



JOY

Developing Attunement through the Experience of Joy

JOY HANDBOOK

Result 2

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Introduction

This handbook is a collection of articles that aims to take an in-depth look at selected approaches within the JOY

The JOY method was developed within the frame of the *Ode to Joy – Developing Attunement through the Experience of Joy* project, a project co-funded by the Erasmus + project from the European Union.

The project

The project Ode to Joy, is named after one of the positive emotions (joy, pride, contentment, esteem) which are catalysts for increasing people's satisfaction generally in their personal lives and professionally in their work. Joyful people are more motivated to act and participate, are much less likely to experience burn out, and have a better mental and physical health and are more resilient towards uncomfortable emotions. The partnership of the project wants to achieve this through fusing experience-based methods together, such as drama, bodywork, dance, music, symbolwork, storytelling, nature work, that help NEETs reconnect with their body and mind, increasing their ability to experience joy and to connect and through this experience develop a greater sense of attunement and joy.

Moreover, considering that the recognition and validation of the competences acquired in non-formal and informal settings is difficult but extremely important for employability and participation, the Ode to Joy project wants to intervene with specific instruments that are able to connect with the deeper layers of a person (invisible knowledge and skills, social roles, self-image, personal characteristics, motives, and underlying positive emotions) and use the positive emotions to make them visible and connect them with recognizable demands from companies/organisations, through valuation of prior learning.

Main results are:

- 1) *Joy Model* – a Guideline for a pedagogical methodology for the JOY-training instruments
- 2) *Ode to Joy Educators' Resources – Toolbox and Handbook*: a collection of methods/approaches aimed at providing trainers and adult educators with detailed knowledge to enrich their working practice and supporting them in their curriculum-planning and implementation task.
- 3) *JOY Course* – A training scheme which includes structure/materials aimed at increasing the awareness of competences and the connection with emotions, personal characteristics, motivation of the beneficiaries of the project.
- 4) *JOY Positioning Paper* – a Memorandum of Understanding addressed to policymakers, stakeholders, and organisations dealing with NEETs to pave the way for the endorsement of the JOY-model, methodology and instruments in a wider EU level.

The partnership is the following:

- Coordinator: [Rogers Személyközpontú Oktatásért Alapítvány](#), Hungary
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- [Astoria Színházi Közművelődési Egyesület](#), Hungary
- [Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo Danilo Dolci](#), Italy

Further information can be found at the following website: <https://joy-experience.eu/>

The Handbook

The current handbook is a tool to go in depth the Joy method: this is composed by a set of disciplines which focuses on providing tools to support NEET people in rediscovering themselves. Storytelling, dance, working with nature and art are the main approaches identified. Exploring them, the partnership discovered and invented useful activities that can facilitate connection with the self. The JOY method thus tries to help these people look for the right motivation to start an educational or professional pathway.

In this handbook, by interviewing experts in the various fields, the partners tried to understand why these methodologies can be particularly functional in activating positive emotions. Each partner interviewed a professional belonging to one of the above-mentioned disciplines and asked him or her how the chosen approach is able to support positive emotions and enhance the learnings previously acquired by people during their past experiences.

Rogers drafted the article on working with nature; Gesob interviewed a dance professional; Astoria interviewed an actor; CSC Danilo Dolci explored the positive characteristics of storytelling by interviewing an expert on the subject; finally, Uwezo drafted the article on art.

The handbook concludes with an article on the importance of the CH-Q method and the valorisation of prior learning as a starting point in the context of working with NEETs but also in educational work in general. The aim of the article is to highlight that even what has been learnt not necessarily in formal education can be extremely useful to the person and can facilitate his or her inclusion in various types of work environments.

We hope that the manual will help you to deepen and clarify your doubts concerning the JOY method approaches and that it will be an opportunity for personal enrichment and growth. Moreover, you can explore the methodologies described here with practical exercises on the Joy Toolbox you can find on the project website (www.joy-experience.eu). For further theoretical contents on the following methodologies, you can explore our Joy Model, always from our free educational resources. En-JOY the reading!

Holistic Dance - Interview with Sabine Parzer - by Eva Virag Suhajda



My journey into somatic practices started several years ago, as a personal journey, however later it turned into a chosen professional way. During this long journey lasting one year, in a Contact Improvisation Festival, in the Three Treasure Valley (Hungary), among beautiful hills, a lake and wondering horses, I met **Sabine Parzer**, holistic dance teacher, the head of the Holistic Dance Institute. Since then, I have been a learner of her, studying also at the Institute the approach of holistic dancing.

As Sabine has said, to understand an approach it is always important to hear the story behind. Sabine Parzer comes from a professional dancer background. She studied in the US modern dance in the 1980s, then she danced and choreographed there for about 10 years meanwhile she has met many techniques approaches. During professional dancing she always had the “*yearning for*

something more, for something that went into a deeper realm, more into a self-reflective practice”, and therefore she also started investigating different kinds of bodywork and healing methods. Through this exploration, she finally discovered authentic movement and contact improvisation.

At the end of the 90s Sabine went back to Austria to work in a rehabilitation center for people who had been in serious car accidents, and also started to deepen the topic of dance therapy. She wanted to understand, “*how much as a dancer I could work with, and support the healing process of people both on a physical level and also on an emotional level*”, which finally led to the creation of her own approach and the setting up of the Holistic Dance Institute 13 years ago.

Dear Sabine, would you introduce us Holistic Dance? What is it, who is it for?

Holistic dance is a crossover, a compilation of different forms and methods. In HD, we usually work with dance, movement and touch in a holistic, transformational way. This approach may resemble dance pedagogy but is slightly different. Some of the elements of dance pedagogy are used and revisited, going deeper.

HD focuses on inner reflection or self-reflection. This method may help the person to explore the benefits of wellbeing, health, resilience and transformation.

We work with healthy, or what we would call “normal neurotic” people, who are usually not pursuing a professional dance career, but want to learn/experience more about themselves. Holistic dance leads these people to learn more about their bodies and identity. Combining dance pedagogy and dance therapy is one of the main characteristics of this approach. These

two disciplines are also combined and compared with other methods, such as: contact improvisation, authentic movement, contemporary dance, improvisation, somatics and applied anatomy, dance in nature or eco-somatics. It is in the dialogue and contact with other somatic approaches that the power of this method lies.

Do you think that holistic dance can be used to enhance or rediscover hidden positive emotions? If yes, how? Do you think holistic dance can bring JOY?

Oh yes, definitely. First of all, through movement. I'm not even talking about dance, but any movement can help people. Movement activates body and brain. Moving can help get out of depressive states. Movement help people feel more alive and connected both to the self and the environment. It wakes up. Any movement can be stimulating and therefore healthy.

Dancing, as a way of movement, is part of this miraculous process. It has always existed. It is an archaic form of expression. Native tribes have used dancing as a way of celebrating, communicating with the spirits, grieving, and performing rituals. Even today, ritual celebrations of passage from one stage of life to another are often accompanied by dance. It is a universal way of communication and celebration. One does not have to be skilled to dance, it is an innate knowledge that brings joy. It's just so simple. It's really hard to be depressed or to be sad when you are moving or dancing. So at the core of it, dancing makes people more alive, and also activates their brain connections, their blood flows and their hearts. Dance also helps to relate to others. Touch and gaze facilitate the approach. Once the moment of awkwardness has passed, an exchange is built, which can also bring joy.

If we are looking more specifically at what I'm doing in my institute, I would consider joy to be one of the aspects of my work. I think there is a big joy that comes from connecting to one self on a deeper level. However connecting to one self might sometimes mean connecting to sadness, grief, anger, numbness and confusion. Deepening can be painful, but it can also bring joy, and joy can also come immediately after retracing or reliving a traumatic event.

