lot of the time and made a new friend who became her training partner. The professional adult was already aware of the girl's special needs. When we started working on records, the girl now suddenly decided that she no longer wanted to train with her regular partner, having found a partner who was smaller and lighter, giving her a greater chance of setting a club record. As a result, her training partner was suddenly alone and in a very vulnerable position.

In the project's experience, acroyoga can also help children with special needs to make new friends. However, this requires that professionals are ready to support their partner, who cannot be expected to understand the complexity of the sometimes violent reactions of the child with special needs.

[Watch the film "Acroyoga and new friends" where Noura, aged 10, talks about Acro yoga.](#)

Summary

All children who participated in a 12-week acroyoga program find that acroyoga creates many new friendships across classes and an increased community between the children. When a child starts their club life by experiencing making new friends, they will carry this positive experience with them to other areas of the club.

Some children quickly find a good training partner, while others do not have a regular partner. An idealized notion that it is important to have the perfect training partner can quickly develop, in line with the ideal of best friends. It is important that professionals take the lead and facilitate all children training with several children and not just one buddy. Professionals should also take responsibility for the group formation process so that all children are included in the training groups.

ROLES IN ACROYOGA

As mentioned earlier, there are three roles in acroyoga: the base, the flyer and the spotter. They have different functions and all contribute to a cooperative effort. At the beginning of the project, it was often an adult who gave the children the experience of flow in acroyoga, by practicing with the children. This was outside in the park in front of the club. It was an open space and many children came by and participated. However, it could create a queue so there were a lot of children waiting for their turn. Therefore, the focus of the project shifted to children basing children. During the 12-week program in the club, it was only children basing children. The goal of children practicing acroyoga together in clubs is that the children learn to balance together, listen to each other and follow each other, which teaches them to cooperate.

Many children get curious and want to try acroyoga right away when they see it. A lot of children come straight and want to be a flyer right away. But not all children can fly and be in the middle at the same time. It's a good exercise for the kids to learn that this is only going to work if they understand how to support each other too. That's why it's good that the children take turns trying out the different roles. So, they also learn to help and support their peers. There are also some children who prefer to start by being a spotter, participating in the activity but without having physical contact. The concept of territorial zones clearly explains the different zones and distances one can have.

Territorial zones: the way the child positions himself shows whether he is ready to try an activity, e.g. acroyoga. Here, as a professional, you can work with territorial zones physically. There are four spheres: the intimate, personal, social and public zones. The zones are extremely sensitive and are dynamic codes that tell about feelings and relationships (Winther 2012).

It is important that professionals see children's signals and respect them. It is important to always ask the child for permission to lift before doing acroyoga with a child. The child must give consent and feel safe.

In the project, a girl sat and watched her friends do acroyoga with me for 14 days. I invited her to try. But she turned me down every time. I respected her answer and she faithfully continued to watch us every day. After two weeks, we needed a spotter, I asked her if she would help to be a spotter, i.e. stand next to her friend and support her friend. She was happy to do so. So she was a spotter for 14 days, after which one day she wanted to do acroyoga in the role of a flyer. She was ready. And then she wanted to try all the exercises she had seen her friends do.

The project shows that once a child has been a spotter for a while, from a few days to 2-3 weeks, the child often wants to participate on its own and tries out the other roles as well. The spotter role gives children who need some distance an opportunity to be part of the acroyoga team without taking big risks. There is thus great value for some children to be able to start by being a spotter. They will most likely try all roles on their own after a few weeks.

In relation to the concept of territorial zones, a child who sits and watches an activity is in a social zone. He contributes to the activity with his attention. The child feels safe in this zone. When the child is ready, he can move closer, into the personal zone. The role of the spotter is a function of the personal zone. The child is personally involved and active but without physical contact. For some children, it is easier to start in the personal zone, i.e. in the role of the spotter. When the child

wants to be a flyer, he/she is ready for physical contact with a partner, which can be described as an intimate zone, and the child must therefore give consent.

In the project's experience, children who have been taking part in sports for a long time, such as gymnastics, football, badminton or dance, are ready to try flying straight away. Whereas children who have not taken part in sports or are slightly overweight or have a different cultural background, often prefer to be a spectator for a few days, and then start in the spotter role. The project shows that after 1-4 weeks, all these children also want to try being a flyer and being the center of attention, they just need more time and sometimes need to get to know the adult through another activity where there is no touching. Sometimes these children get more hooked on acroyoga and come every day for a long period of time and want to learn more.

Here it is important that professionals develop a sensitive understanding of the child. In the beginning, it is good to give lots of space and calm. The child will often come closer on its own. And sometimes, as an adult, you can give the child a loving push and say, now you've been watching us and helping your friends for three weeks. Now it's your turn to try.

Often more children are good at flying than carrying, as flying uses all the motor skills learned in, for example, dance, gymnastics and movement. But it takes much longer for a child to learn to lift.

Summary

Professionals should always ask children for consent before lifting a child into an acroyoga position.

It is recommended that children learn to base each other, as many valuable co-operation skills are learned here. Some children prefer to start by being a "spotter", i.e. a helper. Often, after a while, these children will take courage and try the other roles. It is recommended that as many children as possible learn all three roles. This will make all group formations easier.

RECORDS AS MOTIVATION

Breaking a record is very motivating for children. In the project, records were a team. For a week, the children trained and wanted to beat each other's records. We borrowed the children's record book. The group was very motivated and engaged in the project. The interviews show that a large part of the children can be very motivated by setting new records:



Photo: 10-year-old Andrea lifts 12-year-old Karla.

I think it's great fun to do a world record - because it's cool. Especially if it's something crazy, like basing an adult. Andrea 9 years old

It was super cool to work with records. Troy 12 years

The children made many cool records. For example, Emma lifted the Troy in 10 minutes and 50 seconds. Both girls are 12 years old and in 6th grade. The record has been submitted to the Children's Record Book. Andrea, aged 10, and Karla, aged 12, set a record for children lifting each other, taking turns to lift each other up in the airplane. They had to keep their balance each time.

