

An Introduction to Camphill Communities and the BA in Curative Education

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Introduction

Curative Education is a multi-disciplinary, professional approach concerned with the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of children and adults with special/complex needs. It encompasses care, education, craft and artistic activities and a medical, therapeutic element.

The BA in Curative Education (BACE) is offered by Camphill Rudolf Steiner Schools in collaboration with Aberdeen University. The BACE and its associated awards (Certificate and Diploma) have been developed as professional qualifications for curative educators, and are now recognised by the Scottish Social Services Council as registrable qualifications for residential care staff. The programme is delivered in the context of the vibrant, multi-national culture of the Camphill Rudolf Steiner Schools and associated Camphill Communities.

The programme is unique in Scotland in being a recognized professional qualification specifically designed to focus on the training of individuals to work holistically with children and adults with complex needs.

The development of Curative Education

Curative Education has been inspired by the work of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925), the Austrian scientist, philosopher and educator who founded the worldwide Anthroposophical Movement. His work led to a holistic understanding of each human being as a unique and essentially spiritual individual.

Curative Education began in Germany in 1921. It is now practised worldwide in schools and the Camphill Communities, whose ethos is founded on the anthroposophical understanding of the human being.

'Only the help from man to man - the encounter of Ego with Ego - the becoming aware of the other man's individuality without inquiring into his creed, world conception or political affiliations, but simply the meeting, eye to eye, of two persons creates the curative education which counters, in a healing way, the threat to our innermost humanity.' (König, 1965; cited in Lindenberg, 1990, pp. 25-26)

The founder of the Camphill Movement, Dr. Karl König, an Austrian Jewish refugee and paediatrician, came to Britain with a small group of friends and students in 1938. Their aim was to create inclusive communities, where each person, according to their individual ability, contributes to the well-being of the whole.

In 1940, they established the first Camphill Community, the Camphill Rudolf Steiner Schools (CRSS) in Aberdeen, a residential school for children and young people with complex needs. From these early beginnings, the Camphill Movement expanded and now has some 200 communities worldwide for children, young people and adults with special needs. There are over 40 communities in Britain, including eleven in Scotland.

The Camphill Communities in Scotland.

In Scotland, provision spans almost the entire age range. There are two residential schools, offering education, care and therapy to pupils with complex needs from pre-school age to 19 years. Four residential centres provide further education and training in practical life-skills to young adults. There are also four communities for adults with special needs, and one for older people.

The commitment to reach the undamaged individual behind the cloak of complex special needs is fundamental to Curative Education and central to the ethos of the Camphill movement. Life and work are based on the conviction that each individual's spiritual essence is not affected by illness, disability or even death. Camphill Communities aim to create an environment that encourages staff and residents who share the life there to develop to their full intellectual, emotional, practical and spiritual potential, thus facilitating true inclusion of all members. Curative Education is practised by offering a wide variety of activities within the framework of such a life-sharing community.

Depending on the particular population of the community, activities will have an emphasis on education or work; but all communities have in common a rich social, cultural and spiritual life. Daily living involves creative activities, active involvement in drama and musical events and the celebration of Christian and other festivals.

Co-workers (the preferred term for all those involved in care, education, work, medical/therapeutic activities and craft activities, and which, in an adult community, often includes residents) and pupils/residents share all aspects of life and mutually support each other in finding possibilities in making a meaningful contribution.

Residents and co-workers live and work in a community whose ethos is based on Christian ideals. The community strives to maintain a healthy balance between sustaining significant continuity in its membership while encouraging energizing change. Continuity is provided by co-workers who continue to live and work in the community for many years, some even after retirement. Regeneration is energized by the ongoing cycle of new young co-workers joining the community for short periods of anything from a few months to a year. Long-term co-workers also play a key role in the regeneration, through their involvement in local, national and international working groups, practice initiatives, research and conferences.

The four main areas of the integrated, holistic approach of Curative Education

Education in the widest sense

In schools, education is practised mainly in the classroom, where the children's social, cognitive and sensory capacities are fostered, with a strong emphasis on creative, artistic and therapeutic approaches addressing their emotional and spiritual needs. The curriculum content and delivery is based on the Waldorf approach, taking account of National Guidelines for the Curriculum. The curriculum for 'Waldorf', or 'Steiner' schools was developed by Rudolf Steiner when he was asked by the owner of the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Factory in Stuttgart to establish a school for the children of his workers.

