HAPPINESS IN PEDAGOGICAL INSTITUTIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOLS IN JAPAN AND GERMANY

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This paper elaborates on the question of how education can contribute to happiness. Drawing on and developing further educationalist happiness research, this paper argues that pedagogical institutions follow distinct happiness views, and that they implicitly teach these views. A research approach will be proposed for analyzing pedagogical institutions and practices in regard to their happiness views. This approach will be applied in a cross-cultural qualitative analysis of Outward Bound schools in Japan and Germany. It will be shown that the happiness view of Outward Bound schools can be described in terms of peak experiences. The analysis will further demonstrate that there is no significant difference between Japanese and Germans regarding their view of happiness in Outward Bound, but between Outward Bound instructors and participants of Outward Bound courses. The findings will be related to happiness research in formal schools, arguing that the happiness view of formal schools needs to be considered in plural terms.

Key words: education, happiness, Outward Bound schools, pedagogical institutions

For millennia, people have thought about happiness and ways to become happy. Over time, many different definitions of happiness have been suggested. In a review of philosophical and sociological writings, the educationalist Nel Noddings describes such different views as the view of the Classic Greeks, the religious view, the utilitarian view, the subjective well-being view, and the view on “ecstatic happiness” (Noddings, 2003, pp. 9–29). This review suggests that there is no happiness “as such” but rather that there are many perspectives on happiness that need to be reflected upon in regard to their historical and cultural contexts.

For an equally long time, thinkers grappled with the question of whether and how education can contribute to happiness. While some define happiness as a central goal of education, others argue that education is basically not about happiness but learning. Following the latter approach, education attempts to contribute to happiness as long as this effort does not hinder learning (Barrow, 1980). Therefore, how can education contribute to happiness if there is no happiness “as such”, but only different happiness views?

In a sense, the notion of happiness views is quite compatible with the general idea of

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education, considering education is defined in terms of the attempt to enable people to find their own perspectives on certain issues rather than in terms of imposing certain perspectives on them. In this framework, education’s task is for pupils to learn and reflect about the various views on happiness, enabling them to form their own views and discover their own ways of leading a good life. Conversely, this means that education should be well aware not to prescribe any single view to pupils. As psychologist David Nettle states, “at least within any liberal tradition of thought, happiness should not be moralized. As long as people do not harm each other, then it is their inalienable right to construe their own potential in any way they like” (Nettle, 2005, p. 20). Education can help people to attain the capability of construing their potential by informing them of as many paths as possible that have been suggested for finding happiness.

In educationalist happiness research, many propositions have been made to teach pupils about happiness in school and to make the school experience itself as happy as possible. So far, only little attention has been paid to the fact that specific pedagogical institutions and practices follow certain happiness views and thus implicitly teach about happiness. As soon as a person participates in an institution’s practices, this person “learns” the institution’s happiness view, mostly even without recognizing it consciously.

Against the backdrop of these considerations in this paper I propose a research approach that is directed at the happiness views of pedagogical institutions. This approach will be applied in detail in the case of the “Outward Bound Schools”. Initially, the notion of happiness view will be elaborated in regard to pedagogical institutions. Noddings’ perception, according to which formal schools follow an “intellectualist” happiness view, will be elaborated and criticized, so that a more plural notion of happiness views can be developed. Secondly, a methodological framework for examining an institution’s happiness view will be considered. Thirdly, Outward Bound schools will be analyzed. The final discussion will link this analysis to the general considerations on happiness views of pedagogical institutions.

**The Happiness Views of Institutions**

In her review of different definitions of happiness, Noddings briefly states that formal schools follow a distinct happiness view. Formal schools, she claims, are based upon an outlook that was put forward by ancient Greek philosophers like Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle “held that theoretical or contemplative thought is happiness, and such thought is superior to practical wisdom and activity in the world” (Noddings, 2003, p. 10). She further claims that this “intellectualist” view of happiness is still prevalent in schools, although it seems to be hidden from sight: “Few of us today accept the intellectualist position. At least, few of us admit to it or state it publicly, but our school curriculum continues to be heavily influenced by it. The heavily abstract and theoretical subjects are more highly respected than practical, less theoretical ones” (Noddings, 2003, pp. 10–11).

Noddings provides some empirical examples that shall support this argument, but she does not elaborate on the issue in theoretical terms. I think her idea is close to the
following consideration of the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski. He states: “In each culture the values are slightly different; people aspire after different aims, follow different impulses, yearn after a different form of happiness. In each culture, we find different institutions in which man pursues his life-interest, different customs by which he satisfies his aspirations, different codes of law and morality which reward his virtues or punish his defections” (Malinowski, 1984, p. 25). Both Noddings’ and Malinowski’s considerations suggest that institutions somehow have certain built-in views of happiness.

Yet, how can we understand the concept “happiness view” in regard to institutions? I propose to conceptualize it in terms of two categories; firstly, in terms of a structured set of experiences that an institution enables; and secondly, in terms of reflections upon these experiences in regard to happiness. This will be elaborated upon with reference to formal schools.

