

# A New Look at Borstal Training

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ANY DISCUSSION concerning Borstal training tends to generate considerable anxiety and emotional turmoil. Probably this reaction can be partially explained by the lack of specific aims, an accepted treatment programme and evaluated results. Certainly generalised aims and objects are set forth, but they are too ambiguous and tend to fall into the category of pious hopes.

With regard to the treatment programme, efforts are now being made to inject some new ideas but not on a properly structured basis. Whilst evaluation is very much in its hesitant infancy, these efforts are not being derided but it is suggested that the current concepts of Borstal training should be re-examined. Unfortunately, such an examination lacks properly validated information—the only hard fact being the ‘success rate,’ but it may be of some value to set forth some ideas as a basis for discussion.

When Borstal training began in 1908 it borrowed techniques from other fields, namely, the public school and the army. I refer particularly to the House System

and the concept of discipline. In addition it was very paternalistic in practice and emotionally loaded; all the clients were ‘boys’ irrespective of age or maturity. As time passed new ideas were added to the programme, such as vocational training and education.

Now that Borstal training has been clearly enunciated as ‘social rehabilitation’ the necessity for re-examination is urgent. The technique of just adding on new pieces to the programme does not meet the problem. As a guide social rehabilitation may be defined as:— Learning to live with oneself; learning to live in society; and learning some supporting skills.

These are stated in order of priority. Too often there has been concentration on supporting skills (education or trade training) and a failure to treat the real problem. On the other hand training has been limited to a mere moral problem, with stress on the ‘ought’ and ‘should.’ Indeed, the Staff attitude to training has been that of custody—encouraged by training and institutional policy. Consequently, priority has been given to administrative convenience with

too low a priority accorded to the *raison d'être*.

The inter- and intra-personal problems of the inmates tended to be forgotten or usually referred to as a nuisance: but such an approach to training is unrealistic. Our clients have been committed because of their inability to accept the norms and strictures of society. They can be defined as people whose social training has been so defective that they are unable to conform to society's demands. Rather a simple definition, but its training implementation may be discussed under these headings:—Locality, Treatment, Industry, Education, Staff, Role.

The emphasis has been laid on the social aspect of training and implied is a greater degree of contact between society and the institution. Currently there are closed and open institutions: the former near a town and always with a high perimeter wall, the latter usually in the country and without a perimeter wall. This dichotomous structure tends to ignore the fact that the institutional allocation may be dominant—the individual may behave as the institutional forces mould him—but in both cases there is structured isolation. The inmate's social, industrial, cultural and family links are broken. He may be incarcerated in an institution hundreds of miles from home. For a normal person such adjustment can be difficult but to a social defective it can be traumatic and could be the

dominant factor throughout his training.

Hence it is suggested this be the programme base-line. The institution should maintain these links and develop them—rather a deliberate turning to society and not away from it, which translated, means less accent on institutionalism. This suggests the institution being sited adjacent to an urban area. This then would serve a defined catchment area and ensure that the geographical and social characteristics would be maintained. Indeed, there would be an opportunity for a greater degree of acceptance and integration between the locality and the institution. Too often there has been alienation—rather a policy of the *oubliettes*. The individual having been sent to Borstal, he can be forgotten—'something will be done to him by someone.' Certainly no recognition of the fact that delinquency is a phenomenon of society—rather the reverse. A policy which usually has devastating results upon the individual's rehabilitation—he still retains that feeling of rejection.

Such a siting policy could stimulate pressure in both areas—within the institution and within the locality. Inevitably this seems to cut across the current policy of personality allocation but it need not ignore personality requirements. The present policy entails a great deal of physical movement—via remand centre, local prison, allocation centre—which often means the individual is not received in

his Training Borstal for some 10 weeks—a loss of a critical 10 weeks during which time he may be exposed to impersonality and other negative forces. In any case society is heterogeneous so why not retain this real factor? It would necessitate some programming by the institution staff but this need not be too difficult—why not use the other community agencies such as E.S.N. Schools and Mental Health Day Clinics?

At this point treatment is being used in its narrow sense, i.e. the specific techniques aimed to deal with the individual's problems. Already in recent reports a definite lead has been given by mentioning Case Work and Group Counselling. These can be re-enforced by the psychological or psychiatric facilities provided by our own or local mental hospital staff. Although these techniques are currently used by other agencies they appear revolutionary in their application within a penal establishment. Probably this is caused by the emphasis upon punishment with over-tones of morality—the sin and the sinner.

The concept behind this new approach is the acceptance of the inmate as an individual within his own personality and own self-determination. The programme would provide an opportunity for him to develop as an individual by his own efforts. Often the attempts at reform fail because the inmate has not been fully involved and his positive potentialities ignored. The development of insight and

understanding of self are basic to any growth; plus the opportunity to learn by living. Obviously there are difficulties inherent in this approach—administrative convenience may be threatened whilst demands upon the staff could be exhausting. This will involve some effort of re-orientation—a greater acceptance of the dynamic understanding of behaviour. This world of abstract thought—attitudes—goals—ambition—priorities—scales of values—emotions—will always be difficult but I suggest this is the substance of social training. The policy of suppression and non-involvement is easier but of very limited value. Ignoring the problem does not assist its solution.

A treatment programme would encourage inmate involvement not only in his own life but in the lives of his contemporaries thereby acknowledging the infinite value of peer pressure. The negative aspects of inmate pressures are already well known but this inmate culture does not operate in a vacuum—it is related to the current institution structure and policy. So inmate/inmate—staff and staff/staff involvement ought to be built into the programme. This can be done by establishing: — Functional Committees (sports, religion); Counselling Groups (including house meetings); and Staff Groups (training and policy). So by free and open communication allied to opportunity for responsibility participation a basis for learning by living could be evolved.

