

# The Outward Bound Canada Journal of Education

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Volume 12



**OUTWARD BOUND  
CANADA**



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CANADA**

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## Focus on Mental Health and Wellness

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## Introduction to Volume 12:

### The Mental Health and Wellness Volume

Rob Wallis

May I re-introduce you to JoE? JoE's been away for a while - the last Volume (Vol. 11) was published in 2007. Some of you may never have met JoE before, but here it is - Volume 12 of the Outward Bound Canada Journal of Education (OBC JoE).

JoE was born in 1985 - by 'COBW[eb]S' (Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School) before merging with the Canadian Outward Bound Mountain School (in the Rockies) in 2001. It has had many iterations, has seen many changes, and has undergone a bumpy ride over the last 30 years - similar to the organisation that it serves. Following this trend, it is appropriate that JoE is re-born, reflecting how Outward Bound Canada is doing at the moment (it's doing very well, thank you for asking!), perhaps a little more experienced, wiser and more mature, and through many challenges has become more resilient and focused on sustainability. This student is now self-confident, sustainable and ambitious - a leader and a role model.

On the eve of Outward Bound Canada's 50th anniversary, it is apt that JoE is released into the world again - spreading the knowledge from Outward Bound Canada and advocating for others to get involved. This is the first in a number of Volumes as JoE and OBC grow from, perhaps, adolescence, to maturity.... (and perhaps immortality?).

### Editorial

Rob Wallis

There have been many subjects that JoE has focused on in the past - some still relevant, some not as relevant - and some that, although relevant, were written in a strikingly different time. Topics like Community, Gender differences in the Outdoor Industry, and Historical pieces based on programming areas. All of these are available on the Outward Bound Canada website, or if you're reading this in 2069, email me at [rob\\_wallis@outwardbound.ca](mailto:rob_wallis@outwardbound.ca) (I'll find a way to answer you). One topic that did not come up as a volume focus in the past, but is strikingly relevant to our work today, is the topic of mental health. Mental health is connected to almost any conversation had at the moment in OBC - and Outward Bound as a whole Internationally. Whether it's Risk Management, Programming, Staff Training, Staff retention, Staff welfare - or with all departments of Programming team, Fund-raising, Marketing, Education or Admissions - and for that reason, it is about time that this subject is front and centre to this Volume.

We Present 'The Mental Health and Wellness Volume' - (OBC JoE Volume #12).

It is important to note that these articles are from the authors, who present honest debate on issues from their point of view - suggestions to inspire discussion, nothing more and are not policies or beliefs of the organization as a whole.

The 6 articles presented here progress through:

- 1) A 30-yr retrospective of students and outdoor travel (Bob Henderson 'Students, Culture and Outdoor Travel: Considering What Has Changed over Thirty Years.')
- 2) Relating Kurt Hahn's views to modern day understanding of mental health (Peter Vooys 'Balance and Purpose: Exploring Hahn's Influences')
- 3) Focussing on specific 'declines of youth' presented by smartphone/technology use (Jody Radtke and Nevin Harper 'NoMoPhobia: Addressing technology addiction at OBC')
- 4) Looking at 'antidotes' using natural spaces countering nature defect disorder (Ben Blakey 'The Value of Contact with Nature and Physical Activity in Outdoor Education')
- 5) **Featured Article.** Further antidotes, placing patients with diagnosed mental health issues in an unfamiliar setting with unfamiliar people and facilitating the building of trust and community (see also the connected 'News and Views' article) (Sue Arai, Janet Griffin and Monika Grau 'Bringing Outward Bound into Trauma Healing')
- 6) And finally, pro-actively introducing mindfulness techniques to enhance programming. (Tensley Koonz 'The role of Mindfulness in Fostering Mental Health within the Outward Bound Experience')

The Volume starts with a retrospective on what has changed in students over the last 30 years, by a past JoE contributor and long-time friend and member of the OBC community Bob Henderson, entitled: 'Students, Culture and Outdoor Travel: Considering What Has Changed over Thirty Years.' It is a wonderful piece that takes us on a journey, from around the time of the first volume of JoE to the present, touching on the 'declines of modern youth' with the antidotes that are implicit in every expedition. Some of the differences between now and 30 years ago (not that long a time for some of us!) are startling - and come with a 'the views expressed are those of the author, and not necessarily that of OBC' disclaimer (intrigues you, doesn't it?). Bob goes through the growth in attachment to cities and technology as society becomes more fearful and unfamiliar with all things natural. It's a morally equivalent 'call to arms', that inspires us to continue our practice with enthusiasm!

The latter is explored in more detail in our next article by Peter Vooys; "Balance and Purpose: Exploring Hahn's Influences". Like Hahn in 1960, we find ourselves searching for William James' 'moral equivalent to war' to inspire youth and give them purpose. Outward Bound aims to build connections between (and with this, respect for) self, others and the environment. Imagine today if we could mobilize large numbers of citizenry against the threat of climate change - which is hampered by its insidious effects creeping up on us compared to an abrupt 'proclamation of war'. The slowly marching onslaught perhaps being the biggest barrier to recruitment to the cause... There have been many articles and retrospectives written on Kurt Hahn, but in his article Peter has done well to tease out and tune us on the way Mental Health influenced Hahn's pedagogy, and how Hahn's pedagogy influences Mental Health.

From these two retrospectives on Outward Bound and Outdoor Education as a whole, we then move to present (and future) challenges - but, again, with striking familiarity we still see Hahn's declines of over 70 years ago being relevant - 'the disease of spectatoritis'. Jody Radtke and Nevin Harper's article 'NoMoPhobia: Addressing Technology Addiction at OBC' has some shocking data to ponder - 'the average High School Student spends 8.2 hours online - half the waking day! (or perhaps not half and this being part of the problem!). Although OBC has made a commitment not to succumb to the infiltration of technology on course, this article gives food for thought on developing curriculum / processes to integrate and de-integrate technology into students' lives at either end of the course - both to enable transference of habits from course, but also for student well-being.

From this challenge, we move to the focus on the benefits - the 'antidotes' to the declines seen in youth. Ben Blakey's article 'The Value of Contact with Nature and Physical Activity in Outdoor Education' not only summarizes Richard Louv's well-known work on 'Nature Deficit Disorder' (NDD), but also outlines a library of theories that pre-date and support his work relating to the benefits of outdoor education. Perhaps one of the reasons why Louv's work on NDD is so compelling is that, deep down, it just makes sense. We just inherently know that we have evolved - we were built - to spend time in nature, and when we don't we feel the detriment. This article will act as a great reference as we strive to articulate the many and varied benefits of Outward Bound Canada programs to those who, perhaps have lost their own connection to nature.

Next is our 'Featured Article', which focusses on the interpersonal and personal benefits of the Outward Bound programming model. Sue Arai, Janet Griffin and Monika Grau's article 'Bringing Outward Bound into Trauma Healing', describes how patients in the Traumatic Stress Recovery and Eating Disorders programs responded to the Outward Bound Process, bringing them into unfamiliar settings with unfamiliar people. Reading this, the reactions and feelings expressed feel like a microcosm of what occurs on every Outward Bound expedition. It's an important article to read in order to realise the power of our programming, and I refer you to a more in-depth analysis of the article as it relates to the wider Outward Bound Canada Programs in our 'News and Views' section.

So finally, we come to an article that describes ways in which we can enhance our programming, while at the same time pro-actively provide tools to prevent or address mental health issues participants may experience. Mindfulness is perhaps an overused term, but Tensley Koontz deftly breaks down and clarifies it for us, relating it to Outward Bound programming and giving us some advice, tools, and encouragement on how we may use mindfulness to improve our practice, and our lives!

We hope you will enjoy the journey (expedition?) through mental health that JoE guides you through. This volume gives rigor and helps us articulate how our programs relate to mental health and the impact Outward Bound Canada has. We are proud to have re-kindled this Journal, written by authors from within our practice, who have written such high quality articles. Our thanks go out to the authors, some of whom have patiently waited for some time while we accumulate and review other articles. Thankyou, and see you on the next JoEurney!

## Editor's Commentaries:

### Balance and Purpose: Exploring Hahn's Influences

Christopher T. Walker

Original Article Author: Peter Vooys, p.11

Balance and purpose. A phrase that will ring true in the minds of instructors as they continue to inspire students on their educational journeys. Peter's article dives into the historical influences of Hahn's educational philosophy and shows modern relevance with the Six Declines. A striking concept that instructors will, likely, relate to as they bear witness to modern struggles of students in this digital age. Is there a decline that you teach the most and how to improve? Personally, "the decline of compassion due to the unseemly haste with which modern life is conducted" is the most relevant decline that I see in students as they are flooded with overwhelming stimulants all the time.

A message that Peter brings forth and delivers is the importance and mental health benefits of service to our community. Service to our community doesn't just relate to service projects, it goes beyond acts and relates our sense of self-identity. As outdoor educators, if we see ourselves in the industry of service (to our students) our moral and ethical habits are only increased. We find a sense of purpose inspiring young minds to be the best versions of themselves on their journeys of self-discovery in the natural world. This article beautifully articulates the balancing act of promoting that positive self-worth and the need of service.

Most predominantly, this article reminds me of the "Three ways" quote by Hahn. 'There are three ways of trying to win the young. There is persuasion, there is compulsion and there is attraction. You can preach at them; that is the hook without a worm. You can say "You must volunteer." That is of the devil. And you can tell them, "You are needed." That hardly ever fails.' If we refine our own balance and purpose as educators and understand the best way to learn with our students, they'll likely go on to be the best versions of themselves as compassionate and serving individuals. Enjoy.

### The Value of Contact with Nature and Physical Activity in Outdoor Education

Christopher T. Walker

Original Article Author: Ben Blakey, p.20

It's likely that you've been in a similar situation. A camp counsellor, an instructor, a teacher or observer of children learning while playing in the natural world. You might've also noticed there are less kids playing hockey in the local park, instead fixated on the latest computer game with their online community. Ben's article is a story that brings together past and current research to show the implications and relative theories that affect students' mental health and outdoor play. The exploration of Biophilia, Attention Restoration Theory, Psycho-Evolutionary Theory, Theory of Affordances, the importance of physical activity, and Nature Deficit Disorder are all fascinating theories that will help readers further solidify their understanding of the benefits of outdoor play and interaction with nature.

It isn't news to readers of the benefits of contact with nature. This article explores in greater depth the positive mental health benefits of contact with nature. Decrease in stress, anxiety, and anger (to name a few!) and increase in mood, curiosity, creativity, and memory. On urban and wilderness courses, solo time is the time that participants, often, get the most in-depth nature-relationship time. They're away from each other, and there is no distraction. Just their mind and the small space of the natural world around them. Maybe it's the sound of the ocean, the call of a loon, or the slap of a beaver. Often, students recall these moments on solo as the only time they've been fully immersed in their space around them. Ben's exploration into these theories gives substance to the importance of solo and contact with nature time.

The research that Ben has been involved with, shows that our community of educators are just as intrigued about the benefits of nature-based learning (NBL) and we share similar concerns. Overall, this article will take you on an exploration into theories and may help answer some questions about what's truly going on during courses and the benefits of Outward Bound programming in the natural world.

# Students, Culture and Outdoor Travel: Considering What Has Changed over Thirty Years.

Bob Henderson

(this paper is modified from a speech given at the  
International Outdoor Research Conference/IOERC, 2011, University of Southern Denmark)

## Author

Bob Henderson has been active in Outdoor Education for over 40 years, starting with summer camp canoe trip guiding and continuing with university teaching and some travel guiding mixed in up to the present. He is author and editor of books pertaining to Canadian heritage travel and nordic approached to outdoor life. Of particular satisfaction has been his involvement in Pathways: The Ontario Journal of Outdoor Education where he has enjoyed the challenge of blending the interests of academics and practitioners.

## Introduction

I cut a blaze - an axe cut out of a prominent tree – to mark a portage trail at a tricky canoe portage take out in 1980. Little did I know then that I would be returning to this same blaze every year since 1982 to 2010. Each time, we – eight students and I - pause in canoes on the water to consider where the trail might begin. Usually they opt for an open band of rock, a rising bolder field that inspired my decision to cut a new trail in the first place thirty years ago. I point out the blaze on an aging white birch. Now a faint trail heading obliquely up from the lake becomes more evident. I mention the long tradition of cutting blazes to mark and follow trails.<sup>1</sup> At this point, I often wonder, “does this adventure of the inner spirit and the outer physical body feel like a strange home coming. In other words, despite being a new experience, does this feel strangely natural? I also pause to acknowledge the satisfaction I feel in returning to that same blaze and that heritage-laden pedagogical moment year after year. Some things are changing and some things stay the same.

It's been like this for thirty years at this first portage. That's about 240 students, and that is just my trips. With three and sometimes four other trips with other leaders, that's another approximately 800 student journals read. If I add our winter trips, the numbers surpass 1,000 students on the trail. These are University trips in an Outdoor Education programme. I started guiding outdoor travel experiences in 1973 with summer camps and later for a short time with “youth-at-risk” groups and the odd commercial adult group.

All this is not unusual for a career in Outdoor Education. What is unusual is the repetition hinted at in that white birch blaze. The McMaster University summer

field trip has involved the same nine-day time of year, with the same type of students (fourth year, in the same program of study – in the main), at the same place and route, with largely the same staff / guides and the same philosophy and curricular features. The key word in all that is the “same”. Now, in 2018, and retired from that university this sameness seems a bit unique and worthy of some reflection.