It created positive competition between the children, but also a race to perform. One child suddenly no longer wanted to train with her regular partner as she was a bit heavy and now chose a new partner who was lighter in weight and had a bit more technical experience. It was clear that children who had never taken part in sports before found it difficult to compete for records. So I decided fairly quickly to finish the course with a record. And we started working on yoga values instead.

[Watch the film "Club record in acroyoga" where Emma, 12 years old, talks about her record.](#)

[Watch the film Record in acroyoga - children lifting children with Andrea and Karla](#)

Summary

It is very motivating to break records with acroyoga for many children. But there are some kids who have a hard time breaking a record. It is recommended that records do not stand alone but are combined with other themes and values.

YOGA AS A TOOL IN LEISURE EDUCATION

Acroyoga is inspired by the values and principles of the yoga tradition. The ultimate goal of yoga is to find your inner self, and the most important quality and practice to achieve this is "ahimsa" - the principle of non-violence. This means interacting with others and with yourself with love and respect. Traditional yoga does not focus on how flexible and strong the body is, or how many positions we are able to do and show off; but on our ability to love ourselves and others (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hyltén-Cavallius 2019).

Yoga is an important element of acroyoga. Yoga is about presence in the present through movement. In the project, we work with breath, gratitude and respect (Castellsague 2015).

Breathing: Traditional yoga is based on breath training. Breathing exercises can create contact with one's own body, inner balance and grounding. Breathing exercises can help both adults and children to gain self-connection and inner peace. It is a good starting point to then practice with a partner. (Winther 2012; Castellsague 2015). In the 12-week program, all workshops started with breathing exercises. These exercises provide both a good and clear start, and at the same time give the children practice and knowledge of breathing exercises. When a child falls and gets scared, you can always say 'breathe as we normally do' and help the child to calm down through breathing exercises.

Gratitude: gratitude is another yoga value that helps children connect with personal emotions. Inviting children to notice what they are grateful for today and encouraging them to put it into words develops children's ability to self-connect as well as focus on positive things in their lives. The first day we did the gratitude exercises, the children were a little reluctant, but after 2-3 times they quickly learned to put into words the things they were grateful for.

What was it like to work with gratitude? It was great. It's not something you normally think about in everyday life. Usually, when something great happens, you don't think oh I have to remember to be grateful for that. But it's fun to work on saying thank you. Then you get to think about what you're grateful for. Karla, 12 years old.

Can you say 3 things that you are grateful for today?

I am grateful that Karla has finally come back from corona isolation. And then I'm grateful that I can be here today and be interviewed, and I can do acro yoga, and then I'm grateful that I can come to school every day. Troy 12 years old

I'm grateful that I can finally get out into the world again. And I'm grateful that I can be at the club and be interviewed and do acro yoga. And then I'm grateful that I'm going to scout tonight. I'm really looking forward to that. Karla 12 years old

By practicing gratitude, we can all become more mindful and inwardly aware. We learn to appreciate and talk about the things in our lives that are working and that gives us joy. Gratitude shifts the focus away from the problematic to the positive. Gratitude training sets positive emotions in motion. Many studies have shown that gratitude can have a beneficial effect on the body and mind. For example, one study showed that writing a gratitude letter improved psychological well-being and that the effect was long-lasting. Gratitude distracts us from negative thoughts. Gratitude can prepare social relationships and can make us less stressed (Sølverstein 2019).

By training children to notice what they are grateful for, we teach them to appreciate life and the people around them more. In the project, children practiced gratitude for two weeks. It created a positive atmosphere and seemed to complement the theme of records.

When teaching yoga to children as a professional, it is important that the exercises are familiar and that you have a thorough knowledge of the exercises beforehand. As an adult, when I am clear and confident that gratitude is a good topic, I am persuasive, and the children follow me. But if I only have a superficial knowledge of it and am a little unsure, it won't work. It is therefore recommended that both breathing exercises and gratitude exercises are well known before asking children to do them.

Summary

Yoga exercises, like breathing exercises, can be a way to teach children self-contact. Breathing exercises can both provide a good start to a workshop and also be a tool to use if a child is falling and hitting the floor and needs to calm down.

Gratitude training teaches children to look inwards and focus on positive things and relationships in their lives. When a group of children learns to feel and express gratitude together, it can create a positive atmosphere in the group.

LANGUAGE

There is a political desire to develop the language skills of children and young people (Pejlemærker for dagtilbud og skole, København). In this section, we look at how acroyoga (especially the value of showing love and respect) can contribute to children's language development.

"All children should have the best opportunities for their language development" The leisure center strengthens children's language skills so that they learn to take part in and share responsibility for their own lives and those of others." Benchmarks for educational quality in the municipality of Copenhagen.

Conscious communication is an important aspect of acroyoga. Positive and appreciative language is a way to show respect. The project focused on language in terms of teaching the children to show care through language - both to themselves, to their training partner and to the whole group. As the new 3rd graders had just started at the club, there were some groupings that had particularly nasty language.

A group of girls from Rådmandsgade school has just entered the Nørrebro hall. We are standing on the badminton court. They are talking hard to each other. "You cow". "You're an idiot. Shut up, you're stupid. You suck" ... I'm completely shocked and I can feel it in my gut. My colleague had mentioned at our Friday meeting that this group of girls had very nasty language. But now that I'm with them, I'm speechless. I can't just stand by and let them continue in that tone. I try not to judge and ask curiously:

Why do you talk to each other like that? Girl: It's just funny.

Adult: Okay... Now we're going to do an exercise where you're going to sit down with a partner and say a nice thing to your partner.

They sit down and there is silence for several minutes, then a girl breaks the silence and says to her partner: 'You're wearing nice socks today.

