Positive psychology in the school, the case of the ERASDG project's Innovation camp

Edit Bárány

Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Leányka street 6. Eger 3300 Hungary, baranye@dobosvszi.hu

Abstract: *This study demonstrates the effect of positive psychology in the school, as well as the possibility of competence development in vocational education through the ERASDG project. The study pays special attention to the idea that positive psychology places the emphasis on the strengths of the individual and on discovering virtues. This study evaluates the ERASDG project's innovation Camp event and the incorporation of positive psychology in the initiative. Based on the findings of my study it can be stated that the project develops language skills, as well as creativity and problem-solving skills. Communication is also developed by the project because on the one hand, students need to communicate effectively with each other, as well as with teachers. At the same time, it also develops external communication, given that the participants also had to contact external bodies in the course of the project.*

Keywords: *positive psychology, competencies, ERASDG project- Innovation camp*

1. Introduction

This study discusses the effects of positive psychology in the school, as well as the possibility of competence development in vocational education through the ERASDG project. ERASDG stands for Education Requires Application of SDGs. ERASGD, therefore, uses SDGs. They took into consideration the 17 sustainable development goals contained in the Agenda 2030 documents. Furthermore, the project paid special attention to SDG no. 12 on Consumption & Production and SDG no. 13 on Climate Action.

The author participated in the Innovation Camp of the ERASDG project in May, 2021. This study evaluates the event and the incorporation of positive psychology in the initiative. The Innovation Camp is a 21st-century educational method, with multiple advantages. The project took place online, on Microsoft Teams, where the participants participated as an observant. The author's reason for joining the event was to get familiar with this method of teaching, that I could then incorporate into my own teaching process.

As discussed later, the ERASDG project aims to promote among the students the following notions, while considering the SDGs no. 12 and no. 13 (Homoki et al. 2017): the need to be

aware of the situation, the need for international cooperation, the individual is an integral part of the solution. The potential lies in the youth and the education; therefore, we need to develop the quality of vocational training regarding the topic, in this sense international cooperation offers an outstanding opportunity for the teachers too.

The main aims for achieving these are student-focused, authentic, and innovative educational methods and approaches (Teprics et al. 2015), obtaining positive experiences through cooperation while solving problems, creating the necessary conditions so that the students can keep the learned competencies. As a result of the project the 4 innovative topics Innovation Camp, Living lab, Gamification and Team learning, and the connected practices, if they are to spread in Europe, the quality of vocational training in the environmental sector, can develop further.

2. Literature review

2.1. Positive psychology in the school

Before jumping to positive psychology in school, I would like to discuss positive psychology on its own. The idea of Positive psychology was born in the 1970s. The new school of psychology freshly placed emphasis on knowledge, development, self-prompted joy, rewarding practices, self-initiation, and curiosity (Pléh, 2004).

Positive psychology was developed in the United States of America following World War II, in the 1950s. Positive psychology was in fact the answer to the existing models, that regarded psychology as a discipline that focuses on the exploration and correction of mental damages, pathologies, and problems. In this view, the human was seen as the passive subject, the endurer of, for example, childhood traumas. On the other hand, positive psychology focuses on the active decision-making nature of the individual and it emphasizes the positive sides of existence (Seligman and Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). „For positive psychology, the human is self-determined individual, capable of exploiting their own potential, constant growth and development" (Oláh, 2012, pp. 6).

Positive psychology focuses on the strength and virtue of the individual. (Sheldon and King, 2001). Regarding strength, it can be stated that these include future-oriented mindset, courage, optimism, fairness, etc., personality traits developed through evolution, which help to facilitate the perfection and happiness of the individual and the collective (Park et al. 2004).