I will turn my attention to what I believe is different about the students themselves over this thirty-year period of a sameness of student, place / route, staff and curriculum. I hope I have established the credibility in your judgement reader, to consider such a subjective peregrination. I think the reflective exercise has merits.

I would expect change in students over this time. It is time enough to consider change. Just a few numbing statistics and points of history will suffice. As a personal recollection, in 1981, I remember there were no water filters. Heck in 1971 we didn't have to travel with life jackets and we slept directly on the ground. (The odd person had an air mattress). [Editor's note – we travel with PDFs now...!] In 1982, I didn't need to have student waivers filled in. There were no satellite phones. There were few Outdoor Education magazines and journals, guide books, conferences, risk management plans. There were fewer exercise gyms. Students didn't own portable computers and the wool t-shirt was certainly itchy. On another level, there appears to have been less depression, less adjudicated youth and adults and more outdoor play and exercise. For Outdoor Educators / Adventure Therapists, some numbing statistics carry much credence to lead into themes of change I have noted for thirty years.

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<sup>1</sup> I cannot help add, One student years ago mistakenly called “blazes”, glazes on the tree. An ironic

error given most trail markers now is painted on trees and rocks rather than an axe cut.

The World Health Organization (2008) has noted that in Canada, “depression will rank second only to heart disease as the leading cause of disability worldwide by the year 2020”. Similarly, “disability represents anywhere from 4% to 12% of payroll costs in Canada; mental health claims (especially depression) have overtaken cardiovascular disease as the fastest growing category of disability costs in Canada. Depression is on the increase or our attention to it is. Either way, this has implications for outdoor education.

Jeb Brugmann (2009) in *Welcome to the Urban Revolution: How Cities Are Changing the World* notes the startling growth of urban areas. The urbanized part of the planet, counts 3.5 billion residents and 200 metropolitan areas with more than 2 million people (p.4). Population and growth in population of urban areas is on the exponential growth curve. This has implication for outdoor education.

And there certainly was less viewing of screens in the 1980's. Then, as I remember, many watched the odd favourite TV show. Stats from 2010: the average weekly TV and peripheral screen consumption (DVR, DVD, VCR and game console) was over 28-32 hours per week for all American children ages 2 – 11 (McDonough, 2009), and hours online for young adults in their twenties was 19hrs a week (Carr 2010 p.86) [Editor's Note: more on screen-time statistics in Radtke and Harper's article 'NoMoPhobia: Addressing technology addiction at OBC' in this issue].

Nicholas Carr (2010) in *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to our Brains* showcases the wealth of research literature that concerns what he refers to as, the ecology of interruption technologies (p.91). Essentially given our brains capacity for neural plasticity, we are changing our brains circuitry to accept multi-tasking at the expense of concentration and contemplative thought (Carr, 2010). With tongue in cheek, social researcher Sherry Turkle (2011) refers to our cultural ecology of interruption and multi-tasking as, “connectivity and its discontents” (p.14). These statistics and some minimum interpretation serve to just touch on relevant elements of general change over time.

Playfully I can organize my thoughts concerning what has changed with students over these thirty years into four categories: store-ification, sportification, safeization and screenification. But first, I am aware that this might look like “poppa Bob” talking about “back in my day”, but my day is still NOW. I am still guiding trips, still in the dance of helping people meet the woods and lakes (nature) and the trail (travel) and each other and oneself in an engaging meaningful manner: still informed by research papers, theories, and mostly by observing the student meeting wild nature first hand. I'm still wondering

about these categories. I am still wondering about how outdoor travel experiences can help our culture change (as we must) in directions towards ecological consciousness by showing the traveller a wider range of values / spirit / ideas for how to live wisely. My bias here is clear, too much store, sport, safety and screen is not the direction we should accept. I assume I am speaking on behalf of a majority of outdoor environmental educators, perhaps not? Working against these forces is a “part of the job” so to speak, so that we can feel / be more “natural” in the wilds.

## Store-ification

In 1980, I snared my first rabbit on the winter trail. I returned to camp dreaming of rabbit stew -adding rabbit to our lentils and rice. To my surprise, half of the student group were against this idea. “What if the meat is tainted in some way?” they wondered. I responded thus as I remember: “What if our store bought meat is tainted. Surely it would be more susceptible to spoilage and pollutants than healthy looking meat in the wild” (we were in Northern Saskatchewan). I was one frustrated hunter / guide that night. In short, the principle here is, “trust the store bought item of human intervention. Do not trust the wild”. Thirty years later, I have learned to expect this, “distrust the wild” principle. It is unsettling and I think has amplified over the years as a cultural force to challenge. Disorient folks with the wild: snare a rabbit, try Labrador tea or fiddleheads, and carry fire for a day in a false fungus: but mostly, drink the water... (where you can).

Thirty years ago, I would celebrate specific summer trails and portages with a visit to a cold water spring (the water running directly out of the ground). What a treat to draw up gulps of freezing cold water on a hot day. Something to celebrate indeed – the simple pleasures of the trail. All would enjoy such a moment in the 70's / 80's. Today, I still celebrate such moments, but I am often alone. The “wild” water is not to be trusted. Nature is suspect. Trust the store bought filtered water. Trust the tablet treated water. Take the time to filter that spring water or water flowing in a pristine water course. Fear nature. Trust the store.

Students returning from the trail with upset bowels or stomach are quick to claim they have giardia (beaver fever they are fond of saying). I see this frequently now. I know of no student who has tested positive with giardia following one of these University trips, but I know of many students who make claims to this end usually without knowing much about the symptoms. Dare I say that no student has had giardia but the inclination to claim so has increased over the years? There is no giardia scare in their tap and bottled water. A colleague returned from



a canoe trip with a story. She had helped a canoe tripping group with campers with heat exhaustion. They were travelling, to our minds, on lakes safe to drink. The days were exceedingly hot and they had broken their only water filter. The staff was boiling water in the evenings but not enough fluids were consumed to combat the heat. This was totally unreasonable given her judgement (and mine) that the water was safe to drink. However, using water filters was a camp requirement. Is the solution to the story, have two filters on each trip? Enough said. Perhaps not?

Certainly, one of the greatest joys of the canoe trip is drawing great quantities of water from the lake following a long portage or paddle in the hot sun. This joy is on the decline: so too is the joy of using your wits with a map and compass when there is a GPS, or making your own gear rather than purchasing store gear, or planning a route rather than following the guide books route #12 or reading the rapid rather than following how Tripper Tom's book suggests it be done. I'll call all this the store-ification of outdoor life. It is on the increase. Something is gained, yes. But something is lost!

## **Sportification**

A quick observation: more and more students – not a high percentage, but noticeable – have a fitness anxiety, or is it a fetish. These students must go for a run at our base camp even though they will be in for a very physical time all day. These students complain about missing their regular workout of weights or aerobic exercise machines. These same students might still be exhausted come evening after a full day on the trail. More and more students cannot come on the canoe trip because of sport teams' commitments. The commitment might be time away from competitive sport practice or a perceived increased potential of injury. Organized sports rule the day.

More and more, students have started to call the canoe trip, "the portage trip" emphasizing I assume, the physical, perhaps even competitive quality in the experience. I have heard this in the media of late. Is this an acknowledgement of the one sport-like aspect on the trail – that being the long portage, or long day of many portages? Whatever, it is a noticeable new quality observed over the years. As an emphasis on gear, on the physicality of the trail life and comparison and attention to sport and exercise settles in more and more, I sense a strange sportification of outdoor trail life.

## **Safteization**

First off, by the by, I have noticed a significant increase in eating and allergy related issues. More and

more trips are influenced and adjust to Celiac and/or food allergies and this is a new regime for safety concerns.

Waiver forms are a must and a risk management plan might now negate a certain charmed activity. For example, the traditional axe so indispensable in the bush is now frequently not taken on canoe trips because it is a safety hazard. However, it is a safety hazard trying to keep a group warm in a three-day rain without an axe to help create a fire in wet woods. The decline here is a decline in skills - necessary bush skills I might add – for safety concerns. With the skills would come increased safety but because of safety, the skills are not learned. And, what do waivers say to students/clients if one pauses to consider their salient message; "You can die in the wilds and are more likely too than in human constructed, human filled environments".

I once advised a group of young canoe trippers in a staff training workshop to spice up the trip with an evening paddle by moonlight. Hey, take candles out to add a certain grace to the outing. I was promptly told, night paddles are not allowed based on the programs' risk management plan. Safety first has always been the mantra, but now I feel this quality is affecting bush skills and "special moments" of trail life, denied to the young guided traveller today. Over a thirty-year span, I have become aware of my bucking the safteization trend not in ignorance of safety, but with dire attention for needed bush skills and a reverence for special pedagogical magical moments - and trying to avoid the waiver which offers a 'nature is foreign and dangerous' message, being counter to the program's pedagogical message: "You can be home in the wilds".

A story. Recently and never experienced before, a student in telling her stories of the trip once back home mentioned a bat dormant in a recess of a 14 x 14 foot cotton wall tent ceiling at our base camp. The mother was shocked and called the public health officials who demanded this tent group all get rabies shots. My goodness - safteization run amuck. There is a "risk-industry" now and while it has its place, it too can easily run amuck in the sound outdoor life of the travel experience. Finally, a thought - many school and camp programmes now carry white water helmets for grades 1 and 2 river runs. Really! I hear people saying, "come on Bob, what's the big deal? Helmets are just extra precaution." Sure. Why not wear the helmet on the van / bus drive to the trail head? That is, statistically, when the hazards are the greatest. Of course, the answer is that in the outdoors the public outcry from an injury is hyped up well beyond highway or sport accidents. The helmet carries an insidious message: fear nature. This is counter to one's message that the wilds are a celebration of feeling comfortable and at home.

## Screenification

This one is more anticipatory but there are more than hints evident. The screen - the electrical umbilical cord<sup>2</sup> to the indoors is better as a full talk / paper on its own [Editor's Note – yes indeed! see Radtke and Harper's article 'NoMoPhobia: Addressing technology addiction at OBC' in this Volume!]. How does it manifest itself on the remote trails?

The outdoor travel experience in an Outdoor Education sense should be a time away. It should be a "liminal space" – a space between with definite departure and return. New beginnings surface in liminal space. There are new possibilities afoot. It is liberating, but if you can call "home" at a drop off a hat / signal, and you DO, does all the above become diluted or worse? Worse would be no liminal space. I have seen cell phones, on the trail, people rung up while they are putting up a tent for the evening or making the evening call: liminal [read: valuable] space, going, going, gone.

Similarly, one might comment on the strange double ring around the twilight sun and receive the comment back; we should "Google it when back home". It is easy to appreciate the ease of learning made available, but is there a lose? I'm inclined to want to say; "This is a beautiful moment. There is a mystery here. I don't want to Google it instantly or when back home for the ANSWER". Beauty [read: magic] going, going, gone. Nicholas Carr (2010) in "The Shallows", suggesting we have become far better at acknowledging what we gain from technology (the screen in this case) than we notice what is lost. The deprivation is a terrain for Outdoor Educators, and the specific trips over these same thirty years reveal some interesting observations. These trips are out of standard connectivity range. I can now speculate, from observations over these years, that the general experience of life on the "no screen-zone" remote trail is extra liberating. I've sensed an added intensity of late. For one, the physicality of the trail and camp life seems more celebrated. The novelty of constant direct face to face primary relationships might help explain a social intensity. Living entirely in the present is recognized by students. This has been prominent over these thirty years, so it is hard to speak with confidence. But, that said, I've sensed an increase in

the "difference" of it all in the last few years. The liberation from a general screenification of all kinds – a changing of the lens to a deeper experiential engagement with social and physical environments – is not to be taken lightly. I've seen both sides of this one; trips with the communication screen and trips without. Without the screen, there is an increased chance that as John Steinbeck wrote in *Travels with Charley*, "people don't take trips, good trips take people".

## Conclusion

In August 2010, I returned to that birch tree with a blazed trail marker I first made in 1980. The tree was close to falling down. It might not be standing now. The worrying trends observed over this close to thirty year period will likely amplify, changing the nature of outdoor trail life. Just like the knowledge of reading trail blazes is largely lost. Store-ification, Sportification, Saftization and Screenification are playful categories meant to encourage dialogue amongst travel guide practitioners and theorists. As these categories of change advance / infiltrate into outdoor educator camp / trail life, what felt "natural" in 1981, feels less and less so today. It is not hard to find purpose for your work in outdoor education. We would be wise, I think, to keep in mind both what is gained over time but more significantly what is lost.

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<sup>2</sup> The electrical umbilical cord is a nod to Richard Louv.

# Balance and Purpose: Exploring Hahn's Influences

Peter J. Vooyo

## Author

Peter Vooyo is a graduate student at Queen's University where he studies wilderness travel experiences in Canada. He holds degrees in Kinesiology, History and Education. Peter has worked in the outdoor education field for over 20 years and has been a director, coordinator, guide and instructor for many camping and outdoor organizations including Camp Quin-Mo-Lac, Camp Tamakwa, ALIVE Outdoors and Connected in Motion. He has also served as an urban instructor for Outward Bound Toronto. Peter is currently a teacher in the Limestone District School Board and a former member of the Ranger Rick Fan Club.