Adults: Super. Good. Very good. We do that every day. Just an exercise every day.

Girl: Sigh, you're a little weird... But you're also a lot of fun.

Positive language was a theme throughout the 12-week program. Each time, the workshop ended with the children telling a cool thing they had done to a partner. Often you immediately see all the things you have done wrong. It can be frustrating. Here we practiced the opposite, we trained the children to focus on the positive and dare to say it out loud to a partner.

For a week, the theme was positive communication. The children had to do an exercise using a sandwich model, i.e. say something positive, then something constructive and then finish with something positive. Afterwards, they tried to repeat the same message but in a direct and harsh

way. After each time, they had to feel how the two different ways felt in their bodies. Several of the children said in the interviews that they had learned to talk to themselves better.

What did you learn from acroyoga?

Well... I've certainly learned to talk to myself better. Amani 11 years old

I think it's super important to speak positively to yourself. You can feel the difference compared to if you talk negatively to yourself and say no I can't, instead of talking positively to yourself and saying okay, I'm cool that I dare to try it. You become more motivated. Karla, 12 years old

As professionals, we can become a role models for children. Children are likely to be inspired by the way we communicate. Conscious communication is an important aspect of teaching acroyoga to children. The Acroyoga Manual recommends that professionals use the three C's when teaching children and adolescents; CLEAR, LOVING AND CONSTRUCTIVE.

CORRECT means that communication and messages must be clear and precise. When explaining an acroyoga pose to children, it is good to say the three most important things. If we talk too much, children will forget the important things.

With **LOVING** communication, we show that we care for all children. The process of learning acroyoga sometimes succeeds quickly, but there will also be times when children become frustrated and vulnerable. This is when it is important for professionals to have loving communication so that all children feel safe and accepted.

CONSTRUCTIVE: as a professional, it's good to always start with the positive. Often you see the wrong first and correct it. This can be overwhelming and demotivating. This is why the acroyoga training recommends always starting by acknowledging the child's efforts, and then you can offer a trick to improve the position (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hyltén-Cavallius 2019).

[Watch the film "Acroyoga and positive communication" - with Amani 10 years.](#)

Summary

Acroyoga is a method that uses positive communication to train children to speak caringly. A 2-3 minute exercise after each workshop can teach children to speak better to themselves and others.

Interviews show that some children find that they have learned to speak well to themselves by going to acroyoga.

Focusing on positive communication in acroyoga in an after-school club can help to create a more positive and caring tone among the children.

FLOW

One afternoon at 14.00, the children chose to put on a show for their parents, who came to the club that evening for an open house event. Suddenly everyone was focused and determined. They were proud to show acroyoga to their families. I gave them individual feedback and sparring and made a sequence. All the children had a particularly focused attention and engagement that day. It was as if there was suddenly a state of flow.

Flow is a central concept in positive psychology. Flow is linked to high interest and deep engagement in children. Flow is very similar to intrinsic motivation - both are closely linked to high interest and deep engagement in the learner (Csikszentmihalyi (2005); Ørsted Andersen 2017, 2011).

Many flow experiences create "Optimal Learning Environments" for children. Research shows that flow states can allow children to improve learning and memory. It can also be linked to creativity and innovation. Recent research also shows that being in flow is healthy, both mentally and physically (Ørsted Andersen 2017, 2011).

This section, therefore, explores how acroyoga can contribute to creating flow experiences?

Research shows that there are a number of factors that can promote flow conditions:

1. Clear and precise objectives
2. Something is at stake and the activity is meaningful
3. High level of inner motivation.
4. Feedback
5. Balance between capacity and challenge (flow zone)
6. Absence of distracting factors
7. Manageable, understandable and precise frameworks and rules (Ørsted Andersen 2002)

All these factors were present that day. The children chose to put on a show for their parents. And the whole group experienced a state of flow together. It was a spontaneous decision, and there was a short and precise deadline, they had three hours to do a show, and finally, there were no mobiles and no distractions.

The 12-week course of acroyoga had many of the factors: it was in an enclosed space, mobiles were switched off during training, and there was a ratio of one adult to a group of 12 children.

There are many examples in the project of both children and adults being completely engrossed in acroyoga. We did acroyoga and lost track of time (a characteristic of the flow state). There was always activity in the acroyoga room when the club would close - the children would be thrown out. They didn't want to go home.

Acroyoga is a method that, with the right framework and level of challenge, can create a state of flow for children. When children are in flow, they learn, remember and thrive better. The benefits of

creating new learning environments in after-school clubs where children experience flow are obvious.

It can be a challenge in after-school clubs to ensure that the most advanced children continue to receive the challenges they need to keep them interested and motivated. Building bridges to the voluntary sector is a good option.

Research shows that finding a balance between capacity and challenge is crucial for working with flow in an educational context (Ørsted Andersen 2018). This means that professionals must have the ability to provide differentiated instruction and have more nuances and variations of the different exercises, as well as the ability to read the child's level of challenge.

Summary

Acroyoga is a method that can be used to create flow states and developmental learning environments in after-school clubs. It requires professionals to offer children exercises that balance capacity and challenge. An acroyoga performance for parents created this focused and engaged state of flow for the whole group of children who were part of the show.

CREATIVITY

Teaching children is a balance between structure and improvisation. There must be room to listen to children's wishes and give them space to be inventive and creative. At the same time, there needs to be a fixed, safe and recognizable structure so that the group knows what is going to happen.

In the beginning, children need easy and clear exercises when learning acroyoga. Once children are comfortable with the basic postures, it is exciting to invite them to invent their own movements to use and develop their creativity.

To develop children's creativity, the aim is to create a culture where experimenting and trying out and inventing new moves is allowed. This requires a curious, exploratory and experimental approach to pedagogical work.

As children become more familiar with acroyoga, they will find ease in the poses and they may begin to find a flow with a sense of unity, almost like choreography.

