

The Outward Bound Canada Journal of Education

September 2018

Volume 12



**OUTWARD BOUND
CANADA**



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CANADA**

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Focus on Mental Health and Wellness

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Balance and Purpose: Exploring Hahn's Influences

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Introduction

When looking for ways to better our mental health, best ask an outdoor educator. Despite the wide range of approaches and activities to the outdoor field, most practitioners will agree with the following pedagogy: by overcoming external challenges we not only develop resilience, autonomy, confidence, but also become more empathetic and productive members of our own community. This idea of character building combined with community building has become central to outdoor education practices and has clear positive implications on the mental health of both participants and staff. But if we are to use these tried and tested ideas, it is worth understanding their origins. To unravel the complexities of influence, we can start with educator Kurt Hahn.

Kurt Hahn's list of accomplishments is long and most likely familiar to readers of this journal. Briefly, Hahn is the founder of many schools and organizations; most importantly, Salem Schloss, Germany (1920) and Gordonstoun School, Scotland (1934), Outward Bound (1941), the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (1957), the United World Colleges (1962), and Round Square International Schools (1966) (Tunstall-Behrens, 1970). Each organization aimed to teach beyond the academic or technical and engage the student on a moral and spiritual level – which today might be identified as the mental health of the student. Today, Hahn's educational ideology emphasising compassion and community service, personal growth through challenge, and physical and moral resilience, are ingrained in the world of outdoor and experiential education. Each year, thousands of youth and adults participate in Hahn founded organizations (for example, 2,854 participants attended Outward Bound Canada in 2017), and many more in programs which modelled themselves on his lead. With such an influence, Hahnian educational concepts are an important tool towards addressing the importance of mental health. Sourcing Hahn's ideas and inspiration make it clear that Hahn was always more concerned with the moral compass of his students than if they could tie a proper bowline.

Hahn's Vision History

Kurt Hahn's vision of education was forged by a tumultuous and uncertain Europe during the first half of the 20th century – especially the socio-political climate of Hahn's native Germany during the First World War and the ensuing interwar years (Mann, 1970). Industrial war in Europe brought high death tolls, disease, destruction, suspicion, and mob mentality. Like many, Hahn reacted in horror to what he regarded as a failing of humanity. To curb the tide of apathy and hate, Hahn spent his life in education, working tirelessly to craft the engaged student-citizen. He was dedicated to boosting their moral and physical fortitude and to “cure youth from the social diseases that threaten, even at a young age” (Hahn, 1960, p.7). Just as with educationalization, Hahn was convinced that social reform could be achieved by educating the youth of today into better moral citizens for tomorrow (Hanford, 2015). Hahn's own brand of educational reform remained committed to the development of the student-citizen and he would continue to advocate for pacifism and understanding in the post-war era of continual global conflicts.

Through a series of political appointments during World War I, Hahn would serve as the personal secretary to Prince Max von Baden, the last Imperial Chancellor of Germany. This would prove to be a politically, professionally and personally rewarding partnership. With von Baden, Hahn was present during the signing of the Treaty of Versailles, a document that embodied Germany's humiliation and Hahn's embarrassment for his country (Knoll, 2000). Hahn spoke with von Baden openly about their common beliefs and an educational aim to “awaken in the pupils a sense of duty as citizens” (Ewald, 1970, p.23). Youth could be educated into a proper and moral life, with good judgement, self-denial and civil obedience. To this end, von Baden opened a wing of his palace to students and Schule Schloss Salem was born. Kurt Hahn was its first Headmaster and Director. Von Baden's son was the first pupil.

Working with von Baden, Hahn scribed what he called the “declines of modern youth” in 1920 (Ewald, 1970). Observing post war apathy and the rise of industrialization, Hahn believed beyond doubt that “the young of today have to be protected against certain

poisonous effects inherent in present-day civilization” (Hahn, 1960, p.7). Despite being written almost 100 years ago in Germany, the Six Declines or social ills read very relevant to the contemporary Canadian:

A decline of fitness due to modern methods of locomotion (moving about). A decline of initiative and enterprise due to the widespread disease of ‘spectatoritis’. Decline of memory and imagination due to the confused restlessness of modern life. Decline of skill and care due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship. Decline of self-discipline due to the ever-present availability of stimulants and tranquillisers. And worst of all; the decline of compassion due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted, or as William Temple called it, “spiritual death”. (Hahn, 1960, p. 7)