Through any sort of touch-related movement, we tap into a deeper level of ourselves where there's a lot of information to which we don't really have access in a verbal, normal, everyday situation. So when I say that dancing brings joy, I think joy can also mean to better understand and embrace ourselves. Joy is an authentic feeling and is deeply connected with all the other feelings.

To conclude, holistic dance is holistic in a sense that comprises several levels. Connection and reconciliation occur not only at the level of the individual but also of the relationship with the other and with the surrounding space.

Could we say that it helps to become more confident?

For sure. However it may take some time to get there, because, as I always say, healing is a bitch. During the process of change, we may seem to lose self-esteem because we no longer recognise ourselves since we are passing from one state to another. Our self-image may change while we are connecting with our unconscious, shadows or also more authentic part of our selves.

It can happen to feel confused, but at some point a new self-awareness can be developed, which is usually more integrated and more authentic, because it is also more embodied. It is less mental and conditioned, more in relation to the life lived by the person at that time.

In Holistic Dance how much do you accept and validate previous experiences and learning of people?

I think previous learning has anything to do with previous training or schooling. The life experience of people is the raw material for their holistic dance exploration. That is one of the reasons why we include a lot of different people in the training programs. If somebody has less “*dance experience*” doesn't mean that he/she is less embodied or less aware of him/herself.

I think it is great when people use their real life knowledge. In my trainings, we have school teachers who bring their pedagogy knowledge with them, psychotherapists bringing their knowledge about the psyche with them, and nurses who bring a deep sense of caretaking and compassion. You know, it is always about connecting all the resources you already had and deepening them. Maybe finding a new language or a new container for them.

It is often the case, especially with people coming from the arts, that they have experiences in moving, but they don't have this kind of container: a safe, more concentrated, spiritual or more holistic container. So they work to realize it and fill it with old and new knowledge they possess.

Do you think that holistic dancing can also be used with young people, who have difficulties?

I think it depends on the level of maturity of the person. It may depend on age but also on how mature the person is. You can definitely use some of the methods, maybe not all of them, with younger people. For example, we do not use authentic movement with children or teenagers, but with young adults from around 20 or 21, it is possible to try. You need to be aware of what younger people need, but I think that youth easily get comfortable with improvising. It is like being children again. They can be playful and get aware of what their talents are.

Usually, young people are still quite healthy. Building on their strength and help to channel it into creating something with their bodies, can often be very helpful. However, the issue of touching is always a question of maturity, but you can always modulate any of the exercises to the age that you work with.

What suggestions would you give to a person who decides to undertake a path of self-awareness through this method?

Well, I would suggest, that this method can be good if you are in a relatively stable life situation. That doesn't mean that you can't have challenges, but if you are in a crisis

situation, then maybe therapy will be a better option in the beginning. It is also possible to do it in parallel parallel with holistic dance.

If you are in a stable situation in your life and you want to learn something new or further explore your resources, movement, artistic self, or just find out more about yourself and the world, then you are welcome to this method.

I think, one suggestion I would give people is to really take time for it. One should not rush or even try to fit this in among the other myriad commitments of daily life. I would suggest allowing the self some time because all of this is about sensing, slowing down, connecting with one self. And that takes time. The more time given to the method and its integration the more tangible the results will be.

Conclusion

This is where our interview with Sabine ended, and these last sentences really left us speechless and contemplating about our careers as facilitators, trainers and teachers. Reflecting on making time to introspect, integrate and grow. Maybe this is a main message not only for dancing, but for any approach of self-development.

Resources

Here we recommend two selected resources for approaching and exploring Sabine Parzer's dance and her method:

- www.holistic-dance.at
- <https://www.youtube.com/@sabineparzer4712/videos>

Storytelling - Interview with Valentina Grasso - by Giulia D'Annibale

Storytelling is a methodology that uses narrative and rhetoric as an approach to explore and deepen different parts of the self. More and more often, this method is used to make the person able to find a lost connection with his/her ego. The development of a story, the experience of narration allows people to retrace and reinterpret some fundamental moments of their lives.

Valentina Grasso is an Italian educator and trainer specialized in expressive languages and narrative practices in didactic and educational contexts. In recent years, her interests and professional practices have focused on pedagogical themes regarding poetry, storytelling and illustrated literature for childhood, adolescence and adulthood. In particular, she uses Educational Visual Storytelling as a main tool in narrative workshops addressed to school of different types and levels and to aggregation and training centers. In fact, the target groups with whom she works have different ages (from early childhood to professional training in adulthood) and come from diverse social contexts.



What is this method about?

Visual Storytelling is a structured narration that uses both words and visual elements: images, drawings, pictures, videos. In Visual Storytelling methodology, figures are considered as fundamental in the development of cognitive and educational processes. Images, as much as words, have an autonomous and specific role in the construction of narrative mechanisms and in the transmission of meaning.

What are the main actions and activities that are carried out through this methodology?

The general actions carried out through this method are: education, diffusion of reading, storytelling and visual literacy. Therefore, this practice can be considered as a tool to understand reality and develop critical thinking skills. In fact, the workshops and techniques I use to choose and develop often concern the education and promotion of reading aloud, theatre and creative poetic writing.

Which target groups do you mainly work with when using this method?

As anticipated, this method can be used with varied target groups. Especially depending on the age group, the structuring of the learning path can vary and undergo changes. For example, in the 0-6 age group, I mostly use picture books, shadow and puppet theater and *Kamishibai Theater*¹. The goal is the involvement of the entire educational community. Narrative practice can become a valuable means of building effective emotional and imaginative spaces for encounter, relationship and communication for adults, children, teachers and families.

In the 6-13 range, in addition to the use of the illustrated book, I started using Silent Book and Narrative Cards (*Fabula, When I dream, Carta Conta, L'Inventafavole*). In fact, these tools let the images “speak” and are able to provoke a strong reaction in the reader/narrator. Indeed, in Silent Books and Narrative Cards there is no reference to the text and for this reason the reader/narrator is able to activate his/her own personal interpretation. The absence of a text drives the reader/narrator to create logical leaps and connections between images in a way that stimulates creativity and curiosity. Therefore, these tools can lead to the development of image education, of a gaze capable of decoding, interpreting and negotiating representations. They can also stimulate dialogue, interaction and linguistic skills.

On the other hand, with adolescents, adults and NEETs, the use of autobiographical narration can be extremely stimulating. I tend to initiate the participants to this technique through poetic writing and symbolwork. During my work, I often find myself in front of people who struggle to express their emotions. For this reason, it is essential to create paths that are able to give space to the emotional dimension within the educational field. As part of the Poetic Creative Writing workshops with a narrative-autobiographical background, I am inspired by the method of Visual Poetry by the artistic neo-avant-gardes of the 60s, Caviardage² and the broader literary artistic movement of Found Poetry³. This way of expression, together with Blackout Poetry and Erasure Poetry⁴, advocate the art of finding poetry by erasing some words from the text and repurposing the others in order to create a new poem.

¹ *Kamishibai* is a Japanese word which means “paper drama”. The *Kamishibai theatre* is a method of telling stories, using a small wooden theatre. This kind of theatre was used by ancient Japanese storytellers to animate reading <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kamishibai>

² *Caviardage* is a creative writing method that encompasses different techniques. The writing of the text does not start from a blank page but from written texts. Thanks to the contamination with other artistic and expressive techniques, it is possible to give life to visual poems <https://view.genial.ly/61d8a995d2c6070de780a851/presentation-caviardage-etc-in-english>

³ *Found Poetry* is a type of poetry created through the blending of words and phrases from different sources. The text is lengthened, shortened, the space reworked in order to give life to a new poetic form https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Found_poetry

⁴ *Blackout and Erasure poetry* are two poetic forms that arise from the cancellation and reformulation, starting from an already written text <https://writers.com/what-is-blackout-poetry-examples-and-inspiration>

However, if the educational relationship is part of an autobiographical narration, the most effective methods are Symbolwork and Metaphors. In the workshops, the training/educational incipit of the meeting is provided by the so-called “iconic evocators”, such as: drawings, artistic images, glimpses of poems, symbolic metaphors and so on. In fact, in the educational practice, symbols, metaphors and allegories facilitate the emergence of ideas, beliefs, perceptions, as they allow thoughts and emotions to be explored in a formative order. Symbols, once analyzed and returned, accompany the search for individual experience, allow awareness and clarify the meaning of emotional experiences. The investigative and self-reflexive approach is used. The subject “takes charge” of his/her self by activating virtuous processes of self-care.