## 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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 sense - 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 19<sup>th</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> 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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# NoMoPhobia: Addressing technology addiction at OBC

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Jody has been involved with Outward Bound since 1992, working in schools across the US and Canada in both field and administrative roles. In 2001, Jody received her master's degree in Transpersonal Counselling Psychology and immediately put her skills to work combining self-discovery and healing in nature and community-based settings.

Throughout her career, Jody has continued to focus on the human potential movement combined with strengthening our human and nature connection. Today, Jody does field work with Outward Bound Canada, teaches wilderness therapy to graduate students of psychology, and runs a private counselling practice based out of Squamish, BC.

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<https://www.facebook.com/NatureCounselling/>

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## Introduction

We have become accustomed to quick access to information and entertainment in the digital age, yet have been slow to comprehend the full range of problems this reality presents. From managing tasks, maintaining social engagement and enjoying our leisure time, technology is changing the way we experience the world. While outdoor education and time in the natural world has been espoused as an antidote to this problem, we are increasingly distracted by technology on our field courses at OBC. A need exists to better understand and address this problem. This paper is a brief exploration of how technology, and its removal, may be experienced by students and staff on course, the science and psychology of how we are affected, and recommended steps to assist in addressing its management at OBC.

Imagine you are the instructor, and your course is about to begin:

It's day one and your students are about to arrive. You're excited and nervous. You pull out your phone to check the time, the weather, your email and texts, maybe you post a selfie, and forward that awesome video to a friend. OK; now you're distracting yourself. You check your arrivals plan again and prepare for the first activity that you are leading. You check the time again- "darn, when will they get here?" You message a few more

friends to gripe about the bus delay, read some news and remember to set your 'out of office' message. The bus appears and you slip your phone into your pocket. Students disembark expressing all manner of responses – excited, bewildered, or hiding – behind their hoodies, cell phones and shades. The first circle is formed and the welcome and basic rules talk begins: OB history, values, engagement...and cell phones too.

Over the past few courses you've noticed that many students are having a hard time letting go of their phones... "it's my camera" many of them say, or "I need it to fall asleep", "it has all of my music on it", "they (admissions) said I could bring a small book – it's on my phone", "it's my alarm clock; I don't have a watch", and on and on. You've tried the old "it's expensive and will be safer if we put it away in storage" line with a resounding response of "it's ok – it's my old one", "I have a LifeProof case!"

What's up with all this resistance? It used to be so easy to pack away student valuables and move on with the course. Your reminiscing is startled by that familiar, comforting, but right now annoying, buzz in your pocket. "Who could that be, and what do they want?"

In the mental health field, behavioural addictions have been a topic of discussion since the early 2000s, typically focusing on gambling, pornography and kleptomania (Grant, Potenza, Weinstein, & Gorelick, 2010). In recent years, awareness of addictive qualities of interaction with the internet, technology and cellular phones has been a fast-growing topic of discussion (Turel & Serenko, 2010). Youth today, especially those born after 1997 in North America, do not know what it is like to live in a world without pocket technology. The full consequences of this cultural shift are still poorly understood. We will share here a brief overview of the current literature.

## Developmental issues with i-technologies

Early introduction of technology and media in a child's life has been shown to thwart neurological development, especially related to parental attachments and other positive social-emotional capacities (Swingle, 2015). Compromised parental attachment and reduced parental presence in children's early years, now more often substituted with i-technology and social media, further reduces a child's ability to socialize face-to-face and to self-regulate emotions and behaviours (Porges, 2011). Overall sedentary screen time, including online gaming and use of social media, now accounts for 8.2 hours of an average high school student's day in Canada (Barnes et al., 2016). This growing level of screen time has earned Canada an "F" on the *Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth* from Participaction (Tremblay et al., 2016). Regarding cell phone activity, a recent consumer survey showed users check their phone on average 47 times per day, with that number climbing to 82 times for 18-24 year olds (Deloitte, 2016). The most pressing concern for sedentary screen time, including mobile phone use, is the findings which associate these levels with increased occurrence of anxiety, depression and issues of compulsiveness (Maras et al., 2015; Swingle, 2015).

While increasing deleterious psychological and physiological effects connected to mobile phone use are identified, attachment and excessive use have increased and curbing the dependency has been found to be quite difficult (Nikhita, Jadhav, & Ajinkya, 2015). The resultant issue of detaching from one's cell phone is even under consideration to become recognized as a diagnosable condition (Billieux et al., 2015; Bragazzi & Del Puente, 2014). The problem behavior has been called Mobile Phone Dependence, Mobile Phone Abuse and play on words **Nomophobia**, for *No Mobile Phone* and *Phobia*. The effects of device use have been seen to parallel substance abuse symptoms, so alignment with a disorder

of *dependence* has been suggested. Symptoms of nomophobia include preoccupation with the device and excessive use, use in dangerous situations (e.g., driving), adverse effects on relationships, functional behavior impairments, social isolation, use of device to avoid communicating with others, and withdrawal symptoms (e.g., anger, depression, craving, anxiety) (Nikhita et al, 2015). Prevalence of nomophobia is suggested to be higher among those self-identifying as shy or lonely, as well as in those already experiencing panic or compulsive behavior disorders (Billieux et al., 2015; King et al., 2014).

Of concern to us, in the context of education, and here especially for outdoor experiential education programs at OBC, is that the need to maintain student focus on activities and social relations is disrupted by device use. When i-technologies are leading users to avoid social contact, and in fact re-wiring brains in ways that reduce ability to read social cues and engage meaningfully with peers (Swingle, 2015), we have a potentially significant, and growing, problem for our practice. What this brief research review suggests is of significant importance for OBC to understand, and in turn, to respond to.

## What Are We Doing About It?

So how do we go about responding to this emerging challenge? OBC's path forward will likely need to be addressed on many levels beginning with marketing and admissions all the way through field leadership and course closure. We offer the following suggestions as starting points. As we continue to explore how to best serve our students in regard to technology management, these practices will evolve to meet the broad needs of our program areas and student populations.

### Marketing

Search for *adolescent phone addiction* and you will find numerous articles online from sources ranging from Psychology Today to the CBC. As this growing awareness becomes mainstream, OBC is well-positioned to address this current 'crisis of youth'. Also, search *outdoors health* and one will find a multitude of articles on the healing power of nature [see also Ben Blakey's article in this issue of the OBC JoE "The Value of Contact with Nature and Physical Activity in Outdoor Education" – Ed.]. OBC is already doing what the doctor ordered – unplug from technology, connect with self, engage with others, and be in nature (Harper, 2017). Marketing has a unique opportunity to be at the forefront of this growing body of knowledge – both from student and parent awareness of the challenges as well as education about a direct path to health and wellness.



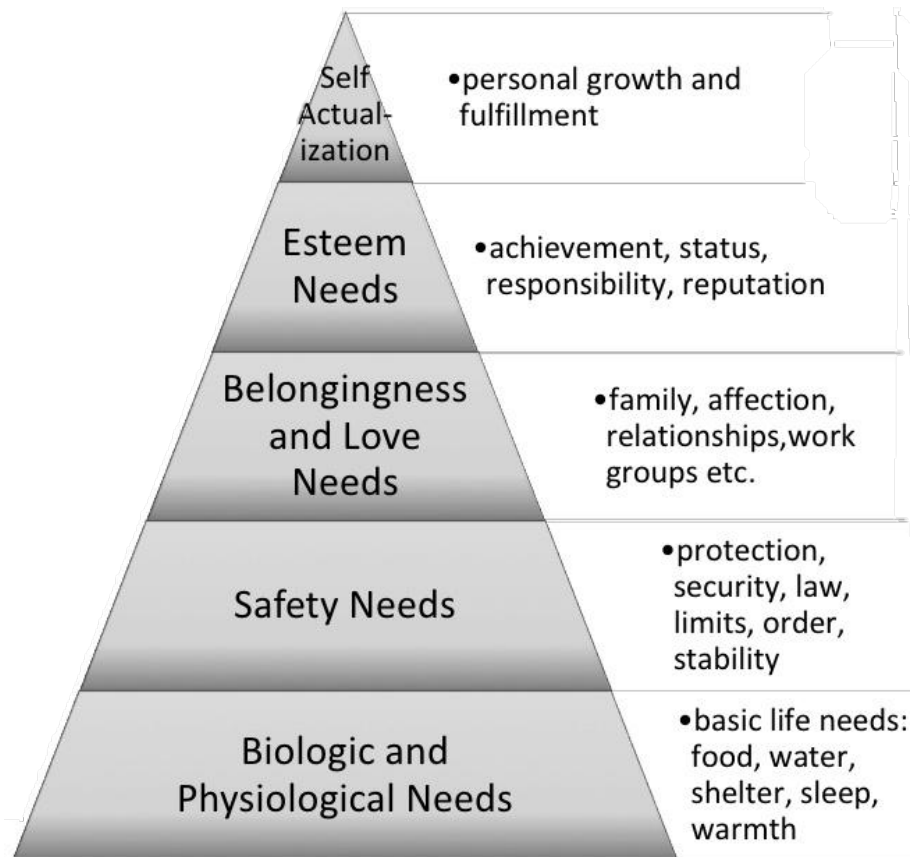
## Admissions

Admissions is the bridge to help begin the transition process from mainstream technology consumption to living off the grid. Students and parents need to be well prepared for the potential challenges that can occur when separating from one's technology. Just as protocols exist to assist participants in smoking cessation prior to a course, similar guidelines can be offered to all participants regarding management of screen time prior to a course. As admissions puts this conversation on the table, students and parents can explore their own relationship to technology use and begin to make plans for pre-course phone management.

## Program

Program areas without cell service still exist, but are diminishing every year. Programs can continue to operate in current terrain and adjust to the technology access or move physical locations to increasingly remote regions. Either path requires adjustments to how we manage phones and other devices. Addressing the process of separating from one's device, as well as responding to the stress symptoms we anticipate seeing as a result of this parting of ways, is needed.

Pre-season preparations, from contracting staff to securing necessary logistics, allows program leadership to set the stage for the season. Distributing reading material or offering a Mental Health First Aid training can support staff in learning about technology withdrawal. Instructional teams are not only challenged with supporting students in letting go of technology, but they too must manage this process for themselves. Field communications are a necessary part of risk management; from emergency calls to checking weather, there is no doubt that having technology in the field provides additional levels of security. The temptation to check personal information, or communicate with family and friends brings up the age-old dilemma of how best to model behaviour, while also recognizing that instructors are doing a job, and their role is also different from students. Highlighting this challenge and offering guidelines to staff for how to manage personal technology use could be quite helpful and a rich staff training topic. Maintaining accurate course area maps and charts that contain information on cell phone



Business Balls. Maslow's Hierarchy of needs. Retrieved April 2, 2008 from <http://www.businessballs.com/maslow.htm>

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[see also page 48 of OBC's Foundational Curriculum Manual (2018) for more on motivation and behavior – Ed.]

coverage areas both inform staff of potential communication points for risk management, but also help instructors anticipate whether their route will be impacted by cell phone access or not.

Many of us relate to using technology to manage the stress of transitions. We scroll through social media while waiting for a plane, standing in line, or procrastinating on a project. The opening Course Director talk can acknowledge the 'normalness' of this response which helps to soften natural defenses and open curiosity to learning. As field staff anticipate and address this increased social awkwardness at course start, more time on intentional activities designed to increase social-emotional learning can be employed. Focused use of icebreakers reduces barriers of contact serves as an assessment tool, thus helping staff to determine appropriate next step learning progressions. Taking time in the early stages of a course to honour

transitions and increase participant connections paves the way for releasing phone attachments.

Course start gear review has traditionally been the time that we physically separate from phones. There are several things that we can do to ease this process. One is to offer each student a camera or other transitional object to use while on course in exchange for their phone. Once the phone is with staff, we can create structured times of technology use during the first 72 hours of a course. Just as we prepare students for solo by integrating sit spots, we can offer students access to their phones in a structured manner.

Responding to technology withdrawal looks much like many stress-based interventions. Key components include: safety and emotional regulation, community connection and peer support, finding deeper purpose and meaning through self-discovery and reflection, and intention for addressing re-integration. Seen through the lens of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, we could call this our basic needs (food, water, shelter and safety): connection, contact and an experience of love and belonging, and movement toward our higher purpose, self-esteem and self-actualization.

Emotional regulation is often affiliated with our most basic needs but can be triggered at any stage. If a student is accustomed to using their phone to do a task (e.g., music, gaming, text) before bed and no longer has access to this resource, a core need of sleep may become dysregulated which over time may lead to a broader sense of personal instability. Teaching new ways to manage bedtime by reading to the group at night or practicing gratitude during an evening circle builds new skills, and meets this basic need.

A sense of community and belonging are integral to the success of an OBC course. When students' understanding of community at home is directly connected to their 'streak' [*for those of us not in the know, a streak is an uninterrupted series of posts on social media - Ed.*], they need supports to manage the stressor of potentially losing this connection as well as new tools to engage in in-person relationships.