Considering the first category, on the one hand formal schools enable certain experiences, for instance the experience of studying in classrooms and the experience of being rewarded with good grades for successful learning. On the other hand, formal schools preclude other experiences. As Noddings points out, the emphasis on learning in classrooms makes it difficult to learn, for instance, about nature in a natural environment; however, for many people a good relationship with nature is a vital source of happiness (Noddings, 2003). Also, Noddings refers to ecstatic happiness in terms of “peak experiences” and highlights that the experience of ecstatic happiness is not likely to occur in formal schools. Coined by psychologist Abraham Maslow, the term peak experience refers to the experience of a momentary great joy that can be triggered by many events, like music, love, or a beautiful meadow. Noddings asserts that “We would be hard put to find a significant form of education that has directed itself at ecstatic happiness” (2003, p. 26). These examples demonstrate that formal schools enable certain experiences and preclude others which is what the term structured set of experiences refers to.

Regarding the second category, human beings often reflect upon their experiences in some way. Naturally, the experiences carried out in formal schools can also be reflected upon and if this is done in terms of happiness, these reflections refer to the happiness view of formal schools. In several interviews, for instance, I asked pupils in which situations they felt happy at school, and I often got the answer: “When I get good grades”. Aristotle’s perspective, according to which happiness has to do with theoretical thought, is another example for a reflection that can be related to the happiness view of schools. It can be noted that the pupils’ and Aristotle’s perspectives do not fit entirely with one another and have quite different historical backgrounds. Yet, they both can be related to the experience of learning in school. It becomes obvious that Noddings’ analysis of formal schools is somewhat incomplete and although Aristotle’s perspective might still be quite influential in school curriculum, it is important to also consider the pupils’ as well as still other people’s—like teachers’—perspectives. The point is that the concept of happiness view refers to manifold reflections about the structured set of experiences.

1 Although Malinowski wrote this in 1922, anthropologists have widely ignored the topic of happiness until very recently (Mathews & Izquierdo, 2009).
enabled by a certain institution in terms of happiness.

If we follow Noddings’ claims further, at this point a problem comes to the fore. By enabling certain experiences and precluding others, formal schools could be said to be biased in favor of a particular happiness view. A person who goes to school will most likely gain experiences of a certain kind, indicating that certain forms of happiness are enabled while other forms—like “ecstatic happiness”—rarely occur. Most likely, pupils will not reflect upon this bias but rather they just go to school and participate in school practices. It is through this participation in a structured set of experiences that their experiences will be structured in a certain way. Accordingly, formal schools implicitly teach their particular happiness view. This means pupils don’t even realize that they are taught, and this characteristic makes this kind of teaching very efficacious and sustained. After some time, the practices in school and the related values become second nature for pupils. We could thus speak of the “hidden happiness curriculum” of schools. To be sure, the “intellectualist” view is not problematic per se; on the contrary, pupils should certainly become accustomed to it. Still, against the background of the introductory remarks, according to which pupils should get to know many different perspectives on happiness, this alleged bias of school curriculum is problematic.

Yet, it appears that Noddings’ conception is too simplistic. It is true that many educational activities in formal schools take place in classrooms and emphasize theory over practice, but school life usually comprises not only of learning in classrooms but also of various other practices, like sports classes, school festivals, and out-of-school-activities. It can be assumed that these practices follow happiness views that are different from the “intellectualist” one. In fact, when pupils were asked about happiness in school, they did not only speak about good grades but they also mentioned, for example, the good feeling of chatting with classmates in the changing cubicle after a team game in the sports lesson. In terms of this it seems to be more appropriate to conceptualize “the” happiness view of schools in plural terms where different practices follow different happiness views, and thus the overall happiness view of a particular school is most likely a mix of different ones. Happiness research thus needs to develop a more sophisticated analysis than the one provided by Noddings. It appears to be necessary to analyze many different practices in a certain school in regard to happiness.

In the remainder of the paper I will focus on a specific pedagogical institution, the Outward Bound schools. These schools are worthwhile exploring for at least three reasons: Firstly, they follow a short-term pedagogy and their curriculum is very much limited to outdoor activities, which allows for a detailed analysis of their happiness view in the scope of this paper. Secondly, Outward Bound schools are located all over the

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2 Another problem is that Noddings does not sufficiently define the word “school”. In fact, there are many different kinds of schools with very different curricula. As my analysis will demonstrate below, Outward Bound schools certainly emphasize practice over theory and enable ecstatic happiness—and yet they are called “schools”. For the purpose of this paper I will distinguish between “formal schools” and “Outward Bound schools”, with “formal schools” including Elementary schools, Junior High schools, and Senior High Schools in Japan, Grundschule, Hauptschule, Realschule, and Gymnasium in Germany, and International Schools in both countries. On the one hand, these schools seem to come close to what Noddings means with “school”, on the other hand they often cooperate with Outward Bound schools in both countries.
world which allows for cross-cultural comparison. Thirdly, Outward Bound schools do indeed enable ecstatic happiness, as will be demonstrated below.

METHOD

Following the preceding considerations, the happiness views of pedagogical institutions need to be examined in regard to (1) structured sets of experiences and (2) reflections upon these experiences in terms of happiness. Both categories can only be studied adequately with qualitative social research methods.