Some children grasp all the exercises that open up their own creativity and develop their own flows. Other children feel more comfortable with the adult showing them the exercises, which they can then copy. Sigrid, aged 10, is very creative and has an experimental approach to acroyoga. Here she explains what acroyoga is:

Acroyoga is a sport where you do all sorts of creative things and exercises that you can come up with yourself. Sigrid 10 years old

Sigrid can play with acroyoga and completely immerse herself in this game. She needs some input, her partner, a quiet space and time. A film has been made about creativity, where you can see some of the children's flows, which they have invented themselves. It was clear that Sigrid and

Andrea were often in flow mode when they were allowed to immerse themselves in a creative process.

[Watch the film "Acroyoga as a creative process" with Sigrid and Andrea S.](#)

Summary

Acroyoga is a method that can be used to develop children's creativity. Some children are very creative and love to explore and invent their own movements and flows. Other children are more comfortable copying exercises, poses and flows that are predetermined by an adult. In the project's experience, it is good to give children the opportunity to explore and invent new movement patterns themselves.

A "RED ZONE EXPERIENCE" CAN BOOST CHILDREN'S SELF-CONFIDENCE

This section is about how to use acroyoga as a method to support children's development so that they grow and feel courageous. As well as how to create a safe environment for this development as a professional.

I go down to the gym at Rådmandsgade school. We have club out at the schools due to corona restrictions. I'm a new employee. I've been here 14 days. I play and do acroyoga with the kids every day. Some of the kids think it is super fun and keep asking to do it again. Naja is very enthusiastic. The first few days she was scared and didn't really dare to try so much. But slowly I got her to try more and more exercises. Today she comes running to me and shows me a book where she has drawn all the exercises we have done together. She says to me: *You have made me braver Tatjana.*

I am grateful and touched. I get tears in my eyes. That's exactly what I want - to make children braver. Now that Naja says it so directly, it hits me right in the heart.

The experience here shows that the child has gained a stronger sense of self. She has become more courageous by practicing acroyoga in her club. This experience of being braver can give her a new self-perception and an increased belief in her own possibilities (Maar Andersen 2020)

Research shows that bodily experiences are very crucial when stimulating psychological change processes. A bodily experience has an enormous influence on whether a child has a low or high belief in his or her own abilities. Mastering experiences of challenging exercises can strengthen self-belief, while repetitive experiences of failure help to devalue self-belief (Bandura 1977 in Marr Andersen 2020).

In a study of sports camps for people with cerebral palsy, Mie Maar Andersen describes a phenomenon she calls "a red zone experience". It is defined as a participant's preconceived expectation of not being able to handle an arbitrary exercise, and then the subsequent experience of having handled the exercise. She highlights how challenges that seem big but are still overcome by children can transform and strengthen their self-perception if the professionals involved manage

to create a safe framework and provide a loving push in a decisive and gentle way. (Maar Andersen 2020)

Acroyoga is precisely a method for inviting children and young people into a "red zone experience". There is great developmental potential in supporting children to overcome challenges that they are convinced they cannot do. Two classic exercises that many children are convinced they cannot do are standing on their hands and beating a weather vane.

Anna: 2 months ago, I couldn't stand on my hands. And now I do, every time we have acroyoga, the first thing I do is stand on my hands, and the last thing I do is stand on my hands.

Tatjana: You thought you couldn't. But then I push you a little. Was it good that I pushed you a little?

Anna: Yes.

T: You were kind of happy about that afterward.

Anna: Yes, now I know it quite well actually. But it's still the balance thing. You just have to go through a process where you don't dare. It's uncomfortable. But in the end you really like it.

T: What's it like afterwards, when you're so dry?

Anna: It's great because then you can just come over to school (makes a cool hand sign) ... I did.

Here we as professionals can help the child through "layering" in our play and training. "Layering means creating a connection between the different exercises and games (Castellsague, t'Felt, Hertog & Hyltén-Cavallius 2019). The goal is to prepare the child's body and psyche for the exercise that the child is afraid of. For example, good preparation for a handstand is to stand on the plank. When a child can stand on the plank for 30 seconds, they can also stand on their hands for 3 seconds. So I made a common game where we stood for a long time in the plank for a few days in a row. We could do a name round in the plank. We could count in different languages while standing on the plank. Ingenuity is important when extra is needed.

Then we can help the child with our experience and our security. The child is unsure of his own abilities. Understanding the child's insecurity, we must show a loving and empathetic attitude while being confident, clear and purposeful; YOU CAN DO IT: I KNOW YOU CAN. NOW DO IT... with a smile and loving push, get them to do it. Here Troy tells about when she learned to make a weather vane:

Troy: Before summer vacation, I couldn't make a weather vane. And I had been practicing for 4 years. And I couldn't. And you told me to make a weather vane. I had really practiced a lot. You gave me some tips and you told me to make a windmill. And by that time, I was sick of you. I thought no, I don't want to make a weather vane.

Tatjana: I could see that you were tired of me. But I kept pushing you a little. Is it ok for you now?

Troja: Yes, I'm so happy about it now. I love making weather mills. I make 50 windmills every day.

Andrea: Yes. She does it all the time. Now she can do them with 1 hand.

Even if the child seems annoyed with us, we should not let go at the moment of doubt. Because the child is always incredibly happy and proud when they succeed. And most of the time the child will do the exercise again and again to ensure mastery of the exercise.

Helping children to overcome their fears can transform and strengthen their sense of self. It increases their confidence in themselves, and also in us. And they'll come back for more positive experiences that help them grow.

The interviews show that all the children are particularly enthusiastic about "popping" to acro yoga.