What is, if any, the result you want to achieve through the use of this approach?

The ultimate goal that is desirable to achieve is the establishment of a care relationship with and among others. Care as a practice of emancipation and not of protection. A practice aimed at promoting in the other a process of self-care which consists in taking one’s existence, moods, character, destiny into custody⁵.

Do you think that the method can be used to enhance the positive emotions present in each of us?

Storytelling promotes identification with the characters in the story and through this a greater awareness of one’s emotions. This means personal growth and strengthening of individual and group identity in positive terms.

How do you think this method can help those who practice it to get closer to the rediscovery of hidden and unexpressed positive emotions?

The rediscovery of hidden and unexpressed positive emotions allows the person to recreate a new individual life-path. Very often, it is precisely through the approach to this type of practices that the individual manages to rebuild his/her own personal dimension and rediscover his/her-self. Storytelling is one of the educational care practices in which the aspects of emancipation, cultural endowment, symbolic competence and self-awareness are combined with greater evidence and intensity. Narration not only gives the individual the freedom to build a symbolic, flexible and adaptable world to different contexts, but also supports the person in the cognitive process of understanding and interpreting the world. One of the most intense aspects of care within the intersubjective experience of narration is the so-called *entropathy*. It is a human dimension, both cognitive and emotional, which favors the initiation of processes of co-construction of horizons of meaning that can be shared starting from the narrative resources.

⁵ Cambi F., 2002, *Storia della Pedagogia*, Editori Laterza, Roma

Do you think that through this method the person can start a process of regaining self-confidence?

Access to the rediscovery of positive emotions can facilitate the acquisition of a renewed confidence in oneself and one's abilities. I strongly believe that reading, listening and inventing stories allow for discussion and collaboration within the group. This exchange leads to the recognition of the other, his/her value and his/her role, not only within the narrative construct but also in real life. Consequently, the recognition of the other, the tendency to listen and care are reflected on the person involved, giving him/her the opportunity to look at him/her-self in another way. The narrative setting is a privileged setting because it allows opportunities for the construction of a relational style capable of extending the narrative model beyond the time of the narration, expanding it to many other moments of the educational and existential relationship.

Do you think that through this methodology it is possible to highlight the learning acquired by the person during his/her past experiences?

Narration is a particularly functional tool for "reading" and reflecting the experiential peculiarities that characterize and mark the course of individual and social life. In fact, through narration it is possible to trigger a whole series of processes, such as: understanding, elaboration, reinterpretation and re-enactment of previous experiences, events and actions. These actions, thanks to the narration, are placed in a space-time plot, told to other individual and social subjects, explained in the light of the circumstances, intentions and expectations of the protagonists. These facts make it possible to give these events a cultural and contextual meaning and to plan appropriate actions and behaviors.

What is the process through which the skills acquired in other contexts are valorised?

Neurosciences have shown us that human brain is capable of synthesizing information at a multisensory level, above all when the information is presented to it in a narrative form. Narration is able to find connections with previous and future skills, placing them in an "experiential continuum", identifying elements of growth and change.

Do you think it would be useful for NEETs to see their previous skills recognized during this process?

The planning of one's life path involves the design of processes and itineraries, the choice and organization of the experiences, the definition of goals and objectives. Narration allows at every moment and passage to retrace and draw sequences, to establish relationships between experiences, to define and grasp the meaning of goals and objectives in relation to one's past story, one's present reality and one's future projects. Therefore, the narration of oneself, of one's personal history gives meaning to specific learning experiences, throwing light on the different ways of learning throughout life and in various situations and contexts, highlighting the active role of the person in his/her relationship with knowledge.

What suggestions would you give to a person who decides to embark on a path of self-awareness through this method?

I would suggest to embrace this journey of self-discovery with open heart and attentive ears. In fact, narration can be compared to a path that can lead us to our most unexplored and unknown places.

Do you think that this method has limitations, if so, which ones?

Although it can be a tortuous and tiring path; I do not believe that there are limits to accessing this exploration. The only limit is the small number of illustrated books in audio or CAA (Augmentative Alternative Communication)⁶ version. There are good possibilities in the future. In fact, many experts are already working to allow the widening of access to this methodology to all. But at present, the situation makes it difficult for people with hearing problems or complex communication skills to access this practice.

Do you think this method could be more effective when used in specific cases, if so, which ones?

Several recent pedagogical researches have highlighted the inclusive potential of all these narrative practices. Indeed, images are a valuable tool for children and adults who have not yet reached a degree of independent reading but also for people who show obvious reading problems and foreign people who are learning a new language. In fact, thanks to the richness of the iconographic and textual pairing, reading picture books aloud creates an attitude of wonder and amazement, exerting an irresistible charm that makes one want to repeat the reading experience even if in front of obvious difficulties.

Conclusion

The comparison with Valentina and with her long experience in this sector has certainly helped us to deepen a methodology that contains in itself all the magic of rediscovery. The journey through narration, images and poetry is able to open new universes and create connections of meaning, allowing the reapproachment with some lost parts of the self. Storytelling is a practice that can help to reacquire hidden JOY, relying on our past experiences but also on those imagined, which have yet to happen.

Resources

We are reporting here some of the resources used by Valentina in her daily work. As Valentina works in Italy, many of the resources suggested come from the educational context of this country but they can easily be re-adapted in other languages.

⁶ *Augmentative Alternative Communication* is the set of means of communication used to supplement or replace speech or writing for those who experience difficulties in oral and written production and comprehension https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augmentative_and_alternative_communication

Visual Poetry:

- *Festa T. (2019), Trovare la poesia nascosta, educare alla bellezza con il metodo “Caviardage”, La Meridiana, Molfetta (BA)*
- <http://arteascuola-miriampaternal.blogspot.com/2012/12/discover-hidden-poems.html?m=1>
- <https://www.metadidattica.com/2013/04/14/il-caviardage-ovvero-trova-la-tua-poesia/>
- <https://www.caviardage.it/>

Symbolwork:

- <https://www.symfos-youth.eu/en/>

Bibliotherapy and Picture Books:

- <https://www.stefaniaciocca.it/2021/08/29/biblioterapia-e-albi-illustrati/>
- https://dinkioastro.it/incanto_del_leggere/
- <https://biblioterapiaitaliana.com/2022/04/06/parlare-di-malattia-e-morte-ai-bambini-attraverso-gli-albi-illustrati/>
- <https://testefiorite.it/tag/biblioterapia/>
- <https://www.ascoltandolefigure.it/category/libroterapia-creativa>

Drama - Interview with Balogh Rodrigó - by Julia Dobay



Rodrigo Balogh is a director-playwright graduated as an actor in 2001 at the Shakespeare Theater Academy, Budapest. During his studies and afterwards till 2006, he worked as an actor in numerous theaters, including RS9 theater. In 2004, he started to do his own theatrical productions. While in 2007, he founded the *Independent Theater Hungary*, where he works in a Roma and non-Roma interethnic team in the fields of theater and education, focusing on social issues. In 2007, he received the Junior Prima Award for his educational work and the UN “Refugee-prize” for his performance as Mirad, a boy from Bosnia. In 2012, he also won the Ibsen Scholarship. Rodrigo wrote and directed numerous plays and performances, in connection with some of which he also ran a theater educational program for disadvantaged youth. He has been researching the work of European Roma theaters since 2015, and has been the director of the Roma Heroes International Roma Theater

festival since 2017. To date, one of its main goals is to establish a European Roma Theater that can collaborate with other Roma theaters around the world.

