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Development Training in the United Kingdom

by Chris Loynes

The use of outdoor adventure for education began in Britain because two men, from very different backgrounds and at different times, felt it was the right thing to do. They were concerned about the moral fibre of young men and saw the outdoor challenge as part of an approach to education that would address the need to develop them physically, socially, morally, and spiritually. The modern equivalent is called Development Training, and it is perhaps appropriate that the current popularity of this approach is so well founded in the roots of the concept. The two men were Baden Powell and Kurt Hahn.

Baden Powell (usually known as B.P.) recognised positive benefits of the outdoor life on young scouts while fighting in the Boer War. The ingredients of adventure, challenge, a common purpose, comradeship, and living together were all included in his vision developed from these experiences. On his return to England B.P set out to find a moral alternative. His first experiments in simple camps operating a troop structure with an adventurous program set precedents in methods such as using a residential setting, working in groups, introducing new and adventurous experiences, and self-reliance. Once published in a form eagerly read by boys, market forces soon established the validity of his insights, with the movement blossoming spontaneously. This was quickly followed by the Guide Movement for girls. Often the initiative for the formation of a troop came from the boys who then sought a leader.

B.P also set standards for leadership being first and foremost interested in the development of young people, understanding their needs, leading by example, delegating responsibility, and using a discovery method of learning. If backwoodsmanship set a bad example in the environmental ethics, it was through ignorance rather than by design. The modern Scout and Guide movements are still founded on these essentials and are the largest worldwide voluntary youth movement. The outdoors and the expedition are still major and central parts of their curriculum. Critics point out the para-military nature and middle class appeal of both the scouts and the guides. It was a far more egalitarian movement than Hahn set out to achieve.

The expedition was also a central part of Hahn's early thinking being part of the personal development program at Gourdonston School where he was head teacher in the 1930's. In Germany Hahn was influenced by the 'reformpädagogic', an attempt to liberalise the German education system in the late '20's. He experimented with these ideas at Salem School before leaving Germany where he was becoming concerned by the take over of the reform by the Hitler Youth Movement.

In the UK he joined a small number of independent schools incorporating the outdoors into their curricula. However, the desire to achieve social influence through the hierarchical approach of educating the future leaders of the country came with him and

came to dominate what had previously been a much wider range of approaches in the independent school sector including the play philosophy of Hodgkin.

Several voices were raising concerns at the subversion of the anarchic nature of outdoor adventure by educators intent on character building. Tom Price, both a mountaineer and an educator and an early warden of Outward Bound Eskdale, commented on the eternal paradox of combining the opposites of adventure and education in one program. In Germany post war critiques of Hahn commented that any use of the outdoors was a misuse.

In the 1930's concern with the establishment values of both the scouts and the independent schools was sufficient to give rise to a new movement, the Woodcraft Folk. Still active and widespread throughout Europe the founding ideas were much influenced by stories of the democratic nature the communities of native American plains people. Simple community living in woodland settings was combined with egalitarian processes of decision making. Programmes were driven by the philosophy of exploration, an internally referenced wondering about the world, rather than by the philosophy of challenge, an externally referenced matching up to expectations.

Hahn's post war influence

The pilots of what was to become the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, also inspired and initiated by Hahn, took place in Scotland in the 1930's. Called the Moray Scheme it also incorporated an expedition. The overall scheme and its aims bear a striking resemblance to those developed by the Scout Movement. The two now work closely together.

It was with Outward Bound (OB) that Hahn made his biggest impact, and OB is really the birthplace of Development Training. Starting in 1941 with the first school at Aberdovey on the Welsh coast, OB developed month-long adventurous programs incorporating adventure activities, expeditions, community work and working in groups. Challenge, self-reliance, and leadership were key ingredients. The aim was character-building, and the forum wild country.

Despite popular opinion, the schools were not elitist, recruiting participants from factories and borstals as well as schools. The mood post war had changed. This was the time of the Education and Health Acts of Parliament in the UK. There was a strong desire for a better society especially for the young. During the war Hahn's first school at Aberdovey was diverted to drown proofing merchant seamen, hardly a social elite.

