

## TEACHING STYLES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

The changing relationship between content and teaching styles in the process of developing the BA in Curative Education

Motto: Learning is finding out what we already know  
Doing is demonstrating that we know it  
Teaching is reminding others that they know as well as we do  
We are all learners, doers, teachers  
(origin unknown )

### INTRODUCTION

This paper will look at Teaching Styles within the context of the BACE. I will approach it from my perspective of Camphill Course Leader, involved in Course Design and Review and also from my experience as lecturer.

I will show how my study of Teaching Styles has helped me to reflect on and evaluate the process of change from the in-House Camphill Course in Curative Education to the present BACE run in partnership with the University of Aberdeen.

My reflections are built on a model I found in an article on Transforming Teaching Practice. ( Larrive, 2000). I found this helpful as it structures and clarifies steps within the process of change, which our Course and we as teachers went through.

### I CURRENT PRACTICE

#### A Historical Aspects

The present BACE, run in partnership with the Camphill Rudolf Steiner Schools (CRSS) and UA has developed in three main phases.

#### 1) The old Camphill Seminar in Curative Education

This began in the early 1940ies as an initiative by Dr. Karl Koenig, the founder of the Camphill Movement. ( see App.) After the first years of more informal teaching to train the first co-workers he established a structured Course in 1949, when he widened the circle of lecturers to include other medical Doctors, Psychologists and Artists. Koenig and these first teachers were charismatic personalities, inspired by him to share their active research and study of Anthroposophy. ( see app) Students and Teachers, mostly coming from war torn Europe, were motivated by their desire to protect and nurture any individual whose human dignity and value were under threat: “Only the help from one person to the other, the encounter of their higher spiritual being, an awareness of the other’s individuality, without inquiring into creed or world conception or political affiliation, but simply the meeting, I to I, of two individualities – only this creates the kind of Curative Education which may counter and heal the threat to our innermost humanity.” ( Koenig,1949) This, by the way, has remained the underlying fundamental principle of CE.

The Teaching methods soon evolved from mainly lecturing to include workshops, small group work and artistic activities. ( see Portfolio) This early structure is still valid in essence:

Lectures – sharing of own research, knowledge and experience

Guided study of R.Steiner's work

Small group activities

Art

Practice

The practice element was and still is a unique aspect of this Course. Students share their life with the pupils. They learn from experience, explore best practice in daily life, supported by experienced co-workers in the Community.

Much teaching and learning takes place also in House based Tutorials, Co-worker meetings and Pupils' reviews in multi-disciplinary settings.

The Camphill Seminar was based on Anthroposophy and practical experience.

Teachers and Students worked, studied and learned together and developed CE with the pupils as active participants and contributors. All this formed the basis for the now worldwide Camphill Movement.

Through the fact that students and teachers were also involved in building up Camphill Community living based on shared values and ideals the Seminar had a rather special quality: personal values and beliefs became intimately mixed with professional attitudes; life and work were closely connected. This is reflected in the Title Seminar was given: "Community as Path of Learning".

Part of my reflections on the development of the BACE will be to explore to what degree this Community context of learning and teaching was affected by this process. All this was fairly settled and comfortably established when I became involved as Tutor and lecturer in 1982 just after the old Seminar had become the Camphill Course in CE (see Portfolio)

## 2) The Middle Phase

Experienced Tutors who had previously been my teachers introduced me to my task. I was expected to continue and maintain established practice and I did this without questioning for some years. I gave lectures, conducted

Tutor directed study and also supervised students' practice in both classroom and house setting. All this was based on the work of R. Steiner, K. Koenig and established Tradition in the context of Community living. (see Portfolio)

Having gained a more objective vantage point I can now see that in this settled phase the original sharp edge of research and pioneering had now been largely replaced by faithfully repeating and using what the early teachers had given. I did not question the content or teaching habits because they seemed to enable the students to become effective Curative Teachers within our setting. In my lecturing I passed on my own knowledge and experience, presenting the Anthroposophical theories related to CE without much, if any, critical evaluation. This meant, that I most probably did not enable students to achieve deep learning, but mainly the level of surface learning.(Biggs,1999)

The interesting thing is, that in spite of this most of them became excellent practitioners. I suggest at this point that this is due to the contribution, which the children they lived and worked with made to their learning. The children, their needs, their progress or lack of progress, were the better teachers and certainly encouraged deep learning! Looking back I also see that they were the actual assessors. Apart from

some essays judging the progress of the pupils a student would work with and how successfully they contributed to the quality of life within the Community made a large proportion of assessment. This relatively happy and contented middle phase of current practice came to a rather abrupt end in the middle nineties. The Course entered the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of development: the process from current practice to transformation, beginning with Stage I.