Self-discovery and connecting to one's sense of purpose and ability is often expressed post-course with phrases like "I didn't think I could do it, but I did". Helping students relate this to their technology use and make conscious choices about who they want to be and how they want to live is at the top of the hierarchy. This highest level of functioning can only take place when more basic needs of security and belonging have been met. At this point, we can address the negative impacts of technology (the psychological, physiological, social and

behavioural issues outlined earlier) - unless we understand how something is negatively affecting us, we are unlikely to carry that change forward in a sustained way to everyday life. It is here, therefore, that addressing re-integration may take place, and we find that if this is not attended to, students may regress in distressed states at the thought of going back to technology overwhelm. Gradually re-integrating phones during the final 48-hours of course, and having discussions about how to manage cell phone use post-course increases conscious consumption of technology (see 'Practical Tips' box). Transferring the felt sense of "I can do anything!" to a direct action with technology management provides the tools for students to practice a new relationship with technology once home.

### **Practical tips for instructors and discussion:**

- Instructors encouraging being present on the bus ride home even when they have their device
- Scheduling "screen-free" time into their lives (i.e. not around the dinner table)
- Setting up specific places, times and practices e.g. for keeping the device away from the bedside table
- Selecting notifications appropriately on apps
- Consciously gain eye contact away from the phone when someone talks to you
- Schedule or use the 'Do Not Disturb' feature in settings
- Ditch the smart phone and get a flip phone!

### **Conclusion**

Significant technology use, at times to the point of abuse, is on the rise. We see it in the news and on course, and we experience it firsthand. So, what is OBC's response to this new challenge going to be? Succumb to societal pressure to integrate more and more technology into programs? Be stalwart in our historical practices and remove student distractions such as their technology at course start? Find a middle road? To answer these questions, we must be willing to take a close look at our practices and the purpose behind what we are trying to do. This issue is not going away, but we are at the forefront and we have the tools. Outward Bound, once again, has an incredible opportunity to lead. We hope this paper has provided a starting point for conversations at OBC and across the outdoor experiential learning field.

“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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# The Value of Contact with Nature and Physical Activity in Outdoor Education

Ben Blakey

## Author

Ben Blakey is a teacher/researcher specializing in outdoor education and nature-based learning at Moncrest School, a K-8 independent school in Toronto, Canada. His research focuses on integrating nature-based learning in education at the teacher education and school level, and his programming revolves around assisting school curriculum and programming taking student learning outdoors as well as by bring nature inside school.

## Introduction

Throughout my years as a camp counselor at a number of summer camps, I had experienced many positive interactions with students in the outdoor environment. Most campers seemed to excel outside, and it always felt like students' spirits had been lifted after a week or several days of outdoor education. As one who has had my own struggles with attention, anxiety, and mood disorders, and who later found outdoor education as a profession, I too also had much better experiences outside at camps, and I remember being more productive, creative, and efficient as a camp counsellor. This article explores central theories and research explaining the value of outdoor education, and helps highlight why the work of Outward Bound is so valuable.

After completing my Master of Teaching degree at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and focusing on outdoor education, environmental education, and continuing with research, I began work at Montcrest School where I work as a teacher/researcher specializing in outdoor education and nature-based learning. Montcrest School is a K-8 independent school in Toronto which has access to many local greenspaces, including the Don Valley Brickworks, where we work often with Outward Bound Canada (OBC) to deliver a program to our grade 7 – 8 students over the school year. Now I'm lucky to work alongside many passionate educators to help primary and junior students thrive in a community that accepts nature as a necessity, and tries to make use of its fortunate access to greenspace. There are many anecdotal statements made about the benefits of nature for youth - but what is the evidence?

Several competing theories suggest that contact with nature has a myriad of benefits to psychological well-being, however it is only very recently that this has become a focus in mainstream psychology. Though it has been difficult to test empirically, Wilson's (1984) Biophilia hypothesis has been a central organizing theory guiding many research projects and theoretical development. Along with the Biophilia hypothesis that has been useful in guiding theoretical development, Kaplan's (1989) Attention Restoration Theory, Ulrich's (1983) Psycho-Evolutionary Theory, and Gibson's (1977) Theory of

Affordances have helped to frame the context for many evidence-based research projects and practices.

## Biophilia (Wilson, 1984)

The Biophilia hypothesis suggests that as we've evolved alongside the natural world we've been genetically programmed to seek out and interact with other life, which links us both biologically and culturally to nature. This implies that as we disconnect from nature we lose the genetically-endowed benefits of our interaction, which results in negative health outcomes (Besthorn & Saleebey, 2003). The Biophilia hypothesis has also been useful to discuss "Videophilia" (Zaradic & Pergams, 2007), a term describing how our attachment to media technology is so strong that is affecting our evolution as a species. Within the context of our highly digital world our children's connection to nature and the value it brings becomes even more apparent - I see it best with some campers and students who are not at their best when in classrooms but who thrive in outdoor environments as caring and connected leaders - a phenomenon explored in the following paragraph.

## Attention Restoration Theory (Kaplan, 1989)

Attention Restoration Theory suggests that nature helps alleviate directed attention, a state that requires mental effort and can be overused resulting in a loss of focus, errors, incivility, and irritability. The premise of Attention Restoration Theory is that settings rated high in each of four key characteristics (fascination, being away, extent, and compatibility) will allow for recovery of directed attention, and that many natural settings rate high on all four of these characteristics (Herzog & Strevey, 2008). In the context of school then this suggests that those vital recess breaks can be highly effective especially for those who experience difficulties with attention, and that field trips to outdoor centres - which often get undervalued - can be effective educational tools for long term student success.

## **Psycho-Evolutionary Theory (Ulrich, 1983)**

Psycho-Evolutionary Theory views stress as a physiological response to any situation that threatens one's well-being, including negative emotions and arousal, suggesting that natural settings allow for substantial recovery from stress. Settings that engender a moderate level of interest, pleasantness, and calmness allow recovery from stress in three ways: positive affect replacing negative affect, inhibition of negative thoughts, and reduction in autonomic arousal. Settings that allow stress recovery include those with moderate object depth and complexity such as having trees or bushes, a focal point like the top of a mountain, and the presence of appropriate content that fits with the scenery. Many natural settings score at a high level on these features, which in turn allows for a substantial recovery from stress (Herzog & Strevey, 2008). Considering the high numbers of children and young adults who experience anxiety and mood difficulties regularly this theory can be helpful both in reacting to existing symptoms, as well as for the purposes of preventative healthcare by embedding a connection to nature for both environmental and mental health.

## **Theory of Affordances (Gibson, 1977)**

The Theory of Affordances views interactions between 'environment' and 'agent' in terms of opportunities for events, such that some agents are afforded different opportunities depending on the interaction with their environment. This theory describes an evolutionary argument that positions the interrelationship of organisms, their environment, and their mutually beneficial development as a holistic system. If individuals' physical and socio-cultural attributes have developed over millennia in mutual interaction with the natural environment, it is reasonable to expect that a sudden change to an industrialized urban environment over the last few hundred years (a blink in the eye on the evolutionary time-scale), or even more recently the huge increase in screen time, would heighten problems within human culture and physiological functioning (Gibson, 1977). This theory gives credence to hands-on programming run at summer camps and through extracurriculars within school that allow students to thrive in their niche, finding interests with an eye to having some inconsequential flexibility.

## **Physical Activity**

There is also an interesting link between access/proximity to greenspace and higher levels of daily physical activity, which has strong implications due to emerging research on exercise neuroscience. According to Ratey (2008) there are developments in a class of hormones called 'growth factors' which have deepened

our understanding of neurogenesis, neuroplasticity, and neurodegeneration. Along with neurotransmitters including glutamate, gamma-amino butyric acid (GABA), dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin, hormones such as atrial natriuretic peptide (ANP) and human growth hormone (HGH), as well as the growth factors brain-derived neurotrophic factor (BDNF), insulin-like growth factor (IGF-1), vascular endothelial growth factor (VEGF), and fibroblast growth factor (FGF-2) all contribute to building neuronal connectivity. Each of the above neurotransmitters, hormones, and growth factors are released at various points during regular cardiovascular physical activity, especially moderate-to-vigorous physical activity, which can have profound effects on physical and mental health (Ratey, 2008; Ratey & Manning, 2014).

## **"Nature-Deficit Disorder"**

These theories become more relevant at a time when many of our species is losing the connection to nature we once had, which coincides with a rise in many physical and mental health issues - termed by journalist Richard Louv as the Nature Deficit Disorder (NDD; Louv, 2005). Though there are many interrelated factors, the NDD term has been useful in creating awareness in the public eye, an important piece in understanding the current drive to reconnect children with nature. Coupled with the above mentioned theories, Louv's NDD suggests that many detrimental changes seen in modern lifestyles may be related to our disconnection from nature. These changes include increases in attention disorders, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, prescription medications, myopia, asthma, obesity, and digital media use, along with decreases in physical activity, eating habits, ecological knowledge, outdoor play, and risk-taking.

Ultimately, while a nature-deprived world has consequences, we don't want to leave our children behind in understanding technology. One useful way of understanding our relation to nature in this digital age is through Louv's 'nature principle': "the more high tech we become, the more nature we need" (Louv, 2012).

Research is continually accumulating on the benefits of contact with nature, which gives credence to the value of outdoor education. One of the main problems with research involving contact with nature however, is that our current system of scientific reductionism in trying to isolate one variable at a time for study often misses the mark: the whole in this case is greater than the sum of its parts. More specifically, contact with nature has been linked to increases in mood, attention span, memory, academic performance, creativity, enthusiasm for learning, physical health, and positive social interactions, as well as decreases in anxiety, anger, impulsivity, inattention, depression, crime, maladaptive behaviour, and both doctor visits as well as

a need for pain medication in patients (Selhub & Logan, 2012; Williams, 2017; COEO, 2007).

## **Nature, Physical Activity, and Summer Camp**

A previous study I completed at Trent University investigated the role of nature and physical activity at a summer camp for children with exceptionalities from the perspective of staff and parents. Using audio interviews and a qualitative methodology (interpretive phenomenological analysis), and seen through the lens of ecopsychology and exercise neuroscience, we identified 4 main themes. These included

(1) Encouraging Mental and Physical Benefits and Fostering a Connection to the Environment for Youth from the City through Outdoor Activity

(2) Promoting Greater Levels of Physical Activity at Camp in Order to Encourage a Healthy Lifestyle, Reduce Frustrations, and Control Behaviour

(3) Promoting Social Skills Development for Youth with Social Deficits through a Supportive Environment and Group Experiences

(4) Encouraging Youth with Exceptionalities to Learn by Trying New Things, Discovering Strengths, and Challenging Themselves in Physical and Artistic Activities.

These themes are explored in more detail through the original article, published on the Canadian Camping Association website (CCA, 2012). They also form the basis of my continued research at Montcrest, as well as the OBC program.

## **Montcrest and OBC**

As the research shared above illustrates, many students benefit from increased time spent in nature and being physically active, which are core components of the program at OBC. Though there are benefits of interaction with nature to support struggles with anxiety, attention, and mood, spending increased amounts of time outside helps all children and individuals. One way to think about the outdoor programming we do is as 'preventative mental healthcare' for all students in a time when diagnoses of anxiety, attention, and mood disorders are on the rise, surfacing at increasingly younger ages. If we can engender a love of the outdoors in all of our students at an early age, then they will embody those biophilic tendencies and hopefully be better protected against what John Ratey calls "afflictions of civilization" (Ratey, 2014), or the difficulties experienced as cause of the dramatic shift in our lifestyles from those of our ancestors.

Our grade 7 program focuses on team building and inter-house friendly challenges for students in 4 houses (think Harry Potter). Our grade 8 program develops leadership skills, perseverance by working together at a rock climbing wall, and culminates in the student leaders teaching games in small groups to local grade 5 students from George Webster Public School. Finally there is an optional mid-winter dogsled trip to Algonquin park that half of the grade 8 class goes on, which is a highlight of the year for many students. It's been interesting from a teachers' perspective to watch the work with Montcrest and OBC evolve over the years I've been part of it, and I believe it's been an incredibly valuable experience for our students to be a part of.

Another beneficial experience that the OBC program brings to our school is the ability for our Montcrest teaching staff to observe and practice outdoor leadership skills. Many of the OBC staff are well trained and passionate individuals who model effective outdoor leadership techniques, and who understand the deep value of the work they do. This is particularly important as there are identified gaps in teacher education of outdoor and environmental education across the country (CMEC, 2012), and opportunities that address this gap, such as the ability of our staff to learn from OBC staff, are a welcome bonus for us to this organizational partnership.

"At a time when students' social skills are increasingly being tied to technology, it is critical that adolescents have the opportunity to 'connect.' OBC provides a forum, through a wide range of age appropriate activities, to gain a better sense of self, exploring strengths and areas for growth. It is also an opportunity to connect with others, to understand how to get along with others, to encourage and motivate and how to listen to instructors and follow direction. For many students this is a 'first' and so their journey may be uncomfortable to begin but in the end they feel good about their growth and themselves." - David Thompson, Montcrest's Head of School.

## **Montcrest Research Initiative**

As a researcher who's been looking into this material ever since reading Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods* I've come to focus on the increased need for urban students to connect with natural areas locally and find activities that are more physically active. If you're interested to read more, check out the Montcrest Research Initiative, where we are trying to support the creation of research from independent schools, mostly focused on Nature-Based Learning (NBL) in the context of our school and others

([www.montcrest.on.ca/index.cfm?id=74296](http://www.montcrest.on.ca/index.cfm?id=74296)).