I love to pop. I love being thrown up in the air. I just thought it was really cool. I was just YES MAN. Troy 12 years

I remember when I first tried pop. It was really crazy. Yeah I felt like it was really crazy... in a good way. Petra 10 years old

At first I thought, I'll never do that, but it was actually really, really fun. It's one of the most fun things to pop because you go up in the air and sometimes it tickles your stomach. It's really fun... But it's also a bit dangerous... A bit creepy... Then when you do it, you see wow I'm really cool. Wow, I dared to do that. And it's not that difficult. Now I've learned. Andrea 9 years old

Popping is a highly technical exercise that requires an experienced base. It is not the first exercise that I would think of before the project started as a key exercise in working with children in clubs.

But Mie Maar's description of "experiences in the red zone" was an eye-opener for me. I had intuitively worked that way in my teaching already. But when I understood theoretically what kind of process is enabled, I became more precise in my work with acroyoga. I suddenly understood why Naja felt that the acroyoga exercises had made her more courageous.

Summary

Acroyoga is a safe method where the exercises can seem like big challenges but can still be overcome by children with the right support from a professional. This can transform and strengthen their sense of self.

Acroyoga can contribute to leisure education by strengthening children's self-perception and making them more courageous.

VULNERABLE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

All children need to be seen and welcomed. Some children and young people are particularly vulnerable. They need professionals to sometimes have extra time for them or to work well with their parents. Here I will give three concrete examples from my work.

CASE 1: Hanne, Camilla and Nawal are in class together, and for a while, we do Acroyoga together in the hall. But one day the girls' group goes out into the yard, suddenly Nawal doesn't want to join in. She sits alone and is passive. I try to get her to join the game

Tatjana: Come Nawal, don't you want to join us? (She shakes her head.) Why don't you want to join us?

N: I don't know... There are a lot of boys here... So they can see my legs and my arms.

Tatjana: Yes. It is not a problem. They can see my legs and arms too. It's okay.

N: It's my birthday next week and I'm wearing a scarf. I choose it myself. Once I put the scarf on, I can't take it off.

T: Wow, that's big. Are you happy about it?

N: Yes. I have chosen it myself. I've already tried it one day during the summer holidays. (she whispers) I'm getting hair under my arms. What if the boys see it?

T: It is not a problem, Nawal. See I have hair under my arms today too. It's okay here in the yard. Look! (I stand on my hands, so she can see my arms. We laugh.) Can't you wear some leggings inside under your dress tomorrow, so you can play with us?

N: Yes. I do.

Nawal felt safe inside the hall, but out in the yard, Nawal is unsafe because the boys are playing next door. This is reinforced by the fact that she has to wear her headscarf. Youth life is dynamic and ever-changing. The case shows that Nawal is uncertain about the conditions under which she acts and how she should behave now. Can you practice acroyoga in the yard? Can you stand on your hands outside when the boys are playing football next door?

Acroyoga is a very physical discipline that can seem overwhelming. There is a cultural barrier here. Nawal's family is Muslim and she attends a Danish after-school club. Nawal also tells me that she is not allowed to come to the evening club.

In the club, there were many girls from ethnic minority backgrounds. Some of these girls clearly kept a great distance when we did acroyoga. It was clear that acroyoga and its physicality seemed both fascinating and transgressive to them.

I often chose to establish a relationship with them through either table tennis or tiktok dancing, as it seems safer and more recognizable. Once the relationship was established and they felt comfortable with me, they all came later and joined me for acroyoga.

Some girls from ethnic minority backgrounds may find acroyoga overwhelming as there is physical contact. Therefore, they are more cautious about joining the activity in the club. However, once they have tried acroyoga, they are as happy, motivated and curious to learn acroyoga as all their friends. It is recommended to do another activity first with children who are shy, to first establish a relationship, through a safer and recognizable activity, and then to give them an introduction to acroyoga.

There are a few young girls from ethnic minority backgrounds who are not on par with their Danish peers in terms of motor skills. It requires a bit more preparation and relationship building from the professionals to get these girls motivated to participate in movement activities such as acroyoga in a club where all activities are voluntary.

If you are curious about working with children and young people in acroyoga, it can open up many conversations with children about the body, identity, rules about what you can and can't do. It is important that we listen and are present. All children have the right to move freely - including girls from different cultural backgrounds. We can encourage all girls to wear a pair of shorts under their dress so that we can always make a weather wheel or stand on our hands.

The project also included some children with other special needs. Here is a description where a girl has difficulty in dealing with unforeseen events:

CASE 2: I tell the children that today we are going to make a film about acroyoga in their club. They would like that very much. They have many ideas. Anna wants to interview. Petra wants to film. They are very excited. All the children would like the program to continue as a rehearsed team in the club. I've spoken to my manager and it's not possible. I need to start a new beginner's class as there are many other children in the club waiting to join the acroyoga class. I tell the kids that it is a new class starting January 1, for beginners. They are welcome to help out. They are a little unhappy.

Katrine gets angry. She starts shouting. She shouts, runs out and slams the door. I know it won't help if I run after her. I'm a bit upset. It's a pity. But there are still 11 kids sitting ready in the acroyoga room. I turn my attention to them. We breathe in as we raise our arms three times. Then we place the camera on a tripod and film our warm-up. Katrine doesn't come back. She is therefore not on the film. After class, I call Vibeke, Katrine's stepmother. We have a good chat. She wants to talk to Katrine. Three days later Katrine comes. I know she and Vibeke have talked. She is calm now. I call Vibeke every time Katrine has a crisis. This helps.

Katrine is strong and loves to come to the acroyoga class. Sometimes it goes well. And sometimes she yells and screams, slams the door. Katrine has a diagnosis and needs a lot of predictability. It can take extra resources to give Katrine the support she needs. Sometimes her training partner

needs support. Her training buddies are usually children younger than her, as she is always playing down. She can suddenly have a very violent reaction, which then affects her partner. Therefore, as professionals, we have to keep an extra eye on Katrine, but also on her close partners. Katrine loves to do acroyoga with an adult. She has a great need for adult contact, and here we have to balance the needs of the whole group for the professional and her insatiable need to be seen and appreciated.