'This curriculum is based on a pedagogical philosophy that places emphasis on the whole development of the child, including a child's spiritual, physical and moral well-being as well as academic progress. There is a strong emphasis on social abilities and the development of pre-numeracy and literacy skills. Formal learning begins later, and learning is done in a very creative and artistic environment.'
(Steiner Waldorf School Fellowships Website)

This holistic approach to learning and personal development is also central to home life, with a continuing emphasis on practical, social and artistic skills.

In adult communities, the focus is on continuous learning and development, fostering general knowledge, stimulating interest in local and world affairs and the ongoing development of individual interests.

Crafts and work

The involvement in crafts and meaningful work provides the means to stimulate neurological and cognitive processes and develop motor skills. It also plays an important role in promoting motivation and fostering a sense of beauty, self-confidence and joy of achievement in producing items that are both beautiful and of practical use. Craft activities, such as weaving, candle-making, woodwork, felt-making or basketry, make an important contribution to the lives of individuals with complex needs, either as part of the school curriculum or as ongoing daily activities for adults. This is complemented and reinforced by involvement in meaningful work, such as farming, gardening, laundry, and household tasks or in Camphill's bakeries, cafés or shops.

A therapeutic approach

This has two different aspects. One addresses specific, individual therapeutic or medical needs of children and/or adults. Normally this is guided by a General Practitioner using conventional as well as anthroposophical and other complementary remedies and therapies, which aim to harmonise constitutional and developmental imbalances expressed in the individual's physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural life. The other is a more general, but no less essential quality: the creation and maintenance of a harmonious, balanced and supportive framework for all activities, to facilitate the well-being of all who live in the Community.

This is expressed in a caring and therapeutic attitude towards all details of everyday life, paying attention to the dignity of each individual, the beauty and quality of the environment: the buildings, furnishings and decoration; the gardens and farmland; the quality of clothes and personal belongings; and healthy, wholesome food.

Care

This is based in home life, where a safe and aesthetic environment is fostered to support social and emotional development. Individuals can be encouraged to develop the ability to make their own choices and decisions within the framework of mutual responsibility and recognition of the needs, rights and wishes of others.

Daily tasks in house and garden are shared, each individual contributing according to their particular ability, thus nurturing a sense of belonging and community. The therapeutic quality of life is supported by a healthy rhythm of activity and rest, social and individual activities and awareness of individual dietary needs, as well as careful attention to order and beauty of the surrounding.

Seasonal celebrations, parties and leisure activities are particularly important ingredients, providing fun, adventure and a variety of opportunities for social interaction.

The professional training of the Curative Educator

In 1949, recognising the need for, and importance of, personal and professional development, Karl König developed a comprehensive training programme for Curative Education. This was known as the 'Camphill Seminar in Curative Education', and for several decades was the main source of learning and development for Camphill co-workers worldwide.

The professional training of the Curative Educator addresses the multi-disciplinary and holistic character of Curative Education, with Curative Educators potentially involved in each of the four areas. The training gives students a basic knowledge and experience of all areas while also allowing them to develop a deeper knowledge and professional competence in one particular area. The principle of life-sharing in Camphill Communities promotes the integration of these areas of professional activity on the basis of ongoing active collaboration.

A long-standing commitment to staff training and professional development

The community that is central to the development and the day-to-day running of the BA in Curative Education is the Camphill Rudolf Steiner Schools (CRSS). CRSS is a thriving learning organization, investing in its future sustainability through staff development. Considering the learning needs of each individual staff member within the context of the balance of the wider training needs of the whole community has ensured that CRSS has maximized the use of a breadth of training and qualification opportunities for its co-workers. This co-ordinated commitment to staff development is possibly unparalleled in residential care settings in Scotland.

In addition to the BACE, the overall training plan includes training and qualifications in counselling, play therapy, social work, teaching in higher education settings, video work, art therapy, use of crafts, and specific anthroposophical training, for example courses in youth guidance, biodynamic farming and the Camphill seminar for house co-coordinators. Delivered within such a community context, the impact of any training undertaken by a co-worker has considerable additional benefit for other co-workers.