In general, qualitative research has the following five characteristics (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007): (1) It is naturalistic: the research subjects are considered in relation to the specific social, cultural, and environmental contexts in which they live. For examining a certain happiness view, it is crucial to study people in relation to a distinct pedagogical institution. (2) It is descriptive: the data take the form of words and pictures rather than numbers, and they are presented with as much of their richness as possible in order to depict the complexity of a case. In fact, a happiness view cannot be depicted by numbers. (3) It is concerned with processes rather than outcomes or products. Research on happiness views needs to focus on how certain experiences lead to happiness. (4) It is inductive: rather than testing hypotheses, qualitative research develops concepts, categories, or theories out of the data. A happiness view cannot be tested, but needs to be explored. (5) Finally, it focuses on meaning: questions of interest are “how different people make sense of their lives” and which kind of meaning people attribute to what kind of experiences. In this regard, qualitative researchers try to reflect the complexity of social relationships by capturing, for instance, the perspectives of different people involved. The concept of happiness view refers exactly to how different kinds of people make sense of their experiences in terms of happiness.

Qualitative research uses a variety of different methods, including interviews, observations, photographs, and the review of documents. In order to examine the happiness view of a certain pedagogical institution, it seems appropriate to include as many of these methods as possible. The structured sets of experiences can be explored with observations, photographs, videos, documents, and interviews while reflections upon these experiences can be explored with interviews and document reviews. The more methods that are being applied, the more aspects of an institution’s happiness view can be examined.

Regarding research on the happiness view of Outward Bound I reviewed literature on Outward Bound and visited two Outward Bound schools in Germany (Kröchendorff and Schwangau, July/August 2009) and the one existing Outward Bound School in Japan (Nagano, several times between November 2009 and September 2010). In these schools, interviews were conducted with both, Outward Bound instructors and participants of Outward Bound programs. Moreover, in Japan I was able to observe two mobile programs and take photos. From the data obtained I will reconstruct the happiness view of Outward Bound schools.

THE OUTWARD BOUND VIEW OF HAPPINESS: “REACHING THE TOP TOGETHER”

The Structured Set of Experiences in Outward Bound

Firstly, I describe what kinds of experiences Outward Bound schools enable. In doing so, I will also portray the main pedagogical ideas of Outward Bound for the readers who are not familiar with this kind of school. My analysis is based upon literature on Outward Bound and one of my observations.

3 The interviews were held with groups of approximately four people. The advantage of group interviews is that they make it possible to examine commonly shared perspectives (Bohnsack, 2003). The interviews were recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The interviews were semi-structured—meaning that a list of questions was used, but these questions were formulated as open as possible in order to give the interviewees the opportunity to develop their answers according to their specific frames of reference.
The first Outward Bound School was established in 1941 in Aberdovey in Wales by the educator Kurt Hahn (1886–1974). Since then, Outward Bound schools were set up in more than 30 countries all over the world. Although there are differences across nations, in general Outward Bound schools are not funded by states, and they are not compulsory. In Japan, there is one Outward Bound center with six permanent staff (including a cook). For courses with many participants, freelance instructors are hired. In 2010, 18,711 pupils, 8,488 youths, and 3,128 adults participated in Outward Bound Japan. In Germany, during the time of my research there were three centers. In each center there was at least one permanent program director and several permanent staff, like cooks, kitmen, etc. Similar to Japan, Outward Bound Germany usually employs freelance instructors. Outward Bound Germany does not provide a detailed annual report on its website like Outward Bound Japan but in a rather general way states that there are around 7,000 participants each year.

Maybe the most striking difference between Outward Bound schools and formal schools lies in the time frame. While pupils attend formal schools for several years, Outward Bound courses last for some weeks at the most. The courses that I observed in Japan took two days while in Germany, the participants that I interviewed took part in courses lasting between five and twelve days. Also, the Outward Bound curriculum differs from the one of formal schools. For the most part, Outward Bound courses take place outdoors, with activities like sailing, kayaking, or mountaineering, depending on the natural environment of the schools. Although there is no standardized curriculum of Outward Bound schools, the website of Outward Bound International lists the following elements as common to all courses: expeditionary learning, high performance team dynamics, solo, outdoor skills, creative skills, environmental stewardship, and personal challenge. Participants of Outward Bound programs will most likely be parted in small groups of 8 to 15 people, in which they will learn certain things and accomplish a series of tasks. Common activities include going on an expedition (here, participants often sleep in tents, prepare their own food in the wilderness, etc.), climbing on a high ropes course (climbing up about 8 meters in height or more, secured by other participants), and so called initiative tasks (like the one described below).

At the outset Outward Bound programs exclusively included only 16–21 year-old boys while nowadays programs are designed for both males and females and cater for a broad cross section of participants including pupils, trainees, managers, and handicapped people. In Japan and Germany some formal schools take a certain class level for Outward Bound.

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4 Hahn, a German born of Jewish origin, was imprisoned by the Nazis in 1933 after having opposed Hitler. After his release he immigrated to the UK and became a British citizen in 1938. In Germany, he had already founded a boarding school in 1920 (“Salem School”), and soon after coming to the UK he established another boarding school in 1934 (“Gordonstoun School”). Other significant educational accomplishments of Kurt Hahn are the “Duke of Edinburgh’s Award” and the “United World Colleges”. Hahn did not write much about his educational ideas, however some addresses that he occasionally gave are available.


7 Retrieved from http://www.outwardbound.net/courses/elements.html
Bound courses. Also, individuals can book courses.

Hahn's pedagogy is based upon criticism of contemporary society in general and the state system of education in particular. He believed that many young people in modern societies suffer from several “declines” of; physical fitness, initiative and enterprise, memory and imagination, skill and care, self-discipline and, “worst of all”, compassion (Hahn, 1967, p. 288). He accused the state school system for failing to address these problems. In contrast, he saw his own educational programs as providing direct “remedies” against the alleged declines. Therefore, his pedagogy is “directed against the established system of education” (Hahn, 1958, p. 1).