The project also involved two lovely girls who have a physical disability. Here is a description of a situation with a girl who has a limited walking function.

CASE 3: Viola uses a walker. She is always in a good mood. She uses the walker to go from school to club. She loves acroyoga. I have a set warm-up program and inside my head, I quickly try to go through it and adjust it, so Viola can join in too. I'm a little unsure if we should run like we usually do. I suggest that she can walk next to me and swing her arms while the others run. "No, I can run, I'll just take the panther," she says, pointing to her walker. She takes the walker and runs off with the other children. Together with her two friends, they get ready for the first exercise in acroyoga - the flying machine. Andrea is the base, she is strong. Johanne is the spotter and Viola is flying. I go over to them. Viola laughs and says to me: "I've told them to carry me, otherwise we might not make this group work." She laughs.

After class, she's a little grumpy. She's always super happy when we've done acroyoga. I go up to her and ask: Are you okay? Is something wrong?

Viola: I just don't think the others are that good at complimenting me. I keep telling them they're cool. But no one tells me I'm cool.

Adult: You're cool! You're awesome! But you're right. We can get better at complementing our partner and group. We'll do that tomorrow, that'll be the day's theme.

Viola: Cool. She smiles at me. We have a plan together. It feels good.

The example shows how Viola can come up with solutions to participate in the exercise. Here she takes her walker and runs with the other children, thus participating in the shared activity and experiencing a sense of equality and possibly belonging with the other children. But at the same time, the example also shows that Viola feels that the other children do not celebrate her small successes. Fortunately, she is good at putting this into words to the professional. Here, there is a need for professionals to have the time and energy to celebrate all the children.

There is also another target group in after-school clubs that may have some barrier when doing acroyoga, that is overweight children. In my experience, they sometimes feel more comfortable with another child who weighs the same. One overweight girl who was doing a warm-up suddenly stopped when the children had to put their weight on top of a partner. A little later, her twin brother came over to watch. He's the same size and weight as her. Putting the two together, I got them both doing acroyoga alongside the other kids.

Summary

Acroyoga is a very physical discipline that can seem overwhelming. In the project, some girls from ethnic minority backgrounds were initially more reserved than the other children. Acroyoga seemed both fascinating and transgressive to them. It requires more relational work from the professionals to get these children motivated to participate in acroyoga. Once these children have started acroyoga, they participate on an equal footing with the other children.

Acroyoga is an activity that works a lot on relationships: children who have difficulty navigating relationships with other children can particularly benefit from practicing acroyoga, but it requires professionals to have the knowledge and time to prepare, as well as being aware of the child's partners who may be in a vulnerable situation.

FROM PASSIVITY TO MASTERY

When a child has a lack of belief in his or her own abilities, it can contribute to passivity or avoidance behavior (Bandura 1977 in Maar Andersen 2019). In the project, there were also situations where children with physical disabilities chose to be passive.

Petra is a cool girl in 4th grade. She is a very positive and brave child. She was mentally a huge resource on the team. Always supportive and positive. She has limited movement in both arms. Whenever the other kids were making or trying to learn weather mills, she would sit over on the windowsill and watch. She suddenly went from being an active participant to being passive. It was obvious that she did not believe in her own abilities. The same thing happened every time the team did the acroyoga sun salutation, a series of poses that all the kids in the team were learning. The last pose in the series was a handstand, and it was physically impossible for Petra to stand on her hands. Therefore, she always did most, but never all of the series. While all the other children quietly started to master the whole acroyoga sun salutation.

There were 12 children in the acroyoga class and I, therefore, had limited time to support Petra. But on Friday she always came just when the club opened at 13:30. Sometimes we had 30 minutes to explore and experiment with variations of exercises and poses that suited Petra better. Troja from 6th grade also always came straight from school and was with us at 13:30. Troja always tried the new variation first, as she was more experienced and had been practicing for longer; then Petra tried. We had fun and played with a lot of variations of the exercises. This was only possible because there were only two children. After 5 weeks there was a breakthrough. We found out how Petra can turn a weather vane on the adult's knee. Petra was beaming. That same day Petra also learned to do a transition from acroyoga sun salutation to a headstand. That way she could do a variation of the acroyoga sun salutation that was very similar to what the other kids were doing.

The following Monday, she came early to practice and showed the other children that she could also make a weather vane and do the whole series of acroyoga sun salutations. She was happy and in a great mood. She kept repeating, 'I am so high today'. It was overwhelming. She was high with happiness.

Adult: You're in a good mood today? Petra: Yes.

Q: Why is that? Petra: I came a bit early today and then I rehearsed with Tatjana and it went REALLY well. So I'm just so mega high today... In a very good way. (She smiles)

V: Most things are going well today? Petra: Yes.

*V: And you have also explained to the other children what they are supposed to do?
Petra: Yes.*

Q: Is it funny? Petra: Very much! (She nods and smiles).

Petra's experience of mastering a weather mill like the other children in the team made her happy. It seemed like a "red zone experience" where she suddenly mastered exercises that she was previously convinced she couldn't do. Meaningful positive experiences like these help to strengthen children's sense of self.

Petra cannot raise her arms above shoulder height. She couldn't make a weather vane and didn't even try, convinced she could never learn. But by being curious and experimenting, we found a solution. With a partner, she can now make a weather vane on her partner's knee and she is incredibly proud. We need more children with physical disabilities to be able to shine and move gracefully, alongside their classmates in our after-school clubs too.

When we as professionals see a child suddenly become passive, it is our responsibility to help the child find new strategies for action. It is fine for children to need a break, but if the child is passive because they do not believe in their own abilities, then it is the professional's job to explore this and show the child new ways of acting.

It would be good to develop more knowledge and materials on how to adjust basic acroyoga exercises for different children, so that the professionals' toolbox becomes as nuanced as possible so that all children have the possibility to participate in this activity. At the same time, ongoing professional sparring is necessary to offer these children the support they need.

