

# Field Report: Visiting an ESEAT Assessment Event as part of NVC-UK Community.

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## **1 Who this is for**

This is written for anyone who is considering attending a certification assessment event. The event was held in the UK, I identify as Neurodiverse and am considering registering as a Certification Candidate. I was supported to attend by the UK-NVC community, and this document is written in support of expressing my gratitude for that.

## **2 Background**

A member of the English Speaking European Assessment Team (ESEAT) team posted to the UK-NVC Rise-Up email list expressing concern about viability for an upcoming event, especially within the post COVID, post Brexit situation and requesting UK community support. One respondent responding in way that I resonated with, empathising with the need for sustainability for ESEAT **and** finding the cost 'very high'. A wish for a 'longer conversation around how to manage all this', was named.

Two actions were taken, the community was invited to contribute to a fund in support of a community member attending, and a meeting was called to explore the issues. At the meeting the ESEAT member expressed uncertainty around whether the event would be viable and they observed different cultures in other European countries where the NVC communities were more active in supporting the assessment team. It was agreed that it would be more likely that the event would go ahead if one person signed up within the next couple of hours and others signed up after that. I was then asked if I would be able to go if the community fund was offered to me, and I decided in that moment to accept.

I would like to name the feelings that came up for me at that time but it would be hard, I was excited and overwhelmed, grateful. Many needs were met, not least 'to matter' and 'to contribute'. However my decision was not fully considered, I made assumptions and I did not have all the information.

## **3 Cost, Logistics, Venue.**

The cost was comprised of two components, accommodation and a contribution towards facilitator's. The structure allowed for a slightly larger

cost to be charged to community attendees. The accommodation cost also included contributions to administration and other overheads.



The venue was in Bournemouth, an affluent sea side town on the South Coast. Owned by the Greenhouse Christian Trust it is a classic Victorian house situated in a pleasant garden with large pine trees. My accommodation was a ground floor en-suite room, it was

very near to the main room and yet mostly quiet and free from traffic noise (people passing by in the corridor or vehicles outside), with a wee exception due to the noise of a couple of the staff having a late night kick about with a ball. There was a swimming pool, a prayer room, a conservatory sitting area, a dining room and a larger room that split into our 'conference room' and a sitting room with sofas. We were requested to be sitting prior to main meal times in order to allow the hosts to say grace and read from a bible. The food was wonderful: unpretentious skilfully cooked from scratch and every dietary requirement was met with precise care. The swimming pool was well enjoyed.

## **4 Attendees**

There were around 13 people. Three assessors, Four Candidates, One support host (a registered candidate), 3 registered candidates, and 2 Certified Trainers.

## **5 The Experience.**

### **5.1 Overall.**

My experience involved a wide range of emotions and I saw that I was not alone. Experiencing a capacity in this group to hold a range of expressed emotions was one of the most precious gifts and it contributed to my sense of safety, inclusion, growth and emancipation. I was anxious around whether I would experience inclusion because; I was not there in the capacity of registered candidate, I identify as Neurodiverse , and I am exploring my gender identity. I am happy to share that my anxi-

eties around inclusion were not well founded, and very soon my hyper-vigilance relaxed into a sense of warmth and safety that supported me to show up more as myself.

Being post COVID, it was a particular delight to be in the company of other 'real' NVC practitioners once again. Connections were made, there was time for deep conversations around interesting topics. There was room for my tears, my joy, my anxiety and my jackals. It affirmed how much I want to Certify as an NVC Trainer and has given me useful insight around the process, including how much work I have ahead of me!

Diversity: There were no POC, one other person openly identified as not neurotypical.

## **5.2 Scheduling**

I wanted to know what the plan for the weekend would be, not only out of curiosity but also in service of easing my (neurodiverse) anxiety and also for planning my energy levels. It is usual for me to research for any 'away' experience and to have a rough idea of how my time will be spent, but I could not find any information. I was unsettled and too anxious to ask! I was determined to accept and go with the flow, and not stand out.

After a minimal welcome, during the first session I discovered why I couldn't find a plan, it was because it had not been made yet! Several flipchart sheets were on the wall, marked up with a blank daily schedule and the planned meal times. So the very first task that was set to the candidates was to build the weekends schedule, as a team. I enjoyed the elegance, openness, efficiency and fluidity of this - as I reflect I can see that this was the Partnership Paradigm in action.

An array of coloured sticky notes represented the activities to be assessed (as detailed in the Certification Packet); FAQ's, Presentations, Role Plays, 1:1 sessions with their assessor. In addition there was Unresolved Conflicts, Space for Anything else, and Community requests. This assessment exercise was a fishbowl exercise, in which the chairs were re-arranged so that the candidates sat in the middle in a small circle facing each other, and everyone else sat around the outside.