The term “outward bound” is a traditional nautical expression that describes the moment of a ship leaving a harbor. In regard to the Outward Bound schools, this term can be seen as a metaphor expressing the idea that young people should be enabled to step out of the certainties of normal life and to open themselves up for adventurous and challenging experiences. With reference to this Hahn states: “We believe that it is the sin of the soul to force the young into opinions, but we consider it culpable neglect not to impel every youngster into health giving experiences” (Hahn, 1967, p. 293).

Although participants acquire practical skills in Outward Bound, the pedagogical idea is much more encompassing. One of the guiding principles is that Outward Bound is less training for the sea than training through the sea (Price, 1970). This means that the participants should not only learn how to sail a boat but also implies the main objective that the participants develop self-mastery and a sense of moral responsibility through sailing. According to Hahn, the problem with intellectual knowledge transmitted at state schools is that it lacks a relationship with practical matters. He held that intellectual achievements need to be integrated in such a way that young people develop into active and compassionate citizens, whereby “the morally responsible man, not the scholar or artist, is the educational ideal of this school” (Röhrs, 1966, p. 31). In this sense, Outward Bound emphasizes not individual performance but social learning.

These rather general considerations will be supplemented with one of my observations. Since it is not possible to describe a whole course in this paper, I will describe one activity in detail, the initiative task, “The Wall”. This is a standard activity which is performed in many—if not all—Outward Bound schools around the world and can therefore be regarded as representative. Furthermore, “The Wall” can be also considered typical in that it contains many of the core elements of Outward Bound pedagogy: team work, planning, responsibility for others, risk, physical challenge, and bodily involvement.

The basic composition of “The Wall” is a high wooden wall with a platform on the backside. In the case described, the wall was 3.60 meters high. The task involves a group of participants getting over this wall onto the platform without the help of any means (except the participants’ bodies). In the case observed, the participants had a time limit of 40 minutes. Outward Bound instructors put emphasis on handing the responsibility to the

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8 This cooperation between different kinds of schools is what is missing in Noddings’ analysis. When different schools cooperate, they will in some way also combine their different curricula.
participants. This means that they do not tell the participants how to accomplish the task, and they only intervene in the participants’ actions for safety reasons. At times they may moderate the participants’ debate if they think it is necessary. Before climbing, the groups need to find a strategy such as deciding who should be the first person and the last. The first person must be lifted up by all the other persons, and once this person has grabbed the edge of the wall, they need to be strong enough to climb up on their own. The last person will have no help from below. Thus, this person needs to be good at jumping up to the hands of the other persons. Such crucial considerations need to be made before and during the task. The students need to communicate and debate with each other to make decisions. This task is an extraordinary challenge for most participants and from my perspective, just the mere sight of the wall gave the impression of an insurmountable obstacle.

I will demonstrate the task of “The Wall” with a series of photos taken of a group of 8th-graders of an International School in Japan, consisting of four girls and four boys (see Fig. 1).

Photo 1 shows the first participant trying to climb the wall. This boy is helped by a girl who in turn is held by other members of the group. During the climbing the participants get involved in the task with their whole bodies, in that they need to hold, push, and pull one another, which also means that they literally get closer together. Photo 2 shows that the first participant failed to get up onto the wall and is returning to the
ground. In photo 3 we see that another participant who has already accomplished climbing the wall is now helping the participant who actually tried to get up first. Also, the participants who are still on the ground help the one trying to get up. In photo 4, two participants are already on the wall, and a third one is pushed from the ground and pulled from above.

In photo 5 almost all the participants have accomplished climbing the wall with one girl still on the ground. She jumps and tries to reach the hands of a boy who hangs down the wall, held by others (the two persons who are standing on the ground are Outward Bound instructors who do not help the girl). In photo 6 the girl is still on the ground. Up until this point the group had not too many difficulties getting up and it took about fourteen minutes for the first seven persons. But now they face difficulties of pulling up the last remaining participant who has tried getting up for more than ten minutes now. We see that the boy who hangs down the wall has taken another position. While the other participants hold him, his legs hang down the wall, and the girl jumps and tries to grab his legs. In Photo 7 we see that the group changed its plan again. The girl who was still down in picture 6 could not get up without help from the ground. Thus the group decided that a boy should descend and help the girl. In photo 7 the girl has already accomplished getting up. The boy who is now the last one on the ground is hanging from the hands of the other participants who pull him upwards. The Outward Bound instructors stand close in order to secure him. Soon after the boy has accomplished getting up, photo 8 shows, the group bursts out in a shout of triumph and many participants perform winning gestures.

Accomplishing “The Wall” is not easy and involves good planning, cooperation, and high physical effort. There is a realistic chance of failure and indeed, not all groups that I observed accomplished getting everyone to the top.

To sum up this section about the structured set of experiences, it can be stated that Outward Bound schools enable outdoor experiences that emphasize extraordinary challenges. Many of these challenges can only be accomplished through the cooperation of the members of a group.