After the war the staff of the first school were largely recruited from the navy and the programs reflect this influence. The day was full with an early start and late finish. Groups operated in a semi-military discipline and activities reflected the skills and interests of sailors. The approach did not emphasise athletic achievement but, rather, tenacity of pursuit and the education of the whole person.

The second school was sited in Eskdale, a mountain location, under the influence of the mountaineer and educator Geoffrey Winthrop Young. Staff were a mix of navy men from Aberdovey and mountaineers. The anarchic traditions of the latter intermixed with the formality of the former to create the full flavour of the archetypal Outward Bound program. This unlikely mix went a long way to help avoid the militaristic and elitist influences of earlier traditions.

Courses for girls began in 1951. Six schools were founded in Britain, of which four remain. There are now many more worldwide.

Outward Bound recognises that adventure is not something one does, but rather a way one feels - that, as an attitude to life, it is perhaps the best way to encapsulate the kind of relationship a healthy person will have with one's environment and one's community. As such, ingredients other than outdoor adventure were included such as community service. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award and, of course the Scouts and Guides, go even further with personal challenges such as the commitment to a hobby and a fitness test.

The Birth of Outdoor Education in Schools

In 1950, the Derbyshire Local Education Authority founded Whitehall Open Country Pursuits Centre and began a trend that became a rising wave of activity in the outdoors that acquired the name Outdoor Pursuits. The increasing number of schools, youth clubs and colleges that became involved during the 1960s initially used land-based activities. Participation was mostly outside school time and so voluntary in nature. Participants were mostly of average intelligence, fit, motivated and obedient, and the expectations leaders could have of such participants were factors in the kind of experience offered. The aim of such programs was proficiency and self-sufficiency, very different from the personal development aims of OB and the Scout Movement. The focus was on the activity rather than the participant. With this emphasis on skill development, teaching styles were heavily directive and inflexible. Early and justifiable concerns about safety tended to reinforce this approach as the best way to ensure the necessary ability for performance in safety.

Field Studies

In parallel with this movement was the development of centres offering field study programs primarily for geography and biology students aged between 14 and 21. This work was pioneered by the Field Studies Council, which now operates 10 centres throughout the UK. In developing courses for students taking higher school and university subjects related to the environment, the council devised an approach that was quickly adopted by schools. Attendance at a field studies course is currently the commonest means by which students gain residential experience and participation is frequently required by the examining boards' syllabuses.

Development and Change

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Over the last 15 years, the three strands of personal development, outdoor pursuits, and field studies have seen many developments and much change. More young people are involved in a wider range of activities, some of which, like board-sailing and mountain-biking, are very recent innovations. Many of the activities have developed offshoots that bear little resemblance to the pure forms from which they sprang. For example, abseiling is often provided as an activity in its own right completely divorced from climbing.

Improvements in the range and standard of equipment now available also permit groups to operate at higher levels of achievement without lowering safety margins. A good example is the change from canvas to glass fibre and now plastic and aluminium canoes. For instance in the 1980's the Ambleside Area Adventure Association (the 4As), a voluntary community group in the English Lake District, had a strong canoeing club working with all ages (in the UK, canoeing is a generic term for the sport, the 4As use kayaks). In competition, the club had trained junior national and world champions and had several members competing in the premier UK slalom division. Expeditions include a 100 mile, four day trip on the Wye, a Welsh river with several rapids, undertaken independent of adults by 12 year olds, and a sea tour off the Scottish coast with a group whose ages range from 13 to 40. Quality coaching and committed members made this possible, but so did modern materials and designs, without which the progress made with young members would have been impossible, the risks faced on the Wye and the sea unacceptable, and the competition achievements unattainable.

The settings in which activities take place have also diversified. For logistical and financial reasons it is often easier to bring the activity to the client than it is to take the client to the activity in its natural surroundings. Increasingly, adventure activities can be found in the wasteland aftermath of urban renewal, and canals and small reservoirs are being used for water-based sports. The ultimate extension of this has been the creation of artificial environments such as dry ski slopes and climbing walls.

