

The Camphill Movement

The Vision of Karl König

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König's "learning communities" dissolved the boundaries between disciplines and honored spiritual well-being, creativity, and ecological sensitivity.

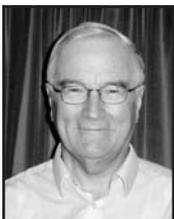
*To serve and not to rule; to help and not to force;
to love and not to harm, will be our task.*

(Karl König 1960, 14)

It was Christmas 1938. A man was sitting alone in front of a gas fire in a small room in a backstreet London lodging house. The only illumination in the room came from the flickering flame of a candle on a table. Because of his Jewish background, he had recently fled the Nazis and was all alone. Exiled from his native soil, separated from his wife and children, unable to pursue his profession as a doctor and witnessing the desecration of his beloved Central European cultural heritage, he must have been close to despair.

Nevertheless, there grew in him the feeling that he must do something positive. Perhaps by creating some kind of community that selflessly served the interests and needs of the wider society, he could make a modest contribution. That modest contribution now comprises over 100 such communities in 20 different countries. The man sitting in front of the gas fire was Dr Karl König — a distinguished Austrian pediatrician — who, in 1940, established in Scotland the first Camphill Community which focused on children with special needs.

König developed a vision of a "learning community" where the traditional boundaries between professional disciplines would be dissolved; where the spiritual well-being of those living in the community would be nurtured and respected; where creativity, spontaneity and originality would be encouraged; and, where ecological sensitivity and responsibility would be exercised. He was looking at one possible way to generate social renewal at a time of social disintegration and to send a message of hope at a time of universal despair. Having experienced some of the horrors of a hate-fueled Nazi regime, König was de-



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terminated to create a community in which compassion, tolerance and, above all, love were present, as it is love that binds a community together (Costello 2002).

It is a vision which has a strong contemporary resonance, for the holistic model — which embraces mind, body and spirit — is one that is attracting the attention of those working in mainstream social care, medical, nursing, and psychological professions in the UK (Anderson 2003; Moss and Petrie 2002; Orchard 2001; Swinton 2001). It is also relevant at a time when the dominant values of contemporary Western culture can be characterised as anti-spiritual, anti-aesthetic, and anti-ecological (Gallegos 2001).

Everyone is Educable

In a speech given in Edinburgh and reported in *The Scotsman* on the 29th of November 1944, König indicated that in each human being there lies a hidden and eternal soul that the teacher has to reach. In that speech he made it clear that it was wrong to speak about any child being “ineducable.” In this, he was ahead of his time; it was not until the enactment of the 1970 Education Act in England and Wales that the longstanding practice of classifying some children as “ineducable” ended. The Act was a belated recognition by Parliament that this small minority of children had for too long been denied access to a basic education.

König was ahead of his time in other respects as well. He totally rejected the medical model of disability, which he saw as incompatible with an holistic approach to the child with special needs. In an address delivered on May 27, 1956 at the official opening of Botton Village Community, König expressed his strong opposition to psychometry and the categorization of children according to measured intelligence, which he saw not only as damaging the entire field of education but also destroying childhood.

It was König’s intention that the Camphill Movement should be comprised of integrated communities in which those with special needs and co-workers lived together and shared their lives in such a way as to foster mutual help and understanding. Camphill life and work were to be grounded in the philosophy developed by Rudolf Steiner known as anthroposophy. Steiner defined anthroposophy as a path of knowledge leading the spirit in Man to the spirit in the Universe. The insights of anthroposophy,

he argued, can help lead the modern scientific consciousness towards the rediscovery of the spiritual sources of the material world. As an inner path of self-development, anthroposophy is also practical rather than mystical, emphasizing study, concentration, meditation, the schooling of perception, and an awakening to fully conscious thinking.

Camphill Communities

The Camphill Movement seeks to create communities in which vulnerable children and adults, many with complex needs, can live, learn, and work with others in healthy social relationships. The co-workers do not undertake this work as a job in the usual sense of the word, but as a way of life. So a community of co-workers was established who shared all the work that had to be done — teaching, caring, household tasks, gardening, and property maintenance.

The Camphill community concept has few parallels anywhere, except possibly for the Israeli kibbutz, the Communist commune, and some Anabaptist sects in North America (e.g., Hutterite; Amish; Moravian Brethren). In the Camphill Communities, there is no hierarchical structure; all are treated as equals. They also are “closed” communities in the sense that only those who accept its values and goals can be fully accepted as members (Jackson 1999).

