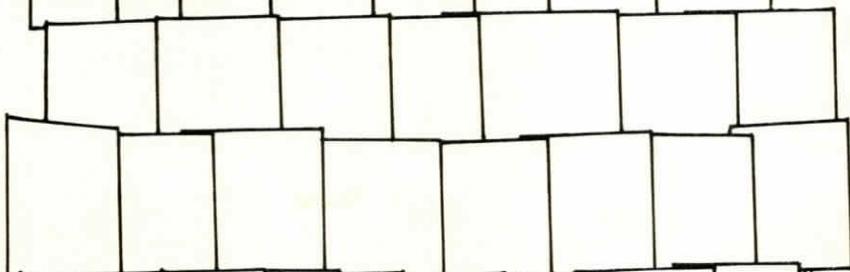


COMMUNITY
SERVICE
AND THE
SECONDARY
SCHOOL



MALCOLM
GROVES



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COMMUNITY SERVICE AND THE SECONDARY SCHOOL

Malcolm Groves



Graphics

Chris Thomas

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Foreword

I am delighted to have been asked to write this Foreword to Malcolm Groves' book. Almost 20 years have passed since the concept of community service was first put into practice by schools, and little substantial work of a critical or analytical nature has so far been written about either its theory or its practice. The time is therefore ripe for a realistic assessment of what is entailed in community service, including its problems and pitfalls and its potential and rewards.

This is particularly so since it has become widely accepted practice for schools throughout the country to include in their syllabus some kind of community service or similar activity. It must be said that this is sometimes done without the rationale having first been fully thought out, and without recognition of the commitment on the part of staff and pupils alike that needs to be made in terms of time and planning, initiative, organisation and dedication, if the experience is to become something more than what Malcolm Groves describes as *'the garden-digging syndrome'*. Mr Groves has had many years' experience with the Sevenoaks Voluntary Service Unit, and he is therefore ideally placed to provide an indication of the problems and frustrations, as well as the rewards and achievements, encountered in promoting community service.

The Sevenoaks Voluntary Service Unit was set up in 1961 at Sevenoaks School, and in 1973 the Education Committee of Kent County Council appointed a Youth Tutor to develop and co-ordinate work in all the Sevenoaks secondary schools. The following year, a full-time Community Service Volunteer was appointed to assist him. The scheme has grown to a point where today it regularly involves 600 young people from 15 schools in the Sevenoaks area, seven days a week, in visiting old people, working with physically and mentally handicapped young people in special schools and hospitals, and organising holidays and play-schemes.

In undertaking this work, the volunteers are meeting real community needs, and by their doing so the Unit fulfils its essentially educational purpose of increasing self-awareness and maturity among young people, providing them with the chance to identify with the needs of others, and taking responsible and effective action to meet those needs. The Education Committee places great value on voluntary work undertaken by young people, and is pleased to show its support for what it regards as a primary example of good and effective practice. I am, therefore, particularly pleased to commend Mr. Groves' book as a demonstration of the value of community service in the secondary school.

W. H. Petty
County Education Officer
Kent County Council

Preface

Everyone gets disillusioned with their work from time to time. A little while ago I spent a day by the sea suffering from such a mood. Then along the beach came a couple of young people. It was clear from the atmosphere, their age, and the two mentally handicapped people who accompanied them, that they were engaged in a piece of community service. There was a sort of vibrance about them, a confidence, a look of both enjoyment and deep satisfaction which I cannot adequately describe, but which I could recognise all too clearly. I had seen it many times before in different settings. It never fails to give me a tremendous lift. I hope the reader can catch some of that raw excitement behind the mass of words which a book entails.