The fishbowl and timed framing was contributing an additional sense of 'pressure' on top of the situation that this activity was the first Certification activity and the first time that the candidates had met as a group. I could see that the situation was eliciting a nervousness in the candidates. As a veteran of many corporate team experiences I was curious how this would play out.



uncomfortable exercise to share it here! I am not aware whether or not I did receive any feedback around what I had posted and it was interesting rereading mine and reading others! I didn't take a picture to record what others had written in service of keeping confidentiality, however I would have liked to have been able to reflect on the range of depths of vulnerabilities that were shared and strategies that others used to manage achieving a depth of vulnerability they were comfortable with or how they described their perceptions of their learning edges.

#### **5.4 A summary of my experience.**

I listened to many presentations, FAQs', Role Plays. I enjoyed many conversations, and made many connections. I went swimming, and walking. I was mostly able to take a break when I needed to. It was intense to be with so many people after many months of relative isolation during COVID. It was also intense for me to be in NVC community - holding myself with relaxed acuity, paying attention and learning. It was intense, making notes, reflecting and reflecting specifically about whether I might be able to put myself through this process too? (and what I might do to prepare myself). It was intense, holding my reading of Marshall, with my experience of this events culture, and wondering about any areas where I identified differences.

Mostly it was just a lot of fun. I quickly relaxed, and put on my skirt. I tried to pace myself, I made notes and watched. I loved participating in discussions; NVC Shadow, Alices' new book (Why weren't we taught THIS at school?), safeguarding. It was a gift to meet NVC practitioners from around Europe, (and beyond) and to accompany those who were putting themselves forward for Certification. It supported my growth to observe NVC Assessors, to ask questions, and to socialise.

And yes, I experienced the weekend as intense and tiring. Necessarily there were activities that I have not written about here, partly because sufficient mystery is necessary for the magic of exceeded expectation to happen and partly because I experienced sufficient magic to want to avoid encumbering them with my clumsy words. Instead I name my lasting gratitude to the ESEAT team here.

#### **5.5 Assessors Acuity: inclusion.**

One morning I prepared for the day by sitting alone and reflective journaling as I ate breakfast. The days before had left me with a bit of a

people hangover and sitting alone was conserving my capacity to listen for the coming sessions. I was not ready to 'people' again, and was happy in my own company, taking pleasure in the liminal state between sleep and waking, and that someone else had made breakfast! I luxuriated in my choice to prioritise my needs in the moment rather than feel guilt for wasting opportunity to socialise, and yet, I had the sense that I was acting in a non-normative way. The room's acoustics compounded my experience that the other diners were talking louder than I was enjoying. This anecdote is as exemplar of the acuity of the ESEAT team, both in noticing my discomfort and also for their choosing to approach me about it at a later time. I was a little surprised when they checked in with me later, and shared that they had observed my discomfort and asked if there might be any strategy that might support me. I especially enjoyed that they approached me at a later time, because normally my overwhelm is intensified and compounded by well meaning people trying to 'include' me and in doing so spotlighting me in the group's attention. I celebrate the acuity, skill and care for inclusion that I experienced.

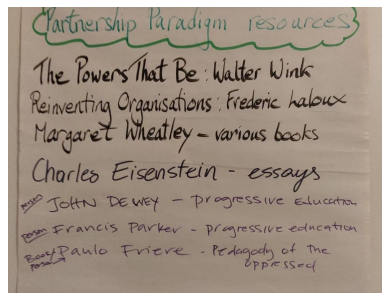
## 6 Reflections

I am reminded of Marshall's gratitude for Paolo Friere's work and how he cites two specific ideas that contributed to his formulation of NVC. Firstly how Freire's problem posing pedagogy serves to critique and emancipate (adult) students from the normative pattern of power over and authority, specifically of 'authoritative knowledge' that is taught to children in western classrooms. Secondly, knowing that NVC is designed so that those educated in NVC may turn and educate others in NVC, what that looks like in reality, when the process of certification is necessarily sufficiently rigorous to support 'an accurate' replication of Marshall's work. So I am curious what it means to 'certify' as an NVC trainer? As an assessor reflected, how long and how much work does it take to 'grow' a trainer? If the assessor is not the holder of **the** knowledge, what does the necessarily emergent knowledge look like?

A useful exemplar of the kind of reflective culture that I experienced is found in a question that at the beginning the assessors invited us to consider and hold in our mind this weekend, 'What do you perceive here in relation with people you perceive as 'having authority?'. Perhaps this was a nod to Freirian problem posing, perhaps not, I don't know. Whilst I really enjoyed the question being posed, I didn't observe any session

where there was discourse around it, and I would have enjoyed that very much.