There has also been a significant investment in the development of a part-time, day-release foundation course for all new co-workers. This provides a basic introduction to requirements of social care staff in Scotland, Anthroposophy, fundamental aspects of the Camphill ethos, and to Curative Education. The majority of co-workers do this course before embarking on the BACE.

Inevitably such a community culture does not suit all, but the many who choose to stay, live and work in a community in which almost everyone is engaged in ongoing, planned learning and development. CRSS now employs a Training and Support Co-ordinator whose task is to develop a training plan for each co-worker within the over all plan of the organization. Co-worker study time and personal support are programmed in to the development plan of the community.

Within this culture of training and co-worker development, the priority is always to protect and promote the well-being of the pupils and to maintain the delicate balance between the study and training needs of co-workers and the quality of the lives of the residents.

The Development of the BA in Curative Education

Over the past eight years, building on the original training programme offered by the Camphill Seminar, the BACE has developed and extended the training for the Curative Educator. This has resulted in parity with other nationally recognised residential care qualifications. The BACE is designed not only to equip the student to undertake the demanding work of the Curative Educator but to undertake the work of residential care in any care context, not only in a Camphill Community.

The BACE is a practice-based training, building on the advantages of communities of practice and situated learning (Wenger, 1998). For many of our students this integration of teaching and practice is a particularly attractive feature of the programme.

Certain elements of the BACE are particular to Curative Education while much of the core content and the assessment of practice experience are common to other training for residential care. As with social work training, students undertake stipulated periods of assessed practice. Students have allocated practice tutors who support their learning and assess practice.

In its constituent courses, there is particular emphasis on the unique multidisciplinary nature of Curative Education. It draws on a theoretical base informed by anthroposophy and more commonly known theoretical understandings and approaches.

The student group

The student group is an international one and the national and cultural diversity brings both unique richness and challenge to the programme. While academic ability is explicitly considered, entry requirements are flexible and evidence of experiential learning is valued. In line with the requirements of Aberdeen University, evidence of competence in the English language is a prerequisite.

Camphill normally sponsors students during their studies. Therefore it is critical that the selection process includes a reference from the relevant Community in support of the student's suitability to work with individuals with complex needs within a residential community setting.

At present most students live and work in a Camphill setting or a village community with adults. Students are normally volunteer co-workers within the communities, with some paid employees now also joining the programme. The students undertake the programme alongside a demanding work schedule within the community, and study time has to be carefully balanced with their work commitments.

Some aspects of the programme content: the four areas of Curative Education

The programme includes core knowledge components of social work training, including human growth and development, the legal and social policy frameworks for social care practice, as well as current theories of and approaches to assessment, education, special needs provision and therapeutic intervention. Theories, principles and approaches based on the work of Rudolf Steiner are also a core component of the BACE. Anthroposophy is a holistic approach to and view of the world, taking into account aspects of reality that transcend a purely materialistic experience and understanding.

In Stage 1, all students undertake a practice placement in a care setting.

In Stage 2, students choose an elective reflecting the four areas of Curative Education: Care, Education, Therapeutic Activities, and Crafts.

Rudolf Steiner explored the use of research methods as practiced in natural science for research into spiritual phenomena. The use of an independent study in the final stage provides experience of research and encourages the development of evidence-based practice and supports the development of a deepening of knowledge in a particular area of Curative Education.

The role of and collaboration with the medical doctor is a significant feature of Curative Education. This is reflected in the programme through including subjects such as anatomy, physiology, nutrition and healthy living. The creative arts also play a significant role in Curative Education and this is reflected throughout the programme in both content and delivery. Students undertake basic training in a range of artistic activities such as painting, drama, movement, and music. The arts are also widely used as a teaching medium and practice ground for self-development and reflection.

All teaching and learning is based on the holistic understanding of the human being and the conviction that each individual's spiritual uniqueness is whole and unimpaired and deserves to be valued and respected.

Conclusion

This is a time of energy and opportunity in the field of social care in Scotland and through the work of the Camphill Communities and the BACE Programme, Anthroposophical Curative Education is continually developing. There is a growing openness to explore and value the contribution of Curative Education in the provision of residential care. Camphill Communities, partly through the BACE degree programme for co-workers, are also exploring and benefiting from the knowledge and practice developed in other care arenas. Care provision for individuals with complex needs can surely only benefit as a result.

References

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