Reflections Upon the Outward Bound Experience in Terms of Happiness

What does all this have to do with happiness? Actually, we already observed the group of participants cheer on top of the Wall, but I was hesitant to interpret these gestures in terms of happiness because this interpretation would only express my—that is, the researcher’s—perspective. Therefore, I wanted to gather the perspectives of the persons involved in Outward Bound. Thus, in the following, I will examine three different reflections on the Outward Bound experience in terms of happiness. Firstly, the “official” perspective, secondly, the perspective of Outward Bound instructors and thirdly, the perspective of participants.

The “Official” Outward Bound Perspective Regarding Happiness

Upon reviewing Outward Bound literature I found that in his addresses, Kurt Hahn, at times refers to words like “joy” and “pleasure”. By evaluating these passages I was able to reconstruct a certain notion of happiness that underlies Hahn’s educational ideas.
Moreover, in further literature on Outward Bound I repeatedly came across statements that in one way or the other refer to happiness and that can be related to Hahn’s standpoint. The idea of happiness that I will reconstruct out of these statements can be called the “official” Outward Bound perspective on happiness.

Kurt Hahn opposed a life of indulgence in simple pleasures. This can be seen in a statement in which he quotes philosopher William James in order to explain his pedagogical ideas: “James threw out the challenge to educators and statesmen: discover the moral equivalent to war. James hated war but he admits that war satisfies a primitive longing which will never be extinguished; to lose yourself in a common cause which claims the whole man (...) If peace tempts men to ‘unmanly ease’, if gain and pleasure become their absorbing goals, this longing may be driven underground” (Hahn, 1967, p. 292). Hence, Hahn held that young people need to be given opportunities to have experiences “which claim the whole man”, so that the longing for adventure can be satisfied in peacetime.

Also, Hahn objected to views which promoted that young people should never encounter hardship: “I once had a discussion with a prominent progressive educator (...) and he asked me this question—he believed that the young should enjoy everything, always, all the time. He didn’t believe with Plato that there are good and sweet things and there are good and irksome things—and so he said to me very sternly, ‘You have the morning break every morning, do your boys enjoy jumping, running and throwing?’ and I was rather naughty and said, ‘Do you enjoy brushing your teeth Sir?’ and he said, ‘I don’t enjoy it and I don’t do it!’” (Hahn, 1958, p. 5). One can conclude that Hahn’s pedagogy is directed not only at the “good and sweet”, but also at the “good and irksome” things. But what does this mean in a more concrete sense?

In Outward Bound there are undoubtedly “good and sweet” experiences. Tom Price speaks, for instance, of the experiences of “natural beauty” and the “pleasures of fresh air”, and states that Outward Bound programs are “full of enjoyment” (Price, 1970, p. 83–84). Yet, there are also irksome experiences, as can be seen in another of Kurt Hahn’s anecdotes: “I once asked a boy who had been on a sailing expedition round the Orkneys and the Shetlands and had encountered three gales, ‘How did you enjoy yourself?’ He answered, ‘Magnificently, except at the time’” (Hahn, 1967, p. 292).

The idea of “sweet” and “irksome” things needs to be considered in relation to Hahn’s idea that the “all-rounder” rather than a “star performer” of any kind is the goal of his education. According to Hahn, education should try to develop a person’s full capacities, which means that children should also do things that they do not like. This is expressed in the answers he gives to some questions that he was asked: “What are you doing with the indoor type? Answer: I chase him outside. What are you doing with the introvert? Answer: I provide circumstances which turn him inside out. What are you doing with the extrovert? Answer: I turn him outside in” (Hahn, 1967, p. 293). The challenge of this education, thus, is to make the students overcome their innate weaknesses, or in Hahn’s words, to address the students’ “disabilities” and to turn them into “opportunities”.

It is here that happiness can finally be found, as Hahn pronounces by quoting a
phrase of happiness philosopher Seneca: When an educator succeeds in “defeating a boy’s defeatism”, the boy will learn “a great lesson, that the severe task is the real joy: ‘res severe, verum gaudium’” (Hahn, 1960, p. 4). This quote is usually translated as “true joy is a serious thing”. In his interpretation, however, Hahn changes “serious thing” into “severe task”, thereby emphasizing that happiness is related to facing extraordinary challenges.

Hahn’s perspective can thus be summarized as follows: in the end, the “good and irksome things” turn out to be “sweet”, too, and it is only by going through both, the “irksome” and the “sweet” things that true happiness can be gained.

The idea that happiness is related to the overcoming of extraordinary challenges can be found throughout the literature on Outward Bound. A recently published text states that one of the benefits of Hahn’s pedagogy is “Obtaining a sense of achievement and satisfaction by overcoming challenges and obstacles: To endure the storm despite seasickness, to overcome homesickness even on Christmas, to carry a heavy backpack up a mountain makes the students proud and happy” (Kugelmann & Dettweiler, 2010, p. 28). Here, we find happiness related to extraordinary accomplishments, whereby these accomplishments have a physical, an emotional, and a mental dimension. In the following question by the same authors we even find the Outward Bound experience being compared to formal schooling: “How many students have you met who are happy about reaching the top of mountain together, in contrast to their common experience in physical education lessons at school?” (Kugelmann & Dettweiler, 2010, p. 25). This quote indicates that the Outward Bound experience is on the one hand comparable to physical education class in school, but that it is on the other hand not “common”; rather, reaching the mountain top together is presented as an extraordinary—and happy—experience.