What is the method about?

The methodology developed for the Roma Heroes workshops is structured along two main lines. First of all, through these workshops we facilitate open discussion based on contemporary Roma drama texts, with the aim of promoting the themes and values brought to life by the characters and situations in contemporary Roma drama. Roma culture is usually portrayed as being non-contemporary but a traditional one, as a specific one, related only to the Roma community and incapable of contributing to the majority or mainstream culture. The only form in which the Roma culture has managed to penetrate and be accepted in the public space is in its traditionalized, folklorized forms (colorful skirts, dances, fiddle music, handicrafts), which have been tamed and broken by the realities of contemporary experiences. However, contemporary Roma culture exists, is alive, dynamic and should be supported, especially when elaborating themes that emerge from the universe of Roma life. Therefore, the Roma Heroes Workshops are a response to the urgent need to bring this extremely important, yet under-explored part of Roma culture to young, non-Roma, and especially Roma audiences. The texts used in the are self-reflective and deal with contemporary topics, issues related to identity, belonging, discrimination and other topics

that can help participants to better understand how Roma authors reflect on their own culture and how it is represented in mainstream culture.

The second direction we explore through the workshops is redefining the concept of the classic hero by the means of creative games, storytelling. By placing the theme of the hero in the center of the workshop and discussing it with Roma young people, for whom racial discrimination is still an issue, we bring to attention the importance of self-representation. Art has the capacity to create a space to seriously discuss the social problems of specific communities and it can produce concrete change.

Besides the concept of the hero, the themes of the workshops were: violence against Roma people, early marriage, school drop-outs, gender inequalities. By discussing these topics together with Roma people, we want to create spaces that can be developed further through debates and establishment of support groups. Thus, the aim of the workshops is to inform and empower Roma communities regarding their values, rights and culture and to establish a meaningful communication between the Roma and non-Roma participants by creating a safe space for dialogue and mutual knowledge.

The program also addresses some critical needs of the Roma artists community: the marginality of Roma theater and the lack of permanent institutional support for it, the lack of current cultural products that talk about recent history in a critical and captivating way for a young audience, the lack of a theatrical repertoire that responsibly addresses important issues for understanding the past and the present of Roma communities, low consumption of theater among young people. The project informs in an accessible and interactive format the young public about these issues, supports and promotes Roma artists and contemporary Roma cultural production. As a result, our firm opinion is that any program that uses art as a means to respond to social inequities, educate young people and develop their critical thinking skills, empathy and solidarity is worth all the effort and all the enthusiasm one is capable of.

What are the main actions and activities that are carried out with this method?

The workshop consists of two sessions and is structured as follows:

During the first session, the youngsters analyze and discuss four plays and four heroes. At the beginning, we discuss in general what makes somebody a hero (What characterizes heroes and their environments? What do they do?). After we get to know the protagonists of the four plays (from short videos which present the focus scene of the dramas), students can decide which play they would like to work with. We analyze the most important narratives together, going through difficulties, activities, decision making, actions and results.

During the second session, the focus is on the personal heroes and hero stories of the participants. We formulate creative messages together. We try to find the hero in ourselves and work with the heroes chosen by the participants with the help of various creative methods (e.g.: theatre scene, visual art, writing). In most cases, when participants create their personal heroes, they are asked to organize themselves into pairs and create their own heroic story. Then, they share this story in small groups and reflect on them.

What targets do you mainly work with when using this method?

The educational methodology was primarily designed for Roma and non-Roma young people studying in secondary and higher education. At the same time, we believe that it can be interesting and useful for other target groups as well.

What is, if any, the goal you want to achieve when you work with this method?

Independent Theater Hungary has been operating since 2007. Our aim is to start a conversation about social issues, drawing attention to personal responsibility. It doesn't matter where you come from, but it is important for us what you think of the world and what you do for it. We would like young people to be able to live together regardless of their origin and do everything to live in a more hospitable country.

The Roma Heroes educational methodology is the first educational approach that discusses Roma drama literature and theater in an international context. The aim of this project is to draw attention to the values of Roma drama literature, give insight to the life of Roma communities around Europe and share the stories and difficulties of the plays' main characters. The workshop also helps the participants to improve their communication and debate culture and become more cooperative.

Do you think this method can be used to enhance the positive emotions present in each of us?

During the workshops, group members get to know each other better, their awareness about Roma communities is enriched (in the case of Roma communities, their identity is strengthened and their self-esteem and self-confidence improved), their communication skills improve, they become more open to different values and more cooperative. All these improvements increase participants' social sensitivity, cultural knowledge, assertiveness, active citizenship and, last but not least, positive emotions.

How do you think this method can help those who practice it to approach the rediscovery of hidden and unexpressed positive emotions?

Thanks to this method, the group members are encouraged to formulate and present the stories of their own heroes or their own heroic acts. Through the stories of the protagonists, they discuss the changes they initiated in their own life and in their closer or wider environment. During this process, both their self-confidence and self-esteem are improving and they can also rediscover their hidden and unexpressed positive emotions.

Do you think that through this method it is possible to highlight the learning acquired by the person in previous experiences?

Since the method also draws on personal stories (personal heroes), most of the knowledge gained by participants in their previous life experiences is revealed during the workshops.

What is the process through which skills acquired in other contexts are emphasized?

By analyzing and delving into the protagonist's personal history and experiences, participants take examples from someone else's lived life. By comparing themselves with the analysed character, they begin a process of self-analysis through which they identify their own skills and strengths.

Do you think it would be helpful for NEETs to have their prior knowledge recognized within this pathway?

Creating their own personal hero could be a great way to recognize their prior knowledge and improve their self-esteem as well.

What suggestions would you give to a person who decides to undertake a path of self-awareness through this method?

It is worth being brave and honestly creating your own personal hero from whom you can draw strength at any time afterwards.

Do you think that this method has limits, if so which ones?

During the creation of the method, the focus was on the Roma people. Therefore, we took into account the characteristics of this target group in the first place but we believe that it can be interesting and useful for other target groups as well.

Do you think that this method could be more effective if used in specific cases, if so which ones?

It was created as an educational methodology and we already confirmed in our research that it can be used very well in an educational environment. We believe that it can be very effective with any target group.

Conclusion

The Roma Heroes Educational Methodology can easily connect to the Joy. Even though this method is focusing on the Roma people and Roma theatre, it can be used with any other target group. Finding our personal hero, and the heroes living around us can empower the self and in this way can help to recognize our hidden skills and rediscover our positive emotions.

Resources

Below, you can find some of the resources suggested by Rodrigo to deepen this method and draw inspiration from it.

<https://independenttheater.hu/educational-methodology/>

https://prezi.com/gqqukvzsd7e/roma-heroes/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

<https://howlround.com/reimagining-segregated-world-roma-heroes-european-dramas>

Nature work - Interview with Kriszta Vásárhelyi - by Anikó Kottes

Research shows that people connected to nature are better able to cope with everyday stress and have fewer negative emotions to deal with. Serious mental and health differences have been shown among people who live close to nature compared to those who spend their daily lives in a world of urban individualism - writes neuroscientist Sonja Sudimac in her article. In Hungary, a group of psychologists, natural scientists and experts from our national parks have developed a very tangible and practical methodology which is based on the participants' own experiences and scientific rigour to help us return to nature. Kriszta Vásárhelyi, one of the founders and professional leaders of *Erdőmerülés* - Forest Immersion, talked about her own journey, the methodology itself, her attachment to the subject and the different experiences she has accumulated over the years.