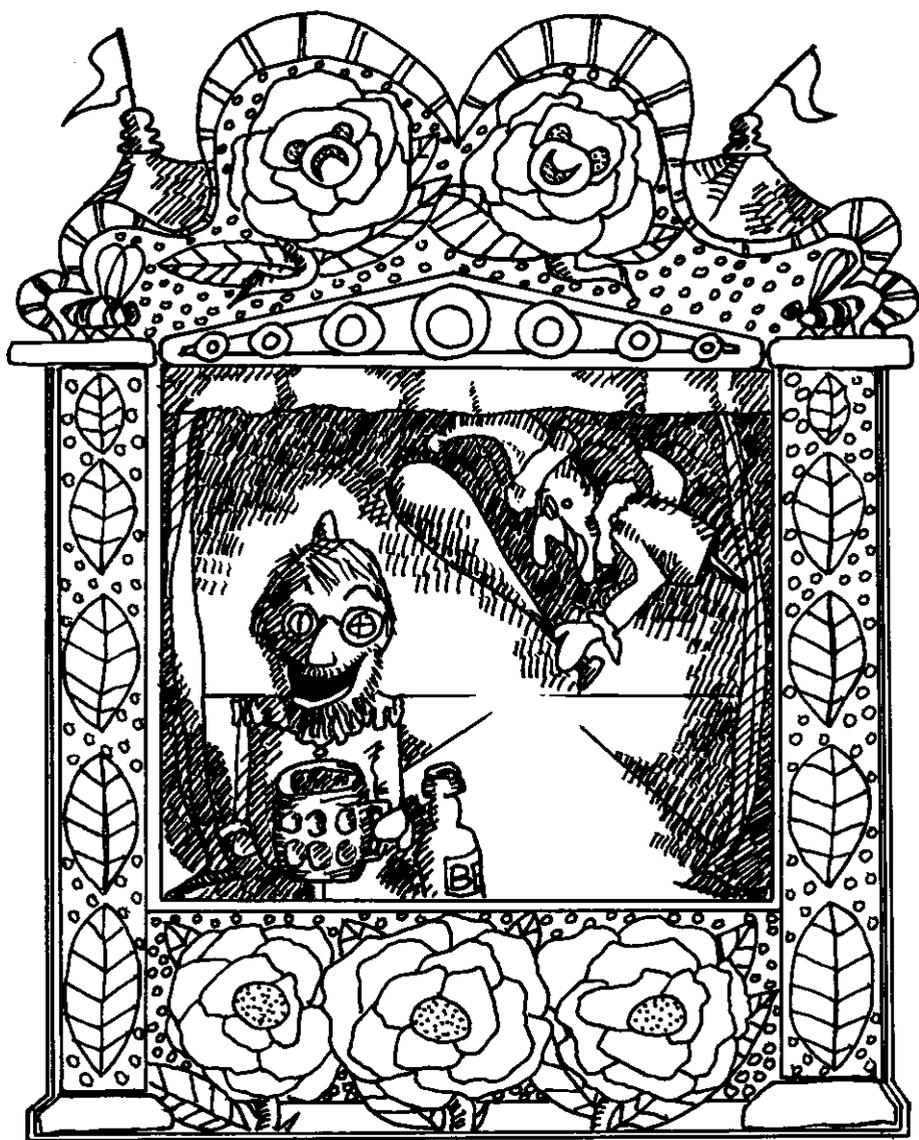
In many respects this is not my book. It is largely the story of several thousand young people with whom it has been my privilege to work and from whom I have learned a very great deal. I trust they will feel their pupil does them justice.

To Colin and Mog Ball I owe both the initial encouragement and the subsequent nagging to get on and write a book. David Howie provided the final shove, and, the effort started, Nev Cheetham, Mike Bolton and my wife, Barbara have all commented on the various draft stages, saved me from some of the crasser errors and made numerous helpful suggestions. In the end, though, the can, and the book, are mine.

Malcolm Groves
August 1979

A Quiet Drink

The Origins of the book



Teachers who venture into public houses in close proximity to their schools, when what they really want is a quiet night out, ought to know better. It is not that I am an advocate of either abstinence or social isolation, but simply of the need to recognise that the chances of meeting either parents or pupils are really quite high. So if you are hoping to escape work for a while, you quickly learn to go further afield.

But on this occasion I was between two meetings and in some hurry to get a bite to eat—and anyway it was reasonably early in the evening. However, my hopes of sitting quietly in the corner and refurbishing both my stomach and my thoughts soon vanished when I was approached by a fifth year pupil. She was a lively, sensitive girl who was actually going through a period of fairly severe emotional disturbance. Her eagerness to notify me of her illicit presence also said a great deal about her current attitude to authority. I was invited to meet her boyfriend.

Perhaps I should have scented danger, but I was tired. He was much older than I expected. The conversation meandered rapidly from tilting at a materialist society to the need for reform in the education system. In both we discovered much common ground. I was about to leave when the boyfriend opened fire on me.