The moment of great joy that is indicated here can be described in terms of “peak experience”. Indeed, it has been declared that “Perhaps the most compelling aspect of Outward Bound is the life-affirming peak experience which occurs so predictably and regularly on the courses” (Bacon, 1987, p. 1).

At this point we can return to Noddings’ considerations on ecstatic happiness. It turns out that Outward Bound pedagogy has certainly directed itself at peak experiences, at least on the “official” level. Here, peak experiences are considered to be the outcome of overcoming hardship and challenge.

Having highlighted the significance of peak experiences in Outward Bound, it must be kept in mind that such experiences are momentary. While it might be the case that Hahn’s above cited notion of “true joy” refers to a temporary joy, it is also true that the ultimate objective of his pedagogy is long term oriented in that it aims at shaping young people into active and moral citizens. The idea of “true joy”, respectively, needs to be considered in this long term orientation, too.

I am inclined to call the perspective described here as a pedagogical one. At its core, we find two interrelated ideas: firstly, that learning needs to happen for happiness to come;

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9 There seems to be a misprint in the manuscript of the talk. The right spelling of the quote reads “res severa verum gaudium”.

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and secondly, that this learning needs to be induced by educational activities.

**The Perspective Regarding Happiness of Outward Bound Instructors**

In the interviews with Outward Bound instructors one of my questions was whether the instructors think that the participants feel happy during a course and in which situations they think participants feel happy. In the following, passages will be quoted from the instructors’ answers in order to examine their perspective on happiness in Outward Bound. Although Outward Bound schools employ both male and female instructors, for some reason, mostly male instructors participated in my interviews. Therefore, the following statements rather express a male perspective, and it cannot be said whether females would take a pointedly different perspective. One of my results is that in regard of their perspective on happiness in Outward Bound there are no significant differences between Japanese and German instructors, as will be shown below.

A Japanese instructor (male, 26 years) said:

“So, my answer to your question is the situation where they overcome a conflict. It could happen on the first day when they face a challenge, such as climbing in many cases, and succeeding in climbing to the top. Otherwise, for those who join an expedition of several days and have problems within their group, that moment can come when they can solve those problems, or when they can honestly tell the other members about what they are thinking and fully understand each other during the expedition (...) Their faces look very different when they can realize that the group or each individual has been changed during their activities. I think they feel happy at that moment.”

The instructor does indeed think that the participants experience happiness during Outward Bound programs. His statement is based on direct observations of the participants’ bodily expressions (“faces”). He relates happiness to different activities of the program and conceptualizes happiness in terms of a specific “moment”—the peak experience of having overcome a challenge. According to this statement, participants may face different kinds of challenges, physical ones (“climbing”) and social ones (“problems within the group”).

The last lines of this statement then conceptualize the overcoming in terms of “change”, both on a collective and an individual level. The examples given—developing honesty and understanding others—indicate that this change refers to the emerging of a *new social attitude*. This notion can be deepened by reference to the statement of another Japanese instructor (male, 30 years) who considers it crucial for participants’ happiness that they open up towards themselves as well as to other participants on an emotional level:

“I think our activities are physically challenging, but the important moment is when they overcome mental challenges. Their feelings toward themselves ..., well, I mean, such as feelings that they just want to run away or they hate themselves, or inner conflicts over other people. Or feelings that they can’t express themselves, they don’t want to do it, or they are not accepted by others. I think the important moment is when they overcome such feelings.”

Similarly, a German instructor said (male, 31 years):
“To me it occurred very often that at first there is an overcoming, well the more overcoming that is involved, the higher is the happiness of accomplishment. (...) Take a climbing route, for example. If there is someone who is already able to climb, and for him it is very easy to accomplish this, he will say ‘well, this was fun, it was good’. Conversely, someone else may be scared of heights and climbs for the first time, so upon seeing the climbing rock he thinks ‘Oh my god, how shall I ever do this?’, and he toils himself up. This is very much connected to overcoming, and when he really accomplishes it and then comes down again, the feeling of happiness will burst out of him.”

The similarity of this statement with the previous one of the Japanese instructor is striking. Like his Japanese colleague, the German instructor relates happiness to the overcoming of a challenge. Also, happiness is again conceptualized as momentary. In this regard, the formulation of “the feeling of happiness will burst out of him” is a remarkable expression for a peak experience. After that, the instructor went on to explain that “overcoming” can refer to different challenges, depending on the individuals. He told about a participant who had no problems with climbing, but who, during the final debriefing, said to the other participants in his group that he liked them:

“They couldn’t believe it, to hear this from this very, well, how shall I say, this guy who usually never says a word, and when he says something it’s just bullshit, and he sat there and said ‘Hey, I like you all very much’, and he got a wild applause, and everyone was completely happy that he said it, and he sat there with his face beaming.”

Again, this is a description of a peak experience. Also, like in the case of the Japanese instructor, this narrative is about the overcoming of an emotional and social challenge (expressing one’s feelings towards others). In this sense, what the Japanese instructor says about the “change” of a person can also be applied to the narrative of the German instructor. This common reference to change relates to an aforementioned statement about the pedagogical perspective on happiness. Instructors in both countries hold that happiness occurs in Outward Bound if certain learning processes take place.

