Research and the Camphill Movement: An overview of developments in the English-speaking world

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No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main.

John Donne, *Meditations XVII*

Introductory thoughts

Research is one of those words that is often used but not always well-defined. Within the social and educational movements inspired by anthroposophy the call for "more research" is increasingly loud and frequent. But what is meant by this? We could say that anthroposophy is itself research; a manner of *seeking out* or *searching closely* for the truths about man and nature. Yet throughout its history there have been complicated – perhaps uneasy – attitudes within the movement towards the concepts, practices and value of research. Perhaps this is mostly explained by the fact that in the 20th century the Western world's understanding of research has been shaped by the mechanistic and materialistic epistemologies of earlier centuries. These have resulted in the strict exclusion of all but measurable knowledge from the field of scientific enquiry, providing the benchmark for what is deemed objectively meaningful and thus socially useful learning. With its focus on qualities rather than quantities as the substance of knowledge, the anthroposophical interpretation of what it means to learn has long been the antithesis of the forms of learning promoted in established educational and research institutions.

This context, however, is changing. The new millennium is seeing the effects of a loosening of the classical grip on the concept of knowledge, a re-kindled interest in the qualities of existence, and a growing appreciation for the importance of considering the whole spectrum of human experience in any efforts to comprehend and improve our world. The change reflects the popularity and influence of paradigm-shifting critical, post-modern and phenomenological philosophies; in more and more places academic curricula are opening up space for visual and performing arts and other types of creative expression; there is a growing emphasis on the need for research that cuts across traditional disciplinary boundaries and attempts to bring theory and practice into more meaningful relationship. In this environment social enterprises which have been informed and sustained by anthroposophy have a great potential – perhaps a renewed opportunity – to contribute to a huge variety of fields of study. It is precisely because anthroposophy has given birth to such

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a range of practical movements – each constituting a living presence in the world, carried by individuals steeped in the day-to-day realities and challenges of their profession or vocation – that it has the power to be transformative in an intellectual world suffering so desperately from a lack of connection to both human experience and our natural surroundings. It is worth remembering too that, although much weakened by advances in modern information technology, universities still hold some function as gatekeepers of culture.   Their responsibility for shaping the minds and morals of the next generation of citizens means they have a profound impact on the social, political and economic realities of tomorrow.

Although it is founded on extensive scholarship, penetrating critical reflection and a synthesis of many philosophical and spiritual traditions, the carriers of the anthroposophical movement have not made great efforts to engage in or establish dialogue with that part of the cultural/spiritual realm represented in universities and academic communities. Nor have there been more than fragmented attempts to cultivate a language and communication style that would facilitate such interaction. The proposals sketched here are based on the premise that the time is ripe for anthroposophy, in its many manifestations, to participate where it has been largely absent and to be heard where it has been largely silent. This is not merely a question of sharing the fruits of anthroposophical research beyond its own circles. It is about the movement's opportunity to be both challenged and invigorated by what a much broader and diverse spiritually-active community has to offer.

Framed by this background, the present article presents an overview of past and ongoing research in just one stream of the anthroposophical movement; namely, Camphill communities. It will start by summarising the existing research and posing some questions raised by this work. It will go on to look at a number of difficulties associated with doing research, both in terms of Camphill's cultural attitudes and practical and financial resources. It will sketch some suggestions for addressing these difficulties and developing a long-term strategic approach to research. Finally, it is hoped that the discussion of research in the Camphill context illustrates the need for a wider conversation about the relationship between anthroposophy and the academic world, as well as the role that research has to play in helping the anthroposophical movement achieve its aims going forward.

The Camphill research landscape

In considering the research that has been carried out on or within Camphill, it is important to distinguish between different types of project because they can and do serve different purposes. Some are most useful as communication tools, some contribute to establishing an evidence base where the focus is on questions of legitimacy and accountability, and some types of research are valuable mainly as learning or self-reflective processes. The existing body of work – if it can as yet be called that – on Camphill can be divided into three categories: books or articles based on secondary research published with academic publishers such as national or international journals; publications or reports drawing on

primary research, whether they be quantitative, qualitative or mixed-methods projects; and finally, unpublished dissertations written as part of a Masters or PhD programme.