This part discussing positive psychology in the school. Positive psychology is used in positive attitude teaching in the educational system (Wehmeyer, 2002). The main goal of positive

attitude teaching is developing the competencies of students. Competence in this sense regards "the degree of successful use of individual and social skills while solving problems. Individual competence requires healthy confidence or the ability to apply strategies for struggles. Social competence, on the other hand, consists of interpersonal skills, that help the individual in adapting to the social surroundings, groups, characterized by new, that is, changed rules and norms." (Hamvai and Pikó, 2008, pp. 72)

The self-detected competencies of the individual are of utmost importance, for example, if the individual regards themselves as clumsy or stupid, there is no opportunity for demonstrating good skills, which could result in the individual choosing tasks, that they are deemed to fail. In this way, their incompetence is not revealed, neither by really easy nor by extremely hard tasks. While if the student's detected competence is high, they are more likely to succeed even at harder tasks. Therefore, it is important to present the students with real challenges (Pajor, 2015). At the same time, it is important to note that the reward should be linked to competence. The punishment the rewarding should in every case bear different functions. A typical case of this would be a teacher who motivates the students by allowing them to play games if they have finished their tasks. In this case, the reward is the game itself, which fulfills a motivating function. This results in the student expecting a reward as a consequence every time. Therefore, the intrinsic, self-generated motivation does not evolve in them. The evaluating or feedback functions regard the individual's success. By telling a student that he or she solved a task excellently, therefore they deserve a good mark, then the reward is connected to the high quality of the finished task. In this case, the student gets feedback on his or her competence. This contributed to the development of intrinsic motivation. The importance lies in the application of the reward, that is, the link between reward and performance should be emphasized. The distinction between intrinsic motivation and controlling function is also highly important. Controlling function regards the ability of the individual to perform under pressure. For example, by telling the student that whoever finished the task receives a good mark, the emphasis is on the competition of the task rather than on the quality. Due to the developing pressure, the task now feels like work, taking away the aspect of enjoyment. Positive psychology also suggests that in the case when motivation is already present in the individual, rewarding or controlling are in fact not necessary. If there is no internal motivation, the rewarding function should only be taken away gradually, when it is in use. Internal motivation can be a booster when it contributes to the achievement of the goals (Pajor, 2015).

It is highly important to use positive psychology in schools, as it is in fact point of view since positive psychology focuses on our strengths, and it aims to prevent problems. Therefore, it is a method of prevention.

Students spend a waste amount of time in school with their teachers and fellow students, their time spent studying constitutes a major part of their lives. In this sense, this era is a lasting experience for them. The focus should be on the goals that help them achieve individual and social wellbeing. While this form of prevention for the sake of wellbeing in the school is of utmost importance, it is also central to note the school's purpose, which is to provide the necessary means for effective learning processes and achievement of positive performance (Fodor and Kolényi, 2019).

Possibilities for the use of positive psychology should not just promote mental health protection, but also give space for the development of study motivation, flow-experience related to the study process, and the evolvement of creativity and skills. (Fodor and Kolényi, 2019, pp. 21-22).

In 1998, when he was elected as the president of the American Psychological Association, Seligman determined the three main fields of positive psychology.

1.   Positive feelings,
2.   personal features and strengths,
3.   studying positive institutions.

Furthermore, Seligman emphasized the establishment of the study on human strengths, which indicate the central character of strengths (Seligman, 1999). One of the first findings of positive psychology was the studying of character strengths and its related concepts. Character strengths bear particular importance in the school. Peterson and Seligman (2004) found that for an individual to be in dispose of a 'good character', all six main virtues should be present in the individual, at least to a notable extent. The six virtues consist of altogether 24 character strengths, that are in fact the different forms of the distinct virtues. The six virtues are as follows:

1.   wisdom,
2.   courage,
3.   decency,
4.   justness,
5.   temperance,
6.   transcendency.

While the virtues are somewhat abstract, character strengths are present in practice. An example of this would be when one shows empathy towards work colleagues. In this case "kindness" is the manifestation of character strength and the component of the virtue "decency".