Summary

Acroyoga is a way for children with disabilities to find new ways to move. By exploring and experimenting, you can work with the child to find new ways to adjust the exercises so that they can master the same challenges as the other children in the club. This can give these children an enhanced positive self-image.

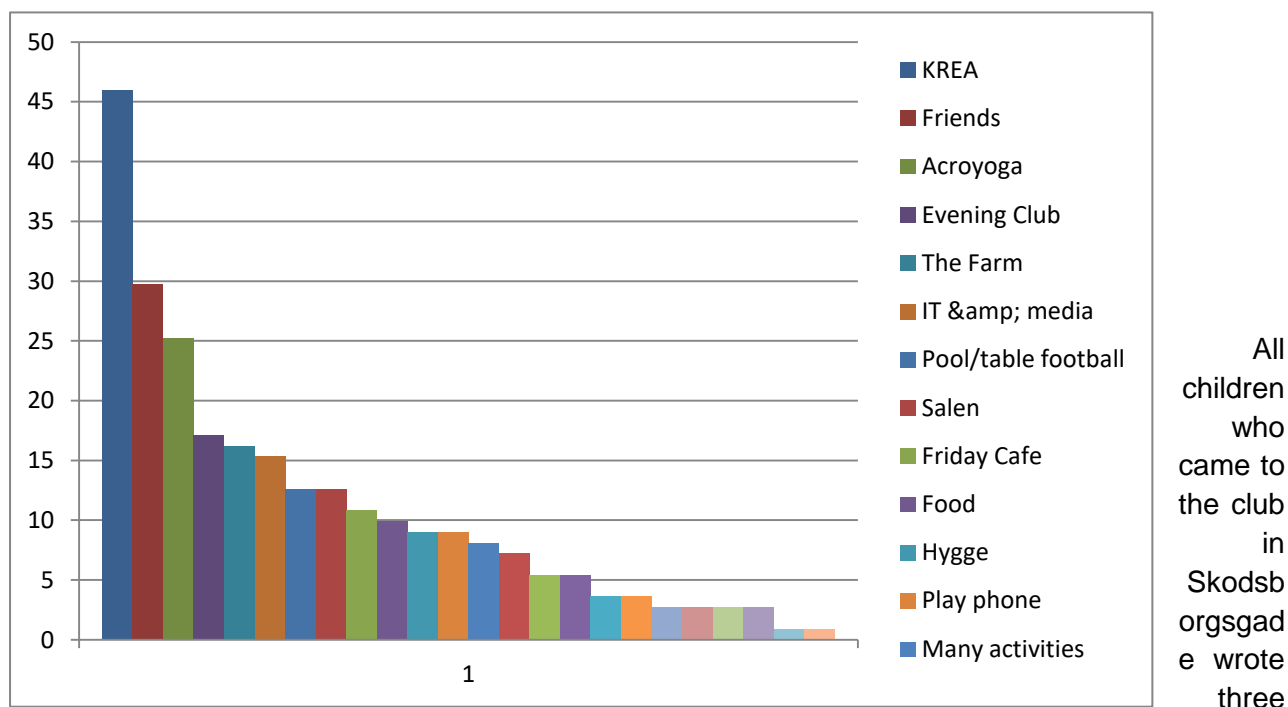
Professionals are needed who are familiar with several variations of the basic exercises so that they can be adapted to the different children.

ACROYOGA IN LEISURE CLUBS

This section is about how to use acroyoga in after-school clubs. The children themselves are the experts in their own lives and in what their after-school club should be like. How do the children want their club to be? What activities are meaningful to them?

*What's good about your club? I can only think of one thing; Acro Yoga!
Petra 10 years old*

Here is a summary of what the children of FCYN like in their club.



things they like about the club.

46% of the children answer that the creative workshop is one of the 3 best things in the club.

30% of children think that friends are one of the three best things about the club.

25% of children think that acroyoga is one of the top three things in the club.¹

The creative workshop is the most popular activity in FCYN. The Krea team consists of 3-4 employees and has four rooms on the first floor of the club. The survey shows that it is very important for the children that their friends come to the club. Acroyoga is a new activity in the club, there is a staff member who teaches two days a week in the club. The children's responses show that acroyoga has quickly become a very popular activity in the club.

An electronic membership survey was sent out in November 2021 to all club members shows that 32% of children in grades 4 and 7 are very happy with acroyoga².

¹ All children who came to the club in Skodsborgsgade answered the question, write 3 good things about the club. The children who went to badminton in the Nørrebro hall were not asked. This is a source of error.

What do the children think about acroyoga being in their leisure club and not in an association?

I think it's pretty good that it's in the club. For example, normally you just go to a club and it's kind of boring and stuff... Here there's something really fun which is acroyoga. And then it's not a completely different place. It's at the club. You know where it is. Andrea, 9 years old

At school you can't just move all the tables and do acroyoga, but here you can just turn a whole floor into acroyoga. Anna 10 years old.

I think it's very convenient because I know those who are already there a little bit. I know Andrea and Sigrid and the other Andrea. But otherwise, I don't know the others. So it's a bit clever because there's someone I know and yet there's a lot of others I don't know. Who I've now got to know. Petra 10 years old

That's good. It's close and it's easy. And it's not just once a week. We can always ask you can't we do a little acroyoga... Often then you can do a little acroyoga with us. Because you love it, you're easy to lure. Troy 12 years

The interviews show that all children who participated in the acroyoga program find it meaningful for the children that acroyoga is in their after-school club. It is an attractive activity as it is fun. The club is perceived as a safe setting as they know others and it is in their local environment.

The membership survey shows that acroyoga helps retain some children. The children could write ideas on how the club can be even better. Here is one child's response:

The practiced acroyoga class on Mondays must continue because if it wasn't for acroyoga I wouldn't go to the club (6th year)

It is clear that the children believe that acroyoga enriches their leisure club (FCYN membership survey November 2021).

