

Making, Creativity and Workmanship: Why Now?

There are many questions that need answering and none more important as a father than: *what should we teach our children?* What skills, what knowledge do our children need to best approach the problems of the future, how might they apply their unique abilities to serve themselves, their communities and our growing responsibility to the wider natural environment? Given AI now answers the problems of factual memory recall and data analysis, some of the most sought-after talents required for our future are empathy, interpersonal relations, creativity and lateral problem-solving skills (natural skill sets of the dyslexic, by the way)[\[1\]](#).

Learning the full process and context of making all manner of things and the patience required for considered creative workmanship is an important lesson we all need, but to empower young imaginations with such skills is essential for our future. Our physical interactions with the world need to be constantly reconsidered on a micro and grand scale. In the midst of our climate crisis, the skills and contextual knowledge embedded through making things provide the kinds of insight required to understand the consequences of our actions on the environment and how to physically mitigate, and find positive solutions to, them.

The pleasure found in workmanship and solving problems is not a 'luxury' found in the pursuit of hobbies and pastimes, but positive emotional and meaningful feedback, which nurtures young hearts and minds. Denouncing and undervaluing the experience, knowledge and joy found in creating and making things by calling them hobbies, pastimes or vocational, does not do their pedagogical value in learning and growing justice. Kurt Hahn, a German post-First World War education reformer, was an

advocate of the adolescent and of the value in experiential pedagogy. He was founder of Gordonstoun School and co-founder of the Outward Bound Organisation and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award. In 1943, Hahn wrote: "*Your builder and your explorer, your actor and musician, your painter and all the rest, in order to feel that they not only have the right to exist, but that there is purpose in their existence, must sense a public assent, and this assent is like a good wind behind a weary runner, helping him over periods of self-distrust and fatigue.*" [\[ii\]](#)

If everyone could be given the encouragement, skills and opportunity to make positive physical contributions, even in a small way, to humanity and the nurturing of our environment, the additional effort in providing such learning and often lack of its perceived value would be overlooked for the positive gains in satisfaction, personal growth and positive interventions.

Learning how to make things and the patience and workmanship required, teaches us how to make the most from our minds, bodies, and the natural resources we have to hand in our environment. It teaches the knowledge embedded in a thing, its context, and full life cycle, an empathy with materials and processes, and the implications of their making. Only from this understanding can you assess any-things' sustainable credentials. Given these tools of lifecycle understanding, the imagination is freed from preconceived patterns, and true creativity is allowed in. Only then can the mind be tuned into making the most of the resources to hand and to answer the problems of the here and now. Our young people need these skills ever more. Faced with the powers and invasive nature of surveillance capitalism, they need now more than ever the tools and efficacy to physically shape their world with creative autonomy, for the benefit of themselves, their communities, and the environment.

Learning to fail is not a new teaching challenge. It has been recognised as an essential lesson for life. After a young person gains some inner confidence, K. Hahn prescribes his sixth (schooling) law: "*It is our business to plunge the children into enterprises in which they are likely to fail, and we may not hush up that failure; we should teach them to overcome defeat.*" This was not a call to humiliate; only after the confidence is strong did Hahn advocate for the challenge of failure. But where else is failure so easily toyed with than in creative pursuits? More often than not, within the artful approach, failure is gold. The happy surprise of something brand new. With careful training, the skill of working creatively and observing failure and reworking it to succeed, the *victorious patience* required for good workmanship is a powerful life-affirming lesson. A lesson which fuels ever more 'guided rediscovery' [vi] as is necessary to develop the resourcefulness and deeper understanding for great creative workmanship.

All the above makes perfect sense to me. As a dyslexic artist, I make everything I can myself for my family's needs and wants. I am sure my life looks bizarre and non-conventional to many onlookers, but it feels nourishing and satisfying to me, and hopefully to my family and friends too. Right now I am a professional artist, making art that, I hope, provides a useful reflective tool and facilitates others' commitment to 'make-it-happen', with autonomous creative workmanship.

[i] 2025, *Intelligence 5.0 Spotlight: Why Dyslexic Thinking is the human skillset every business needs – and how to hire it today*, <https://www.madebydyslexia.org/>

[ii] Hahn, K. 1943. *Ten Years of Gordenstoun*.

[iii] Zuboff, S. 2019. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*.

[iv] Hahn, K. 1943. *Ten Years of Gordenstoun*.

[v] Hahn, K. 1943. *Ten Years of Gordenstoun*.

[vi] Ingold, T. 2013. *Making, Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture*.

Images:

1. My son aged 5, self directed, re-shafting his real spade.
2. My daughter at her own workbench, again self directed making wire sculpture, 3 years old.
3. 4. Roskilda Viking ship Museum, Denmark, 2005. Shaping a thwart from oak with axe, lesson for school groups, from 7 years of age!





