

The 'Principle-Based Approach'

by Tanya Kennard-Campbell

The Principle-Based Approach offers a simple means of understanding how we all make sense of our world and the realities we create out of that for each of us individually.

The approach originated in the US and was the founding philosophy behind Health Realization. The Health Realization Institute has led several researched projects in the field of criminal justice, addiction services, mental health, schooling, relationship counselling and community regeneration. There have been several documentaries, books and articles written, based on these projects. (See bibliography).

In November 1987, Dr Roger Mills began an experiment. He attempted for the first time to effect community change from an entirely different direction – from the inside out. Two low-income housing projects in America, rife with violence, drug gangs, shootings, crack addicts and alcoholics, child abuse and spouse abuse, were completely turned around. In two and a half years they became healthy communities.

Although the quality of research was not robust and went unpublished, Mills had proved something. He had demonstrated that drastic community change, reducing problems and enhancing Well-being was possible from an entirely new way of approaching prevention.

What Mills and others have now replicated in their work is the principle that **'if people's thinking does not change, their feelings and behaviour will not change'** (Pransky. J 2003).

Does this sound familiar?

This approach is called a Principle-Based Approach because it offers

three fundamental principles that, once understood, offer people a simple means of understanding themselves (and others) and how we as individuals construct our realities, and subsequently affect our mental health and Well-being. These principles are **Thought, Mind and Consciousness**.

Thought is seen as our ability to create anything out of the way we think; our ability to create our realities.

Consciousness is our ability to experience, through our five senses, the reality which we have created. It is also our levels of awareness.

Mind is the power behind all of life, the formless potential that we have access to at any given moment.

An understanding of this approach encourages an underlying belief that we all have infinite possibilities available within us already to create healthy, happy lives, or alternatively lives filled with violence, anger and despair.

This approach puts us in the driving seat allowing us to realise, from the inside, the things we do to ourselves moment to moment to create our actual experiences in life.

Health and Well-being within the 'Principle Based Approach' is seen as an inbuilt and inalienably buoyant quality that everyone has access to and is very different to many models of mental health and Well-being. **It starts with the bold assumption that everyone has everything they need, right now, to assist them in life: Health, Well-being, potential, wisdom.**

Children are born with their

'lights blazing', full of curiosity, creativity and confidence. They are not self-conscious or inhibited, they don't notice skin colour and disability like adults, they notice things with innocence. As we grow, we are taught what is acceptable, appreciated and valued.

Slowly we begin to compromise who we are to make others happy, often inhibiting who we really are. This may be why so many children and young people can react so strongly to the pressures put on them,. They often feel it just doesn't feel right putting yourself, your creativity and passion aside in favour of what the school system, our families or society believe is how we should act and live our lives.

Do we want to produce a generation of children that dance, sing and act the same way? What about the pioneers, innovators and initiators? Did they develop their talents by conforming to other's expectations? Or did they believe in themselves enough to follow their dreams? These dreams are part of our birthright, we nurtured them as children and many of us discarded them as adults as we were told the reasons why we couldn't achieve them, not the reasons we could.

We are taught that others know best, be they teachers, health professionals, the police or the government. We are taught to respect this kind of knowledge from a young age and this is reinforced by images and messages portrayed in the media and society in general.

Unfortunately, what this does is disconnect us from our own wisdom and guidance in favour of outside knowledge. We begin to lose our confidence in finding our own ways for fear

that we may get it wrong. This is seen so clearly with parenting, where parents were told the importance of listening to the 'experts' to prevent problems with their children. They began to buy the newest parenting book or DVD and made sure little Johnny had the best new educational toys and lead-free paint on his cot. The process became never ending, anxiously rushing to buy the new copy of Parenting Weekly in case they missed some vital piece of information that could affect their son's emotional and educational development.

There have been huge industries made out of the self help movement, parenting, smoking cessation etc, drawing on people's fear. We have been taught not to trust our own instincts, then are sold external ways of rectifying them. We are taught to place value in logic and intellect. Of course it's logical to invest in the wisdom of others, 'they know so much more than me!' **But why don't we trust ourselves? Because we are taught to place value and trust in expert knowledge, taught to look outside ourselves for the answers.**

Unfortunately we in the West have learnt to value our logic, intellect and rational minds to the detriment of our instincts, intuitions and gut feelings.