Referring to the comparison between Outward Bound and formal schools, the following statement of a German instructor (male, 42 years) is instructive:

“I also think about the overcoming of certain patterns, patterns that may be of vital importance for dealing with school, for getting a somewhat passable grade-point-average in the end. These patterns that develop in school are not necessarily conducive when it comes to making authentic contacts or to thinking in a multifaceted way. And then they arrive here and run around with these patterns and then work is needed to bring them out of their shell, to make essential offers in which these patterns do not function. (...) And in this little group that I had, it happened yesterday. They didn’t like hiking, they didn’t like this and they didn’t like that, it had to do with motion. And yesterday we were at the climbing rock, and they were totally awesome. This was a moment of happiness for all, including me, to see this is no more exhausting, no, that it is exhausting and that is why it’s fun; and then after climbing their faces were all smiles.”

In this narrative, change of attitude refers to the participants’ attitude towards the Outward Bound activities themselves. At first, the participants had a negative attitude and could thus not enjoy the activities, but then finally developed a positive outlook which
resulted in a commonly shared peak experience. On a more theoretical level, this statement also refers to changes of attitude in regards to social relations ("making authentic contacts") and cognitive skills ("thinking in a multifaceted way").

Moreover, the theoretical consideration deploys a comparison between Outward Bound schools and formal schools. Here, "overcoming" does not refer to individual fears or feelings, but to general "patterns" of thinking and social behavior which, the instructor assumes, the participants acquire in formal school. These patterns, he thinks, limit the participants’ social and cognitive capacities. According to this perspective, pupils cannot but develop such limiting patterns because of the inherent logic of the grading system in formal school. To an extent, the instructor criticizes formal schools for failing to develop the pupils’ social and cognitive skills. He sees his own pedagogical task in confronting participants with situations that disturb these patterns and thus set the participants free ("bring them out of their shell") so that they can develop a new attitude. The instructor thus perceives his work as being directed against education in formal schools. The similarity of the notion expressed here and Kurt Hahn’s accusation of the system of state education is obvious.

In the interviews with German instructors I often came across criticisms of formal schools like the one presented here. Mostly, the instructors expressed this criticism without any hints or leads on my part. Comparatively, the interviews with the Japanese instructors were different as they did not express such criticism on their own. However, when I explicitly raised the issue, one Japanese instructor (male, 27 years) said the following:

“Recently many young people can’t see what their own happiness is. Most of them live their life not thinking what they want to do but thinking what they have to do (...). They don’t even realize that. They can’t distinguish ‘what they have to do’ from ‘what they want to do’. When they participate in Outward Bound, they are asked about it for the first time in their life. At that time, most of them notice that they’ve considered only ‘what they have to do’, but not ‘what they want to do’. (....) The education conducted at school tends to force ideas on students about ‘what they should be’ rather than ‘what they want to do’. That’s our impression about the current education, and if they promote such educational policies further, that will result in a large number of people who have no opinion of their own, or many of them become an ‘empty’ person.”

Again, we find a criticism of formal schools and the notion that Outward Bound pedagogy is directed against formal schools’ shortcomings10.

Summarizing, the instructors’ perspective on happiness in Outward Bound relates to peak experiences that are triggered by overcoming physical or social challenges, whereby this overcoming is conceptualized as a learning process that is both different from and directed against learning in formal schools. From this, the instructors’ perspective is very much in line with the “official” Outward Bound perspective.

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10 The fact that Japanese instructors do not elaborate on this criticism without being explicitly hinted at may be attributed to the generally less pronounced tendency of Japanese to complain and criticize, compared to Germans.
The Perspective of Participants Regarding Happiness in Outward Bound

Finally, the participants’ reflections on the Outward Bound experience will be examined. The following statements will demonstrate that there is no significant difference between Japanese and German participants, but that the participants’ and the instructors’ perspectives differ slightly. The participants were asked whether they felt happy during the Outward Bound program, and, if so, in which situations. The interviews were conducted with participants aged from around 12 to 18 years old. Both, females and males participated in the interviews, but I found similarities between females’ and males’ perspectives rather than differences. Usually, the interviews were conducted shortly after the Outward Bound program was finished, so that the participants could elaborate on quite “fresh” experiences.

Here is what a 16 year old German girl said:

“Well I liked it when we did this task with the whole group, when all of us had to get across the beam, and this was somehow quite a task, and when we solved it, and everybody had accomplished it, there was such a group feeling, all of us were delighted, and this was quite awesome.”

Although this statement refers to an initiative task other than “The Wall” we can easily recognize similarities between the above given observation and the girl’s narrative. The girl elaborates upon the moment of having accomplished the task in terms of happiness. In fact, her statement describes this moment as a peak experience. This peak experience, it should be noted, is a collective one whereby the word “group feeling” indicates an intense sense of community with the other participants.

This interpretation points toward the importance of the social dimension in the participants’ perspective on happiness in Outward Bound. Indeed, this dimension comes to the fore in almost all interviews with participants. There are frequent references to the joy of having accomplished something as a group: “to see that it works out in the group”, “it was good to see that we could do something”. The social dimension is also a focus of the following statement by a 16 year old Japanese girl who attended an International School in Germany and participated in a German Outward Bound program:

“I was happy that I got the chance to work with someone I don’t know reall ... I didn’t know very well, because maybe we are in a different class or they are new or we’re a different nationality, and usually I don’t get to communicate very much with these people. And the groups, I didn’t get to choose the people, so I could work with people I don’t know, (...) and we went hiking yesterday, (...) and we had a nice teamwork.”

