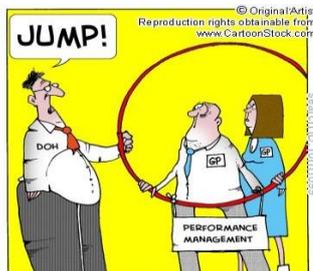


Presentation by Maria Lyons at the Inclusive New Lanark Conference May 2012: Research as a Signpost to the Heart: The Difference Camphill Can Make

My research was inspired by my experiences at university. I wanted to find out why our study was so regulated, why our lectures and seminars were so narrow and fixed, why we were constantly being advised (and often compelled) to go on training courses where we would be instructed by experts on how to do pretty much everything: how to listen, how to write, how to take notes, how to communicate, how to network, how not to offend each other, how to be what they called an 'effective' learner. Essentially we were being trained to become 'effective' people.

It became clear to me quite early on that the reason we were being bombarded with all of these extracurricular courses and sessions was because we were not trusted to learn these things for ourselves. Not only were we students not trusted to muddle through and figure things out as we went along, but our tutors were not trusted to know what to teach us, and how to teach us. So they also had to be told, and in great detail, and constantly checked along the way to ensure they were doing things correctly, and that we were learning the right things. Every course had to fit a template, with pre-determined learning outcomes, against which their teaching and our learning could be measured. I came to see my education, as I'm sure many of the teaching profession, and other professionals, have come to see their jobs. Like this:



My education wasn't about learning at all, it was about *performance*. I was being taught how to act as though I had learned something.

Trust is a fascinating thing. Today we often hear that there is a crisis of trust. Apparently, the public, we, you and I, no longer trust each other, or public servants such as doctors, dentists, politicians, teachers. But how can this be? We still go to the doctor, we still send our children to school, we still listen to the advice of our friends and carers? If we didn't trust each other, day-to-day life would be simply impossible. Without trust, we wouldn't get out of bed in the morning, we'd be too frightened of all the awful things that could happen to us throughout the day! Basic things, like walking down the street, would become very difficult, because we wouldn't know if people would step out of our way, they might bang into us, knock us over. Or maybe the shopkeeper won't give me my change back, or maybe the bus driver won't stop at my stop, or perhaps my best friend won't meet me for coffee as she promised she would.

Rudolf Steiner said that we should try to strengthen our trust, the “instinctive confidence” that we have in each other in these small, everyday situations should be present also in bigger, more important events and relationships:

Trust must reign in interpersonal relationships. In this trust – what a golden word – in the education for this trust, in this belief in the single human being, in the education for this belief in the single human being, lies the impulse, the only impulse for the social life of the future.

Steiner believed that it is only this trust that “will lead the single human being into the community.”

It is perhaps hard to imagine that we would have to establish laws and procedures for stepping out of each other’s way on the pavement because we no longer trusted each other to do that. But this is the reality of where we are heading. It is always the lowest common denominator that determines the rule, in other words, the potential for anti-social or irresponsible behavior by one person becomes the standard by which we are all judged. Although we don’t really know what this trust thing is all about, if we do indeed lack this fundamental human quality or if something else is wrong with our society, the tendency has been to move towards greater and greater efforts to *guarantee* – to make sure – that we will all act in a certain way.

The philosopher O’Nora O’Neill has spoken a great deal about trust, and she observed that in our efforts to *guarantee* correct and trustworthy behaviour we are “imposing ever more stringent forms of control.” That is to say, whatever our work is, be it in a school, in a bakery, in a shop, on a farm, it is believed that we can and will only do our work *well* if we are under heavy and constant supervision.

In my department at university there was once a policy handed around for *carrying books*. It spelled out the procedures and safety measures for individuals working alone in that most dangerous of places, the library. At the bottom of this long list of instructions for how to behave in the library was the following message: “REMEMBER – COMMON SENSE PREVAILS!”

This piece of paper told me two things. Firstly, it told me how to carry books and walk up and down stairs, which I had been doing without accident or incident my whole life. It also, more seriously, told me that the university feared that if I hurt myself, while carrying books or climbing the stairs, that I would not take responsibility for my own carelessness, that I might blame them. It’s not my fault philosophy books are so heavy; someone else should suffer the consequences too.

This is just a small example, but this is how we do everything on a wider scale in our society today. Someone else, it could be my employer, an institution, perhaps an official, is responsible for what happens to me. We’ve all heard on the radio or read in the newspaper, similar complaints: ‘My child cannot read, it’s the government fault’, ‘My health is bad, it’s the governments fault’, ‘Young people are behaving badly in the street, the government should *do* something...’ Hand in hand with this tendency for blaming others – usually politicians – for our difficulties is this profound, remarkable belief that they

can do something about them. That they have the power to fix our problems has become a matter of blind faith. Ensuring our safety, our health, our learning, even our happiness, is someone else's task, as if there existed a suitable national policy to deal with every single human problem or type of interaction.