Our first Montcrest research project looked at the integration of NBL over the course of one school year from the perspective of staff sampled from each division, and including both homeroom and specialty teachers. Using a qualitative methodology involving audio interviews, gathered perspectives from staff in November 2014 & June 2015 to look at the current state of NBL at the school as well as supports and barriers to NBL. Results identified many supports including a number of readily accessible green spaces, existing programming, and enthusiastic staff members, as well as barriers including seasonal variation, lack of teacher training, and staff politics. The full study is available along with an executive summary on our website.

Our second Montcrest research project looks at the use of NBL as an extension of Environmental Education in the grade 6 - 8 science and technology curriculum and school culture, from the perspective of science teachers and students at 4 independent schools using a mixed methods study. We interviewed all science teachers at the beginning of 2017 ( $n = 12$ ) using qualitative audio interviews and used those interviews to develop a student survey which was delivered to all grade 6 - 8 students across all 4 schools ( $n = 402$ ) near the end of 2017. While it would be problematic to report on results before it's finished, results look promising, and we are looking forward to publishing the study on our website in a few months. We encourage you to read these studies, make use of them if possible, and share any constructive insights.

## Concluding Remarks

I've often said that it's both an exciting and frightening time to be involved in outdoor and environmental education, given the context of the assault on the natural world as well as the body of research building that supports getting students outside to combat the many difficulties youth are faced with. OBC's vision is a stronger, more resilient society formed through lasting connections to self, others, and the natural world. I am fortunate to be able to be part of a profession that has such a profound effect on our future society and interested in future opportunities to conduct research that adds to our current level of knowledge on outdoor education.

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## Featured Article - Bringing Outward Bound into Trauma Healing

Rob Wallis

Original Article Authors: Susan Arai, Janet Griffin, and Monika Grau

There is something to be learnt by instructors in the testimonials within this article. Perhaps because of the unique situations the participants have been through, their reactions - and the benefits - seemed to me multiplied / concentrated many-fold. 'Trauma recruits people into extreme responses', but those responses are a window (or magnifying glass) into what many of our participants may be experiencing in the field. These reactions are familiar: avoidance of interaction to avoid guilt, shame, pride, social anxiety, and embarrassment. Through facilitated reflection by professional therapists, the participants in this study are able to harness and articulate outcomes that our students experience daily in our programs, but either do not have the skills, or the responses and experiences are not extreme enough to allow participants to pinpoint what actually happened. My Laugh-out-loud moment was reading Max's comment '*I am trying to wrap my head around what the hell just happened here*'.

The article describes the benefits of social interaction, trust, compassion, and the feeling of safety in a new social context that uncovers the effectiveness of the OB process. Instructors may see similar behavioural patterns in their participants, not to the same extreme. It also substantiates many of the 'givens' that we, from within OBC, may take for granted; small group sizes, unfamiliar activities with unfamiliar people in unfamiliar environments. One participant explains that 'experiencing a feeling of safety in a new social context with a new set of peers is a powerful experience', and that being outside created a unique environment for a different kind of learning relationship between herself and her peers. They described the power of being connected to other individuals and being able to 'step out of a feeling of having to "perform"'. The article also adds weight to the power of reflection to provide the opportunity to put the experience into words and 'bring it in to consciousness'.

Within all of this, the skills of the instructors are also front and centre. It's important to note these are not 'technical' skills (such as rope work or white water skills) – but being able to witness, react to, and facilitate interpersonal skill development. Many view that it is Outward Bound's focus on these facilitation skills that sets us apart from other outdoor organisations. It is re-assuring to see many of the techniques used by OB instructors recognized in a short, 6-hour program –

... pacing, scaffolding, providing choice, providing space for participants to leave the program if needed, building comfort level, introducing the program with a clear description of what is going to happen – and not least of which, building trust. Being able to come into a group of individuals, already hyper-suspicious of the program and of the facilitators, and building that trust – and that feeling of safety - from nothing. The participants describe witnessing vulnerability in OBC instructors – of sharing and risk taking – this allowed new possibilities for participants to risk sharing their own thoughts and experiences, and to be playful. OBC instructors balanced that delicate line to be both facilitator and co-participant.

It is useful to remember Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (also highlighted in Radtke and Harper's 'NoMoPhobia' article in this issue) – that a student will not be motivated to participate and there will be barriers to learning if they are distracted by Basic Needs (food, bathroom), Safety Needs (emotional and physical), Social Needs (Belongingness and Love Needs) and Esteem Needs (responsibility, confidence). It was clear the participants climbed up the hierarchy as the day progressed, motivated to try additional new activities as safety, connections and confidence increased. Of note, the power and responsibility of being trusted - not just trusting others - had a profound effect for the participants – of being trusted to lead a group, or to lead a blindfolded person and the empowerment that brings. These are similar comments to those we receive after our 'Women of Courage' programs, and it is a big part of why that program has been so successful.

As a final comment – and especially as have been witnessing a dramatic increase in mental health concerns in our applicants recently – it is important to define what is Therapy vs. what Outward Bound Canada does. We are not therapists, but our programs may have therapeutic benefits (some of our instructors happen to be professional therapists, but they do not actively practice while on course). Our courses are beneficial to all, at whatever place one is on the spectrum of Mental Health - however, Outward Bound courses are not appropriate for all. Some may require additional support, and there are some excellent organisations that provide this. Rather, at Outward Bound Canada we create spaces where people can heal – and allow them to heal themselves.



## Bringing Outward Bound into Trauma Healing

Susan Arai, Janet Griffin, and Monika Grau<sup>3</sup>

### Authors

Sue Arai is a registered psychotherapist emphasizing trauma, stress, depression, and anxiety. She engages a feminist, relational, and anti-oppressive exploration of relationships, life's challenges, personal transformation, and intersectional negotiations of difference related to gender, sexuality, race, and disability. Sue trained at the *Toronto Institute for Relational Psychotherapy* and *Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute* (level II) and additionally trained in mindfulness-based stress reduction, mindfulness-based cognitive therapy, and Psych-K. She is a practitioner of yoga and Buddhist meditation and Adjunct Professor in Recreation and Leisure Studies (University of Waterloo) and Health Sciences (Brock University). Research interests include mindfulness, trauma healing, therapeutic relationships, and inclusion.

Janet Griffin is a registered psychotherapist and has worked as a Recreation Therapist in the Program for Traumatic Stress Recovery at Homewood Health Center for over 20 years. Janet has authored journal articles about her work with adult survivors of trauma which have been published in the *TJF* and *TRO Research Annual*. Janet shares her professional experience through professional conference presentations, both internationally and nationally: TRO, CTRA, CCLR, CCII. In addition to giving frequent guest lectures at the University of Waterloo addressing Recreation Therapy and trauma recovery, as well as, self-reflective practice through experiential learning exercises; Janet is also an active participant in research initiatives at Homewood.

Monika Grau is a registered psychotherapist and has worked as a Recreation Therapist at the Homewood Health Centre for over 24 years – specializing in working with the eating disorders population for the last 14 years. Monika focuses on using a client centred, collaborative approach to treatment, drawing from cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT), dialectical behavioural therapy (DBT) and motivational interviewing (MI) approaches. Monika has spoken at the University of Waterloo, various conferences and workshops in the field of Recreation Therapy and Eating Disorders Treatment. Monika is currently working on her masters level diploma in art therapy.

### What potential does Outward Bound bring to trauma healing in a residential treatment setting?

This question guided our invitation to Outward Bound to offer ten daylong sessions (the *Outdoor Classroom*) to participants<sup>4</sup> as an addition to their eight-week residential Program for Traumatic Stress Recovery (PTSR) and Eating Disorders Program (EDP) at the Homewood Health Centre in Guelph, Ontario. The purpose of the Outdoor Classroom was to integrate outdoor experiential activity into the healing process and the program objectives were to:

- engage participants in a relational experiential activity in a physically and emotionally challenging outdoor environment,

- provide an authentic environment complex enough to practice mindful awareness and enhance coping through reflection on experience,
- increase knowledge about self and self-with-other, and
- explore how experiential avoidance is negotiated in outdoor experiential activity.

This article provides a glimpse into participants' experiences and implications of Outward Bound for trauma healing. As Briere and Scott (2006) describe, trauma refers to “major events that are psychologically overwhelming for an individual” (p. 3), emphasizing the temporary overwhelm of the individual's internal resources and the potential for lifelong implications. We

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<sup>4</sup> In this article, we use the term **patient** when referring to people in the context of their 8-week in-patient program (EDP, PTSR) at the Homewood Health Centre, and we use **participant** when describing patients in the context of their engagement in our research study of the Outdoor Classroom.

begin this article with a narrative from Indyanna to provide you with insight into her relational experiences of this outdoor experiential activity and the kernels of coping and transformation that began to unfold. To explore these experiences in more depth, we further describe the value of Outward Bound in a clinical setting. We present nine themes arising from our research that describe how the experience helped participants **shift patterns of experiential avoidance** and **increase capacity for self-knowledge** (see themes 1.1 to 1.5), and **make new meaning** (new narratives) and increase **cognitive and experiential flexibility** (see themes 2.1 to 2.4). Throughout this article pseudonyms are used in place of participants real names to ensure confidentiality. More information about our research, trauma and PTSD appears in the endnotes at the end of the article.

### Indyanna's Shifting Narrative

In this narrative, Indyanna described her experience of the Outdoor Classroom. She described a different experience of being in connection, shifting away from a focus on performance and the role of the patient, and letting go of control and hypervigilance. As the day unfolded, Indyanna described a growing emotional connection with others, growing trust in the unknown, and forming a new narrative that included the possibility of feeling a different kind of health and happiness.

**Being in connection.** As we gathered in the Clubhouse at the beginning of the day, PTSR and EDP participants sat in two distinct and separate clusters in the room. Coming into the PTSR, Indyanna was highly anxious, socially isolated, and vigilant and she described how this came into her thoughts about being with people from another program, *“At first, I was nervous like, “Dam, why did we have to bring in another program? But when everyone sat down, and [I] recognized the fear in their eyes, it actually didn't make me hate it so much.”* As part of the PTSR program, patients are encouraged to slow down and notice their own reactions, sensations in the body, and thoughts. Indyanna described coping with the new activities and engagement with the other participants by slowing down and pausing with deep breathing, *“Before I made any decision on what to do and what not to do, I just paused. My motivation was clearer, so that helped me.”*

**Shifting away from performance and the role of the patient.** Indyanna described that being outside created a unique environment for a different kind of learning relationship between herself and her peers. She described being able to step out of a feeling of having to “perform”:

*There was nothing about the atmosphere or the situation that was sort of like performance-based. I think, 'cause we're outside, it wasn't like... It didn't have*

*that classroom feel, it didn't have a sort of like, performance feel. It was about doing things together, so it didn't feel like I had to be anything.*

As Indyanna described, in this outdoor environment she experienced a willingness and ability to learn and open to new experiences:

*Inside the hospital, I feel like there's an automatic pressure of work hard, study hard, listen hard, go and do this, do that. There's a whole performance-based thing for me in the building. . . But when you're outside and you're still taking instruction outside, and you're doing what someone else is telling you to do, to me it was, not only was I more eager to learn because of that, I'm able to.*

Indyanna described feeling “outside the role of patient.” For Indyanna, being performance-oriented was a familiar pattern for engaging in many aspects of her life and it had cost her the ability to experience enjoyment and a healthy sense of self. Her sense of worth and sense of safety were often externally focused and based on her perceptions of her performance in a group. A significant learning for Indyanna was about her own self-appraisal – especially in relation to others. The Outdoor Classroom provided opportunity for Indyanna to feel vulnerable and work through feelings of shame and embarrassment.

