

REVIEW

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RE-EDUCATING TROUBLED YOUTH: ENVIRONMENTS FOR TEACHING AND TREATMENTS, by Harry Brendtro and Arlin Ness, 288 pp. Aldine Publishing Company, New York, New York.

"Alright, guys. Now you're in for it. You're going to have to decide exactly how you're going to live and the rules you want to live with. Here's the rule book as it now stands. The rules we like, we'll keep. The ones we don't like, we'll either rewrite or throw out. Let's start with the first one. Do we need it?"

It was my turn to lead the weekly meeting at the group home for emotionally disturbed and delinquent adolescents. The previous week had been a stressful one for both the residents and the staff. The residents had been testing, bending and breaking the rules. The staff had at first attempted to reason, then had resorted to strident commands, and finally had to use discipline to maintain order and preserve the structure of even the simplest, everyday routine. Nerves were frazzled. Relationships were strained. No one was happy. Everyone in the group home needed to be reminded of the purpose and meaning of rules. By asking for their comment, discussion and emendations, I was encouraging residents and staff to consider their need and desire for rules. By inviting them to make a contribution, I was hoping they'd invest in the group home and become more responsible for each other.

That is a tactic, I believe, that Larry K. Brendtro and Arlin B. Ness would approve. In their new book, **RE-EDUCATING TROUBLED YOUTH**, they emphasize the necessity of focusing treatment on the functional needs of the child. Combining, mixing and integrating several diverse and sometimes contradictory disciplines into a "holistic approach," they have created a model environment for treating and educating disturbed

and delinquent youth. They have named their philosophy *psychoeducational*. Eclectic enough to be considered erudite, referenced sufficiently to be called scholarly, and imaginative to the point of being too idealistic, it is an inspiring challenge to all Child Care Workers to reassess their theoretical orientation and alter or change their therapeutic programs.

The authors use as their model the French *educateur*, who draws from an existing knowledge base and is trained in the principle that a close interpersonal relationship with youth is the cornerstone of all re-education. A child's development is divided into five categories: physical, affective, cognitive, social and moral. (In this field, this is the first book I have read which has no religious affiliation or pious doctrine to preach; that still clearly states the importance of teaching values. It is an indication of the authors' motives and their altruistic natures when they reveal the value that is of paramount concern to them: the value of the human being.) Each category, or potential, must be assessed ecologically: the transactions between the child, other people, his environment and himself are to be observed and recorded. Then the interpretation of the acquired data will be holistic: the analyzation and diagnosis is to be done with interdisciplinary (social, psychological, educational) knowledge and skill. After this is completed, the relationship between the Child Care Worker and the youth is used as the primary instrument for treatment and education.

The authors practice what they preach. Each chapter is introduced with a detailed presentation and discussion of existing theories. Recent studies and empirically supported evidence are cited and used as a launching pad for their ideas. Brendtro refines and expands upon his previous work in **THE OTHER 23 HOURS** and **POSITIVE PEER**

CULTURE in the chapters that deal with relationships, peer groups and the life-space interview. Fritz Redl is quoted extensively in two chapters and is listed as a reference in five. (Any book that so thoroughly exploits Redl's work cannot be anything but an exciting book.) Although each chapter is followed by a comprehensive bibliography that attests to many hours spent researching and evaluating the tenets of the various professions, the authors claim that psychoeducation is a logical and practical result of their experiences in the child care field.

In the single chapter that defines and dissects the child care organizational ethos, it is stated that an institution's dynamics have a profound impact on the process of re-education and that the agency's internal structure is a powerful predictor of success or failure in its treatment program. If an organization is dysfunctional, the children committed to its care will suffer accordingly. Those institutions patterned after the factory/hierarchical/authoritarian system are less effective than those organizations that employ a problem-solving/teamwork model in which the multi-disciplinary work team is the primary care-giving group and is responsible for any decisions regarding the treatment and educational process. Parents of children should be encouraged to become active participants in the process by being included in many of the team's functions and the organization's design.

It is in this chapter that the authors' idealism is the most conspicuous. They admit that due to "professional defensiveness" ("I'm right. This is my territory. You're the cause.") and "parent difficulties" (ignorance and prejudice), parent involvement in the treatment and educational process has been almost nonexistent. Nowhere do they mention the very real problems of cultural blindness and bias, racism, economic disadvantage, emotional incapacity, or mental inadequacy. They declare that much rhetoric has been heard and exchanged regarding the appropriateness and plausibility of the teamwork model for all child care organizations.

However, they state, there has been a limited commitment to it due to a lack of communication between staff and administrators. They are much too modest. If a re-educational program is to be generalized to the public arena, then the practice and goals must coincide with the realities of the world. That is why the authors take pains to construct an organization that matches the ethos of their treatment and educational philosophy. Assuming that they succeed at establishing not only a psychoeducational program, but an organization that is congruent with it, what do they propose for the society outside of the organization and, more importantly, how do the children transfer the knowledge and skill they have acquired to the outside world? This fundamental contradiction is also evident when they discuss the language that is used in developing a positive peer group. They belittle and deride the names of carcinogenic cigarettes, and suggest that is how youth learn to use terminology that both enhances negative behavior and ridicules positive behavior. If their program is so diametrically opposed to something that is so intrinsic to our species and our consciousness, namely our use and abuse of language, aren't they proposing a program that cannot exist without a revolutionary overhauling not only of society, but our operating value system as well? I do not want to play Seneca to anyone's Nero, but should we be teaching youth one way to function, when outside the embryonic-like protection of the envisioned organization, they have to learn another?

Yes. I would love to see peer and professional groups work in the manner the authors prescribe. Yes. I would love to see all child care organizations incorporate teamwork into their basic structure. Yes. I believe all parents should be included in the treatment and educational process. Yes. I would love to see everyone relate to each other on the assumption that we are all of equal value and worth. And I'll tell you why: when I opened the rules of the group home to the residents and staff, I feared all kinds of hell

would break loose. Instead, many of the residents, who only hours before the meeting were breaking the rules either willfully or on a whim, became staunch defenders of those very same rules. The few changes that were suggested were reasonable and were made immediately. For five days following that revolutionary meeting, harmony returned to the group home. Unfortunately, the social worker also returned from a week-long illness. He was appalled by what I had done and I was reprimanded. He vetoed all the changes that had been made and added a layer of consequences that he believed would have restored order originally. A general and chaotic rebellion by the residents ensued. Now, I ask, what would you have done?