At the start of weekend we were told that the event is run according to a 'partnership paradigm'. From what I observe it seems that everyone else in the room knows what this means! I have never seen these words before, so I gather my courage and I ask what 'partnership paradigm' might mean, because I appear to be the only person who doesn't get it, I specifically ask where might I read about what it means? Part of me jackals: 'the event has only just started and already I am taking everyone's time asking my questions'. An assessor responds that I am encouraged, 'to live it and not study it', my jackals agrees, 'I told you to shut the f\*\*k up', I find myself slipping into disconnection, regretting making my request, and wondering whether I am in the right place.



Fortunately a candidate then offered that they understood 'partnership paradigm' to mean 'power with', and with that I am instantly 'back in the room', needs met. 'Power with' is a feminist idea that I really love, and in that offered translation everything changes for me - Oh what a gift to be got!

Then, a piece of paper was put on the wall and people were invited to contribute references in support of my question. That is an example of a pattern I saw happening throughout the weekend; when distressed feelings arose, when there was disconnection, there then was an exploration of needs, people were heard, **after** that there was creativity and re-connection. In other words, it seemed that I was part of a temporary community that was living NVC!

## 6.1 My Contribution - a question

During an early scheduling session, there was an invitation from the assessors to make requests or offers. I noticed that there were no requests of assessor team, and so I asked something like, 'given the background, I wondered if you would be willing to share how things are for you, and perhaps that might be usefully framed as around your relationship with CNVC'? My question was noted and scheduled. When the time came for this, the only request of the team, to be addressed I felt all sorts of heebeejeebees. (sssh don't tell anyone but I wondered, 'who am I



to ask these goddesses such things?' and 'who am I to take everyone's time?") However it seemed that what I had brought was really helpful, well attended and contributed something that everyone seemed to be interested in. One of the assessment team expressed gratitude for the question having been asked, sharing that it was the first time that this had ever happened and that it was wonderful to have time to be heard for their experience of this part of the NVC structure.

## **6.2 What I would have liked to be different**

Choice is axiomatic to NVC, and I often wonder whether this choice is lost amidst a herd like behaviour. For example, during the first evening I had a scheduled NVC sharing to support, and I was interrupted by someone who was very keen that I attend a meeting. I have experienced this frequently within NVC culture, there is a strong expectation of participation with group events, and strong curiosity around when people choose not to participate. This is very different from the choice based culture that I experience in Autistic cultures, such as Autscope (where for example it is not considered rude to enter or exit any session at any time provided your moving is respectful of the session). I wonder whether this reflects a deep privileging of 'belonging' in NVC and I am curious around many aspects of how this affects NVC cultures.

So I would have loved my choice to not be in any particular session not resulting in someone coming to find me (and I know that they imagined that they were being helpful). Since then a similar thing has happened to me at other NVC residential meetings, so I have been able to learn more about what contributes to this cultural behaviour and what actions I might take in support of both inclusion/group and choice/autonomy, but that is perhaps another subject for another piece.

It would have helped me a lot if I had been able to access some information about what I might expect. I was anxious about pacing my energy levels effectively, such that I would be less likely to become overwhelmed and become reactive or show up in other ways that I might regret - such being liberal with vernacular. So I had a real fear about pushing myself too hard in order to 'fit in' with cultural expectations. This article is in support of those who follow who would also love this kind of information.

I would have loved more time for feedback at the end. Having been asked to come up with 3 learning edges, and face down the vulnerability of sticking them to the wall, in service and expectation of feedback -

none of my feedback addressed any of my learning edges! So, that didn't meet my expectations!

And whilst I really enjoyed the feedback ceremony at the end, because I found it interesting and innovative and useful - It was a real gift to take away some feedback. I would have loved it to be twice as long because the 20 minutes that was allocated supported me to write about half of the feedback I would have wanted to write. The process was fascinating, each participant had a sheet in a circle in the middle of the room, and we took each others sheets, and wrote our feedback. There was a bit of a dissonance between the feedback I received and the feedback I gave. That is to say, I acted on an assessors encouragement 'not to offer just nice feedback, but also to use the opportunity to share jackals' (at least that is how I heard it!) All the feedback i received was lovely! and I worry that my feedback was perhaps too frank!

Oh yes, please don't clap, especially in small spaces. : ) Jazz hands for the win!



I would have loved a more central location in the UK. In comparison, it would have been cheaper and quicker for me to fly to the Romanian assessment than to travel from Scotland to the South Coast (and the accommodation would also have been cheaper).

## **7 Summary**

Attending this event is a very worthwhile thing, if you are considering certification. It is also worthwhile as part of the NVC community, because your learning will be accelerated by the immersion. It is also worthwhile, if you wish to contribute to the UK's NVC community, because you will be supporting the ESEAT team at a time when community support is welcome to ensure the expertise and resource that it brings continues to be as readily available as it is.