In addition to being a mentor and trainer, Kriszta is a clinical child psychologist, a family and couple therapist, a CIP (Catatime Imaginative Psychotherapy) therapist, and a child psychodrama assistant. She is a psychologist working in a therapeutic environment, but she is also the founder of *Erdőmerülés*. As you can see from their website: *"Erdőmerülés is a forest therapy health promotion programme, during which participants take a leisurely, leisurely walk in the forest, immersing themselves in nature. This mindful walk is complemented by relaxation, energizing and well-being exercises and techniques that work on all five senses. As a result, the body and mind become calm and relaxed. The programme is developed and guided by a team of well-trained, dedicated experts with the professional support of the Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate."*

What is this method about?

The method helps participants to experience the calming atmosphere of the forest in a more positive way. The *Erdőmerülés* method draws inspiration from *Sinrin-joku*, a Japanese approach that became popular in America and Europe around the 1980s. The *Sinrin-joku* was a forest bath and has a tradition dating back thousands of years. Nature has been used since antiquity for its healing purposes and its ability to invigorate the soul.

The essentially instinctive need and desire for people to go out into the woods to recharge and relax only later became a marketing concept. Today, however, a growing number of studies show that time spent in the woods, even if not necessarily consciously, has a very positive effect on health indicators, both physically and mentally. This phenomenon has led to the increasing popularity of this type of activity worldwide. In Hungary, this name has only been used for the activity in the last 5 years - environmental education and connection with nature has been around for much longer.

My co-founder Tímea Merényi - a marketing and event planner by profession - and I worked together on a children's event and that's where she came to me with her idea, because she had experienced the benefits of the forest first hand by moving from Budapest to Nagymaros. She noticed that she was more creative, more balanced and able to cope with the stress of everyday life. In 2018, we started to develop the methodology of *Erdőmerülés*, which we refer to as the Hungarian adaptation of the Japanese method. We developed a method that is understandable and tangible for everyone, which means that it can be more easily connected to the Hungarian spirit and functioning mechanism. We also wanted to provide an opportunity for people who are neither familiar with Zen meditation nor with mindfulness techniques or forest walks.

We have several different programmes, but the basic Introduction to *Erdőmerülés* is the first step to learning the whole methodology. It is a three-hour walk in the forest, where you walk very slowly, almost ambling through the forest, while you contemplate and try to direct your attention from different points of view. The walk leader offers the participants exercises and practices that will help them to live and experience the moment and the place as best as possible. One of the basic approaches of the method is not to work with instructions and tasks, but to offer opportunities to strengthen the experience of conscious presence in the forest, to live the here and now, to help participants focus on the present moment.

How exactly does this unique method work?

Usually, they first do body awareness exercises, good stretches and breathing to arrive at the forest by relaxing the muscles and paying attention to the body. Afterwards, participants are invited to take a quiet, slow walk where they can begin to really experience a sense of slowing down and listening inward. Throughout the walk, various handholds are given to help bring this state into focus, directing their attention to the present so that they can actually leave distracting and stressful situations outside the forest. They don't have a phone or any means to connect with the world outside. There is only the person and the forest.

During the walk, they stop at intervals to do breathing exercises, which helps them to slow down further, both physiologically and mentally. In addition, sensory games and exercises are used to connect walkers to the different elements of the forest, some focusing on hearing, others on touch and smell. And at the end, a forest picnic awaits participants, where they will also try to stimulate their sense of taste - another important sensory experience. At this point, a quiet retreat is held where everyone can spend their own time in the forest. By the time they reach this point, the practices and the forest atmosphere have slowed their attention and they are able to experience this meditative stillness in an almost altered state of consciousness from their energy level before the walk. Generally, very strong positive emotions tend to emerge, with many people reporting a deep sense of belonging, being at one with nature, feeling a sense of support and security.

The other very important approach of *Erdőmerülés* is the natural scientific connection and the exact approach, which is best represented by András Sevcsik, co-founder, who works at the *Hiúz House Forest School and Visitor Centre*. The close cooperation with National Parks is also a result of this. Based on their approach, the guides of the walks accompany the participants along the way as intermediaries, and in fact nature shows them what to look out

for. The spontaneity is what makes the experience so special. When a particular bird flies by, the focus is not on the stream, but on the opportunities that nature offers. This approach gives the programme variety and uniqueness, freedom of creativity and spontaneity.

Do you think this method could be useful for NEET people trying to reconnect with themselves?

The programme is "tailored for the Hungarian soul", because currently in Hungary there is a high level of anxiety, fear and inflexibility, and we Hungarians don't really know what it means to relax and calm down. Moreover, historically, not much importance has ever been attached to nature in the religious sphere compared to Eastern cultures.

Erdőmerülés (Forest Immersion) can be very useful as a simple anxiety relief method. NEET young people are particularly affected by this issue because they are overwhelmed by the crisis of growing up, starting a new life. Many of them were not able to take a sufficient step back during adolescence and are therefore experiencing a second adolescence, which means they are late in discovering who they are and what they want. Moreover, covid had a negative influence on their relationship with the peer community, preventing them from building strong relationships at a key age. Furthermore, their self-esteem is greatly diminished by the use of digital media. Their self-image is constantly being stimulated by stimuli that make them think that they would be better if they respected the standards set by society.

For all the reasons above, *Erdőmerülés* could be a real challenge for NEETs: without a telephone, surrounded by nature, participants can immerse themselves in the forest, relaxing, for a three-hour guided tour. It's so important to show them that "doing nothing" can be a different experience of concentration, mindfulness and connection with positive emotions too often left aside.

Do you think this method can be used to enhance the positive emotions present in each of us?

Erdőmerülés offers the opportunity to experience positive feelings and resources. When participants manage to put aside anxiety, during the tour, they can later return to their everyday environment with a much clearer consciousness of themselves. Many participants, after the experience, report feeling lighter shoulders, freer lungs. Contact with nature, even for a brief moment, can bring a feeling of uplift and relaxation.

When one experiences the layer of anxiety being stripped away, there are clear, tangible and joyful feelings underneath. Thanks to this process, these sensations are more likely to surface. By connecting with nature, participants often report a deep sense of belonging. Being surrounded by something beautiful, stable and alive helps people feel connected and enhances their self-confidence.

Which groups do you usually work with?

Groups usually consist of 6 to 8 people. There can be a maximum of 20 people per walk. An extremely powerful process is triggered when many people at a time manage to remain silent within the forest, paying attention to the smallest details.

These programmes are aimed at everyone. Usually, people who wish to have this kind of experience prefer to do it alone, giving themselves the opportunity to meet people directly on site. Those who come to experience self-reflection are more likely to immerse themselves in a state of stillness and silence.

Also organised groups often participate, such as: school groups, work teams, etc. When people know each other, it is more difficult to achieve a collective silence. Silence is created with more difficulty but once achieved has the same beneficial effects.

Furthermore, 3-4 times a year we organize our *Erdőmerülés* leader training, where we show our own method to related professionals, who take its elements and approach and incorporate it into their own work. Teachers and psychologists regularly participate in these sessions, but also yoga teachers and other people with a more holistic approach.

What is the reaction of the participants to the experience?

The method is tailored to a particular group, but there are also general techniques. These techniques may have a different impact on each participant, which may depend on the initial condition of approach to the method.

At the beginning of the path, everyone has 30 minutes of meditation and self-reflection at the tour site. At this stage, the participants' reactions are varied: someone falls asleep, someone concentrates and manages to empty their mind, someone else is moved and cries. We have set up exercises that are equally understandable for children and adults. Before each session, I ask everyone to imagine a return to childhood, made up of curiosity about the world around them, attention to the natural elements and surprise.

At the end of the walk, participants are greeted by a table laid with seasonal fruit, mushrooms gathered from the surrounding forest, tea and much more. The aim is to gently accompany the participants back to everyday life with a gesture of care and love.