Identifying “what is wrong with youth” is not unique to Hahn or his time. Yet, it is striking how fresh and relevant the Six Declines seem. Any one of the Declines still make headlines today (Price and Godwin 2012), and some might have gotten worse since Hahn penned them. Youth fitness levels still concern parents and the medical community. Spectatoritis aptly describes the problems associated with mobile technology and YouTube culture (Swingle, M. K. (2015). The availability of stimulants and tranquilizers has become a public health crisis. Anxiety levels of youth are at all time highs (Maras 2015). Hahn even identified the confused, restlessness and relentless pace of modern life as a social ill *in 1920!* Imagine what Hahn would have thought about the 24hr news cycles, artificial intelligence and ecological disasters that define our current digital age. Not to mention the continuation of global conflicts of which he was so opposed. Hahn has identified timeless threats to the physical and emotional health of all people, let alone youth. Yet it is the youth that bear the sins of the fathers, and if you are unable to change the whole of the current society, you dedicate your efforts to curing the next generation. And Hahn did truly see the failings of youth as a disease that could be cured.

The Foundation Of The Pillars

Hahn offered the antidote as educational goals that he called the Four Remedies: “Fitness training (e.g., to compete with one's self in physical fitness; in so doing, train the discipline and determination of the mind through the body); Expeditions (e.g., to engage in long, challenging endurance tasks over sea or land); Projects (e.g., involving crafts and manual skills); Rescue Service (e.g., mountain rescue lifesaving, fire fighting, first aid)” (Hahn, 1965). These Remedies became pillars of the Hahnian curriculum and continue in organizations that bear his influence. Again, for contemporary readers, the Four Remedies should feel relevant, almost common sensical - at least for outdoor educators.

Balance and Purpose: Hahn is addressing two main points with his pedagogy: balance and purpose. Two qualities that are extremely important for one's mental health (CMHA 2018). The declines are a list of compounding societal factors and individual choice that lead to life out of balance and without purpose. The remedies are an attempt to restore balance and purpose to a student's life. To further illustrate the rationale behind balance and purpose, two examples are given from Hahn's philosophical influences: the educational concept of *Bildung* that teaches balance; and the philosopher William James who asked about purpose.

Balance: Educated in the German gymnasium system in the late 19th century, Hahn would have inevitably been exposed and influenced by the principles embodied in the concept of *Bildung*. *Bildung* is about a wholistic view of the individual and approach to education. *Bildung* is the desire to educate one's mind, body and soul as one, to elevate oneself to a higher holistic standard. *Bildung* is aspirational and spiritual, more than just knowledge and more than just moral (Horlacher, 2004). *Bildung* is about balance.

Rebekka Horlacher (2012) discusses some of the finer points of the development and philosophical debates surrounding *Bildung*, and several are of note here. *Bildung* was initially a response to France's idea of itself as a culture of civilization, which through German eyes was regarded as glorifying the exterior. Reactionarily, *Bildung* became a way to conceptualize constructing the inner being. Academics could raise the individual to new heights, but as philosopher Humbolt argued, the inner world needed to interact with the outer. Hence, *Bildung* became an ideal that strived towards unity between the inner self and the outer world. By the 20th century, *Bildung* was given the additional responsibility of being an emancipatory force. The idea that it could be used to not just better the citizen, but the world. *Bildung* then becomes a call to action, a call to build yourself, to build the world. This is the *Bildung* of Hahn. Recently, educators from around the world are taking notice of Germany's institutionalised ideal of balance as a source for inspiration on how to achieve a higher purpose in education (Jusso 2012, Kovalainen 2012). Setting his own high-purpose educational goals as spiritual, moral and academic, Hahn used the qualities of *Bildung*, and was ahead of his time.

There is evidence in the language of *Bildung* as the underlying philosophical base of Kurt Hahn's educational ideology. Consider one of Hahn's favourite sayings, now a motto of Outward Bound, “there is more in you than you think” (Hanford, 2015). The maxim is designed to comfort the student in hard times, to look within themselves and realize that there is a spiritual and physical fortitude that will help them overcome their obstacle. The language of balance continues in Outward Bound Canada's mission statement:

'Our mission is to cultivate resilience, leadership, connections and compassion through inspiring and challenging journeys of self-discovery in the natural world', and descriptions of courses are on the same vein: Each Outward Bound course is much more than just learning the technical skills of canoeing, rock climbing, kayaking, backpacking and dogsledding. It's designed to be an incredible and indelible journey of self-discovery. (Outward Bound Canada, 2014).

This language so clearly embodies Hahn's take on Bildung. Outward Bound is offering the educational dualism of technical and spiritual, communal and individual, all wrapped up in a holistic morality. Bildung strives for balance and echoes the classical Greek philosophy of "a sound mind in a sound body." Hahn contemporizes the mantra into "a sound mind in a sound body cultivates a sound community."