Several children say that they also use experiences from acroyoga in their everyday lives. Here, Sigrid talks about what she has learned in acroyoga:

We have learned balance. To be calm no matter what you do. It's not just when you're doing acro yoga. It's also in everyday life that you are a little calmer and more active. Sigrid 10 years

[Watch the film "Acroyoga in my club" where Anna 10 years old and Andrea 9 years old talk about acroyoga.](#)

Summary 25% of all children in the club think that acroyoga is one of the three good things in their club. Acroyoga is a brand new activity in after school clubs and has quickly become a very popular

² Electronic membership survey sent out to all children and parents via Aula in November 2021. Unfortunately, only 25 children responded from 4th and 7th grade. Unfortunately, due to an error, acroyoga was not a response option for 5th and 6th graders.

activity. All children who participated in the acroyoga program think that it is good that there is acroyoga in their club. Several children say that skills they learn in acroyoga they can transfer and use in their lives.

SUMMARY AND PERSPECTIVE

Acroyoga is a new method that has great potential to strengthen children's sense of their own bodies and give them moments of physical immersion. However, it requires that a safe space and opportunity for immersion is established. A 12-week course of acroyoga in after-school clubs can create a safe space. The interviews show that the children feel that acroyoga in their club is a safe space where it is okay to fail and try new things that they would not otherwise try.

Acroyoga can contribute to the development of club pedagogy by focusing on physical empowerment in leisure clubs. Acroyoga and the yoga values on which it is based can be used as tools in after-school pedagogy to train children to interact more lovingly and respectfully with each other.

Acroyoga is a living bodily communication where children can experience being met with presence and empathy. Acroyoga as a method can be used to create positive adult contact in leisure education.

The project shows that acroyoga helps to create new friendships between children across schools and ages, can build cohesion between children, and strengthen children's confidence in themselves and each other. These new friendships can contribute to cohesion in the after-school club. However, an idealized notion of the perfect playmate may emerge. It is therefore important that professionals take the lead in creating an inclusive training community, for example by encouraging all children to train with several children, rather than just one partner.

Some children say they have learned to speak positively to themselves by going to the acroyoga club.

Working with gratitude develops children's ability to connect and to feel inside. It focuses on positive events and things in the children's lives.

Acroyoga can give children and young people many personal and shared experiences of success, giving them confidence and trust in each other. Acroyoga can also be used to create flow states and develop children's creativity.

The project shows that acroyoga is very popular among children. 25% of all children in the club think it is one of the best things about their after-school club.

The interviews show that a 12-week course of acroyoga contributed to the leisure club in relation to three benchmarks of educational quality: the experience of positive adult contact, increased cohesion and language development.

Acroyoga is a way of inviting children and young people into a "red zone experience"³. As many acroyoga exercises can seem overwhelming, the child may be convinced that they cannot complete the exercise. However, with the right preparation, and building up exercises and an experienced teacher, children can be successful with these exercises. This can transform and strengthen their self-perception.

The project also shows that acroyoga is a way for children with physical disabilities to find new ways to move. This can contribute to new and strengthened self-perception. Acroyoga is thus a method where these children can become equal to the other children in the leisure club if the professionals manage to create a safe and supportive environment.

There is a lack of support and research on how we can support children with special needs, such as physical disabilities, to practice acroyoga or similar forms of movement in their after-school clubs.

Experimenting with new forms of movement, such as acroyoga, opens up the range of activities available in leisure education.

I hope that this report has inspired you to work with acroyoga in leisure clubs.

³ It is defined as a child's preconceived expectation of not being able to handle an arbitrary exercise, and then the subsequent experience of having handled the exercise.

FILM ABOUT THE PROJECT

The children and Tatjana have made a series of films in which the children talk about their experiences with Acroyoga in the FCYN leisure club. The children were involved in filming, interviewing and editing the films. Here are links to all the films:

[Acroyoga in my club - told by Anna and Andrea](#)

[Acroyoga as a creative process - with Sigrid and Andrea S.](#)

[Acroyoga and positive communication - with Amani](#)

[Acroyoga is about trust - with Troy and Karla](#)

[Acroyoga is fun - told by Petra](#)

[Club record in acroyoga - told by Emma](#)

[Acroyoga and new friends - told by Noura](#)

[How much should children decide to acroyoga?](#)

Tatjana t'Felt is Cand. Scient. Adm. From Roskilde University and has for many years taught children and young people in movement. She has worked for several years with vulnerable children and young people and has a special interest in how to quickly establish trusting relationships through the body. Since 2014 she has been teaching acro yoga. Tatjana was employed by FCYN. Tatjana was in charge of teaching acroyoga and of the development project on acroyoga in FCYN. Tatjana is currently teaching for acroyoga for kids and youth, Family Acroyoga teacher trainings and Acroyogaforall. Read more about her work here: www.akroyoga.dk www.familyacroyoga.com and www.acroyogaforall.eu .

Helle Winther is the supervisor of the project. Helle is a lecturer at the Department of Physical Education and Nutrition at the University of Copenhagen, PhD in Dance and Movement Psychology and researcher in *Body Language in Professional Practice*. Read more about Helle Winther here: <https://nxs.ku.dk/english/staff/?pure=en/persons/129316>

Fritidscenter Ydre Nørrebro FCYN is a leisure club in Nørrebro with a strong focus on sports and movement. FCYN has been responsible for the Sports Playground, which offered sports activities for children and young people in Nørrebro. During the Corona closure, FCYN offered online acroyoga, online gaming and made a number of films with games and movement, in the club's online club. Read more about FCYN at www.fcyn.dk .

Read more about acroyoga with children and young people Denmark at www.akroyoga.dk.

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Read more about the project and see all the videos on www.acroyogaforall.eu .