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Historical background of Adventure Therapy in the Netherlands

General

Gass (1993) describes the term Adventure Therapy (AT) as a relatively new term that is only 25 years old. Also, Newes (2003) indicates that AT gradually begins to be included in the therapy sector where it serves as a treatment for several populations including: youth offenders, mentally ill, people with eating disorders and also people without diagnosed problems. Kurt Hahn, a German educator, is described as the first person who offered experiential education in a wilderness setting in 1920 (Gass, Gillis, & Russell, 2012; Newes, 2003). Later, around 1940, he founded the first OUTWARD BOUND (OB) school in Wales where he used his pedagogical principles (Hovelynck, 2001 Bouman, 1998). Since the start of OB, AT has proven to be a unique therapeutic treatment that can be used both as a supplement to another form of therapy but also as an independent form of therapy (Newes, 2013).

The fact that AT is a new form of therapy, makes it difficult to determine exactly when people started using professionally 'adventure' in a therapeutic setting (Davis-Berman & Berman, 1994; Gillis & Priest, 2003; Kelly & Baer, 1968). In the AT world history are mainly descriptions of organizations and individuals who started outside the regular care program by performing adventure therapeutic treatments in mental health care (Gass, Gillis, & Russell, 2012).

AT emerged from the vision of the "experiential learning" methodology which is defined as "learning by doing, and reflecting on this" (Gass, 1993; Newes, 2003). The principles of experiential learning can be traced from the educational descriptions of Dewey (Newes, 2003). This methodology is based on the belief that learning is a result of direct experience, and that people learn best when multiple senses are actively involved in learning.

Examination of Newes (2003) shows that at the same time the use of several senses ensures a higher cognitive activity and a better memory. Specifically looking at AT would this fact, combined with adventure activities, may be responsible for the high reported positive behavioural change.

Also, assumed the methodology of experiential learning that active learning has a great value for the client since he is responsible and involved in the process. In addition, the theory of experiential learning is based on the belief that individuals learn when they step outside their comfort zone.

Belgium and the Netherlands

In Belgium and the Netherlands the beginning of outdoor-programs, based on the principles of Kurt Hahn started in 1961 and was founded in the “Nederlands OUTWARD BOUND School” in Renesse, Zeeland. In the Netherlands they organised a 21-day structured program with a lot of physical activities. The goal was not to develop physical strengths but personal development. Since the 60s of last millennium some Dutch OUTWARD BOUND instructors developed an approach that was substantially different from the imported British model. This development laid the foundation for a typical Dutch-Belgian outdoor tradition (Wittockx, Van Stiphout & Lagrou, 1988, 4; Hovelynck, 1998a).

The approach of the Dutch OUTWARD BOUND instructors which was developed in the 60s and 70s brought outdoor training closer to an experiential model. Hahn's pillars evaluated into the ideas of humanistic therapies, and the T-group tradition, inspired by the work of Kurt Lewin. The emphasis in the guidance of a group shifted more to 'here and now' and 'feedback', and to experience the process of meaning: the role of the trainers evolved from instructor to facilitator. This development changed the face of the OUTWARD BOUND programs substantially.

Both in Belgium and in the Netherlands, outdoor training was initially spread out through OUTWARD BOUND instructors who went over time elsewhere to work for a variety of reasons. Some of them grounded their own organization - such as Frans Griffioen with Elan Training, Herman Wittockx with Organisational Behaviour Development or Stef Geens of Exponent. Others brought their outdoor experience into youth work, social work or educational work.

The Netherlands

Later in the Netherlands there are several organizations all over the country which individually searched for practices from abroad to work with vulnerable youngster. Project Adventure Netherlands and Outward Bound Netherlands are some of them, also Youth at Risk Netherlands. There were also organizations like YMCA which searched for activities and methods for facilitating the work with youngsters in their social development. Somewhere in the 90s an organisation in the south of the Netherlands went to the USA and New Zealand to look to the theory and practice of Project Adventure and Adventure Based Counselling. They came back with a lot of experience and a lot of enthusiasm. What they had learned in those countries allowed them to transformed it into a practice on its own, based on experiential learning, but suitable for their target group: mentally disabled youngsters. They developed a methodology which was spread out over several organizations in the south side of the country. This methodology developed in some cases to an AT-approach and from there on to Adventure Therapy. Nowadays there are only a few organizations in the Netherlands who use the term Adventure Therapy.

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