It is important to use character strengths in the school. The development of character strengths results in the development of skills connected to studying, self-efficiency, the choice of reasonable goals, and a positive attitude towards colleagues. (Fodor and Kolényi, 2019, pp. 27). As discussed in this part of my study, the introduction of positive psychology to the school environment is very beneficial, as it is equally important to nurture talent and to develop positive traits as to eliminate the existing problems and faults (Hamvai and Pikó, 2008).

2.2.   The development of competencies in vocational training

The most important elements of positive psychology are positive feelings, deepening of feelings, intellect, performance, and the formation of positive social connections. Thanks to this point of view and thanks to the project we can improve the competencies of students in vocational training in a way that also prepares them for the challenges they are to face later on. As of the academic year 2021/2022, it is possible to teach the sustainability subject in one lesson a week. In the framework of freely planned lessons, it provides the possibility for teaching the topic and developing the necessary skills in the 9th and 10th grades. The focus of the program lies in environmental sustainability, also paying attention to the financial and economic aspects, giving the whole complex picture on the issue, taking into consideration the real-life nature of the cause. It also aims not to merely pass on the lexical knowledge but to lay the foundations for and develop a positive environmental attitude, as well as to increase environmental insistency. [1] Schools, where a variety of teaching methods are in use, are more effective and successful. If we were to analyze the different teaching methods used in different types of schools, we would find that project-based teaching is most common in private schools (Simonyi and Homoki, 2020).

The transformation of vocational training implies a change in which project-based learning gets more emphasis. The young generation needs to be able to work with this method. Furthermore, complex approaches help them in performing in the world of work. The goal of Professional training 4.0 is to help the young generation acquire the skills and competencies throughout their school years, which can help them in performing even in the world of the changed function of

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[1] Kék Bolygó Alapítvány (2020): *Fenntarthatósági nevelési - oktatási program* https://kbka.org/tankonyv/

jobs as the effect of the fourth industrial revolution (Innovative Training Support Centre, 2020). Project-based learning develops these skills and competencies.

Project-based learning especially promotes the social skills of the students, as they work together on projects, providing the possibility of cooperative work (Teperics et al. 2015). The students need to learn how to accept help as well as to be able to offer help. If we use project-based learning in vocational education, students get a chance to develop social techniques while their empathy, tolerance also changes for the better It is then fair to state, that project-based learning promotes the development of the community, while traditional teaching models promote individualism (Ádám and Bódis, 2013).

Teachers must devote more time to using methods that help students to not just understand, but also to solve different environmental, societal, political, economic issues (Simonyi and Homoki, 2020). Teachers should lay a firm foundation for the student's ability to possess environmental morality and social-environmental responsibility. This requires new teaching and learning strategies, that take into account the differences of individuals, and open the door for every child to acquire the competencies connected to environmental culture (Paksi, 2013). In 2015 193 member states of the United Nations have adopted a new framework for integrated sustainability development, Agenda 2030 (official name: Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), drawing on ideas of the abolition of poverty, the overcoming of inequality. And the protection of our environment.

2.3.   The ERASDG project

The ERASDG project was inspired by the sustainable development goals and the framework of Agenda 2030 (Homoki et al. 2017). In 2015 193 member states of the United Nations have adopted a new framework for integrated sustainability development, Agenda 2030 (official name: Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development), drawing on ideas of the abolition of poverty, the overcoming of inequality. And the protection of our environment. The new framework, unlike the previous plans of cooperation for development, is characterized by the adaptation of a more comprehensive approach for sustainable development. The Agenda prescribes tasks and goals for each country and region. In the center of the Agenda lay the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). They apply to each and every member state, with the intent of "leaving no one behind". The Agenda identifies 17 goals, divided into 169 sub-goals and 230 indicators, that aim to measure and monitor the extent of sustainable development until 2030 (KSH, 2020).

The ERASDG places the emphasis on three main problems: to teach the students to believe that they are able to solve problems, changes are necessary in the point of view as in action, solutions are only possible if we work together with a society-centered view.