Purpose: For purpose, we look to the pragmatists. In 1906, the American philosopher William James delivered a public address entitled, "The Moral Equivalent to War," to a nation still dealing with the aftermath of a devastating civil war. James' speech addressed the unfortunate affinity for war that humans have, and sought to heal wounds and move beyond the destruction of war by asking "what was the moral equivalent to war?" What was the peacetime equivalent to the passion and dedication shown by individuals and communities during wartime? (James, 1906/1995). James mused that the answer, instilling passion and purpose to everyday life, would lead to a more productive and peaceful world. For Kurt Hahn, seeking a moral equivalent to war came as a rallying cry, and so intrigued him that it helped focus his view of moral education.

In his speech, James argues that political unity and civic virtue are best sustained when there is a credible threat, such as a nation at war. Though he mentions bureaucratic urgency and cooperation rates among competing interests as reasons for this efficiency, James focuses his thoughts on the pride and satisfaction gained when young men sign up to defend their country. As Hahn explains it in a public address in 1960, "war satisfies a primitive longing of men which will never be extinguished, to lose yourself in a common cause, which claims the whole man. War, so he says, shows human nature at its highest dynamic" (Hahn, 1960, p.1). How best then, to sustain this unity and efficiency of society in the absence of war? The answer says James, is to mobilize the same nationalistic and heroic sentiments and channel them into civil service in the interest of the individual and the nation. Thus, the same sense of virtue and good morals that one feels when serving the nation, or at the very least being a part of something that is bigger than themselves, needs an equivalent outlet in the face of peace (James, 1906/1995). Imagine today if we could mobilize the citizenry against such threats as climate change - the insidious nature of which, compared to a

'proclamation of war', perhaps being the biggest barrier to recruitment to the cause.

Relations to Mental Health

Purpose for individuals is paramount for positive mental health (Ryff and Keyes 1995). Hahn supposed that if that purpose is constructive, youth would feel better about themselves and their communities. Hahn had another motto, "you are needed." Hahn intended to remind his students that their school, community and the world needed their active participation. Where James called war the human nature at its highest dynamic, Hahn argued that "reverence for human life" is a more powerful tool for releasing human potential (Hahn, n.d. p.5). To this end, Hahn included rescue service – the practice would be extended to community service in other Hahnian schools – as the most important of the four remedies (Hahn, 1960, 1965). He had students enlist in the local fire service, mountain rescue service, or lifeguard service. They trained with professionals and volunteers and were actively involved with real rescues of their fellow community members.

Hahn saw success in his educational efforts to create resilience and compassion in students. Service to community demanded a well-rounded student-citizen, one well versed in the other three remedies – physical training, expeditions, and projects. A rescue service demands discipline, physical prowess, mental resilience, communication and cooperation skills, the ability to problem solve and react quickly. Similar to a military unit, but with one fundamental difference. As Hahn himself described the skill of service in 1936, soon after enacting the process at his school Gordonstoun in Scotland, "Life-saving requires soldierly drill, precise and brisk as any drill for martial purposes, but it is a good thought that mass discipline such as this aims at the saving, not the destruction, of lives" (Hahn, 1936, p.3). Youth involved in community service are given purpose. They are more likely invested in their community, have a greater sense of responsibility and sense of self worth than their disengaged and uncompassionate peers. "I am quite certain that the young of today respond better to the service which is demanded from them in the interest of others than to the service which is offered them for their overt benefit and improvement" (Hahn, 1960, p. 6). Selfless purpose – a practical answer to James' search for a moral equivalent to war.

Hahn's ideas are perfect for promoting positive mental health in students. His two main messages for youth, "there is more in you than you think" and "you are needed", balance and purpose, echo the tenets of Bildung philosophy and American pragmatism. The personal extends to the practical. "There is more in you than you think" asks the student to find the resilience needed to complete the challenge, be it scholastic studies, a mountaineering danger, or standing up for their political beliefs. The motto encourages self-confidence to

push beyond their limitations and achieve things they thought not possible. “You are needed” calls youth to realise that they have a responsibility to the community, that political and cultural apathy are not acceptable. Hahn believed education should produce a sound mind in a sound body that cultivates a sound community. Balance and purpose.

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“There can be no doubt that the youth of today have to be protected against certain poisonous effects inherent in present-day civilization. Five social diseases surround them, even in early childhood.

- there is the decline in fitness due to modern methods of locomotion;
- the decline in initiative due to the widespread disease of spectatoritis;
- the decline in care and skill due to the weakened tradition of craftsmanship;
- the decline in self-discipline due to the ever-present availability of tranquilizers and stimulants, and
- the decline in compassion, which William Temple called "spiritual death."

Kurt Hahn circa 1930s, Quoted by Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, at Colorado Outward Bound's 25th anniversary in 1987.

(nb: the decline of Memory and Imagination due to the confused restlessness of modern life was added later in the late 1950s)

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