In terms of the first category, there has been a gradual increase since the 1970s in publications relating to Camphill appearing particularly in journals specialising in the fields of social work, social policy and intellectual disabilities. Since 2000 the increase has been dramatic. That said, the group of academics and writers responsible for this work remains extremely small, with more than half of Camphill-related publications available in the English language contributed by a single author. Academic, consultant and outspoken advocate for people with an intellectual disability, the role played by Dr Robin Jackson in raising awareness and understanding of Camphill in both academic and professional spheres cannot be overstated. His work, however, highlights by contrast the limited steps taken on the part of those within Camphill to ensure that it is presented and represented in the national research community. A community, that is, which plays a significant part in informing the decisions and policies that all social services will have to contend with in the future. By generating interest, promoting open-minded discussion and developing a substantial body of literature on the Camphill approach to community and disability, Dr Jackson has paved a way for Camphill's greater participation in the debate at a national and even international level. It is up to "Camphillers" to decide if and how they want to capitalise on this work.[2]
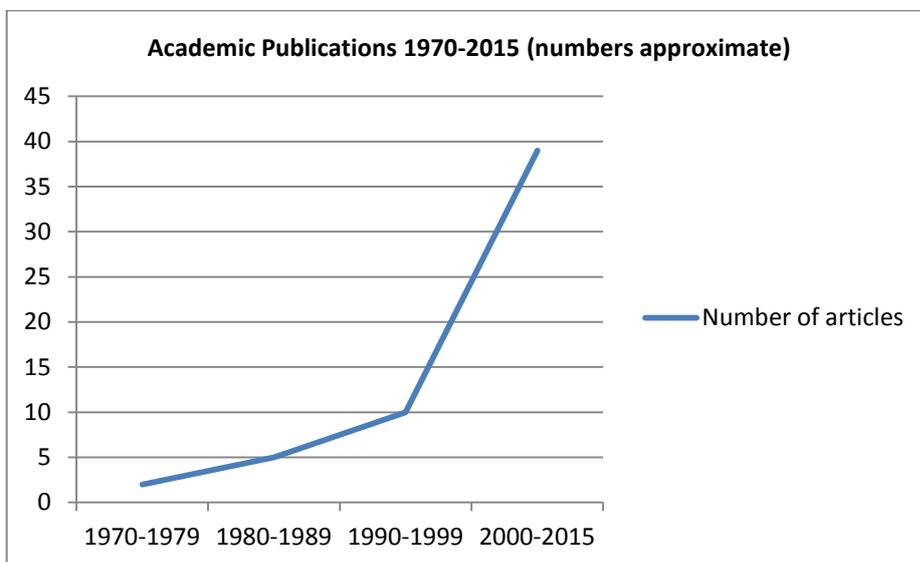
A further observation in relation to this first category of research is that despite the international range of authors and journals, nearly all publications refer to the experience of Camphill communities in the UK. This raises the question first of all of why Camphill has almost no academic presence in the rest of the English-speaking world, despite its considerable expansion and success in North America. Secondly, how does this research

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[2] Further details and reviews of all of the works mentioned in this article can be found in the library at www.camphillresearch.com.

profile compare with the situation in Central Europe and other parts of the world where Camphill and/or other forms of curative education have taken root?

In terms of the second category of research, again by far the most formal investigation on Camphill communities has been carried out in the UK. Here a review of the last decade reveals approximately 10 completed projects and three ongoing ones, the majority being internally commissioned by Camphill bodies (see for instance Swinton et al. 2006; Brown 2009; Baron 2012). To the author's knowledge none of these projects have been followed-up or formally published. With regard to formal publications, only a handful of studies on Camphill have been reported in peer reviewed journals (see for instance Randell and Cumella 2009; Jackson and Menzinger 2009; Fahay et al. 2010; Brown et al. 2011). The three ongoing projects, all university-lead evaluative studies (University of South Wales; University of Edinburgh; University of Strathclyde), could be an indication of a growing interest on the part of external institutions in assessing the validity of Camphill methods. One of these in particular, a nation-wide survey evaluating the standards of end-of-life care in different types of service across the UK, draws attention to the possibilities that exist for Camphill communities to be more pro-active in gaining recognition as quality alternatives for people with intellectual disabilities. Participating in high-profile, independently or government-funded studies is a way to stand up and be counted with relatively little cost, time or administrative commitment on the part of individual communities.

Looking beyond the UK, the list of primary studies involving Camphill is even shorter. In the United States Harvard Professor Dan McKanan published the results of research which explored the intentional and socially transformative dimensions of Camphill and Catholic Worker communities across the United States (McKanan 2007). Professor McKanan is currently conducting further research on Camphill as it transitions into a fourth generation, as well as working on a book on anthroposophy and ecology. More in line with the service-oriented focus evident in the UK, in 2010 the Camphill Association of North America commissioned a study which evaluated (among other things) Quality of Life outcomes for people with developmental disabilities in five Camphill communities (Goeschel and Heitzman 2010). Exploratory in nature this study, as with statistical research carried out in the UK, provides evidence that Camphill performs well based on quality indicators as compared to other types of setting. However, also similar to the UK, significant follow-up research would be required in order to interpret and explain this phenomenon in a manner that would enable the findings to be used in policy and practical decision-making.