Conclusion

The preserving power of nature is faith, trust and strength. It can always give joy and beauty. Experiencing the connection with nature with other people helps everyone to understand the importance and beauty of our planet. *Erdőmerülés*'s mission is to facilitate people interested in entering into a unique and immersive experience where concentrating and listening come first. Getting to know nature and caring for it is also a way of getting closer to oneself and one's needs.

References

For more information on this method you can consult their facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/erdomerules/>

Art - Interview with Christel Strykala - by Kees Schuur



In this article, Christel Strykala, using two examples, shows how young people manage to create a work of art together that far surpasses the individual in terms of dimensions, variety and quality.

Christel Strykala completed her studies as a qualified art teacher at the University of Leipzig. She was an art teacher for 40 years, the last decades at the Greifen-Gymnasium in Ueckermünde. She has studied various art forms in her international travels. Together with her partner, she is working on the monumental work of art *Lost Paradise* in their garden.

She has worked with young people in pioneering and expanding ways. For her, every young person has a certain level of artistic and creative competence that can be ignited and taken to a higher level. It is important for her that young people enjoy their work, are proud of the art objects they produce, talk to others about it and imagine how this art can further create and stimulate their path of life.

What are the methods about?

Together we can do it

In these two examples, I would like to describe how young people can experiment and create with and in art, developing skills such as perseverance, community spirit and determination in group work.

The first experience I want to tell you about is a group work called *Together we can do it again*. The education policy in Germany has created a compulsory curriculum for the schools. In the 4th semester of the last year of high school, this provides in the art subject. At the end of the semester, each student has to defend publicly a practical artistic final work. Since this subject is only taken at the end of the year, many students do not take it seriously. It is very difficult for teachers to motivate students to produce work that can express something about themselves. The most important thing to increase student involvement is to assign them the task clearly, to make them understand why they have to do the work.

There are many public spaces in the school building that can be artistically designed. First, I would like to explain this method using the example of the cafeteria of the *Greifen Gymnasium* in Ueckermünde. The students were given the task of understanding the spatial conditions. To do this, the room had to be measured. We measured all the furniture and

reported the colour and condition of the space. Small sketches, floor plans and elevation drawings were needed for further planning.

The students then developed their first ideas. They presented them and discussed whether they could be implemented and which artistic techniques would have been better used. After a vote, the majority chose to use painting as the technique. Everyone worked on acrylic on 70 x 50 cm canvases. Each student made two paintings to cover all the walls of the café. Everyone focused on their own painting, but the planning was done in a community manner. They thought together about which images could be put together and how to fill the space. The topic chosen for the paintings was: Heroes among us. Each one chose a famous person to portray, studying his or her biography, making sketches and delving into the figure. In this phase, the students motivated and helped each other. Then the actual painting process began. Each student has their own handwriting, their own style of painting. Individuality came into its own. The commonality was the dark brown table, where all of them were working. In the meantime, the students were motivating each other, giving each other tips and also criticizing each other.

The timely completion of the work was of course the most important requirement. The facility manager organized a company that made rails to hang the paintings. The students then had to decide how and where to place them. Not all of them looked good next to each other. After a trial hanging, a color gradient of the background was determined as an aesthetic criterion. After deciding the different positions, each student gave a brief explanation of his or her painting. Although the turn was individual, each student could feel the support of the others, being part of the same group. After the explanation, everyone signed their work and hung it in their chosen place.

All-day school grades

In terms of education policy, the ideas of the all-day school are certainly good and even more beneficial for the students. Unfortunately, the implementation options in the schools are problematic since there are no teachers for this task. At the Gymnasium Ueckermünde, students were given this opportunity. However, the lessons offered were often not particularly interesting for the students, who spent most of their time distracted.

I decided to give them the opportunity to participate in a ceramics course. Working with ceramics in the digital age can be extremely complex. This is why it was necessary to find a way to motivate and engage students in an activity that is completely new to them. In the art department, we regularly take part in the "European competition". In 2022, among other topics for this age group, we chose the topic "What's flying there?". I thought we could participate in the competition by having each student produce a work that could then be incorporated into a more collective work.

First, the students collected information about the appearance, the way of life, and the living conditions of insects. They became interested in other disciplines in order to better understand what insects look like and where they usually breed, such as: geography, biology,

etc. They recognized the environmental problems caused by monocultures, the use of insecticides and, as a result, species extinction and the resulting other problems in nature.

Each student, as in the activity described above, worked individually on their ceramic piece. Subsequently, the works were collected into a single work of art. Elements from nature were also used for the work, such as: leaves, plants, flowers. When, after the glaze firing, the finished reliefs finally lay together on the table, the students stood in front of them in amazement. All the tiles looked beautiful - a section of a lively, blooming meadow with lots of insects was created. Each student was proud of their plate, their contribution to the meadow. Many didn't think that they would ever be able to produce something like this. The school administration was so impressed that the work was displayed in the atrium.

How have these two projects helped young people express their positive emotions?

Both works allowed students to practice something new, discover their hidden skills and be surprised by their own abilities. In both experiences, moments of difficulty and disillusionment emerged, but curiosity and the power of cooperation prevailed. In the first project, the students also improved their communication and expression skills by having to present work in public. Whereas, the second experience also led them to delve into other disciplines, making them interested in unexplored topics. All this helped to increase in them a sense of joy related to success and the building of a more positive self-image.

Conclusion

Many surpassed themselves and would never have believed they could do such a job. Everyone's self-confidence grew in the community. They received praise and recognition from classmates, parents, and fellow teachers, which is motivating for future work and in both occasions they left something "lasting" for the next generations of students. They were immensely proud of their work and everyone was able to collaborate in the community according to their abilities. The feeling that their works also had a benefit (beautification of the school building) gave them more self-confidence and recognition.

What Christel told about the two experiences shows how art can be a motion of unity and change, especially in young people. Creativity and a sense of community can fortify the self-esteem of individuals, especially those who are going through such a complex phase of their growth. Such experiments, in fact, can also be extremely useful with NEET people seeking motivation to enter a career or educational path. Art is cooperation, play, rediscovery and growth. Using the latter can enable one to reconnect with the self and regain the right spirit to deal with certain aspects of life.

Resources

For more information about Christel and her work at the school, you can give a look at the website of the Gymnasium of Ueckermünde: <https://gymnasium-ueckermuende.de/>.

Valuation of prior competences - CH-Q bridging the gap between emotions and formal recognition

One of the cornerstones of the JOY methodology is based on the valorisation of previously acquired skills. The basic idea is that in order to embark on a path of personal and professional growth, one should not only rely on knowledge acquired in the formal environment but also on life experiences gained independently. JOY approaches therefore tend to lead participants to rediscover themselves also by virtue of what they have learnt during their lives. Here, specifically, we will take a closer look at what the CH-Q method and the valorisation of previously acquired skills consists of.

We are continuously being valued for what we know, what we do or who we are. We are valued in education, at work, socially and by ourselves. People's perspective is made of a combination of different valuation systems. Each system and each 'level' has its own set of norms and values. The competencies must be made visible and understandable to one self and to others to make a valuation possible. People have to become aware of their own competencies, understand the power of each of those combinations of competencies.

The result of a positive valuation makes people feel more satisfied, proud, confident. This leads to greater creativity, productivity and motivation. This state also helps people feeling happier and more interested in improving themselves. Research⁷ has found a link between an upbeat mental state and improved health, including lower blood pressure, reduced risk for heart disease, healthier weight, better blood sugar levels, and longer life. But it is not clear whether positive emotions lead to better health or being healthy causes positive emotions.

Through valuation we evaluate/estimate the nature, quality, ability, extent, or significance, the meaningfulness of our competencies. Valuation shows the real human potential based on the analysis (by one self and by others) of personal, social, methodological and functional competencies. Being positively valued strengthens our self-esteem, well-being, and identity, which consequently can increase our participation in life and work. It gives meaning to our life; as we become stronger, we have less fear of failure, less worries and a better self-control and self-management of the use and development of our competencies.