Here, happiness is not conceptualized in terms of peak experience but rather the significance of doing and accomplishing something together with others is highlighted. The following statement of a 17 year old Japanese-American girl from the same group is another example of the importance of the social element; however, this girl explicitly considered social relationships in an extended time frame:

“We did a lot of like team working, problem solving and all that stuff and I think it’s not really the theme that we are doing this, like solving the problems ourselves, but more that we are doing it as a team, because we are a pretty huge grade, like 80 people in one grade, and you get to know other people, and we got a lot of new students this year, and I
think especially because we are doing this in the beginning of the school year, we are kind of bonding.”

This statement suggests that the social relationships among participants would benefit also in a long-term perspective through the Outward Bound activities. The girl then went on to describe that in school they also do teamwork tasks, but that in Outward Bound it is different, because here it is more “physical teamwork”, where students can develop leadership, learn how to “follow rules” and to “make the own rules”. She appreciated that the pupils were given more responsibilities by Outward Bound instructors than they are given by their teachers.

The importance of taking responsibility for other participants is also obvious in the statement of a 15 year old German boy:

“For example, when we were on expedition it rained heavily, and the fire was about to extinguish, which meant no food, and then I stood with another guy, we stood absolutely behind the fire, as rain catchers, so that the fire would not extinguish, so that the group would get food, and then the rain became heavier, and we stayed, and at the end the fire did not extinguish, and we made it, and this was a moment when I thought, yes, we made it, together.”

This narrative of a peak experience demonstrates that the boy perceived the Outward Bound activity not as a pedagogical simulation of reality, but as a real task that has real consequences. If they had failed to keep the fire alive the group would have had to eat uncooked food (or even “no food”). This statement relates to the aforementioned quote by Kurt Hahn, claiming that “the severe task is the real joy”.

The quoted passages are taken from the very beginnings of three different interviews with participants. Similarly, in most interviews with participants, the first statements conceptualize happiness in terms of a combination between a sense of accomplishment and a sense of social bonding. However, references to individual accomplishments, like successfully climbing on the high ropes course, can also be found. Furthermore, a sense of accomplishment is not always mentioned in regard to happiness. One participant, for instance, said that he was happy when he slept outside and saw shooting stars, thereby describing a peak experience that is related to passively and individually enjoying nature.

As can be recalled, the instructors also considered the social dimension in their statements on happiness in Outward Bound. However, they conceptualized this dimension always in connection with learning processes (e.g., overcoming bad feelings towards others). This perspective could not be found in interviews with participants. One German boy (16 years) said “I was happy the whole time, every day you learn something new, which in turn makes it even more interesting”. However, although this statement refers to learning, it does not link learning to the social dimension. Also, although in some statements participants compare the Outward Bound experience with formal school, there is no reference to a breaking of limiting “patterns” allegedly acquired at school through the imposition of the grading system. Interestingly, as previously stated, when participants were asked in which situations they felt happy at school, one common answer was, “when I get a good grade”. This indicates that the pupils interviewed do not see Outward Bound schools as a kind of cure against an assumedly depriving disease acquired
at school, but rather as an institution that simply enables another form of happiness. It can then be said that although the instructors’ and the participants’ perspectives coincide in many regards, the participants do not share the instructors’ particular pedagogical perspective.

To sum up, the prevalent view can be characterized as follows: Happiness in Outward Bound is related to the overcoming of extraordinary challenges in a natural environment. The challenges have different aspects which depending on the participants’ individual abilities can be bodily, mental, emotional, or social. Typically, the accomplishment results in peak experiences. Most often, the peak experiences are collectively shared by groups of participants. Also, there is a belief that the courses will enable better social relationships in the future. Many Outward Bound activities trigger peak experiences in a very literal sense, therefore the Outward Bound view of happiness can be phrased as “reaching the top together”.

**DISCUSSION**

Now, after having examined the Outward Bound view of happiness, I come back to the initial considerations. My analysis makes clear that Noddings’ statement, according to which there is no “significant form of education that has directed itself at ecstatic happiness” (Noddings, 2003, p. 26) needs to be qualified: Outward Bound schools undoubtedly include and even focus on experiences of ecstatic happiness. To be sure, Outward Bound schools do not teach participants explicitly about happiness, yet by enabling participants to have peak experiences, these schools implicitly teach about this form of happiness.

From one perspective, Outward Bound schools can be considered as distinct pedagogical institutions with a distinct happiness view. Since the set of experiences enabled by Outward Bound schools is limited, I assume that my analysis encapsulated “the” happiness view of Outward Bound schools quite accurately. From another perspective, Outward Bound schools need to be considered in relation to formal schools. Keeping in mind that Outward Bound schools often act in cooperation with formal schools it can be said that the elements of Outward Bound pedagogy are a kind of “outsourced” part of these formal schools’ curricula. I conclude that at least those formal schools that send their pupils to an Outward Bound course do not solely follow an “intellectualist” happiness view but rather commit themselves to “teaching” also about ecstatic happiness. Accordingly, the above developed pluralistic notion of “happiness view” holds true. In the light of the introductory discussion, this finding is quite encouraging considering that if we want to enable the coming generation to find their own happiness, we should provide them with a rich variety of different experiences of and thoughts on happiness. Thus, Outward Bound schools have an important lesson to teach about happiness—not only about peak experiences, but also about the pluralistic happiness views of some formal schools in Japan and Germany.
REFERENCES


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