

Holistic Special Education: Camphill Principles and Practice

Robin Jackson, editor.
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Living in the pressurised, information-overloaded and, often, fearful times that typify the beginning of the 21st century, it can be hard to step back and reconnect with that which we know to be authentic, meaningful and life-promoting. This book offers the reader just that opportunity. Holistic Special Education: Camphill Principles and Practice is a story of a vision transcending the destruction and displacement of the Nazi era, and then bringing a holistic philosophical and spiritual approach to the care of children with special needs in the North East of Scotland. This approach is manifest at the Camphill school/ community, which practises curative education developed from the philosophy of the anthroposophical work of Rudolph Steiner.

The book offers the reader an opportunity to gain an understanding of the historical context and evolution of the philosophy central to the healing work undertaken in the community. The book also gives the reader a practical understanding of the therapies utilised in both the educational and group living environment, through a series of chapters written by those involved in the life of the community. The individual therapists write with enthusiasm and in an accessible manner, clearly linking their practice to a holistic awareness of child development, latent potential for growth and spiritual needs.

Rather than conduct a chapter by chapter analysis, I will share with you some of the key words and phrases that encapsulate the ethos of Camphill: colourful and individual, fresh flowers, attention to detail, a trusting relationship, rich rhythmic cultural life, the realm of the spiritual, a respectful relationship with the environment, a sense of belonging and a community of learning. All of these should resonate with workers committed to child-centred practice.

The book aims to inform, educate and promote the philosophy that underpins the life of the community and it does so in an accessible and balanced manner that gives prominence to the lived experience of those connected with the community. This is achieved by way of case studies and reflective accounts from students, co-workers and parents. Perceptions of Camphill by those looking in have often been tainted by a lack of understanding, as have the views from within the community regarding the outside world. This book honestly acknowledges the tensions surrounding the community’s response to the ever-more regulated and inspected social care environment.

In uncertain times, filled with constant change this book offers the reader an insight into other possible worlds in the sphere of residential child care. Whilst not everyone will embrace the full spectrum of the Camphill philosophy, there is much in this book to uplift one’s heart.

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