The European council encourages Member States to put in place national arrangements for validation. These arrangements often contain the formal Validation/recognition of Prior Learning (VPL) "to identify, document, assess and certify (=validate) all forms of learning to use this learning for advancing their career and for further education and training."⁸ Validation is defined as the process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual

⁷ National Institute of Health, (2015) <https://www.nih.gov/sites/default/files/news-events/research-matters/2015/20151224-nihrm-highlights-full-list.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en>

has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard (e.g. NQF)⁹. The participation in VPL is limited, mainly because the formal standards don't connect well with the personality traits, individual motivations, emotional competences of and meaningfulness for a person.

The JOY methodology adds valuable exercises from different methods to the prior learning assessment process using the CH-Q¹⁰ approach. To a certain extent, these exercises provide special insight and support for the assessment of prior learning.



1. Becoming aware
2. Making competencies visible
3. Develop a competence-biography and peer-valuation
4. Sitematically self-valuation

5. Presentation of competencies
6. Plan for the future: action plan

Competence assessment in the JOY methodologies is in addition to the CH-Q method and is partly overlapping. The benefits of combining the two approaches are listed below.

1. Competence development. JOY methods and exercises can develop several types of competencies, such as creativity, communication, sensitivity, group-work.
2. Connecting the awareness of specific competencies with underlying emotions, motivations, and personality traits.
3. Making competencies better or in other valuation systems visible and valued.
4. Indirect positive impact on the valuation of other competencies.
5. Strengthening the use of personality traits and increasing self-esteem.
6. Effective use and control of emotions opens hidden and unexpressed positive emotions and understands how they contribute to well-being and how they affect negative emotions.
7. Increased motivation to participate, persist, or work to achieve.

⁹ NQF = National qualifications frameworks classify qualifications by level, based on learning outcomes - that is, what the holder of a certificate or diploma is expected to know, understand, and be able to do. This classification reflects the content and profile of qualifications. ([CEDEFOP](#))

¹⁰ CH-Q is a bottom-up approach for recognising competencies, leading to a sustainable self-management of them.

8. Strengthening the identity.
9. Experiencing new context, which can increase the understanding of competencies.
10. Discovering/recognising cultural and contextual meaning and planning appropriate actions and behaviours.

Let's take a deeper look into the valuation systems in the life of a person. A person is generally confronted with valuations at three different levels. In the overall assessment system, from the person's point of view, these three levels are linked to different normative approaches (ranging from self-assessment to National Qualification Framework validation and outcomes from self-esteem to graduation).

There are two main approaches in valuation:

1. Bottom-up (CH-Q + JOY-methods)
2. Top-down (NQF + Validation of Prior Learning)

In the following, different ways of valuation will be considered, starting with individual one and ending with the CH-Q method. When combined, these valuations can lead to a good overall assessment of the person.

1. Self-valuation

The centre of valuation, the point where all the valuation systems and types meet, is the INDIVIDUAL. S/He needs to be competent in bringing all the valuation together and to match it with his/her self-valuation results. The challenge is to connect deeply and honestly, by diving in the deeper layers of being, where there are personality traits, emotions, self-image, roles played and motivation.

2. External valuation

By external evaluation we mean that carried out by colleagues, working place but also friends, family. In the work environment, it can also turn into salary increases, recognition of various kinds. Important competencies nowadays, in the ever-faster changing society and work-environments, are communicating and networking. Often, however, young people struggle to find work in their area of expertise or study, having to accept low paid jobs. This increases their stress level and lowers their self-esteem. It is also a fact that 65-94% of adult learning is informal. The level of participation in informal learning remains high until retirement. While, the level of formal learning (and assessment) declines rapidly after the age of 40. It is therefore moderately unreasonable to place so little emphasis on what is learned in informal or non-formal settings.

3. Validation / Formal Accreditation (VPL, VNIL, APL, APEL, etc.)

The formal approach for recognition (Education, Validation of Prior Learning) is based on the National Qualification Framework or on branch standards. The validation is strongly promoted at global, EU and national levels. In 2022, more than 40 % of people aged 25-34 years in the EU had completed tertiary education. In February 2021, the Council of Europe approved a resolution that sets an EU level target: the share of people aged 25-34 years with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 45 %, by 2030. Therefore, formal

accreditation, even at the lowest EQF levels, will need even more formal accreditation in education systems through validation. ¹¹.

The use of VPL in the formal approach to education and work is very limited, despite all the national and international efforts of the last 20 years. Despite the attempt to increase strategies, Cedefop states that we have little information on the level of adoption of this system.¹² Monitoring systems for validation are still limited and little is known about the level of acceptance of validation as a pathway for assessing or certifying competences.

4. CH-Q

The CH-Q, as anticipated, is a bottom-up method, starting with the creation of a safe environment, with assessment at the personal level, then reaching the social level and thus providing a basis for the recognition of competences at the informal and non-formal level.

It works like a pyramid. At the bottom, we have a very dynamic process of self-estimation in which the emotions play a very important role. Positive emotions will support this process and fear and anxiety will protect us from making wrong decisions or dangers that are on our life pathway.

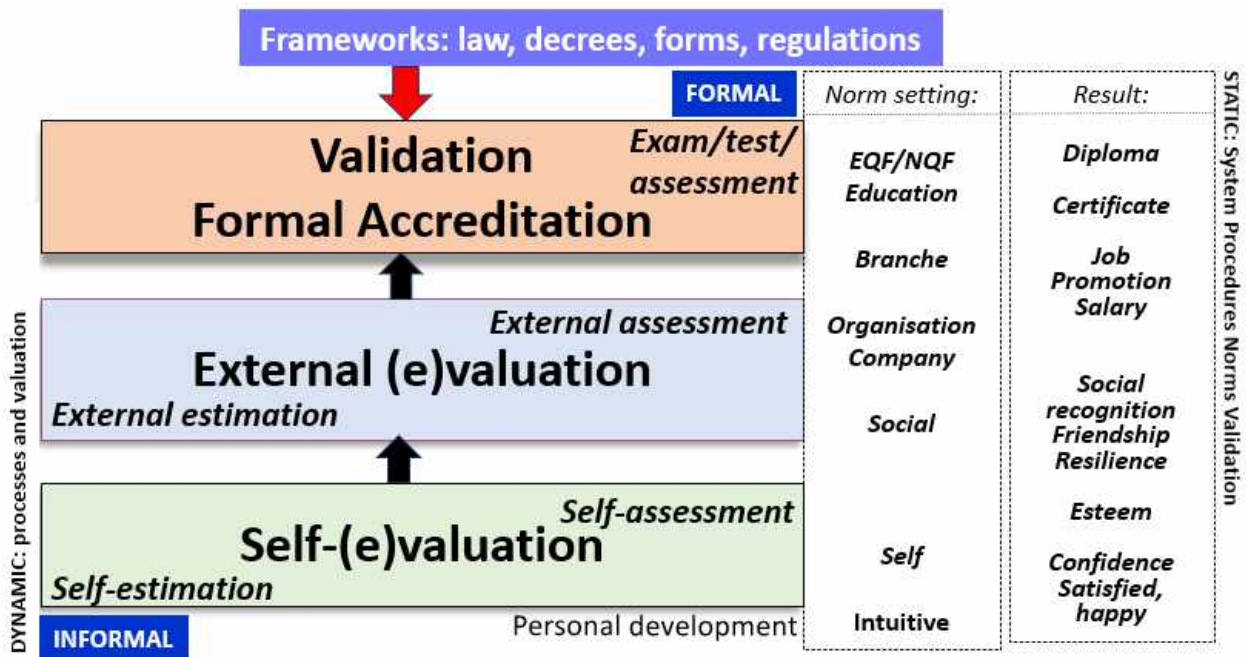
The CH-Q approach strengthens the emotional quotient with:

- Emotional self-awareness
- Emotional self-control
- Motivation
- Adaptability
- Achievement orientation
- Positive outlook
- Empathy
- Social skills
- Organizational awareness
- Influence
- Coach and mentor
- Conflict management
- Teamwork
- Inspirational Leadership

¹¹ [European Union, 2022](#)

¹² [CEDEFOP](#)

VALUATION PROCESS OF COMPETENCES: THE POWER OF CONTROL



C. Schuur
(C) Foundation CH-Q, Houten, The Netherlands

This bottom-up approach is highly necessary because:

- Answers the specific needs of a person through a person-centred approach;
- Provides for quick responses in the evaluation. While the formal (top-down) approach involves lengthy procedures, strong quality control and is often expensive (or subsidised);
- Gives special attention to the hidden qualities;
- It fits in with the reality of society, in which approximately 80 per cent of adult learning takes place informally and it is estimated that up to 80 per cent of competence assessment takes place informally;
- It pays strong attention to personal motivation, personal traits and positive emotions.