#### **Letting go of control and hypervigilance.**

For Indyanna, either being in control of a situation or staying silent were familiar patterns in her life; they were a way for her to keep herself safe. The Outdoor Classroom provided opportunity to challenge habitual coping patterns and experience what it is to hold new dialectics—not having to control a situation and still being safe, not having to be funny and still being valued. She described that experiencing a feeling of safety in a new social context with a new set of peers was a powerful experience:

*I found that was hard for me not to just take charge, just to say, “Okay, listen. We have to do it this way”. . . So I let things unfold the way, like I said something, but then I didn't push it, and I let other people try to figure [it] out too. And that I found surprising, because after I let other people do it, and just follow their lead, too, and not try to lead, I still had a good time. . . I was like, “yeah, it's better actually just staying at the same level than everyone else, than winning. I actually wanted that more than winning...I learned that I don't need to be funny. I don't need to be encouraging or supportive. I can just be the same as them and they actually are happy with that. I don't have to be something bigger than they are, I don't have to help them. I can just be with them and it's okay, it's acceptable. It's nice.*

Indyanna further described the experience of feeling equal to others:

*[A]ll of the games put us on kind of the same level. And I really haven't felt that way ever, at the same level as other people... And when we had to do things as a team, I was just really intrigued, and felt like human. I felt real, I felt... I don't know how to explain it. It was a nice, not alone in this and mentally, that I haven't had.*

**Growing emotional connection with others.** As Indyanna described, there was a new sense of emotional connection with others that grew through the daylong experience. Instead of fear and a tendency to isolate, she experienced a different connection and opening to new possibilities:

*if I don't see these people again, I'm gonna miss them. And I don't usually think that way. Usually I need to count down 'til I can get away. So I felt like I was able to appreciate people instead of seeing them as scary. So, I don't know. Maybe I saw myself as a little more real. I don't know how to explain it. Maybe I could be a friend, maybe. It's just a new feeling, maybe... I don't know.*

*I am going to, purposefully, with deliberate thoughts, remember how it felt to have, to feel connected. . . So I want to remember that feeling of being, kind of like you're both human. I don't know how to explain it, but the same level of, you're connected, so that maybe I can experience that with friends at home.*

**Growing trust in the unknown.** Indyanna shifted from being nervous and fearful to feeling excited and having a positive anticipation of unknown elements in the activities. This positive anticipation of the unknown is a highly significant shift that Indyanna connected to trust:

*I'd have to say, when [Outward Bound facilitator] started saying, "Okay, we're gonna work on trust, that trust stuff now." I have to say I was kinda excited because I wanted to experience that after I experienced the other stuff I didn't expect. Because,*

*yeah, trust is really difficult for me. So, when he started talking about that, I was already pretty eager. . . [T]he trust part I really liked, 'cause I knew I could... I don't know why I knew I could trust everyone... I just wanted to feel it. It just wasn't a question of if I couldn't, it's just like, "Yeah, let's feel that now, please.*

**Forming a new narrative.** Indyanna continued to think and speak about her experience repeatedly throughout the remainder of her admission in the PTSR. Through this process of meaning-making, a new narrative started to replace Indyanna's trauma-based narrative of the past:

*I felt healthy, like a kind of healthy that I haven't felt. It was beautiful. There is such as wholeness, like a complete, relaxed happiness that I haven't felt in so long. It was just an amazing day. It's just like one of the best days.*

### The Value of Outward Bound in a Clinical Setting

*I hadn't been that present in a long time. I've actually stopped and noticed that I wasn't even noticing really I was there I was doing it. My mind wasn't thinking about... It wasn't going crazy. It wasn't about anything outside of what we were doing. And usually, that's a different thing too because in our program, all we do is think about what we are thinking about. (Jane)*

Participants like Indyanna and Jane reported experiences that were layered, complex, profound, and at times beyond what could be expressed in words. From a clinical perspective, nine main themes describe the value of an Outward Bound experience in the process of trauma recovery. The first five themes address the connection between experiential avoidance and the capacity for self-knowledge (themes 1.1 to 1.5). The final four themes (2.1 to 2.4) describe processes of making new meaning and the return of cognitive and experiential flexibility. We elaborate on each of these themes in the following sections.

CLINICAL THEMES	
Shifting Patterns of Experiential Avoidance and Increasing Capacity for Self-Knowledge	Making New Meaning and the Return of Cognitive and Experiential Flexibility
1.1. Playful engagement shifts habitual performance. 1.2. Shifting recreation therapist-participant power relationships- mirroring that discomfort does not necessarily indicate a lack of safety. 1.3. Safe physical and playful engagement in the world increases choice and decreases rumination. 1.4. Collaborative debriefing shifts an emphasis on isolation and control; moves connection from being a concept to an embodied experience. 1.5. Insight and confidence through use of knowledge and skills developed in PTSR and EDP.	2.1. Experiencing self beyond the role of patient in hospital structures. 2.2. Holding paradox – both-and rather than either/or. 2.3. Opening up spaces for being human. 2.4. Opening up spaces for hope in the unknown future.

## Shifting Patterns of Experiential Avoidance, Increasing Capacity for Self-Knowledge

The first five themes that arose from our research address the connection between experiential avoidance and the capacity for self-knowledge.

**Self-knowledge** includes motivational and emotional aspects of the self which function to “protect people’s social well-being”, and are “rooted in people’s concerns with social approval and acceptance”, they function to “facilitate people’s social interactions and relationships” (Leary, 2007; p. 317). This includes informational and motivational barriers to self-knowledge including awareness of the impact of trauma on self-in-social relationship such as experiential avoidance.

**Self-knowledge** includes motivational and emotional aspects of the self which function to protect social well-being (Leary 2007).

As Indyanna and others describe, their Outward Bound experience created the opportunity to notice and begin to challenge **experiential avoidance** as an aspect of coping. In some contexts, subtle avoidance or suppressed behavior can be viewed as a self-protective strategy to prevent seemingly disastrous consequences” (Kashdan et al., 2006, p. 1301); however, over the long term “[e]xperiential avoidance becomes a disordered process when it is applied rigidly and inflexibly such that enormous time, effort, and energy is devoted to managing, controlling, or struggling with unwanted private events. This struggle, in turn, gets in the way of movement toward valued goals, diminishes contact with present experiences, and thus yields impairment in functioning” (Kashdan et al., 2006, p. 1302). One of the identifying characteristics of PTSD is avoidance of external reminders that arouse distressing memories, thoughts and/or feelings about their traumatic experience.

**Experiential avoidance** involves excessive negative evaluations of unwanted private thoughts, emotions, and sensations, and an unwillingness or deliberate efforts to control or escape from them (Kashdan, Barrios, Forsyth, & Steger, 2006).

Challenging avoidance is an important aspect of trauma recovery—avoidance can act as a catalyst in maintaining PTSD symptoms for survivors. As Indyanna and other participants described, the Outdoor

Classroom created a context to engage mindfulness and challenge habitual thoughts and actions of avoidance. Avoidance, as many participants describe, derive from a desire to protect the rise of **emotional aspects of self** including guilt, shame, pride, social anxiety, and embarrassment and are part of what create *motivational barriers to self-knowledge* (Leary, 2007). As a result of trying to protect self from these feelings, experiential inflexibility follows from experiential avoidance. This can yield a “fusion of a sense of self with thoughts, feelings, and actions, such that an individual is unable to differentiate private emotions, thoughts, images, and memories from the sense of self (e.g., ‘I am worthless’)” (Kashdan et al., 2006, p. 1302). As Indyanna described initially, trusting was not easy for her and a habitual focus on performance was a way to avoid shame or humiliation (i.e., to protect self). She then described experiencing a different feeling of connection and feeling human when she was able to take risks to engage in a more playful and collaborative spirit.

### 1.1. Playful engagement shifts habitual performance.

Trauma recruits people into extreme responses. Healing from trauma means learning or relearning how to find a balance between these extreme responses. As Indyanna described, often there is a tendency toward perfectionism and over-emphasis on ability to perform and please others. **Witnessing playfulness and appropriate sharing and risk-taking** by Outward Bound facilitators, Recreational Therapists (RTs), and other group participants mirrored new possibilities for more inhibited participants to risk sharing their thoughts and engagement in playful, and often hilarious, experiences. This increased the sphere of participation and learning potential as Outward Bound facilitators and RTs demonstrated a capacity to laugh and play freely and be both facilitator/therapist as well as a co-participant. When a group norm of playfulness was established, participants had an opportunity to give themselves permission to engage in the activity for fun or pleasure; enabling them to safely risk and step outside of habitual patterns of performance and control.

### 1.2. Shifting recreation therapist-participant power relationships—Mirroring that discomfort does not necessarily indicate a lack of safety

*I got to see a different side of her [RT]. And I found that really helpful. I trust her more, I have more trust in her. Just knowing that I got to see a side of her that was more relaxed, and more free, and more in her terms... But yeah, it definitely, I think, will help*

*continuing on with the rest of the program, just feeling more confident around her. (Ani)*

This playful interaction helped to “level the playing field” between patients and facilitators – it set the tone for the day. The two recreation therapists from Homewood Health Center engaged as participants in the daylong experiences in addition to their clinical role. Participants had an opportunity to experience the duality of their roles; giving participants a view of therapists as persons. Patients and therapists were perceived as equal to one another as everyone joined in the experience – they seemed bonded by the mutual vulnerability and playfulness of the experience. As therapists balanced their roles as clinician and co-participant, participants were able to challenge their compartmentalized patterns of thinking and assumptions about fears, vulnerability, and strength. In some activities, the recreation therapist’s discomfort was visible and audible. Participants had opportunities to witness people in perceived power positions showing and leaning in to fear and discomfort. This active participation communicated that fears and vulnerability are human, and discomfort is not the same as being unsafe.

### ***1.3. Safe physical and playful engagement in the world decreases rumination and increases choice.***

*That’s not me at all to play these games. So my first impression was, oh, this is pretty juvenile but when it started rolling I couldn’t help but get into it. It was so . . . it was life-changing... it was life-altering. It was really, it was a huge step. (Alonzo)*

Traumatic and Eating Disorder (ED) experiences leave people with challenges with trust and feeling safe with others. Social isolation and avoidance create intense losses – including losses of sense of self, enjoyment, and ability to experience joy. For participants who did not have a framework for understanding safety in social context, this experience created awareness of possibilities they had not fathomed before. Through self-reflection and group-reflection and the layering-up of challenge in the activities, participants actively challenged ruminative patterns of negative self-talk and catastrophizing by attending to how they could improve their group functioning to create more success in collaboration.

From the onset of the activities, participants physically moved around a large space engaging in playful interactions. This engagement style was role modeled by Outward Bound facilitators and the RTs. Initial reluctance from participants quickly shifted to everyone joining in as movement and engagement were

demonstrated and normalized in this context. This physical engagement required a negotiation of their own energy throughout the day, becoming more comfortable with safe touch, expanding their sphere of movement, and full body engagement and focused attention for the duration of the activity. Group processes that incorporate physicality and movement of the whole body, provide an outlet for somatic expression and release of excess emotional energy. This facilitates concentration, attention, and learning in general, and participants from EDP were able to connect with their body’s functional capacity for movement, play, and peer support and decreased rumination on body image and eating disorder diagnosis. This process also facilitated choice and empowered participants to choose when and how they engaged. People who have experienced trauma are often devoid of choice during the traumatic event; thus, empowering participants to make and embody their own healthy choices is an important element in recovery.

### ***1.4. Collaborative debriefing shifts an emphasis on isolation and control.***

Debriefing each experience created opportunity for the group to reflect on what was noticed by participants—what did and did not work well. Throughout the day, the group progressed as a collective body with individual and group learning and insight occurring.

*I feel that it took me out of my comfort zone and it made me challenge a lot of different things. And I think it also taught me a lot about my misconceptions about trust and teamwork and communication and all of that sort of stuff, and I broke those misconceptions and showed me how things really are." (Ginger)*

As participants reflected on personal experiences and ways the group could improve communication and interactions, they gained important experiential evidence that they are not alone in their thinking. Group members had similar (problem-solving) ideas and also shared their fears about speaking up. Reflecting on personal and collective experiences created space for an embodied knowing of feeling valued and connected to others on a level far deeper than a logical or cognitive understanding of “not being alone.” A unique opportunity within the outdoor classroom was that participants interacted with patients from a different specialized treatment unit. As a result, participants came away with a deepened knowing of their capacity for connection with others. This also challenged a belief they held about only being able to connect with others who have the same diagnosis; it widened points of connection rooted in aspects of self-knowledge.

*And even the debriefing afterwards, where people were kind of saying the same things and you could relate to what they were saying, they were kind of in their own heads as well, and that the group activities kind of helped shift their perception to, like it just kind of makes me realize that I'm not the only one that thinks that way. (Jade)*

### **1.5. Insight and confidence in knowledge and skills developed in PTSR and EDP.**

Complex experiential engagement (challenge activities) with new and unfamiliar people created the conditions for people to practice and gain confidence in knowledge and skills learned in the EDP and PTSR programs. This provided immediate opportunity for feedback and reflection, pointing to areas where more practice was needed—a shift from thinking they know something to an embodied awareness of gains and barriers that continue to block recovery and healing. Many participants reflected they now had more confidence in their ability to access skills in “real life” rather than a return to habitual ways of functioning. As Ginger described:

*It forces you to put what you have learned into practice. It forces you to take the tool that we have been taught for the last, well for me, 8 weeks and see how they work in real life and see how they affect to your relationships and your effectiveness and focus. So putting to that practical hands on sense rather than reading or writing about it (Ginger)*

As participants discussed experiences with teamwork, dealing with unfamiliar people, communication, self-expression, and taking risks they described having more confidence in being able to apply new skills acquired at Homewood in their lives at home. They described feeling like their gains in healing were now more tangible:

*I found that everything that I had been learning up to date...it's one thing to learn it in the classroom, it's another thing to practice it outside. And the practising outside reaffirmed in my mind, everything that I've learned, and actually gave me the confidence to know that I can actually get off the victim triangle and get on with life and yeah... Be able to lower my boundaries. (Lizard)*

Throughout the day we saw this **increase in motivation** to try additional new activities as safety, confidence, and enjoyment increased. **The Outdoor Classroom also created a context in which participants could embody new experiences that work to expand motivational aspects of self** (self-enhancement, self-verification, and self-expansion) that had previously been motivational barriers to self-

knowledge (Leary, 2007). This provided participants a sensory experience of what it feels like to successfully complete a challenging task with a collaborative sense of problem solving, social inclusion, and unity. This is further described in the remaining four themes.