The aim of ERASDG's four projects is to demonstrate through project-based learning with its innovative and student-centered approach, the importance of the use of positive psychology. Students should receive experiences, ideas for approaches, and solutions that the students can use to grow in the future.

Eight countries took part in the ERASDG project: Denmark (project leader), the Netherlands, Spain, Finland, Austria, Romania, and Hungary. The countries work in pairs: one demonstrates a well-functioning teaching method, the other one tests and evaluates it. Nevertheless, the other countries are also not excluded from the testing and the development of the distinct teaching methods, as all eight countries take part in the demonstration of the teaching methods. Following this, the refined teaching methods get adapted by the different countries later.

Hungary is represented by the Agricolous Educational Centrum of Central-Hungary. All four schools participating in the project chose a topic for a workshop that they want to develop. Therefore, the following allocation will apply for the Hungarian teachers for working together with foreign teachers:

- Táncsics Mihály school topic: Innovation Camp (demonstrator: Denmark, tester: Hungary)
- Varga Márton school topic: Gamification (demonstrator: Spain, tester: Poland)
- Fáy András school topic: Team learning (demonstrator: Finland, tester: Romania)
- Bercsényi Miklós school topic: Living Lab (demonstrator: the Netherlands, tester: Austria)

The author joined the international project as an observer, set in a cooperation agreement. Due to the Covid-19 regulations, there was no opportunity to organize the project in real life. For the sake of the success of the project, several meetings took part, where the coordinators and the teachers participated. The training sessions and the Kick-off meeting took place between the 25th and the 29th of January 2021 on Canvas, in the organization of the Netherlands. The Innovation Camp itself took place between the 17th and the 21st of May 2021 on Microsoft Teams, in the organization of Denmark. The working language was English. There were 52 participants of the event, 27 students, 25 teachers, and 2 facilitators from Aeres University. The topics were chosen step-by-step through the teaching method demonstrated by Aeres University. With the help of teachers, the task of the multi-national student groups was to find

innovative and sustainable solutions to real-life problems. The solutions had the be presented on the last day of the event for a professional jury. Through the students as well as the teachers established international connections, their skills and competencies developed significantly.

3. Data and methods

3.1.   Participants of the ERASDG project, location and time

While collecting the data the units of analysis were the 6 groups taking part in the Innovation camp. In total, 27 students in vocational training took part in the project week. In my study, I used observation and surveys. In my observations I took notes. As an observant, I did not take part in the events. I received access to the chat rooms from the organizers of the project week. I jumped from group to group while they were working together without having told them beforehand when I would observe them. The survey was also distributed through the internet. The limitation of this could be the question of whether I used the most fitted forms of questions and whether I was clear enough, as I was surveying students from different nations. On the positive side, students were more likely to answer honestly to the questions as they filled out the survey completely individually. Analysis was conducted on the basis of the answers received to the survey questions.

3.2.   Observations and experiences in the ERASDG project's Innovation Camp

As already stated, I joined the Innovation Camp of the ERASDG project as an observer in May 2021. The event took part online, on Microsoft Teams. It is important to note that the teaching methods discussed in the last part of my study, were developed by Danish professionals. These methods are already in use with significant success in the Danish vocational training system. The Innovation Camp event of the ERASDG project was organized for the first time online.
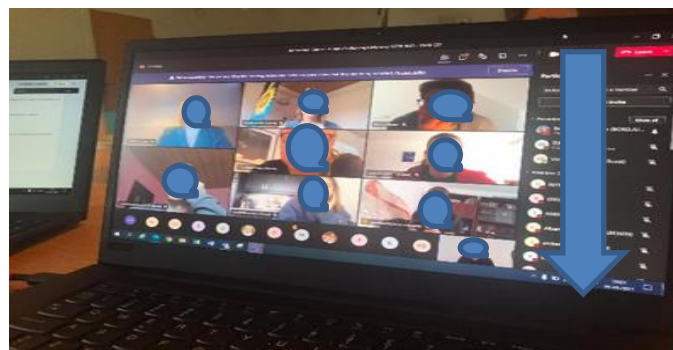

Figure 1. The Innovation camp on Microsoft Teams (own source)

The author was very satisfied with the organization of the event. Multi-national groups of 3-4 students worked together for 5 days, to find a solution to a concrete environmental issue. Following these sessions, they gave a presentation on the last they of the event.