Perhaps the leading example is the Ackers Trust, within a mile of the centre of Birmingham, on an old waste tip (garbage dump) where a canal and a railway cross. Nearby are the derelict buildings of the old BSA motorcycle works. The area is characterised by old residential housing, a poor district with a wide variety of ethnic groups represented. The BSA social club was taken over as a community centre, the derelict land set aside as a nature reserve and park. The contours of the rubbish heap have been used as the base for a motorbike scramble course and road training facility. A trim trail quickly sprouted, followed by a ski slope on the biggest mound of rubbish and a climbing tower was built in the centre of the park. There are plans for an indoor equestrian centre in an adjacent empty factory. The canal has been dredged (there are more miles of canals in Birmingham than in Venice) and two narrow boats and a fleet of canoes are available. There is open access to the local community as well as educational and recreational groups. The site managers provide supervision where necessary, but prefer to train group leaders in the skills needed to run their own sessions.

The Growth of Development Training

With the raising of the school leaving age in 1974, the experiential approach of outdoor education increasingly found a home in the school timetable as a more relevant way of learning for low-achieving pupils. Also, the recently introduced programs of personal and social education in many schools often used outdoor education. This further increased the use of the local environment as the arena for outdoor education. Cumbria Local Education Authority was the first to issue a policy statement on Outdoor Education:

Outdoor Education is widely accepted as the term to describe all learning, social development and the acquisition of skill associated with living and journeying in the outdoors. In addition to physical endeavour, it embraces environmental and ecological understanding. Outdoor Education is not a subject but an integrated approach to learning, to decision-making and the solution of problems. Apart from opportunities for personal fulfilment and development of leisure interests, Outdoor Education stimulates the development of self-reliance, self-discipline, judgement, responsibility, relationships and the capacity for sustained practical endeavours.

The Authority owned and staffed three residential centres and mounted an in-service training program for teachers to acquire the necessary skills and concepts. They stated:

Outdoor Education embraces 3 interlinked areas of experiential learning, through outdoor pursuits, outdoor studies and the residential element.

A curriculum model incorporated these three strands from age 4 to 19, and advisory teachers were appointed to promote and resource its implementation.

Experiential Learning

Few would disagree that outdoor education and experiences in a residential setting have a unique part to play in extending the opportunities for young people to develop, learn and grow, because of the range of opportunities available for experience-based learning. This approach to education and training relies almost totally upon the participants being completely involved in their learning and taking a genuine responsibility. They are invited to think, share ideas, make decisions, and exercise independence in the carrying out of activities. However, educationalists assumed that learning automatically occurred as a result of experience-based activities; that having subjected participants to a range of exciting and challenging activities, attitudes are automatically moulded or reshaped. There is little evidence to support this assumption, and the realisation of this has seen one of the more recent major developments in approach.

If activities are to affect personal and social development and have full impact and more relevance, then there must be opportunities for preparation, evaluation and reflection. This has led to a change in the approach of many leaders, who have adopted a facilitative approach, a long way from the conventional styles of imparting, instructing, and directing. In particular, it requires sensitivity to draw out the personal learning as a result of an activity or experience, not, as one trainer put it: 'I do reviewing. I sit them down at

the end of each activity and tell them what they did wrong! This process has become known as reviewing.

The Brathay Hall Trust, founded in 1946, was the first residential centre to develop this approach and is now widely regarded as a centre of excellence. It was responsible for coining the phrase “Development Training”, and has applied this approach to activities like work experience, as well as to the outdoors - which it regards as only one, albeit potent, of the tools available. Development Training is based on Kolb’s learning model, ‘do, reflect, generalise, apply’. After an experience, people in the learning group articulate their reactions, reviewing how they worked together, drawing conclusions, and applying these to real life situations. The tutor facilitates this process by helping members of the group structure their thinking and confront the issues that arise.