## **Making New Meaning and the Return of Cognitive and Experiential Flexibility**

Another identifying characteristic of PTSD is the presence of negative alternations in cognition or mood associated with the traumatic event. This includes persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs about themselves, others, and the world in which they live. Often related to feelings of shame and self-blame is the persistent belief that “I am unworthy” or “I am undeserving.” This cognitive inflexibility has a direct bearing on sense of self. This inflexible cognitive state resulting from traumatic experience(s), is pervasive and extends to many other aspects of social and personal functioning. Tied into this cognitive inflexibility is a diminished interest or participation in significant activities and persistent difficulty to experience contentment and joy. Many trauma survivors struggle to create and tolerate feeling happy, or even to remember a time when they felt that way. As facilitators of the Outdoor Classroom instructed they lead by example and supported participants to move outside their comfort zone and engage in playful activity—this challenged cognitive distortions developed as a result of traumatic experience. As participants actively engaged in and reflected on enjoyable socially-focused activities this new experience challenged existing narratives about how they see themselves in their life and in relation to others. In the words, “*I am trying to wrap my head around what the hell just happened here*”, Max captured the moment of confusion that happens when mindfully-focused present day behaviours directly contrast long held schemas. This process of meaning-making is further described in the remaining four themes.

### **2.1. Experiencing self beyond the role of patient in hospital structures.**

*It's nice for somebody from outside to come in and not look at you like you're a patient. You're just a person who's taking part in this. They don't need to know your history, they don't want to know your history. We're just 10 girls together. That's what was really cool about it. Like your label, it disappears at that moment. You're just there for a different reason. So you're able to leave your illness back behind in the hospital and go up there and do that instead. (Hope)*

In addition to Hope's comment about the importance of encountering people from outside of their program and the hospital (e.g., Outward Bound

facilitators, researchers), most participants in the Outdoor Classroom commented on the benefits of being in an outdoor space during treatment in hospital. The natural outdoor setting provided an opportunity for participants to experience self beyond the role of patient and the structures of the hospital. The outdoor setting was often described as feeling like a safe place to engage in difficult work. This was often described in contrast to feeling restricted and enclosed in traditional group room spaces. The spaciousness of the outdoor environment seemed to dispel the contagion effect of “negative” or anxiety-focused emotions while not limiting the benefits of group connection and cohesion.

### **2.2. Holding paradox – both/and rather than either or**

*[I learned] I'm not always the 'nice girl', wanting to help and encourage everyone else...some people and their behaviours within a group make me angry! At the same time, I was able to work with them, without trying to change them and even listen to ideas/advice they had. (Jen)*

Embracing paradox is the call to shift away from Cartesian thinking to explore intersecting pairs such as choice-responsibility, connection-isolation, living-dying, and meaning-meaninglessness (Farley, 2008; van Deurzen-Smith, 1997). Embracing paradox means being able to be with the combined whole of what was previously viewed as separate binary experiences. Challenging old coping patterns and experientially working with a dialectic of both being true can result in an awareness of control in social situations AND still having a good time or “I can connect socially AND still be safe.” Indyanna described being able to shift her habitual habit of needing to take control and also to be funny and entertaining in social situations. The ability to experience dialectics like those described by Indyanna and Jen, challenged extremes in thought patterns and enabled participants to consider a range of options between extreme end points. This experiential awareness opens up choice points and gives a birth place for challenging existing narratives about how participants see themselves and in relation to others. The narrative and extreme thinking pattern that “I don't trust others” is directly challenged by the experience of trusting others enough to engage meaningfully and successfully in the initiative tasks facilitated by instructors. The Outdoor Classroom created opportunity for participants to understand experientially the varying degrees of trust that exist along a trust-distrust continuum (e.g., the level of trust needed when sharing personal trauma details, versus level of trust needed to enjoy a group initiative or challenge experience). This dialectic in thinking expands options for participants and creates space to reclaim

parts of their life from the restrictive consequence of avoidant PTSD symptoms that arise with extreme thinking.

### **2.3. Opening up spaces for being human**

*I was me again. For a time I got to see who I used to be and it was like one of those things like I want that again, I want to do that again, I want to do that again tomorrow and... I forgot who I was, so it was like an achievable goal to become who I was before the trauma and for 6, 7 hours today I got to be that person again. (PB)*

“Feeling human again” was described by many participants across the 10 sessions of the Outdoor Classroom, and often by participants who were military veterans and police officers. Some traumatic experiences and critical incidents forced some participants to act, or not act, in ways that conflicted with their ethical and moral values; leaving in question their moral/spiritual integrity and this often resulted in people feeling less than human. Instructors layer levels of engagement in the activities to eventually move the group to a place of building and working with elements of trust. Although many participants reflected on the challenges and successes gained from learning to trust others enough during the exercises; the reciprocal element of being trusted by others was equally as powerful. Participants described the importance of being trusted by other group participants (e.g., to lead them around blindfolded). For participants struggling with deep wounds of shame, self-blame and sadness related to real or perceived “mistakes” that resulted in fatal or dire consequences, being trusted by others was a significant therapeutic moment. For some participants being trusted by a total stranger to lead them around blindfolded had a profound effect. Experiential evidence in the present (someone is trusting me) directly contradicts a traumatic schema (I am not trustworthy); challenging the binding of emotions and cognitions related to the schema.

### **2.4. Opening up spaces of hope in the unknown future.**

For people who have experienced childhood abuse, the unknown future brings an incredible sense of vulnerability, fear, and perceived threat. A tremendous amount of energy is often spent trying to avoid; hence hyper-arousal and avoidance that characterizes PTSD symptoms. In addition to insight into how trauma continues to influence their daily lives, participants spoke about how the Outdoor Classroom gave them insight into experiences of joy, self, and healing.

*Realizing that I can have moments of joy. I haven't had them in such a long time, it is nice to know they are still there. (Alison)*

*To me it says I can get better. Not that I can, that I am going to get better. (PB)*

As participants began to feel connections being made, and they began to feel confidence grow around their ability to communicate, engage, and lead in interpersonal exchanges they also spoke about starting to have insight into another set of questions they hold such as: Will I be able to return to work? (Madelaine) and What am I going to do next? What do I have passion for? (Oliver).

## Concluding Reflections on Healing

Central in this process of meaning-making is the opportunity to reflect and put experience in to words, to bring it in to consciousness. Thus, an essential part of this work was not only the guided reflection throughout the day but also being able to reflect on experience in the week that followed as part of the research process.

*It was like a switch was flipped on inside of me for the first time in a very long, long time. And that's just how powerful this [Outdoor Classroom] is. And whether it's rain or snow or sleet or hail, this is definitely something that should be implemented for everyone within this program. – Lizard*

Participants' embodied experiences moved beyond logical and cognitive awareness of new insights. The fusion of cognitive, emotional and sensorimotor awareness of experience created the moment when the "switch is flipped" as Lizard described, and was reflected in participant statements such as, "I got it", "Now I get it", and "I want it."

*Basically, the message to me was wherever you're at right now is okay. And that was important to me because I think my gut feeling, my default feeling is to be disappointed in myself, so it allowed me to let that go and just say, "Well, this is... I got some work to do." [laughter] "This is where I'm at." So it was information for me. -Kermit*

The Outdoor Classroom helped to create a bank of embodied experiences to reflect on well after the conclusion of the Outdoor Classroom. This sense of feeling a part of, being connected with others while feeling present and "real" afforded participants a powerful opportunity to find language to describe this newly embodied experience. Experiential moments and reflection created a space to connect language and unfold new actions, a new narrative about experience, and create positive emotional memory; that is, to create new schemas about their place in the world and with other

people, and the motivation to re-create that experience again in the future.

As Jon Kabat-Zinn (2005) accurately reflected in his book, "Where Ever you Go There You Are", we each bring ourselves, our beliefs and our perceived limitations to each encounter we have. Providing people with experiential awareness of their potential as human beings, of possibilities not yet considered, and of the benefits of a life lived differently from a diagnosis challenges trauma-defined knowledge of self. It is this new relationship with self, or self-knowledge, that can be brought forth in to other areas of life.

## Endnotes

**More About the Research.** The Outdoor Classroom was offered as part of a larger research project involving a partnership between Susan Arai (Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies) at the University of Waterloo, Janet Griffin (Recreation Therapist, Program for Traumatic Stress Recovery [PTSR]) and Monika Grau (Recreation Therapist, Eating Disorders Program [EDP]) from Homewood Health Center.

**Participants.** The Outdoor Classroom was offered 10 times, with 10 participants (5 PTSR patients, 5 EDP patients) involved in each offering. Participants voluntarily signed up to participate in the Outdoor Classroom. Most participants were 18 years of age and older and included both men and women; however, some participants from the EDP were under 18 years of age with the youngest being 16 years old. Participants were in varying stages of recovery/treatment—some were new to therapy and others had more experience with therapy.

**Defining Trauma and PTSD.** The DSM 5 characterizes PTSD by: re-experiencing via intrusive symptoms (e.g., distressing memories, flashbacks, nightmares, physical sensations); persistent cognitive or behavioural avoidance of stimuli associated with the traumatic event(s); negative alterations in cognition and mood associated with the traumatic event (e.g., difficulty remembering important aspects of the traumatic event, persistent and exaggerated negative beliefs or expectations about oneself others or the world, persistent and distorted blame of self or others about the cause or consequences of the traumatic event(s), persistent negative emotional state such as fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame, decreased interest in activities, feelings of detachment or estrangement from others, persistent inability to experience positive emotions (i.e., unable to have loving feelings); alterations in arousal and



reactivity associated with the traumatic event(s) (e.g., irritability or aggressive behaviour, hypervigilance, exaggerated startle response, difficulties with concentration, sleep disturbance) (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

**The Program for Traumatic Stress Recovery.** The PTSR provides a community milieu (therapeutic community) to support people to heal in the aftermath of traumas such as childhood abuse, workplace accidents, military traumas, and violence and crime. Many have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder. Groups offered focus on psycho-education, emotional regulation and distress tolerance skills, experiential, and psychotherapy, as well as 1:1 sessions and family work. The PTSR supports patients to gain insight into coping strategies, and automatic reactive responses and behaviours that enable traumatic schemas to negatively impact current experiences of self, others, and the world in which they live. Trauma treatment occurs within a therapeutic milieu. This therapeutic community provides a sense of physical and emotional safety in relationships with self and others, and a context to rehearse new and healthier patterns of response and action. The EDP supports women and men 16 years of age and older to regain control over their lives. The EDP provides voluntary, group-based, and recovery-oriented care that encourages self-responsibility and healthy coping. The EDP supports participants to restore healthy attitudes and eating habits, develop positive body image, learn about healthy nutrition and exercise, cope with emotional difficulties, increase self-awareness, practice healthier coping techniques, and improve marital and wider family relationships. Community and home outings provide opportunities to practice new coping skills and integrate therapeutic experiences.

**A Description of the Daylong Experience.** The *Outdoor Classroom* was a full day experiential workshop held in the green space located in the lower grounds of the Homewood Health Center property. From this green space, views of the hospital facility were obstructed by a section of dense forest. To

the side of the green space sat a gazebo, herb garden, and labyrinth. Beyond that, sat the tennis court and the Clubhouse where we met in the morning and end of day, and where we sat to share lunch and energy breaks together. In addition to the 10 participants, there were two facilitators from Outward Bound who guided the process, two recreation therapists from the EDP and PTSR who participated alongside participants in the Outdoor Classroom, and two researchers observing and engaged in capturing field notes of group experiences.

As the day began, we gathered in the Clubhouse and then moved to the green space and group facilitators introduced the format of the day. Delivery of a brief history of Outward Bound and the facilitator’s role and function helped clients who struggle with trust to feel more comfortable in this unfamiliar situation. With intention, facilitators invited participants to notice that many of the activities were playful in nature and may move people out of their comfort zones. Pacing and taking breaks was normalized as part of self-care and emotional safety when engaging in a daylong workshop. Participants were invited rejoin the group when they felt they could.

Activities were introduced with clear instructions. This helped participants to have a sense of what to expect during the activity; again adding to perceived safety and comfort when trying something new. Increasingly complex layers of experiential and relational challenge were introduced gradually. This provided an opportunity for participants to integrate learning from individual and collective experiences, before layering on additional elements. The typical session incorporated the following outdoor experiences.

At each stage of this layering-up of activities, participants were invited to reflect *in* and *on* learning to enhance individual and collective experiences of the activity. Facilitators provided opportunities for participants to verbally share how it felt, what they noticed, what they liked/disliked, and to share thoughts about improving communication and insights for completing the presenting challenge. These observations and insights were then incorporated into the next layer of the activity.

MORNING ACTIVITIES	GROUP LUNCH	AFTERNOON ACTIVITIES
Jellyfish Feelings Cards Name Toss Where the West Wind Blows Chicken Goggles [energy break] Bullring Group Skis Ying Yang Cards	<i>Took place in the clubhouse, with participants, Outward Bound facilitators, recreation therapists, and researchers.</i>	Blind Opera Zipper Blindfold Walk [energy break] Ascend and Traverse/Zig Zag

Throughout the day, Outward Bound facilitators, RTs, and group participants mirrored appropriate and safe risk-taking for each other. In addition, participants were equally afforded the opportunity of choice to not contribute to the verbal reflection, or to step out of the group experience. RTs actively participated alongside participants in each activity and provided additional support when unexpected moments of emotional dysregulation arose (when feeling triggered or when traumatic schemas were activated) and supported re-integration back into the group experience.