### Stage I Examination

In order to reflect the process correctly the sequence of steps in model (fig. 3, 305) needs to be adjusted. In fact the steps cannot be clearly separated in this case. The examination of the status quo of content and teaching in the Camphill Course in Curative Education began with a challenge.

### Challenge

Challenge came in the form of HMI Inspectors as well as changes in legislation and government requirements in regard to qualification and registration of teachers and carers.

This led to intensive questioning.

#### 2) Questioning

We had to ask ourselves questions:

Why are we not considered to be qualified for our work although we are often commended for what is seen as good practice?

Is our Course still relevant in changing circumstances?

Who can help us to be accredited as qualified in Curative Education?

This led to a partnership with Northern College in Aberdeen in order to establish a BA Awards Scheme in Curative Education to be accredited by the Open University in 1997.

Now a new challenge arose, this time from Northern College and the Open University in connection with content, teaching styles, assessment and especially regarding a reflection, which was deemed to be missing in our teaching. We had to face unthinkable questions: Are the students learning what is required now? Must we really respond to the new challenges? If yes, how? Are we not, or no longer, the 'best in our field'? There was great reluctance to ask these questions.

#### 3. Desire for Change

This was initially a rather forced response to outer demands and expectations. At this point the wish to hold onto precious core beliefs and core attitudes was determined by the fact that teaching, learning, professional and personal life was all closely interwoven with Community values and traditions. Some of us, however, joined the challenge at this point and developed the desire for change from inside, wanting to change our rather insular attitude, learn to build bridges to other professional bodies, theories and approaches. This phase of examination was a true challenge to our status quo affecting not only our teaching, but our Community as a 'path of learning'.

At this point my reflections led me to an unexpected insight: all aspects originated from either outside agencies or from within the tutor group not from the students who seemed happy with the status quo. What does this mean? I will leave this as an open question for now.

### III Fear

As I said before, our Course was, and still is, closely interlinked with Camphill Community life. This gives it a distinct character, very different from a usual academic course. This explains why any criticism, even if well meant and constructive, seemed to be an attack on our core Community beliefs, values and precious traditions, and caused fear not only in the teacher, but in the wider co-worker Community. The fear that the CRSS as an institution and the Camphill Community might not survive unless we responded to the call for change and renewal because very real and certainly overshadowed the next stage.

### II A Stage 2 – Struggle

All the elements of Fig. 3 interact here and cannot be clearly separated into a time sequence. They occurred in a dynamic, constant motion, tossing us about until we could find new, firm ground. It was like being thrown from the firm rock of tradition into a waterfall. As in B. L. words, “The sense of liberation...pg 304 It was at this point in the process of change (1999) that was given the task to be Camphill Course Leader to work together with the Course Director of Northern College on all aspects of the Course and share the responsibility for it.

### 2, 1, 2 Inner Conflict and Uncertainty

Uncertainty arose for me when the External Examiner and the Northern College Staff told us that our teaching in the module of child development and Waldorf Education was old fashioned, rigid, and non-reflective. As a result, many students were unable to use theory in a creative way and their written assignments lacked a dynamic, critical and comparative approach. With other words, our teaching did not seem to encourage ‘deep learning’ in the academic context.

In my role as Course Leader as well as lecturer in Child Development I joined the reaction of some colleagues: anger and defensiveness added to uncertainty. How could these people who had no knowledge of Anthroposophy or Waldorf Education criticize our teaching? This was the negative attitude of victims. The pain of struggle, of uncertainty, chaos, surrender only began to be constructive when we could embrace chaos and surrender and could enter the struggle, feeling the ‘sense of liberation’. (op cit) We could do this because our partners in Northern College gave us a new tool: Critical Reflection!

I began to see that what seemed to me to be a negative attitude was actually constructive support. I learned to do what is called ‘reposition’. (op cit, 299) I changed my point of view and saw a situation in a new light, with new attitude. I could surrender my old way of thinking, namely what and how we teach is best, build

on given, established practice and experience. This allowed me to transcend the feeling of being personally attacked in my Community values.

## 2.4 Chaos

Letting go of my defensive fear, I could accept the chaos which results from admitting that a problem exists and needs to be faced. This is the first step towards change. (quote)

This positive attitude to chaos, gained through the use of reflection, helped me to no longer feel like a helpless victim of an imposed struggle, but to become an active, creative participant. How did this reflection help me? I was able to analyze my feelings and that of my colleagues, by questioning our reactions I began to see that the perceived attack was so painful because we could not separate professional work, teaching and personal community life. 'Community as a path of life' had blurred the borderlines. Professional values had become an unspecified mix, rather than distinct elements in dynamic co-operation and mutual support.