The chq method also pays special attention to the competence diagram invented by Spencer & Spencer, in 1993¹³: the competence iceberg. In their book, these authors describe competences using the metaphor of the iceberg.

In the top of the iceberg, rising from the sea level are.

- **knowledge**
- **skills,**

under the sea level are

- **self-image** (identity and 'value')

- **social role** (expected attitude and behaviours for a function in a social or job function)
- **emotions**

and at a deeper level

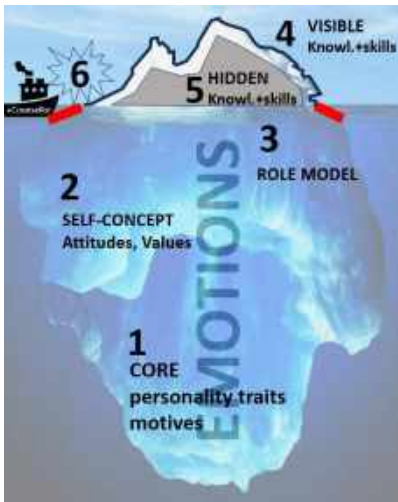
- **personality traits** like intelligence, creativity, curiosity, conscientiousness, self-confidence, self-awareness, empathy, optimism, leadership, extra- and introversion, curiosity.
- **motivations**

Making the competencies more visible and the person aware of underlying elements is important. It can lead people to a personal, sustainable management of their competencies. The metaphor of the iceberg also visualises the difference between the top-down VALIDATION approach and the bottom-up VALUATION approach. Validation mainly limits itself to identify, document and validate a specific part of the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to a qualification of the NVQ or branch certifications but the 90% of an iceberg lies below the sea level and is not visible.



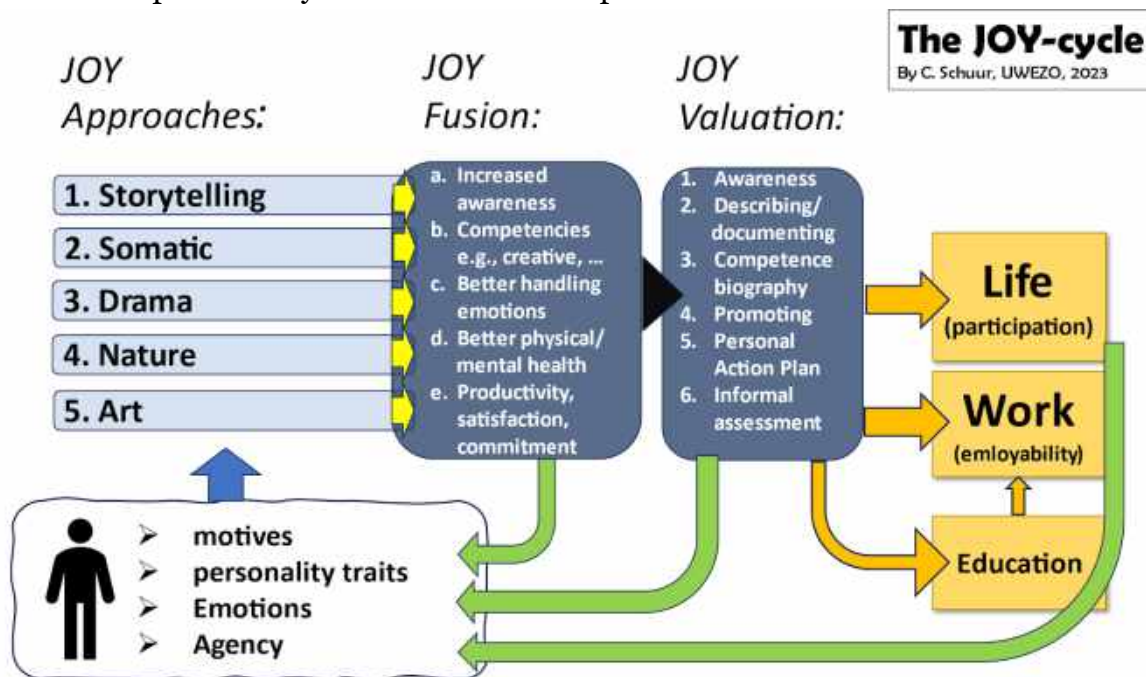
The JOY instruments combined with the CH-Q approach are fundamental for:

1. Becoming aware of all the elements in the iceberg competencies model;
2. Connecting all these elements together;
3. Developing/adapting toward a set of norms and values;
4. Understanding why these elements are connected and in which way they can influence the well-being;
5. Using and controlling positive emotions;
6. Describing competences;
7. Making competences more visible, usable and valuable.



The iceberg-competence model shows also certain challenges that JOY and valuation in general must deal with:

1. The personality traits and motive are mostly hidden deep in a person. The people we work with require cautious and careful interventions.
2. By working on the self-concept, self-evaluation, and self-esteem, a person has to change existing attitudes and value norms.
3. Each person fulfils one or more role models that can strongly be influenced by the environment and often little by a strong self-concept.
4. The visible state is the hardest and most complex, it should not be destroyed but gently shaped by the person himself, through working with the deepest layers.
5. In the core of the iceberg, there is a selection of knowledge and skills that are kept hidden for different reasons (personal experiences as being a refugee, bullying, abuse at home, childcare, school, ...).
6. The unknown size and shape of the submerged part of the iceberg in the sea poses a danger to ships that get too close. Rescue services may damage their ships and as a reaction a person may be reluctant to co-operate.



The combination of JOY exercises (art, somatics, drama, nature, storytelling) and the bottom-up assessment enable the specific needs of NEETs to be addressed, ranging from the search for meaning and identity to the desire to fit into a pathway within society, e.g. finding a job, linking ongoing informal learning with formal learning and validation opportunities. Combined intervention could also be applied to younger people (as a preventive intervention) and older people (improvement, reintegration).

Conclusions

The aim of this handbook is to demonstrate, through the words of the chosen experts, the fundamental importance of a combined method, capable of bringing together different approaches that all aim at the well-being of the person. By paying attention to what was explained by the people interviewed, it is possible to see how these methods are all closely related to each other and can easily be used to enable the person who decides to try them out to investigate his or her deepest desires. Rediscovering the self, paying attention to one's unexpressed feelings, admitting one's limitations but also one's abilities increases self-esteem, strengthens one's personal self-image and enables the individual to face life with a different strength and joy. Dancing, storytelling, contact with nature, creativity, improvisation are all parts of a great self-exploration mechanism. All this, combined with an appreciation of what has been learnt in non-formal contexts, leads the individual to feel capable, once again able to have different experiences in various areas of life, no longer stuck in a sense of incapacity and frustration.

The methods presented are all to be considered as part of the same journey, the end of which is unknown, but the path is certainly full of adventures and discoveries and it can only be good to give it a chance.

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