

Biographical sketch of august aichorn

[Law](#), [Crime](#)



Born in Vienna about 129 years ago on the 27th of July August Aichhorn was to change the face of Special Education forever in the years to come. Of course, no one in his family or amongst his friends or neighbors could have predicted his illustrious future since he was, like most kids, little more than a gawky bespectacled studious little thing while in school.

There was little to be noticed about him except that he had a twin brother. This twin brother he lost at the age of 20. Heartbroken and a little frazzled (since he had after all been close to his sibling) he began teaching at a school in Vienna. He seemed to have had his career pretty clearly etched out in his mind.

And a pretty predictable path it followed too. Teaching was a respectable profession those days and young respectable young men from well-established families (like him) jumped at the chance to pursue it. Only problem was that in those days once you chose a career for yourself you were expected to stick to it until you were too old to continue with it and had to retire with a pension.

The hop-skip and jump routine we are so used to performing in the job market today was an absolute no-no then. Unfortunately Aichhorn soon discovered that conventional rules such as these did not matter much to him.

In 1907 when the Boy's military settlement was introduced in Vienna Aichhorn, then an enthusiastic 27 year old, opposed it vehemently and finally managed to outdo the system with his exuberance. Soon after, in 1908 he

assumed the role of the chairman of a brand new board designed only to organize boys' settlements.

By means of his rather effective and well-directed activism he therefore managed to keep the education system, a system he had now grown to love and honor, from being maligned by the now growing 'military spirit'.

With great determination he now endeavored to take his devotion to the system to the next logical level, the institution he organized in Oberhollabrunn for delinquent boys was an outcome of this very attempt. (Dollard, 2006)

In Oberhollabrunn Aichhorn managed the unthinkable by creating out of the dilapidated remains of a refugee camp what was later considered to be one of the most sensitive, touching and humanitarian studies of human behavior. This was a period of flux for what had once been a great and much respected monarchy in Austria.

Old Austrian traditions were now being dragged into the street and left ankle deep in poverty and shame. Austrians were striving to keep themselves afloat despite the tremendous inflation and revolution brewed. Amongst it all Aichhorn chose to, characteristically, stay away from all the humdrum and surrender himself completely to work.

As in every other state of chaos Austria was now becoming a cauldron for trouble, crime and delinquency was frothing up and societal pressures were getting harder to bear than ever before. Amidst it all Aichhorn dreamed of a way to bring back hope to crime doers. Of course he was not original in his subject choice.

Dozens before him had meddled with the same topic rather unsuccessfully. Many of Aichhorn predecessors had advocated some old school mercy and ' understanding, while others had strongly recommended a good dose of thrashing all in order to bring wrongdoers to their senses and recuperate them.

Aichhorn however was not a big fan of either approach. In Oberhollabrunn he had the opportunity to put into practical use the sort of methods he considered truly effective to deal with crime and delinquency. What he saw and understood he finally put down in the form of a book, now the ' Bible' in the field – *Wayward Youth*. (Lamb, 2004)

It is perhaps a little difficult to really grasp the importance of the door Aichhorn managed to open up to the public and academicians by suggesting that psychoanalytic principles be applied to the study of delinquent behavior today in 2007, when much has been said and done in this direction.

Despite the progress we have made in the field however Aichhorn's work, the *Wayward Youth* still continues to be a supremely important resource book simply because of its pioneering nature. In the field of crime and delinquent psychology Aichhorn's work still continue to provide the basic fundamentals even when we have walked far enough to form complex sentences with these letters we will still have to turn to Aichhorn for support.

What makes *Wayward Youth* such a complete pioneer is the fact that it distinguishes between what it terms the ' latent' and the ' manifest' delinquents. Further, it suggests that an arrested development inclines a person towards ' antisocial' behavior.

Hence, a troubled child-parent relationship in the early years of the infant might be the primary reason behind his/her delinquent actions in later life.

Aichorn's capacity to deal with delinquents is often been described as 'instinctive' or 'intuitive'. After having discovered his talent in dealing with antisocial behavior Aichorn was further influenced and encouraged to train himself in the field of psychoanalysis by none other than Anna Freud, daughter of the man who began it all Sigmund Freud, who was herself engaged in some remarkable studies of the human mind.

Aichorn joined the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute at the ripe age of 44, in 1922. He would later organize a special service for child guidance in the same institution.

Aichorn remained in Austria even during the tumultuous 1930's, thanks to his non-Jew background and the utter ease with which he handled the Nazis.

He worked quietly during the war years and waited patiently for the storm to pass and a new day for psychoanalysis to begin in the post-war era once the war ended Aichorn enthusiastically reopened the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, only now it was to be called August Aichorn Gesellschaft. (King, 2000)

It was also a regeneration time. Ideological conflicts and military interests were shaking civilization right up to its foundations. The doubts, dilemmas and confusions were gradually, quite slowly indeed, giving way to a new and unique cultural revolution. It was happening all across the Western world.

People suddenly seemed to realize that there was enough of political warfare to disgrace humanity. (Fletcher, 2005) The prevailing standards suddenly

seemed to be meaningless, and the insurgent youths wanted something different to happen and Aichhorn was one of the characters of the era that found himself in his own elements in such a situation.

He never lost hope and continued to proceed in the direction he was meant to be. It is certain he never became frustrated like many of the individuals of the post war period and stood firm on his ground rather than drift away. (Kar, 2006)

Many think Aichhorn's tryst with delinquents began early even while he struggled as a grade school teacher in the city of Vienna. He hankered for a theoretical base which would be able to support and expand his understanding of the world of these crime doers and help him set them right again.

Hungry to fulfill this desire he studied neuropathology, like many his age during that period unfortunately neuropathology did little to quench his question, instead it only made him wonder further.

Desperate he now tried his hands at experimental psychology, which too failed to satisfy him. It was only when he would finally discover psychoanalysis that he would finally find all the missing pieces to his puzzle. (Edelman, 2001)