Critical examination and reflection helped me to see that critical comments directed at some professional aspects such as teaching did not aim to destroy my personal and Community ideals, but rather to strengthen and support them. It was not helpful to identify my own personal values with the content of a theory I taught. It is only the approach to teaching and not the actual contents that were being questioned. I began to see the struggle as exciting, helpful and important and that without it we would not have reached the perpetual shift.

## Stage III – Perpetual Shift

The newly gained ability and practice of reflection enabled us to stand back, observe and evaluate our actions and we found joy in navigating the waterfalls of change with out fear of drowning. Again, the 3 steps of reconciling personal discovery and new practice can hardly be separated. By being able to accept and value the helping hand of our "outside" critical friends we were able to see the more 'old rock of status quo' more objectively. We discovered new attitudes, like life goals which allowed us to navigate the river of perpetual change and problem solving. "We also had a clearing and are seeing things in a new light." (305) This led to several personal discoveries.

### III 2 Personal Discoveries

I could see the importance to disentangle some aspects of teaching and learning from Community life in the sense that I had to learn to be much more conscious of the areas where Camphill Community values and ideals are identical with professional attitudes and approaches, and where they are not.

I realized that not everything of the 'old current practice' was wrong as I had thought for some time during the phase of struggle. For example, that the teaching style or old rock of lecturing, 'talk and chalk' which I had used predominately still has its place in our Course and my teaching. I do not entirely agree with the rather off-handed dismissal with which some authors ( ) treat the

‘sage on the stage’. It seems to me that the quality of a lecture depends entirely on the quality of the lecturer and his/her ability to present personal research and discovery in an inspiring way. After all, the Camphill Movement owes its success in no small part to the inspiring lectures given to co-workers in the early years.

Also, our student groups are small, usually between 5 and 20, and so there is little danger of losing contact with them while lecturing. I would argue that many of our subjects in Curative Education lecturing is justified in order to introduce the Anthroposophical background and philosophy which is mostly new ground for the students. As we live in Community with the students it is relatively easy to assess what their previous knowledge and experiences are in an informal way. We can then choose the right level of delivery.

All our students, in contrast to many students at Universities, come highly motivated and interested to engage in learning. It is not a lighthearted choice to enter the commitment of study based on daily practice in a Community setting. All this is in defense of the ‘lecture’.

I do agree, however, that for some types of learners, taking notes in lectures can be a distraction. (Briggs.....) Our old practice was to expect students to take copious notes for future reference, and this was a good idea only for some of the students. This is no longer so, and I now take care to prepare handouts with the essential points as well as additional information. I will turn to this in more detail in the chapter on ‘New Practice’.

Another of my personal discoveries seems to contradict all this. Reflecting on the comments made by the External Examiner on the inability of our students to critically reflect on Theory, I realized that my own critical reflection was missing in some of my teaching. Was I simply repeating learned facts or stimulating new questions? Was I unconsciously trying to transfer my own conviction and beliefs? Did I underestimate the student’s ability to formulate their own questions and discover their own conviction and point of view? Did my lectures have any element of research and discovery?

I seemed to have forgotten the motto I applied in practical life from my academic life:

Teaching is reminding others that they know just as well as we do. We are all learners, doers, teachers.

I saw that I sometimes fell into the convenient trap of treating students as if they were empty vessels that had to be filled by my wisdom. I was the doer on my own, the students were only passive listeners.

I would now like to share how these questions informed my teaching of ‘Human Biography’ and ‘Adolescents’ within the module of Child Development.

### III New Practice

I decided to stick to my old practice of giving a lecture on “Phases in Human Biography” mainly because I saw it as the best way to present this information in the time given of 1 hour. The new element was that I gave a handout before with,

what I hoped was, thought provoking texts and questions in order to set the tone and stimulate active participation in the students. (4)

I also prepared handouts for the lecture (see portfolio 5) to support the delivery and relieve the students from copying the diagram and taking notes.

Viewing the video (see portfolio 6) showed me that I had mainly achieved what I wanted, but also that my drawing was rather messy – a prepared overhead might have been better. On the other hand, the handout provided a good copy. The other negative was not having enough time to respond to questions properly. I was not too worried, however, because I knew that the following lessons on ‘Adolescence’ would be full of student activity.