It is worth noting that König’s wife, Mathilde Maasberg, came from a Moravian Brethren family and that the early character of Camphill community life had undoubtedly been influenced by that fact. Two social reformers who were identified by König as being significant in shaping his own personal philosophy were Johann Amos Comenius (1592-1670) and Count Nicolaus Zinzendorf (1700-1760), both key figures in the Moravian Brethren.

Relevance

The relevance of the Camphill community concept has become increasingly apparent in recent years. Over the course of the last two decades there has been in the UK a succession of major crises in childcare, linked with child abuse, that has resulted in a series of inquiries and reports indicating profound concern (Wagner 1988; Warner, 1992; Skinner 1992; Waterhouse 2000). One especial concern has been the quality and appropriateness of the training

for those working in the childcare sector. The Warner Report (1992) called for urgent consideration of the training of social pedagogues/social educators, as found in Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands, (Petrie, Boddy, and Cameron 2002). Social pedagogy is not narrowly concerned with just a child's schooling but relates to the whole child: body, mind, feelings, spirit, creativity and, crucially, the relationship of the individual to others (Hart and Monteux 2004). The goal is for children, including those with special needs, to live in more normal relationships with others, including staff members (Petrie, Boddy, and Cameron 2002). Childcare workers are seen less as professionals and more as friends.

In the UK, the first step towards introducing a professional training based on a social pedagogic model occurred in Scotland. In March 2003 the Scottish Social Services Council recognized the B.A. in Curative Education Programme as an appropriate child care qualification. Curative education — or holistic special education — integrates care, education, therapeutic and medical activities, the use of crafts, and creative arts. All are used to help and support children and adults with complex needs (Jackson 2006). The Scottish Programme developed as a partnership between Camphill Rudolf Steiner School in Aberdeen (a residential special school) and the University of Aberdeen.

Getting Trained

The partnership between the special needs school and university is mutually beneficial because it ensures that the Programme is both academically rigorous and is constantly informed by professional practice. The students "live the course" in a residential care community. Throughout the four years, they combine learning in the classroom sessions with day-to-day community living and practice. Living and working in the community provides the opportunity for close, continuous supervision of work at all levels and facilitates the concurrent acquisition of theoretical insights, practical skills, and personal growth (Hart and Monteux 2006).

There are two particular features of Camphill life which are reflected in the Programme which merit closer attention: (1) rhythmicity and (2) spiritual well-being.

Rhythmicity. The Programme draws attention to the importance of the rhythmic. Life comprises a wide range of natural rhythms, from the regularity of the heartbeat to the change from day to night. As Maier (1992) observes, rhythmicity is an essential ingredient in human communication and development. In attempting to communicate effectively with a child, the caregiver must fall into step with the child so that they dance to the same tune. The child and the caregiver then search for ways to establish and maintain that joint rhythm. As they become aware of the rhythms and pace their interactions, caregivers develop their capacity to speak with, rather than to, a child. Caregivers also learn to attend to the pulse and rhythms of the larger groups with which they work. I would suggest, in addition, that only by living one's work — being part of the whole community — can one become sensitised and respond appropriately to these rhythms.

Spiritual Well-Being. It is unusual for a social care institution in the UK to include the goal of spiritual well being, but I consider this to be a true goal in the Camphill schools. In my view, spiritual well-being is an essential aspect of everyday life which may have everything or nothing to do with religious belief and observance. It can be defined as a sense of good health about oneself as a human being and as a unique individual. It occurs when people are fulfilling their potential as individuals and as human beings; are aware of their own dignity and value; enjoy themselves and have a sense of direction; can sense this quality in others and consequently respect and relate positively to them; and feel an underlying connection with the world around them (Crompton and Jackson 2004). Swinton (2001) has argued that spiritual care and support do not result from the acquisition and application of a series of techniques and skills; they result from sharing together and learning together.

Conclusion

Ramon Gallegos (2001) has observed that a true holistic training programme considers education an art more than a technology; it is a creative process more than a mechanical process. The central element in the training of the holistic educator is the encouragement of creative, spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic qualities — not just scientific and technical

pursuits. In this sense, the holistic model is out of tune with the present instrumental focus of UK schools. Today's schools would have appealed to Thomas Gradgrind, the schoolmaster described by Charles Dickens in his novel *Hard Times*. Fact not Fancy was his watchword. There was no place in his curriculum for imagination, creativity and spontaneity — let alone the love that inspired König's vision.

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