In terms of the final category of research, particularly in the last five years there has been a substantial amount of student interest internationally in researching Camphill communities. PhD and MA students have analysed Camphill experiences in the UK, North America, Australia, Norway and Germany, and it is highly likely there are many more completed dissertations quietly gathering dust on unknown shelves. The question here is how to convert these pieces either into publications which can be distributed within academic and

professional circles, and/or into meaningful learning for not only the communities which were initially involved in the research but the wider movement as a whole. The latter is partly a matter of cataloguing, accessibility and dissemination, of transforming what is currently a collection of disparate and isolated research projects into a cohesive body of work. Yet there is also an outreach and awareness-raising dimension to this student activity; postgraduate students represent direct links to universities and the more open and responsive Camphill communities are toward this interest the more students will be in a position to enhance knowledge and understanding of Camphill within their educational communities.

Some challenges associated with doing research

It can be argued that the biggest obstacle to Camphill communities engaging in research is not related to practical or financial considerations, but rather involves more complex issues of culture and historical attitudes. Before looking at ways to promote research, therefore, it is worth spending some time on the questions of the general value and purpose of research. Although responses to these two questions can only be sketched here, if communities can initiate and sustain a genuine discussion about the underlying aims of research, and come to some collective conclusions, they will be much better placed to start developing plans for research in the future.

There are, of course, multiple and diverse reasons for doing research. It is possible, however, to outline three broad themes or driving impulses into which individual projects can be grouped. The first reason usually given for doing research is as a response to external demands for justification. Many communities have felt the pressure to prove their legitimacy and viability in the face of new regulations or a less than sympathetic policy and financial context. This is research which has the purpose of evidencing the value of Camphill methods in the field of care for people with intellectual disabilities. It can be described as "defensive" or "self-preservational" research and in the author's experience when people talk about the need for research this is what they have in mind.

Although this kind of research might seem the most immediately and directly useful for Camphill today, a long-term view of the possible consequences of such a research agenda does suggest the need for caution. Developing an evidence-base tends to demand the production of objective data based on measurable outcomes, and these on their own are unavoidably reductive. Like Waldorf Schools, Camphill communities are increasingly finding it expedient to define themselves according to externally given values and give account of themselves in accordance with externally specified standards. The risk is that demonstrating these values and achieving these standards become not merely necessary but sufficient goals in themselves, and communities gradually lose the will and/or ability to cultivate, articulate and practice their own vision of what it means to care for and support one another.

A second and somewhat different rationale for doing research in a sense goes back to the core mission and vision of König and his founding colleagues. That mission was to study the deeper needs of individuals, of communities and of our environment and to share that learning with wider society and local communities (Costa 2008). In other words, this takes a view of research as part of a broader social task and responsibility to the world and to the future. It implies the possibility for transformation not only in the lives of people within community boundaries but beyond those boundaries. Research is one way that the experience and learning of Camphill can be communicated to the benefit of people who have never set foot in it.

Finally, a third and closely related rationale for doing research is connected to self-reflection and self-development. This is research as improvement rather than proof. Communities engaging in research processes to further their own organisational and personal learning is the most important form of research; it should be the first priority precisely because it encompasses the other two impulses behind research outlined above. A community, like any organisation, which carries out its own self-reflective investigations and makes its processes and findings freely available, is not only improving itself but demonstrating transparency, a willingness to be self-critical, a willingness to learn and grow and a willingness to engage in other ways of doing things. This in itself does an enormous amount to increase knowledge and understanding and generate legitimacy in the eyes of the world. Research by its very nature encourages a two way flow of information and learning; communities can take in new ideas and practices, and share their own ideas and practices with others. In short, research that is undertaken for the primary purpose of learning will also serve the aims of better communication and increased public legitimacy and accountability.

Even if one or more of these broad arguments in favour of research are accepted, there are always more prosaic difficulties to overcome. There are often objections to investing in research on the grounds that it is too time-consuming, too expensive and/or requires specific expertise which is unavailable. An even more common objection is that research tends to be a waste of time and money because it seldom goes anywhere. These are all valid points, but because they highlight a set of organisational issues rather than arguments against research per se. The last point is the key: research is futile unless something is accomplished through either its process or its results. Time, energy and money are indeed wasted when research takes place in a vacuum.

Addressing Camphill's research needs

Research so far in Camphill has been largely ad hoc, uncoordinated, commissioned as and when different individuals, communities or regional associations have a particular need or interest, with scant reference to either past projects or future intentions. The result is a collection of one-off projects which are not disseminated, meaning that communities across the movement are largely unaware of each other's work, and thus unable to learn from

each other or pool resources. Projects tend not to be followed up in any way, i.e. through formal publication, by being replicated or expanded on, or by being adapted into formats suitable for a variety of different audiences (such as people living and working in communities, their relatives, health care professionals or policy-makers). Finally, the lack of collation and cataloguing of existing research means researchers both within and from outside Camphill face considerable difficulties in finding and accessing the resources and material which would enable them to develop this work.