#### Highlights of the structure of the Outdoor Classroom:

- engaged and open facilitators
- clear instruction, providing insight into each upcoming experiential activity
- invitation to be playful and to exercise choice, including the choice of taking breaks and not participating
- gradual layering up of challenge
- opportunities to reflect individually and as a group *in* and *on* learning
- facilitators, RTs, and participants mirror appropriate and safe risk-taking for each other
- RTs engaging fully in the experiential moments, alongside participants
- therapeutic support as needed from RTs
- day long experience as a community (including meals and energy breaks)

As a foundation for the day, participants in both PTSR and EDP had been introduced to mindfulness within their programs. *Mindfulness* refers to the practice of “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Mindfulness brings us to a preconceptual and preconscious space before thought. There is a shift away from the driven nature of habitual thinking of the rational mind. Bishop et al. (2004) broadly conceptualize mindfulness as “a kind of nonlaborative, nonjudgmental, present-centered awareness in which each thought, feeling, or sensation that arises in the attentional field is acknowledged and accepted as is” (p. 232). Mindfulness asks us to let go of avoidance and striving and the pursuit

**Mindfulness** - turning our attention inward to body sensations and noticing habitual patterns of emotions, thoughts, and actions. It is “paying attention in a particular way; on purpose, in the present moment and non-judgmentally” (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4).

of goals or wanting a certain outcome; it asks us to release competition with ourselves and with others so that a deeper wisdom and being may surface (Arai, 2017). Kumar (2005) suggests “[a]ny activity, when done mindfully, becomes a meditation session and can help you gain experiences that can serve as the building blocks of a mindful way of living” (p. 23). In mindfulness we turn attention inward to body sensations and noticing patterns of habitual emotions, thoughts, and actions. This creates a foundation for noticing patterns of experiential avoidance and growing self-knowledge.

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# The Role of Mindfulness in Fostering Mental Health Within

## The Outward Bound Experience

Tensley Koontz

### Author

A sea kayak guide and outdoor educator on BC's West Coast, Tensley has been involved as an instructor with Outward Bound Canada since 2013. He finds balance working during the 'off-season' as a teacher in Victoria, facilitating mindfulness and social-emotional learning programs, and working towards completing a Masters of School Counselling program. Proud husband and father, Tensley is most often outside, with a bike, kayak, or backpack, breathing into nature alongside his wife and two-year-old daughter.

### Introduction

An elusive yet central aspect of the 2500-year-old tradition of Buddhist psychology, the term 'mindfulness' only came to the Western world in the late 1970s. Found largely within the teachings of just a handful of practitioners steeped in Eastern philosophy, a relative explosion in popularity has occurred within North America over the past two decades. Now, mindfulness is increasingly entering professional fields ranging from health care, to education, military, and business, and the term continues to evolve new meanings and gain validity as a tool for cultivating wellness. By melding the roots of Eastern spiritual teachings with the Western need for scientific confirmation, a literal flood of research now lauds the many benefits of mindfulness (AMRA 2017). Most recently however, some health professionals have argued that mindfulness is over-hyped, over-prescribed, and is no substitute for Western medicine or therapy (Dam *et al* 2018). Given these shifting perceptions of mindfulness, what is a realistic role for mindfulness within Outward Bound in terms of fostering mental health? Following is an introduction to mindfulness, its reported benefits concerning mental health, and a summary analysis of mindfulness within Outward Bound programming. Importantly, a further reading list is offered for the reader to engage themselves further with the subject, begin or deepen their own practice, and successfully integrate mindfulness within their programming.

### What is Mindfulness?

'Mindfulness,' as used in ancient texts, is the English translation of the Pali word *sati* which connotes awareness, attention, and remembering. The first dictionary translation of *sati* into "mindfulness" dates to 1921 (Siegal, Germer and Olendzki 2008). However, as mindfulness has been adopted by the West, the meaning of the term has migrated from its ancient meaning and

now encompasses a broad range of ideas and practices. Most notably, mental qualities beyond *sati*, yet central to other aspects of Buddhist philosophy, are being included in mindfulness as it is adapted to treat clinical conditions and foster mental health – a decidedly Western concept in of itself. Those qualities most often included in the modern Western definition of mindfulness include non-judgement, acceptance, and compassion (Siegal 2008).

Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, the foremost pioneer in the therapeutic application of mindfulness, offers a definition of mindfulness which illustrates the shift to a modern perception of mindfulness:

*"Mindfulness is the awareness that emerges through paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally, to the unfolding of experience moment by moment' with qualities of compassion, curiosity, & minds of acceptance" (Kabat-Zinn 2003).*

Dr. Dan Siegel, clinical professor of psychiatry and co-executive director of the Mindful Awareness Research Center at UCLA, author, and Executive Director of the Mindsight Institute, offers a definition tinted with his perspective in the field of neuroscience:

*"Mindfulness in its most general sense is about waking up from a life on automatic and being sensitive to novelty in our everyday experiences. With mindful awareness the flow of energy and information that is our mind enters our conscious attention and we can both appreciate its contents and come to regulate its flow in a new way.*

*Mindful awareness, as we will see, actually involves more than just simply being aware: It involves being aware of aspects of the mind itself. Instead of being on automatic and mindless, mindfulness helps us awaken, and by reflecting on the mind we are enabled to make choices and thus change becomes possible." (Siegal 2007)*

Thich Nhat Hanh, renowned Buddhist monk, scholar, and teacher who shares much of the credit for bringing Mindfulness to the West with Kabat-Zinn, offers his own definition blending Buddhist philosophy with Western language:

*“Mindfulness is the energy of being aware and awake to the present moment. It is the continuous practice of touching life deeply in every moment of daily life. To be mindful is to be truly alive, present and at one with those around you and with what you are doing.”* (Hanh 2018)

In analyzing these definitions, a nebulous nature of mindfulness may yet be apparent. It is strongly recommended within the field of mindfulness that any facilitator, teacher, or clinician who seeks to integrate mindfulness into his or her practice need *experience* mindfulness for themselves. Through direct experience one can develop an understanding and deep sense of mindfulness that theory and literature alone cannot instill. Several disciplines and practices can cultivate mindfulness, such as yoga, tai chi and qigong, but most literature and research has focused on mindfulness that is developed through mindfulness meditation — those self-regulation practices that focus on training attention and awareness in order to bring mental processes under greater voluntary control. Learning mindful meditation from an experienced teacher is the best way to begin and, again, is strongly recommended. Along with direct experience, a conceptual ‘roadmap’ can be helpful to guide the integration of mindfulness into one’s work. This roadmap features the concepts most central to modern mindfulness and the definitions offered above: (1) awareness, (2) of present experience, (3) with acceptance. A moment of mindfulness contains these three intertwined elements and a mindfulness teacher may ask, moment to moment, “How do I cultivate awareness of present experience with acceptance, for myself and my student?” This can serve as a touchstone for practice (Siegal 2008).

## **What Benefits Does Mindfulness Have for Mental Health?**

As research of mindfulness continues to expand exponentially into all manner of fields, the list of benefits continues to grow in all areas of health and wellness, psychological, emotional, physiological, and spiritual. Considering strictly the benefits to mental health, the list remains extensive and the American Psychological Association describes several empirically supported benefits of mindfulness. In general terms, these researchers theorize that “mindfulness meditation promotes metacognitive awareness, decreases rumination via disengagement from perseverative cognitive activities and enhances attentional capacities through gains in working memory. These cognitive gains, in turn, contribute to effective emotion-regulation strategies.” (Davis and Hayes 2012)

More specifically, research on mindfulness has identified these benefits specific to mental health (Davis and Hayes 2012):

- Reduced Rumination
- Reduced Stress and Anxiety
- Boosts to Working Memory
- Increased Focus and Attention
- Less Emotional Reactivity
- More Cognitive Flexibility
- Relationship Satisfaction
- Other Benefits including: self-insight, morality, intuition, fear modulation, increased immune function, increased information processing speed, and decreases in psychological distress (increases in equanimity).

Given the extensive list of benefits, it is little wonder that mindfulness-based research is growing at such an exponential rate and mindfulness is being viewed as a panacea for all matters of health. It is important to note that recent years has seen a push back against the use of mindfulness as such a cure-all, citing small sample sizes and poor research designs, and there’s call for more rigorous and repeated research be conducted to validate its benefits (Mikulak 2017). The ready adoption of mindfulness into schools, office buildings, the armed forces, and medical professions has indeed outweighed the evidence for its efficacy; however, it is also important to consider the dilution and even distortion of mindfulness as it is absorbed into Western society. Continued rigor in research is most definitely needed, as is careful attention to preserving the ancient essence of mindfulness in the face of secularization and scientification (Siegal 2008).

## **What Role Can Mindfulness Play in Cultivating Mental Health on Outward Bound Experiences?**

‘*Get Out, Look In.*’ This tagline illustrates perfectly the close relationship Outward Bound programs and Mindfulness shares. Considering the most generally accepted elements of mindfulness: (1) awareness, (2) of present experience, (3) with acceptance, it is not a stretch to state that all traditional Outward Bound programs intrinsically incorporate mindfulness-based activities, physical challenge, solo experiences, reflections, and communication tools included. Similar to mindfulness, it can be difficult to separate the positive mental health outcomes of an Outward-Bound experience from other areas of wellness, most notably being the cultivation of both social and emotional intelligence, which then contribute back to overall mental health.

## The Natural World

Also intrinsic to the Outward Bound experience, a natural setting lends itself beautifully to the cultivation of mindfulness. Nature has served as a space to pursue spiritual and contemplative practice for centuries, evident in the Buddha himself meditating on the banks of a river for six years before attaining enlightenment underneath a Bodhi tree. Just as the natural world offers students opportunity for self-reflection, self-discovery, and adventure within the Outward Bound model, the natural world plays an important role as temple for mindfulness practice. Dependent on the intention and framing provided by the instructor, yoga during an alpine sunrise, a sitting meditation timed with an approaching fog bank, or a walking meditation over a moonlit beach could offer moments of self-reflection, deepening of a practice of mindfulness, or simple immersion in the wonder of nature.

## Community

Similarly, the cultivation and practice of *sangha* (community) features prominently in both Buddhist teaching and modern mindfulness programs, with group reflection and or instruction being included along with the mindfulness experience, often a meditation practice. This equates well with the concepts of community building, briefing or framing, and debriefing found on Outward Bound courses. In fact, close parallels exist between all stages of the Experiential Learning Cycle (McLeod 2017, Outward Bound Canada, 2018), modern mindfulness training programs such as Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction or Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therapy, and even some classical Buddhist teaching, with each following an Introduction-Action-Reflection model.

## Transference

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, introduction and practice of mindfulness on course can offer students a concrete tool for transference. Students can be taught a range of therapeutic tools within the lens of mindfulness, and be encouraged to continue their practice and join a sangha at home, continuing the path of mental health, general wellness, and self-discovery.

Despite the proven benefits of mindfulness regarding mental health, and despite how well mindfulness and the Outward Bound model complement one another, ultimately the level of benefit students receive – to their mental health or otherwise - through the integration of mindfulness into an Outward Bound experiences comes down to the instructors. As with field, technical, and other instructor skills, mastery as a mindfulness instructor takes practice, time, and continued study. The intention and attention instructors give to their own personal mindfulness

practice will be reflected in their level of success integrating mindfulness into their course programming. Moreover, it could be concluded that an instructor with a consistent personal practice will have reaped the positive mental health benefits upon themselves and thus carry forth those qualities into their work as an instructor.

## Summary

Mindfulness is a complex and elusive term attempting to define a young field in Western social science, and, despite recent sensationalisation as a cure-all and questions around the rigor and reliability of some studies, sound empirical evidence has shown a number of benefits from mindfulness, including many regarding mental health.

Mindfulness and Outward Bound programming complement one another in several facets, while intentional integration of mindfulness into an Outward Bound experience is well suited to foster positive mental health during course and beyond.

Intentional attention to the instructor's personal practice is imperative as mindfulness requires a high level of experiential knowledge to be most effective. Moreover, mindfulness training for instructors brings the positive benefits of the practice back onto themselves; the result being instructors better equipped to manage students in the field and deliver high quality programming.

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- Glossary**
- Yoga - a Hindu spiritual and ascetic discipline, a part of which, including breath control, simple meditation, and the adoption of specific bodily postures, is widely practiced for health and relaxation.
- Rumination - the focused attention on the symptoms of one's distress, and on its possible causes and consequences, as opposed to its solutions (Nolen-Hoeksema 2008).
- Tai Chi - an ancient Chinese discipline of meditative movements practiced as a system of exercises
- Qigong - a Chinese system of physical exercises and breathing control related to tai chi.

## Call for Papers

We hope you have enjoyed re-uniting with JoE. It's been a really rewarding experience putting this volume together, and there were a number of additional articles that almost made it into this Volume – Volume 12. Perhaps those articles will make it into the next Volume – Volume #13.

If you are interested in submitting an article, please email [rob\\_wallis@outwardbound.ca](mailto:rob_wallis@outwardbound.ca) or [info@outwardbound.ca](mailto:info@outwardbound.ca).

Topic of Volume 13:

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