The Brathay Hall Trust has founded this approach particularly useful in management and leadership training, therapeutic work, and for personal development at times of transition, such as school to work.

Environmental Education has also seen development that contributes to Development Training. Increasingly, project work and excursions are made in the local environment. The approach has shifted from the use of the field as an outdoor classroom to its use as a laboratory applying a discovery method of learning. Recent work takes an issues-based approach. The learning model involved can be summarised as ‘head, heart and hands’, that is, from knowledge and understanding to empathy and action. One Devon school prepares a centre spread on community issues for the local newspaper researched and written by the students.

The Primary School curriculum lends itself to work based around outdoor visits. Here are found some of the best examples of curriculum enrichment, with the outdoor experience being integrated into every aspect of the schools’ work. Additionally, basic concepts of global and local ecology are being introduced, and environmental awareness is practised rather than preached.

Residential and Expeditions

Residential experience as an aid to learning is not a new idea. In 1963, the Newsom Report confirmed the conviction of many teachers that a wide range of activities developed in a residential context provided an abundance of opportunities to enhance and extend learning. Out of it emerged an almost unique environment to promote social and personal development and to bring teachers and young people into closer contact. In the last 20 years the increasing use of residential centres by schools, youth clubs, and colleges testifies to the rapid demand for such provisions. Significantly, most of the major curriculum initiatives currently being developed stress the potential value of a period of residential experience. Many education authorities have their own centres, often in distant wild country locations. Some schools use other facilities as a base for running their own programs.

A recent trend has been the acquisition of simple accommodation by individual schools often quite close to home for maximum accessibility. The Peers School in Oxford is an example. The simple hut, on its own wind-generated power and water supplies and two fields from any road, is within half an hour of the school. The rural setting, simple lifestyle, and teaching style are deliberately in contrast with the school environment. Groups can use the centre on a part-day or residential basis, and it is built into the curriculum in many ways including field studies, personal and social education, outdoor pursuits, and class tutorial work. In such a setting it is easy to have a different kind of relationship with pupils.

It has also become common to recognise that pupils who are involved in the design of their own experience will learn a great deal more from it due to their investment in the outcome. A Bradford school uses a series of day and multi-day journeys designed, organised and carried out by the pupils as the centre of a curriculum for low-achieving pupils. Their literacy, numeracy, practical skills and life skills are all focused on the task of carrying out the residential program. This is achieved on a minute budget and no more than a day or two's cycle ride from the school. The danger has become that the rest of the school's pupils would like the same approach! In Dudley one school has done just that, and each year pupil carries out a residential program in each year of their school career with increasing amounts of responsibility. However, right from the start each student chooses the activities, the location, and the staff member who will help them.

It is apparent that the most effective residential programs are carefully structured to meet pre-determined aims and the learning experiences integrated with the curriculum. The use of the residential has also expanded across the age range with many effective examples from the primary sector.

Yet another popular approach incorporating many of the above factors is the expedition. The Young Explorers Trust, the umbrella body of the youth expeditions in the UK, annually advises and supports some 40 trips and is aware of some 40 others. This is the tip of an iceberg, as it only included overseas trips. There will be many more within the UK. Destinations range around the world with recent venues in Nepal, Peru and China as well as the Arctic, the desert and rain forest. Projects range from adventure and field work to community service. The recent trip to Nepal by St. Xavier's school from Essex, five years in the planning, combined with a Nepalese school to climb in the local mountains. All the equipment was homemade, and that which was used by the Nepalese students was left with them along with equipment to make more and the training to do it. This was an excellent example of both cultures learning about and from each other, for in return the Essex students received some Gurkha-style survival training from the Nepalese.

Diversity

Traditionally, most user groups have operated within the structures of local education authorities. However, recent developments have encouraged other groups to use the

outdoors for their own, equally valid purposes. Social services, recreation programs and community groups are all part of this growth.

The opportunities to gain proficiency in the skills of an activity are no longer confined to remote and inaccessible outdoor centres but can increasingly be found in the community as part of the recreation department or youth service provision.