The Principle-Based Approach shatter these myths by asking people to begin investing in their own wisdom, by beginning to listen when it speaks.

This is a process recognisable in stories of Recovery, where through the process of distress, people realise no-one else can help with an internal process, the only person there is you. **When we look for the answers from others we only get their view of what should be done.**

However they don't always have our best interests at heart. They may think they do, but what if they're tired? Had a bad day? Do they put us first then? Are they there at two in the morning with the answers we seek?

The only person who will ever know the most powerful answers and always have your best interests at heart is you!

Once this understanding is grasped it has a natural life of its own, led by one's unconscious mind through insights or

reflections, affecting deeper and deeper understanding of one's internal reality.

By challenging our 'knowing' or knowledge of our world new knowledge and creativity is generated when old ways of seeing, feeling and believing are naturally discarded.

So let's take a deeper look at the three main principles of this approach, MIND, THOUGHT and CONSCIOUSNESS

MIND

Described as the potential or intelligence behind life, something we always have access to. For those who favour science, Mind is described as a universal energy that is at the core of everything that is. It provides us with meaning, purpose, faith and spirituality. The process of Mind is not led or directed by anyone else but the person's own wisdom and intuition. Underneath all our thoughts, reactions and fluctuating moods, is a deeper, calmer state where wisdom sits. If we just stop, get quite and allow our thoughts to settle, we can experience our own deeper wisdom. This wisdom pops up at times to guide and reassure us and always comes with a good feeling. **This is what to listen to, when searching for our true well-being. A positive feeling that comes from within you!**

THOUGHT

Our ability to create anything out of the way we think; our ability to create our realities.

Thought (memories, voice hearing) has the ability to rapidly bring on feelings of calm, fear, panic, serenity, guilt or many others. Just as these things affect your levels of consciousness, mood or Well-being, so can your general level of Well-being affect your thoughts.

This is where our body helps us work out where we are in terms of our levels of health and Well-being by providing us with our very own 'alarm bells'. These come in either physical or emotional forms, some of us experiencing upsets with our emotions more than physical upsets.

If you think for a moment of how your body communicates when you are tired or rundown, you will instantly know how that feels for you.

Unfortunately we often override these alarm bells, thinking we know best.

When our alarm bells appear, it is a sign that we have moved out of our range of Well-being. **It also indicates that as a result, our thinking may well be 'off' and that we should not invest too much in the content or meaning of it right now.**

When we begin to listen and respect our body's communication, we begin to reclaim a sense of control over our health, as we realise we have our own built-in health professional, life coach or guru!

It also tells us that there really isn't anything you need to do to rebalance your thinking in that moment, other than realising that it is not something you are going to invest in right now. This releases the things suppressing your health and Well-being, so it can naturally return to its rightful place.

As we become more aware of our body's communication, we become more aware of the effects our decisions have on our health and Well-being. As a result, we naturally choose the things that support our Well-being.

As humans we have been given the free will to make choices in life; sometimes these decisions do not assist our health long-term. Until we have an insight into the effects of our thoughts and decisions on ourselves and others, then true change will not likely to be sustainable.

What seems to happen following exposure to these basic principles, is one naturally reflects on the reality of one's own thoughts, beliefs and convictions. It tests our belief that our personal thoughts are always real. This process does not occur through 'thinking hard and trying to work things out', but subconsciously or unconsciously at one's own pace.

There is a common belief that if one has experienced a trauma that still affects one today, then one needs to address this issue, by understanding it, often by going back and reliving or rewriting it. However, the principle of THOUGHT does not require this process to occur, firmly placing memory and past experiences (especially negative

ones) in their place, that place being in the realm of Thought, pure and simple. This is where Consciousness comes in.

CONSCIOUSNESS

Whenever we experience a thought, memory or voice, our five senses kick in and make that thought appear real to us. If we took a moment to remember a traumatic event, our bodies would quite readily support the experience, by providing us with the visual, olfactory, auditory or physical experience of that. But the event is not happening right now; our experience of it is. We get caught up in the moment and often don't stop to question the reality of our thinking. Because it feels real, we assume it is real. Thoughts are constantly coming into our heads either consciously, subconsciously or unconsciously, night and day.