So, paradoxically, the flipside of the absence of trust in each other is that it evolves into a disengagement from our own lives, a surrendering – a giving up – of personal responsibility. We let someone else make our decisions for us, determine how we are going to behave in any given situation. Sometimes this happens consciously, but more often than not it happens automatically, without our really thinking about it.

The Brazilian educator Paulo Freire said that “to alienate men from their own decision-making is to turn them into objects.” Surrendering responsibility – looking for answers outside of ourselves, perhaps in politics, or in management systems, or in standard procedures – means that we objectify ourselves and others. We lose ourselves, and we lose each other. We are less and less human beings, of head, heart and hands, of body, soul and spirit, and more and more simply problems to be resolved by the latest policy or technology.

Karl Konig, the founding father of Camphill, recognized that so long as we allow ourselves to be treated as objects, and treat each other as objects, we are somehow less than human, incomplete. He believed that it was only through forming meaningful relationships that we can develop our humanity in its wholeness. “Simply the meeting, I to I, of two persons creates that curative education which counters, in a healing way, the threat to our inner humanity.”

I believe this threat to our inner humanity is as real now as it was in Konig's time, it merely takes on new and ever more subtle forms. There are two ways we can resist the powerful forces that, in treating everyone as objects, squeeze out individuality and personality. The first way is to take responsibility for ourselves, our own lives and decisions, and the second is to form meaningful, trusting, relationships.

At university, I couldn't understand why my fellow students, my lecturers, the professors, were allowing these things to happen. Why they were allowing themselves to be controlled and dictated to by administrators and external authorities, why were they allowing learning and teaching to be corrupted and even destroyed by all of these pressures for assessment, for measurement, for marketable skills and paper trails. Why, I would ask myself in mounting frustration, were they not saying NO? And then, in my reading, I came across an answer. They were vulnerable to all of these pressures and self-interested temptations because of the absence of anything that could be called a genuine academic *community*. A mere collection of specialists, there was nothing they would go to the stake for. They were left defenseless primarily by their isolation from each other.

I realised then that resistance doesn't lie in calling for reforms or new policies or new governments. If members of my department and university made a conscious effort to form a community, to identify shared purposes and, most

importantly, *share responsibility for realising those purposes*, this would be an act of resistance far more powerful than any intellectual critique or political protest.

Having grown up in Camphill and gone away to study something completely different, I suddenly came to a new understanding of what Camphill was all about. The scholar and writer Dan McKanan described the Camphill Movement as being founded on the notion of “Transformative Presence: the idea that society changes when small groups of people begin living in a new way.” This characterisation captures something essential about Camphill, I felt. But, as Dan McKanan noted, in order to be a transformative presence in the world, you have to *touch it*, you have to BE PRESENT in it.



Which brings me, finally, to the matter of research. Doing research ourselves, and being open to research done by others, is engaging with and participating in the wider world, with our heads, if you like. Many people are talking today about the need to justify the Camphill approach, to make it more transparent and understandable to the world, to assess its impact, and so on. Like the cartoon man says, its not enough anymore that many people think we do a jolly good job. We need to prove that we do.

While this is really important, I think the most vital part of this research effort is not the showing that Camphill’s particular methods of care or community way of life are legitimate and effective, but rather that they are *possible*, that they exist. In other words, in showing the world what we do and why we do it, through research and publicity, we are getting the message across to many more people that it *is* possible to take responsibility for yourself, it is possible to base your life and work on respectful relationships with other people, it is possible to trust each other and still survive, it is possible to cooperate and still be successful. It’s to say, ‘Look at us, over here, we are doing it’, or at least, we are trying our very best to. We’re doing things differently. It’s not an idea, it’s a reality.

As I understand it, the founders of Camphill were inspired to meet social needs, not needs confined to a specific sphere of social life or a particular profession, but any needs as they change and develop over time. I think that in presenting a clear and un-ignorable example that individuals can in fact decide to ‘begin living in a new way’, not necessarily *this way*, or *our way*, but one’s own way, Camphill would be doing the world a service that reaches far beyond what we are already accomplishing in our immediate communities.

Quotes taken from: Rudolf Steiner, *Threefolding: A Social Alternative*; Onora O’Neill, *The Philosophy of Trust*; Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; Carlo Pietzner, *Aspects of Curative*

Education; Marjorie Reeves, The Crisis in Higher Education; Dan McKanan, Touching the World: Christian Communities Transforming Society.