A few weeks previously the girl had begun to visit a psychiatric hospital as part of a school community service programme for which I was responsible. This had been of her own choosing, but she had found it a disturbing experience, as do many of her age and temperament. We had spoken about this at some length on an earlier occasion, and it had seemed right to change her placement. She was now well settled in an infant school.

The boyfriend, however, was clearly still angry about it, and I was asked in no uncertain terms whether I had any idea what I was doing to people through this community service business. By this time I was anxious to get to my meeting and quickly became unduly niggled by what seemed to me to be blatant inconsistencies in his position. And so, after what diplomats would, I think, term a 'frank exchange of views', I left.

But the conversation continued to bother me. I think it must have come at a strategic time. It is good now and again to be forced to question and justify assumptions about things which are important to you—even if the result is indigestion!

In this book that questioning is continued—with, I hope, more digestible results. It was around 1960 that community service first entered the lives of our secondary schools as an activity in its own right. Today most secondary schools in the country espouse it in some form or other. It is time to draw up a balance sheet of what we have learnt and achieved, and what we still need to accomplish. It is time that those of us who would like to see a much greater

community bias in our schools offered closer scrutiny of, and a fuller statement about, our case. It is time we asked—and answered—those hard questions about what we really think we are doing to people.

Community service, like each of those similar-sounding but different phrases ‘community education’, ‘social education’ or ‘community studies’, covers a multitude of sins as well as many virtues. As I discovered when I first became involved in this area of work a few years back and searched vainly for some outside support, the literature on, and analysis of, any of those terms is appallingly thin. And there is precious little documentation of the problems which follow from a practical commitment to any theoretical base. Experience is often lost and needs to be relearned by each succeeding generation of workers. Teachers who develop community service tend to do so by chance or special interest. Often, if they move on to a new job, they are not replaced because there is no-one with the requisite skill or enthusiasm. The excellence which has been achieved in many areas is largely accidental and often unreported.

Consequently, the quality of practice in community service has not improved anything like as rapidly as it should, and we often find ourselves still trapped in what I shall term ‘the garden-digging syndrome’, so aptly satirised in a magazine produced by Community Service Volunteers:

‘We hope to broaden their minds and give them a truly enriching experience’, said the volunteer organiser, as his volunteers scythed another garden overgrown with weeds—the 18th this week. ‘We feel this sort of work contributes so much to their understanding of themselves and of the world they live in...’⁽¹⁾

While it remains true, as our local volunteer bureau organiser is known to observe each summer as together we have tried to sort the seemingly endless requests for gardening help for old people, that *‘The bloody lawns have got to be cut!’*. Nevertheless, to see this as the limit, or indeed as anything but the most trivial contribution that the young have to make to the community, is a serious failure of imagination. The promotion of garden-sharing schemes would be a much more creative solution to the problem, but the endless repetition of the garden-digging syndrome, unsupported by any mutually enriching relationship, seems still as persistent as the weeds.

The reasons for this scarcity of analysis and paucity of development are not necessarily idleness or lack of rigorous thought on the part of practitioners. I suspect they stem more directly from the very great pressures on what passes for the free time of those involved in this field. Any teacher organising community service will know what I mean. It is an extraordinarily time-consuming activity to arrange. And precisely that pressure on time will impose