Figure 2. Scene of a real problem to be solved (Green Academy, 2021) [2]

The working language at the event was English, therefore the Hungarian students, as well as the students of all other nations (Denmark, Spain, Poland, Finland, Romania, the Netherlands, Austria), and the teacher, had to speak English during the event. This was an excellent opportunity for the students to develop their English language skills too. I think that the idea that a professional jury evaluated the work of the students on the last day, was also an excellent idea. This way they received feedback on their work and achievement.

Looking at the scheduling of the project week, we can state the following. Every day started with a group work session at 9 am. The opening event was on Monday and the closing event was on Friday.

The schedule of Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday was similar, they went as follows: From 9 am to 11 am group work, from 10 am to 11 am consultation, from 11 am to 12 am group work, from 12 am to 12.45 am lunch break, from 12.45 am to 1.30 pm training, from 1.30 pm to 2.30 pm group work, from 2.30 pm to 3 pm group work (information session and debrief for the students), from 3 pm to 4 pm meeting for the teachers.

Monday started with an opening ceremony from 9 am to 10.30 am. The topics of the opening event were goals, schedule, getting to know each other, working environment. Then from 10.30 am to 11.30 am the challenge took part, when the students could ask questions and get answers. Following this, from 11.30 am to 12.30 am brainstorming, followed by a lunch break. From 12.45 am to 1.30 pm group work, from 1.30 pm to 2.30 pm group work again, from 2.30 pm to

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[2] Green Academy (2021): *Innovation camp challenge* https://storage.net-fs.com/hosting/7125024/0/ (obtained on: 11.30.2021)

3 pm group work again (information session and debrief for the students), and finally from 3 pm to 4 pm meeting for the teachers. The goal of the project was to solve real environmental problems. The goals were achieved through the teaching methods developed by Aeres University.

On Friday the greeting of the participants took place at 8.45 am, then from 9 am to 10 am the students gave their presentations. 6 groups presented in 8-8 minutes each (3 minutes of presentation and 5 minutes of questions and answers). From 10 am to 10.30 am Kim Falkenberg's presentation took place. From 10.30 am to 11 am there was a break, while the jury was discussing the presentations. From 11 am to 11.30 am the jury gave general feedback (15 minutes), and then every participant filled in an evaluation form (15 minutes). From 11.30 am to 12 am the closing event too part, where awards were given. Finally, the project week was concluded with a meeting for the teacher from 12 am to 12.45 am.

Teachers were present at the event to observe and help the students. From my side, the coaching method was a new experience, that I have never used in my own teaching before. Following the project, I will also apply the method in my teaching.

We can state that the Hungarian team's participation was satisfactory while working together with the Danish, Dutch, Finish, Polish, Austrian and Spanish teams. They did encounter difficulties at the beginning (especially with regards to the working language, English), however, by the end of the five-day project, they managed to overcome the difficulties, and communicate efficiently.

3.3.   Results

Drawing on feedback (21) from students and participants, I would like to demonstrate what causes difficulties for the students throughout the project (table 1), and the skills and competencies that the project developed in the students (table 2). At places, we have results over a 100%, because some participants gave multiple answers.