So this Tutor-centered teaching experience where the students were rather passive was later followed by Tutor-guided sessions with intense student activity. (see portfolio)

My co-tutor and I prepared two sessions on ‘Adolescence’. We planned to stimulate student’s involvement with guiding questions to be explored in small groups of 4-6. The results were collected, presented and followed by a general plenum conversation. (see portfolio) Both times the level of activity was high and the resulting presentation proved this motto right: Teaching is reminding other that they know just as well as we do.

We only gave some teaching input in response to questions which arose. Some of the questions and some of the presentations taught us tutors new ways of understanding adolescence, so our experience confirmed that ‘we are all learners, doers and teachers’.

The tentative experience of ‘new practice’ and my personal discoveries I described earlier are the first steps to the goal of transformation.

### III Transformation

Transformation of what? How much has been achieved, how much is still in process? The questioning seems to begin again! Part of understanding what has been transformed is to go back to my question in the passage on page....”Why were the students happy when so much of our teaching seemed to be wrong”? As far as I can see the answer relates to the fact that the teaching in the Course is practice-based. Teaching and learning takes place in the classroom and in daily life simultaneously. The teachers are not only the lecturers, but also the children and the senior co-workers who accompany, guide and supervise the students on a daily basis as they share life and work.

The delivered content was directly related to Camphill practice, the relevance could be directly experienced and tested. The response of the children, positive or negative, provided the element of assessment and reflection needed for the professional development of the students. The practice and teaching provided ample opportunity for reflection and critical questioning and I realize that deep learning took place in practice. It is a real eye-opener for me to see how this seemed to happen without anyone really being conscious of it.

Because this unconscious reflective learning in practice was so successful, no one noticed that the academic side of our teaching was lacking many essential ingredients. The content, mainly based on Rudolf Steiner's work, was relevant, but delivered in a non-critical, non-reflective way. There was little, if any, attempt to create dialogue and/or comparisons with other professional approaches. On the practical level the teaching was effective, but not on the cognitive level.

Through learning to reflect on teaching and learning I feel justified to say that there was change and transformation, but in a subtle way.

The basic content has remained the same and I realize now that it has never really been questioned. The teaching styles have been improved and adjusted but not principally changed. We still employ lecturing, small group work, workshops, and projects as before. Assessment has undergone the most fundamental changes, but this will be the subject of another essay.

So what has changed? There is objective proof of definite change in the last External Examiners report, which states that the quality of assignments has now reached a high standard. I suggest that the transformation lies in our changed attitude. By introducing the element of reflection into my own study and preparation, I am better able to stimulate inquiry, dialogue, a sense of exploration in the academic and cognitive work of the students.

I can see how this new awareness and widening of mental horizons has re-introduced excitement and enthusiasm into study and learning in both teachers and students. An example I can bring is of a situation where students at the end of the Diploma Stage met a senior Education Psychologist to discuss the sensitive issue of integration. Both parties were delighted with this event, the students because they felt that they could have a true professional dialogue, presenting Curative Education in a non-dogmatic, but convincing manner. The Education Psychologist because he experienced willingness to listen and evaluate and he gained deeper insight into Curative Education through that dialogue.

## Conclusion

The process of writing this paper, reflecting on and evaluating the steps of transformation of the old Curative Seminar to the present BACE and my own personal professional development within that process has been greatly helped by the model I adopted. I followed the process from the status quo of established practice through examination into struggle. My new awareness of critical reflection in contrast with teaching styles has enabled me to understand the fear and struggle we went through in that middle phase and to put some painful experiences into perspective of the whole process in the light of the positive achievements of transformation in the present BACE.

Saying that I am immediately aware that this transformation cannot be the end point, but only the beginning of a new cycle. New practice, achieved transformation will soon stagnate and become old practice unless the process will

be entered anew. We as an institution and I as an individual must never stop being problem solvers.

I am also aware that this last step coincides with the time of review and revalidating of the Program with the University of Aberdeen. I recognize in the quality of our partnership and discussions with the University of Aberdeen that having gone through the complete cycle we have gained a new conviction, professional attitude and strength to present our case. We have let go of old practice and securities and are ready to invite and deal with the unexpected and new. My hope is that our partners at the University, as well as representatives of the Scottish Executive will have the same truly reflective and open attitude to lean and work with us for the sake of the pupils whose dignity and quality of life we all want to uphold and improve. I hope that the motto I chose will extend to and include all partners in this work; teachers, students, pupils, authorities from the government, and academic practitioners.

The title of the pre-BACE course – Community as a Path of Learning – has been dropped. It might be worthwhile to re-examine it and possibly invest it with new meaning in the context of this wider community of Teachers, Learners and Doers.