This picture immediately presents a number of clear steps that can be taken to establish a framework which will not only encourage and facilitate research, but turn it into a more rewarding endeavour for Camphill communities. The first of these steps is to start with and make the most of what already exists: to create a platform where all the research on or relevant to Camphill is gathered in one place and easily accessible to anyone. Research requires research, and it also begets research. Interested parties are more likely to embark on new projects if they have something on which to build. It is this which has inspired the creation of the Camphill Research Network (www.camphillresearch.com), an online resource designed to host a library of projects and publications as well as provide a forum for the exchange of information and ideas related to researching Camphill.

A second step is to enhance communication and coordination between different groups or communities conducting research, nationally and internationally. This could extend beyond information-sharing to pooling resources when it comes to research questions or objectives which are common to more than one community or even region. Not only might there be financial incentives for such collaboration, but research outputs tend to have greater validity where the sample is greater and therefore more generalisable.

A third step is to ensure that no research is embarked upon without a clearly articulated purpose and a long-term plan for how it will be used. Needless to say, this assumes that the resources are in place to follow-through with that plan.

This brings us, finally, to matters of expertise and finance. On the one hand, as mentioned above, there are many different types of research and not all are hugely expensive. Small-scale, self-reflective, action research projects, for instance, need not break the bank for individual communities. Moreover, also as mentioned above, engaging in research does not necessarily mean conducting or commissioning one's own project. There is a great deal of scope for Camphill communities to participate in large projects or consultations conducted by external parties.

On the other hand, when it comes to commissioning projects and hiring professional researchers, there are large pots of funding (both government and private foundations) specifically designated for charitable service providing enterprises like Camphill to carry out research and development. It cannot simply be assumed that Camphill bodies will be

unable to attract research funding before they have made concerted, well-organised efforts to do so.

Looking to the future: A Camphill Research Council?

In developing a strategic approach to research, Camphill bodies can look to other professional spheres in the anthroposophical world for inspiration, particularly Waldorf Education. The Waldorf movement has organised itself in a number of ways to promote and disseminate research: one example in North America is the Waldorf Research Institute; in Europe the European Waldorf Council has created the Waldorf Research Educators Network. As a working model of collaborative enterprise, perhaps the most interesting and potentially instructive initiative is the Nordic Research Network in Steiner Education (NORENSE). NORENSE is a partnership presently between three Waldorf teacher training institutions in Norway, Sweden and Finland. Through the establishment of a common fund, the three countries were able in 2010 to create a Research Council which since then has been granting scholarships and sponsoring research projects specifically related to the education and training needs of their institutions. Beyond administering the fund, the NORENSE Council's broader remit is to support the development of a research culture in Steiner Education in the Nordic countries (NORENSE 2013).

While by no means suggesting an exact replica of this model, there is certainly a strong case to be made for Camphill associations to explore the possibilities for setting up a body specifically mandated to design and implement a long-term research and development strategy. A series of regional or national working groups, made up of both professional researchers and community representatives, could lay the groundwork for such an initiative. A research council would be in a position to directly address many of the difficulties surrounding research described here: tasks might include offering support and expert advice to communities wishing to engage in research; consulting with stakeholders on research needs; raising and allocating funds for research projects; building partnerships with universities and other external organisations; and finally, disseminating information about research and publications across the Camphill movement. It is possible to foresee that in such an endeavour the greatest challenge will not be attracting external or internal supporters – there are many voices urging Camphill in this direction – but rather engaging the attention and commitment of formal Camphill bodies.

Concluding thoughts

In giving an account of recent developments in research on Camphill in the English-speaking world and raising some connected questions, this article is an attempt to provoke discussion on both the "whys" and "hows" of research. Beyond discussion, it is hoped that the arguments presented will encourage action. Rather than addressing specific types or topics of research, the focus has been on the context within which research takes place; the culture which will make it most fruitful and the structures which can facilitate it practically.

What are the research questions most pressing for Camphill today? It is extremely important for individual communities to answer this for themselves. Yet the answers can best be turned into effective strategies when communities work associatively rather than in isolation from each other.

In summarising, it is actually difficult to say whether the existing amount of research on Camphill is surprisingly small or surprisingly large. It depends really on the perspective one takes on what Camphill is: a spiritually-inspired intentional community movement, which in general tend to be defined by their insularity and efforts to sustain a lifestyle and value system deliberately differentiated from the mainstream; an intentional community movement dedicated to addressing a particular and universally recognised social need, distinguishable from but firmly interconnected with mainstream society; or, a community movement whose social striving is both broader and deeper, encompassing spiritual, political and economic transformation. Camphill is undoubtedly a combination of all three, and the matter of research is clearly bound up in the wider debate about Camphill's identity, purpose and future. Research, however, is a significant element in that debate and its potential usefulness should not be ignored.

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