Table 1. Obstacle encountered by the students in the Innovation Camp of the ERASDG project

1. working language (English) – language barriers	70%
1. time-consuming method – time management	55%
2. task division	49%
2. cultural differences	37%

Using table one, we can see that the biggest difficulty for students (but also for the other students) throughout the project was the working language, English, as it was not their mother tongue. After struggling in the beginning, they managed to overcome the language barrier by the 3rd or 4th day, as they kept practicing. The second difficulty was the time-consuming nature of the method. The right scheduling and use of time are really important, to ensure that everything fits in one week. Therefore, task division is really important. The fourth difficulty was the cultural difference between the different nations. This because especially obvious when the Hungarian and Eastern-European (the Polish, and the Romanians) students wished to stick more to the specific tasks determined by the project, while the Western-European students (the Dutch, the Austrians, etc.) were much more flexible.

Table 2. Skills and competencies, promoted by the Innovation Camp of the ERASDG project

1.	language skills	68%
2.	creativity	57%
3.	problem-solving	55%
4.	organizing	48%
5.	planning	41%
6.	discipline	38%
7.	communication	36%

Regarding table 2, it can be stated that the project undoubtedly develops the language skills, because the working language is English, it also promotes creativity and problem-solving. The project also develops planning and organizing competencies too, the different roles form inside a group, for example, one oversees organizing and the other is in charge of planning. Discipline is present throughout the whole project as the setting resembles a work environment where the students have to work together in Microsoft Teams. Communication skills are also promoted by the project as the students have to communicate with each other as well as with the teachers, and even third parties because they have to contact companies as part of the project. If the project did not take place online; Denmark would have hosted the event.

4. Discussion

The Agricolous Educational Centrum of Central-Hungary has three main strategical aims on the international level:

1.   Providing up-to-date vocational training using international practices
2.   Developing international collaborations

3.   Constant development of the professional and personal competencies of participants using foreign experiences and observations. (Agricolous Educational Centrum of Central-Hungary, 2020).

While conducting the project the collaborations are strengthened between countries, schools, students, and the partner, Green Man company. All participants receive new experiences and practices, resulting in the constant development of competencies. In my opinion, the ERASDG project's Innovation Camp contributes to the realization of all three strategic aims.

This new teaching method is applicable in vocational education too. It develops the student's creativity and problem-solving skill. The only "problem" with the method is that it is time-consuming. It requires a week of work, as the execution of such a project takes more than one or two days. Nevertheless, a project week every semester could also be implemented in the Hungarian teaching system too, in which the students can take an active part.

5. Conclusion

In my study, I demonstrate the different possibilities for the use of positive psychology in the school and its manifestation in the project. As we could see, positive psychology places the emphasis on the strengths of the individual and on discovering virtues. Positive psychology is used in positive attitude teaching in the educational system, with the main goal of developing the competencies of students. It is also important to demonstrate how the development of competencies is done in practice in vocational training.

In my opinion, the ERADG project's Innovation Camp was a success, and it became clear that the future of vocational training lies in project-based learning, because it develops the students' competencies with the tools of positive psychology. For example, language skills, working in a group, creative approaches, planning, and organizing skills, and finally, the results show that constant improvement is possible if the will to productivity is present. These are essential to the success of professionals. The future should be built on the new experiences and data found through the project. It is important that students can reach results in an international setting (online or in real life) through the simulation of real situations with the tools of group work, perception, and detection, which is not possible in normal teaching settings. Furthermore, it is important to realize that the use of positive psychology and a firm knowledge of its basics is important to reach these results. I am looking forward to the next steps of the project. Depending on the outplay of the pandemic, this event might take place in person or online. Furthermore, based on the feedback of the teachers an evaluation will take place. Following the evaluation,

the project will be applicable in any other country. For me, the project helped to gather international experiences, contributing to my own teaching methodology.

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About the Author

Bárány Edit, teacher at Budapest Economic Vocational Training Center Dobos C. József Hospitality Technical School and Vocational School, PhD candidate at Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Doctoral School of Education. Research area: Theory and practice of the environmental education in vocational training. The potential of project-based education in vocational classes, with the emphasis on environmental awareness and sustainability.