

RADDERY - THE PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERPINNING

An explanation by Eric Butlin MA Oxon and Depute Principal, Therapeutic Care & Organisation written in 1995 to prepare the school for a change in leadership

History

Raddery School was founded in 1979 by David and Valery Dean as an independent residential special school for emotionally damaged young people. The school is a registered charity and managed by a Council.

David and Valery brought to the school a clear set of values for the day to day care and education of the young people which they sought to put into practice through every aspect of life in the school. This has been reflected in the daily programme for the young people within and outwith the classroom; in the nature, decoration and furnishings of the rooms within the school; and the wish to avoid hierarchical boundaries within the staff team. The school has been geared to meeting the individual social, emotional and educational needs of the children by creating a therapeutic environment within which each child's inherent worth is recognised and encouraged, where mutual support is emphasised and interdependence fostered to encourage personal growth and the development of insight. In short, severely emotionally damaged children can acquire a greater feeling of wellbeing wherein they can discover they are lovable and in turn have the capacity for love leading to a greater degree of personal autonomy.

Since 1979 the school has naturally evolved and experienced change. This has often been a reflection on the skills of the staff team at anyone point in time. Raddery's reputation and David and Valery's openness has meant that many experienced workers with emotionally damaged children have been attracted to work at the school and this has inevitably led to the assimilation of new ideas and approaches to the therapeutic process. Additionally, external forces have affected the school reflecting the changing climate of opinion towards residential education expressed through HMI recommendations and local authority referral patterns.

Evolution and change can be painful and difficult for staff and young people alike. However, change also leads to growth and positive development and this can be applied both to the individual and the institution. The school has come a long way since 1979 but, as David and Valery retire from the work in 1995, the school retains their original vision and values summed up in recognising the worth of the individual and creating a containing, caring, loving environment in which the needs of emotionally damaged and distressed young people can be addressed and hopefully worked through.

Raddery in 1995

Raddery prides itself in offering more to its pupils than the majority of special schools. The school refers to itself as a therapeutic community but such a description in itself does not explain what is different about Raddery.

A therapeutic community can imply a self-sufficient group of individuals, interdependent and reaching decisions through a consensus of shared responsibility. Whilst Raddery has elements of these and the group process is fundamental to its work, the age and ability ranges of the young people (9-17 years) and the increasing emphasis on preparation for reintegration into the outside community mean that today the original application of the term 'therapeutic community' to Raddery would be inaccurate. However, the use of the terms 'therapeutic process' and 'community' would not.

Within residential care the term therapeutic implies the application of theoretical ideas within a philosophical framework that goes beyond mere containment and the meeting of physical needs to provide a healing process for the young people. At Raddery the framework is based on the acceptance of the worth of the individual, the acknowledgement that we can all help each other and that, having accepted our ability to be lovable, we can in turn love. The school uses the term holistic which can be applied at two levels. Firstly, with regard to the person. Here we are dealing with the whole person, accepting that all elements of a person's life experience, past and present, contribute to that person's personality. In practice for a young person we need to appreciate his life experience and acknowledge that every part of his daily experience within the community is potentially therapeutic and we should not, for example, divorce the classroom experience from the evening activity.

The second application of the term holistic refers to the organisation of the staff team from its foundation in 1979. The school has recognised that each member of staff whether employed as teacher, groupworker, houseworker, cook or maintenance person will have involvement with the children. Individual skills irrespective of position held will be used to the full. Most staff are assigned to a team of staff and children and each adult in a team takes a special responsibility for at least one child in that team as a 'team mate'. Despite this, in recent years external pressures have led to the need to introduce a clearer line management model to facilitate appraisal and staff support/supervision. Additionally, the school's financial position does not allow the payment of a common salary.

The holistic approach allows the school to emphasise the importance of individual staff/child relationships within the therapeutic process. The other major strand to the therapeutic process is the use of the large group, the community element of the school, to facilitate co-operation, interdependence and personal growth through a group identity. Each weekday begins with a Morning Meeting in the Meeting House, a room that encapsulates the spirituality of the school and the values and philosophy of the founders; four days of the week there is a Daily Meeting before lunch at which issues are addressed and notices and feedback is given; once a week the Daily Meeting is replaced by the weekly Community Meeting, the major meeting of the week that addresses the wider issues of the community.

The Daily and Community Meetings provide a forum for praising children and also for confronting behaviour. Skilful use of the group process by the Meeting Leader and other staff helps to foster a sense of community and the children can be encouraged to support each other and share and learn from each other's experiences.

Individual and group work with children is complementary and provides the focus for intensive

therapeutic intervention. However, the bulk of the child's day is not spent in either of these forums and it is the structure of the day, class, meals, activities, bedtimes, etc. that provides the continuity for the therapeutic process. Each child has an individual treatment plan and in drawing this up attention is paid to the child's personal history and staff are informed by psychodynamic insights into behaviour which may provide pointers for day to day handling. However, in this handling staff make use of a range of techniques including elements of behavioural modification and crisis intervention to contain the child's problematic behaviour and hopefully to meet their defined needs.

In short, the school sees and treats each child as an individual with specific needs. These needs are then met by intensive individual work and use of the large group process within a planned, caring, residential environment that can contain the child and allow them to feel loved and wanted and to develop the insights to understand the causes and implications of behaviour which will facilitate the development of internal controls.

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