

# Conclusions of the EM meeting / Saturday 13 April, 2024, Douzelage GM, Sherborne, the UK

**Participants: 23 (representing 20 member towns)**

## Sherborne / EM meeting / Friday 12 April, 2024

**Keynote speaker Joep Wolters:** *Well-being through nature and music from a neuropsychological perspective*

The Education Meeting was opened by the keynote speaker Joep Wolters (Fontys University of Applied Sciences, Department of Pedagogy) from Meerssen, the Netherlands. He approached our topic, *Well-being through nature and music*, from a neuropsychological perspective. We were explained on the basis of strong scientific evidence how music affects and activates our brain, and is, in fact, strongly linked with well-being.

First, Mr. Wolters provided us with the framework and defined the notion of well-being. He explained us the PERMA model, which is a scientific theory of happiness by Seligman (2010). The model is based on the principle of five existing key elements to maintain happiness. These elements are positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishment.

Wolters then explained the different ways music can be experienced. Listening to music activates the hedonic parts of our brain and dopamine is released as a response. When looking at the PERMA model, listening to music involves positive emotion, relationships and meaning. However, practicing and participation, in other words making music yourself, will also stimulate feelings of engagement and accomplishment in addition to positive emotion, relationships and meaning. All in all, music promotes well-being significantly.

Although the focus of the presentation was the neuropsychological impact of music on our brain, it was stated that also green environments are beneficial to children's neuropsychological development and mental health, and thus promote well-being according to various studies.

The presentation was followed by a conversation. It was discussed when and how music could be used at school to enhance learning. It was stated that in certain lessons music can be especially beneficial, e.g., PE lessons or language lessons where music can be used to make students or pupils feel more at ease. It was also discussed how to introduce classical music in class. Finally, we learned that homework can be done when listening to music, but it is advisable to choose instrumental music only.

## **Rachel Milestone: singing workshop**

Rachel Milestone (Director of Music at Leweston School, PhD, MEd) introduced the theme of her workshop by citing her own article about the major role of music in children's academic success. She pointed out that music should not have to fight for its existence in school curricula as it has been proven many times scientifically that it is without any doubt essential for our well-being and learning. It is crucial that music education is seen as a necessity, not luxury. In conclusion, music for music's sake is important.

Rachel then presented an initiative that was set up in her school after the covid pandemic, called *Leweston Lyrical Learner (Operation Singing!)*. The initiative was launched to restart singing after covid restrictions and to motivate youngsters who had not been singing together for a long time.

This program is aimed at those who wouldn't sing voluntarily, and it focuses on participation – Rachel's motto being 'loud and proud'. The program is aimed at pupils aged 9-13 and its main goal is to keep young people singing throughout their early teens. In the very heart of the program is the thought of music appreciation. In practice, *Leweston Lyrical Learner* means encouraging pupils to become active singers, for instance, contributing to the assemblies, Mass, and choosing singing ambassadors and singing in a choir (Cantemus), which is compulsory for year 7 pupils. There is also a rewarding system in place to support pupils. The staff is also part of the singing community as they show an example. There are for example free singing lessons available for them as well as a choir for both staff and sixth-form students. The program is essentially based on music appreciation and participation.

Finally, Rachel demonstrated how her singing workshops are run in practice. The teachers' group enjoyed singing together very much and it was easy to see how music is a powerful tool in education.

## **Presentations by Douzelage member towns**

The workshop was followed by presentations on good practices by the member towns.

- Škofja Loka: positive psychology for every teacher using the PERMA model as the framework of reference.
- the presentation was about what determines the teachers' well-being (students' results, timetables, appreciation of teachers' time, lectures about stress, etc.)
- motivation goes hand in hand with well-being; six aspects of psychological well-being; PERMA model => the hardest for the staff was 'accomplishment'
- the teachers' group discussed whether the learning process is more important as an accomplishment than grades or winning a competition
- Bad Kötzting: several examples of good practices that promote well-being, e.g., a music party for children; wind instrument class; forest kindergarten; research class; beekeeping; literary picnic in the schoolgrounds
- Asikkala: a national Schools on the Move -program to increase physical activity during the school days; free snacks offered by a local bakery combined with the environmentally-friendly idea of reducing food waste; sports and activity tutors (pupils and students, volunteers)
- Türi: a campaign to collect rubbish; teaching outdoors is common; greenhouse project
- Niederanven: promotion of well-being through a connection with nature and outdoor sciences; woodwork workshops; technology and science; science in kindergarten (bees, flower boxes); school garden, planting, harvesting and then cooking
- Tryavna: more and more outdoor activities according to students' preferences, bird-watching, fishing, climbing; local events (local community level) like marathons, music festivals, concerts, hiking, local clean-up events / campaigns

The presentations were shared with all the participants using Google Drive: [Douzelage Sherborne Teachers' Meeting Presentations – Google Drive](#)

## **Visit to Leweston 'Forest School'**

In the afternoon, the teachers' group had the opportunity to take part in a guided tour at Leweston School. We were guided by Rachel and her daughter Lily, 9 years. The main aim was to learn about special forest school pedagogy used in Leweston School on a weekly basis. We were told that children are entitled to use the school forest every week to study outdoors. Lily was an excellent guide, and it was evident how

beneficial it is to study outdoors. In addition to obvious health and well-being benefits, this pedagogical approach most definitely nourishes children's imagination and creativity and allows them to remain children as long as possible. During our visit in the school gardens, we were also told about the long history of Leweston School, originally a mansion, and about the school values, of which green values are among the most important.

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The Chair of Education, Riikka Penttilä, introduced a workshop for future co-operation. The teachers worked in small groups discussing and brainstorming looking into possibilities of organizing exchanges also without ErasmusPlus funding and partnerships as well as online meeting events. As a result, several interesting ideas were brought up. For instance, special needs teachers agreed on starting co-operation, which would mostly be co-working with the colleagues in different Douzelage towns as student mobilities might be more complicated to organize. In addition, a Teams-group was set up to facilitate co-operation after the EM in Sherborne. Rovinj suggested the possibility of organizing an annual meeting, so that different municipalities would in turns organize a meeting for one student and one teacher from each municipality. We also discussed the possible practical problems, mostly administrative, when planning exchanges or projects. In conclusion, we realized that we would need more time to plan and to get organized for co-operation, and therefore the conversation and planning will continue using Teams as soon as possible after this GM.

At the end of our meeting, we listened to Lonneke Frijns' report on a successful project called 'Free Press' in Meerssen, the Netherlands, which was a very inspiring experience for young Douzelage members especially. Finally, Martine Defontaine from Granville, shared their Douzelage initiative 'Apéro-time' and invited teachers to join their distance meeting events where different Douzelage member towns are introduced to one another.

Riikka Penttilä

Chair of Education

Asikkala, Finland