Today Britain industrially is experiencing a greater degree of industrialisation. This is evident even in that least developed industry of all—the building industry. This means that the labour force is predominantly unskilled or semi-skilled. This is not meant as a slight but it is probably true that the majority of our clients will move into this field of employment; after all, the job opportunities and financial rewards are quite substantial. If the institution is serving a specific catchment area the work programme ought to reflect the local employment structure in conjunction with the local community agencies; e.g. Ministry of Labour, Employers' and Trade Unions. For some years the institutional emphasis has been on vocational training but by Borstal Association feed-back we know this is unrealistic. To raise vocational hopes without subsequent fulfilment can be demoralising as well as being a misuse of time and resources. If the catchment area offers industrial semi-skilled employment then our training policy should move from the artisan and agricultural angle to supply such appropriate training. In so doing the three industrial factors of purpose, tempo, and efficiency, could be exhibited, in addition to the local industrial forces being involved.

Education in this context refers to all aspects of didactic teaching. These include religion, academic, vocational, physical and leisure.

These are already provided for in the programme but their approach may have to be modified. If the policy aim is to stimulate the growth and development of the individual then such factors must be acknowledged. An example is the current use of compulsory attendance—what is its value? Further, the programme activities may have to be broadened and extended to include a greater degree of community involvement.

Recently there have been several memoranda concerning Staff Training and its future role. Indeed with the development of case work and group counselling some staff have been given an initial social work training and within some institutions there has been some modification of the traditional roles. Often in a group session an inmate will discuss his basic problem whilst reluctant to do so with his Housemaster. Obviously this is an important development and must be acknowledged. Probably the pattern will emerge of the Housemaster being a supervisor of social work within the house: already the genesis of such a pattern has been established with the house staff acting as Group Counselling Leaders.

With the disappearance of the training hierarchical structure and the emergence of a team approach the creative talent of the staff would be given expression. This inevitably would mean a staff involvement and case/policy meetings held frequently at house

and institutional level. Obviously recruitment and in-service training programmes would have to recognise and provide for these new staff roles and qualities. Administratively these would have to be acknowledged by according them increased status and remuneration.

It is appropriate at this point to refer to the effects upon staff of isolation; geographical and social. As staff serve quite a number of years at one institution it would be sensible to attempt some evaluation, not only upon the staff member but upon his whole family. The artificial staff community tends to freeze the staff rigidly in their functional roles—they are denied the opportunity of fuller social intercourse which would enable them to be accepted as individuals.

Within an institution serving a defined catchment area there would be need for a clinical staff to undertake diagnostic work but not in isolation. They would have the opportunity to participate as colleagues in the general training programme including evaluation and research. Such research could be both in and outside the institution. Indeed within the institution only a small proportion of the delinquent population is seen. Further, we are only vaguely aware of such factors as the domestic circumstances — the parent/son relationship, the neighbourhood factors, or the criminal sub-cultures. A staff possessing such appropriate information is more intelligently equipped to understand these

inmates' problems. At present we attempt in Rochester to deal with an inmate's problems when in reality they may well be in his home in Liverpool—and obviously we cannot fully appreciate all the factors operating.

In turning to society, the local community resources could be brought into the rehabilitation programme from the day of reception. Their use would be facilitated because the geographical factors would permit a greater degree of face-to-face relationship, thus affording our own staff the opportunity to study local society's norms and expectations. The inmate's desocialising (institutionalising) during training would be minimal, indeed lessened, by the avoidance of local prison experience and being involved in movement and escorts. Thus the return to society would be easier in that community/institution inter-action would have maintained essential links. Opportunity to work through specific problems (e.g. authority figures represented by Police, Probation Officer, the 'boss' and parents) would be assisted as the inmate would never be entirely removed from them. This might be beneficial as the parents could be more fully involved in their son's Borstal training—they might be assisted in the development of parental insight and understanding. In addition, the inmate being so near could use the institution during periods of crisis such as unemployment or domestic upheaval.

The feed-back would be much more comprehensive—not only through the crude fact that a former inmate had been reconvicted but we could also be in a position to examine the quality of the act and the factors involved. In addition, we could receive information concerning those who had successfully adjusted upon discharge. Such information could be useful in future institutional policy—but, of equal importance, it would develop a more co-ordinated approach to the treatment of the delinquent in that the Probation Officer and Housemaster would actually be field colleagues.

A flexibility could be introduced so that the Probation Officer might at first signs of real rehabilitation stress suggest the inmate spend one day a week in the institution. Indeed the institution could be accepted as a community facility in its own right. There would be ample opportunity to participate in sociological and longitudinal researches, and consequently gain in public status.

The above programme is only sketched in broad outlines with the main theme that criminal activity has its origin in the intra- and inter-personal relationships—these to be recognised in the allocation of time and facility. Hence it is presented as a basis for discussion.

At least one point is clear, the current treatment programme is less effective than desired. Perhaps such a suggested programme could be attempted at one of the new institutions being opened. Our Service could benefit considerably by the establishment of an institution operating in such a specific policy of social rehabilitation including diagnostic treatment and discharge evaluation. This programme does not mean anarchy or abdication by the staff—rather the development of a more meaningful inmate programme with a continuing evaluation. For the staff a possibility of greater job satisfaction in that they all are directly involved and participating in the programme policy.



## Your point of view

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