If we attempted to stop this process it would be like trying to control the waves in the ocean. What we do have control over is what we make of them. With this approach it is recognised that we often get caught up in the moment and don't realise it until later. But our consciousness gives us clues to the quality of the thinking we are experiencing (as some thoughts we are not consciously aware of).

The feeling we get at any given moment will alert us to the quality of our thinking. Rather than finding the original thought and challenging this, we remind ourselves of what thought is (our ability to create) and ask ourselves if what we are creating at that moment is what we want to invest in. We then don't have to do anything, as when we no longer invest energy in our thoughts, they no longer have the power behind them to affect us. The feeling created by our thinking will gradually dissipate as our levels of Well-being rise naturally.

When we begin to see for ourselves the effect of our thoughts on our current reality, we know that we can choose to continue to invest in this experience or not. By examining the power and life we put into our thoughts, an understanding is gained of where thoughts come from, their function, reality and effects.

What affects Consciousness?

Consciousness is our ability to experience through our levels of

awareness. Another way to put this is our levels of moods. Consciousness exists on a continuum, from unconscious to enlightened.

These levels of awareness or mood fluctuate moment to moment, hour to hour and day to day, depending on various things.

Somewhere in the middle of this continuum is our current level of Well-being, where we are at our best. In this range we experience clear, fresh thinking.

For some of us, when we move out of this range it marks a head downwards to a 'low mood' or, for others, upwards to an 'elevated mood'. Either way, we know where our range of health and Well-being sits and when it becomes 'tested'. (See Well-being curve exercise)

It is easy to say that some people lack insight and don't know what this is for them, and they need 'telling'; but until people 'realise' it for themselves, there will be no permanent change.

The things that affect our levels of consciousness include:

- Toxins (pollution, medication, chemicals, nicotine, alcohol)
- Sunlight
- Exercise
- Diet
- Temperature
- Tiredness
- Hormones
- Sound
- Colour
- Energy

I was a sceptic when first exposed to the principles, but was very much intrigued and fascinated by the whole philosophy of innate and buoyant health, that no matter what state a person was in, they still had access to their health and potential.

For me, I felt the real test would be in psychosis. Having experienced working with service users for over thirteen years, the direct treatment of delusions and hallucinations appeared wholly unsatisfactory with very few sustained results.

But with an understanding of the principles of this approach, I was able to assist individuals to challenge the reality of their thoughts naturally, (self directed) in an extremely effective and powerful way.

No matter how distressed a person is, there are always

moments of clarity or 'insight', even though these moments may be fleeting. These moments can be used to access the person's innate health and wisdom. The more you 'talk to' the health and wisdom in a person, the more health and wisdom is 'drawn out'.

The body wants to regain its equilibrium, but sometimes it needs a little assistance. From this approach, you always have something to work with, as everyone has health and wisdom inside. This 'potential' is part of the principle of 'Mind'.

What is Common

Mental Health is accessible to everyone; it has nothing to do with the colour of your skin, which family you come from or your intellectual capacity. You have the ability to access the full capacity of your Mental Health at any given moment.

What is Constant

Mental Health doesn't die or get damaged by your experiences, even though it may seem as if it does. Health is buoyant, always working to rebalance itself; it's our inbuilt survival mechanism.

What happens is that our beliefs and thoughts about our ability not to recover mask it. Whatever it is we tell ourselves about why we can't achieve Mental Health like others, it becomes part of the fears about our health.

We put power and life into these simple, but damaging thoughts until they become real to us. Then we live out of the reality that "It's not for me" or "I'm one of the unlucky ones" and, unfortunately, we have so many others telling us the same, reinforcing our worst fears.

What is Inherent

Mental Health is part of who we are, it is something we are born with and is much stronger than the illness we experience. It will always come through despite distressing symptoms.

Unfortunately we actively try to do so much to regain our balance; reading books on new techniques, seeking the wisdom of professionals, medication etc. We then go into battle with the unwanted side effects of these approaches, such as complicated concepts that don't seem to work long term, other's pessimistic views, and the side effects of medication – the list goes on.

The principles of this approach to well-being transmits a message of hope to all by reinforcing the innate mental good health in us all.

www.wholelife.org.uk
www.well-beingeast.co.uk