Fringe groups only marginally related to mainstream education are becoming increasingly involved in exploiting the potential of the residential. Where a residential experience is recommended as part of a course it is often associated with some use of the outdoors as a medium to develop personal effectiveness. IBM ran such a scheme over two years, during which the trainees attend 3 five-day residential. The first aimed to develop participants confidence and their ability to work together. The second explored taking responsibility for standards and making things happen. The last was a chance to reflect on their own abilities and aptitudes and put them into practice. The supervisors of the trainees also attended a residential to experience what the trainees had gone through firsthand and acquire facilitating skills to help them transfer the learning to the workplace.

The Trident Trust, a charity dedicated to bringing Development Training to programs aimed at helping the transition from school to work also uses outdoor and residential events. However they take the wider view of adventure and incorporate community involvement and work experience into the schemes as well.

The social service and the probation service have been exploring the value of outdoor and residential programs for restoring self-esteem and developing positive attitudes in young offenders and children at risk. This is meeting with increasing success, especially when it is linked with continued opportunity for participation back in the community.

Fairbridge, which arose from the successful Operation Drake, forerunner of Operation Raleigh, operates teams of staff in the inner cities of a dozen towns. Their task is to identify disadvantaged young people from all backgrounds and use outdoor programs to give them a new direction and perspective on themselves. After a standard two-week program, there are opportunities for several exciting extension projects and drop-in facilities in the urban centre. Some undertake community work and make available a great deal of advice and counselling. Many of the staff are in fact past students of the program. Although the scheme has the advantage of accessibility and street credibility in the towns where these people work they also face the burden of the seemingly insurmountable circumstances of inner cities and their crushing effect on people. Fairbridge is often the only positive opportunity for many.

Recent figures suggest that a young person placed on an outdoor alternative to custody program will have offended on average 16 times prior to this sentence. The cost up to that point will have been close to £250,000. On that basis if the typical outdoor intervention program diverts between 1 and 3 clients a year from crime then their budget is justified.

Success rates are known to be several times better than this. However, as with many preventative programs, funding remains an issue.

There are many new programs with therapeutic goals that encourage the mentally and physically handicapped to extend themselves, work toward independence, and mix with able-bodied people. The Calvert Trust in the Lake District aims to give disabled people as equal an access as possible to adventure activities by adapting equipment and appropriate supervision. There is a strong feeling that disabled people have as much right to the benefits of risk-taking and challenges as anyone. They often display qualities of determination and courage others cannot manage and delight is always apparent.

Outdoor activities are not just the domain of the young anymore with a number of schemes aimed at increasing participation among the unemployed and retired.

The male-dominated approach to challenge and adventure is also being reassessed. Feminine values are being introduced with a priority on young girls' participation. Outward Bound Eskdale ran the first all women's course to help participants explore themselves, their attitudes and their capabilities. The Water Activities Centre run by Manchester Youth Service has also addressed female participation by various strategies, including all girls sessions, changes in teaching style and content, and positive discrimination, all of which have doubled girls' participation in the centre over five years. Backbone is an all women, all black adult youth worker training program. Its aim is to create positive outdoor role models to inspire young Muslim women. Within six months 12 new leaders had introduced over 150 young women to the outdoors from one town. Up to this point it had been assumed that this group were unreachable or simply disinterested.

Relevance

The impact of diversity has brought about what are perhaps the most important developments in Development Training to date. There have been fundamental changes in philosophy. The natural environment and its activities have come to be regarded by many no longer as simply a subject to be taught. The outdoors is seen as a medium and the concern is to use it as a vehicle to provide situations for learning with the aim of developing self, social and environmental awareness. The common strands between outdoor and other experiential approaches to development, such as community involvement, are increasingly being utilised. The emphasis is moving from learning about a subject or an activity to the process of learning itself. And the common ground is the sense of adventure. The early thinking of B.P. and Hahn is undergoing a reappraisal and, with updated values, is being found to be increasingly appropriate as an approach to learning for a modern world.