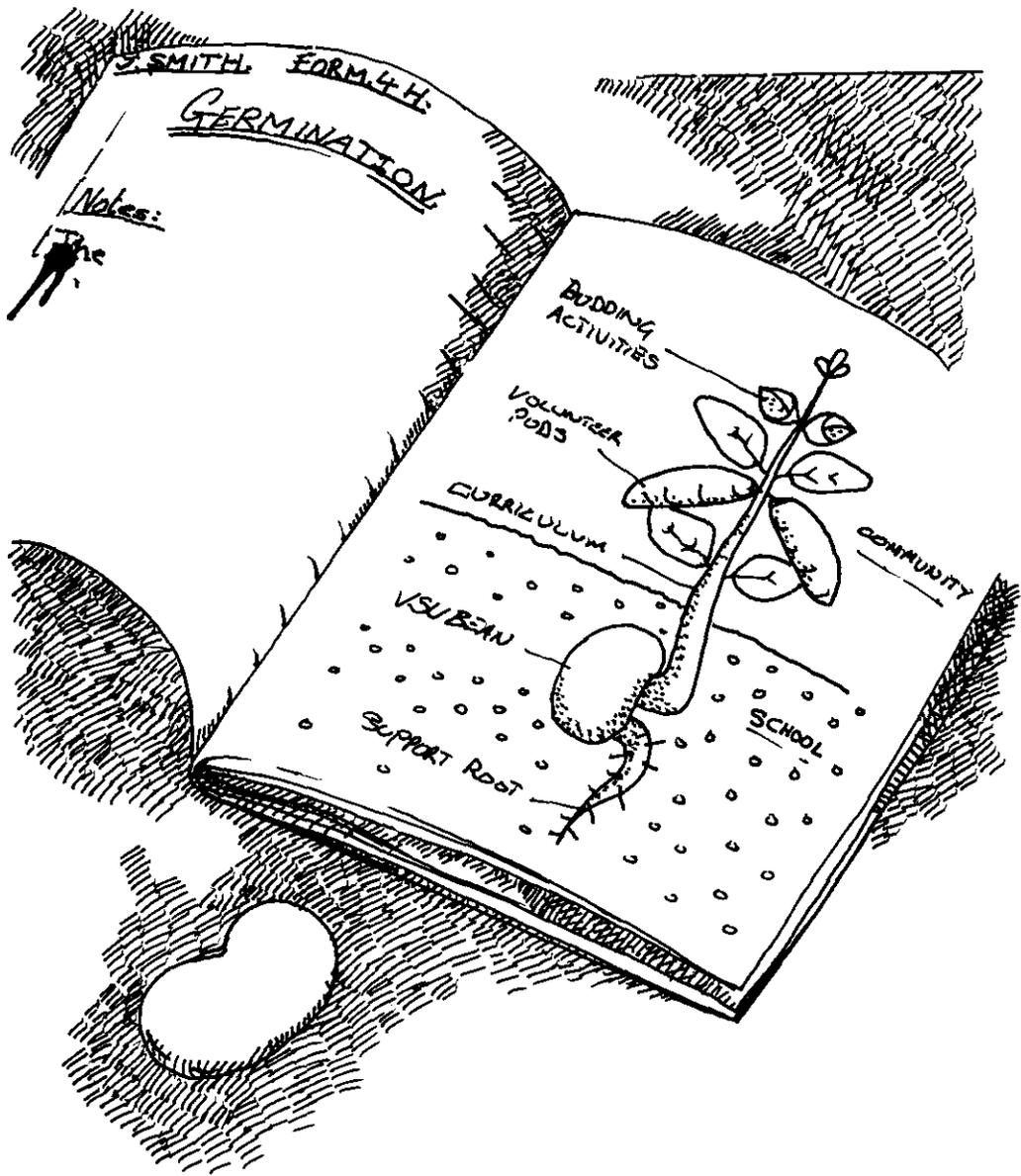
limitations on what this book is able to achieve. As a spare-time enterprise, its intentions must necessarily be modest.

I intend to examine in some detail one attempt to involve schools more closely with the community outside through the medium of service. I want to examine some of the ideas which have underpinned this initiative. In particular, I wish to argue that, while we have been misled by some early assumptions about the word 'service', we have nonetheless, through the community service movement as a whole, seen an important and distinctive contribution to the education of young people, irrespective of any social welfare benefit which may also have accrued. That is not to make exaggerated claims for the importance of this area of work. It does mean that there are certain specific contributions which community service has to offer to the education of the young. They constitute more than a survival strategy for giving relevance to fourth year RE lessons, and have a particular place in the current climate of concern with fundamentals. They are also pertinent to a number of rising issues, including health education, political education and education for work and leisure.

The notion of community service, in fact, stands at the point at which our ideas about the young, about society and about education intersect, and as such has been promoted in a wide range of contexts from unemployment to the penal system. I hope that this account of how it has widened and developed in one setting will provide a record of experience otherwise lost, some grounds for hope that the garden-digging syndrome can be beaten, and some evidence and analysis on which wider discussions might draw.

A Piece of the Past

The growth of VSU



The Sevenoaks Voluntary Service Unit (VSU), which provides the focus of this account, is a registered charity which aims to *'educate young people by teaching them the need for and manner of rendering voluntary service to the community'*. It is also unique.

That is not a statement of conceit but a statement of the obvious, for every situation, every organisation, every gathering of people with a common purpose is unique. The peculiar and ever-changing chemistry, the particular interactions which have occurred here, will not be exactly repeated anywhere else.

So, while I hope to interweave both experience and the principles and problems underlying the activity described, anyone who expects a blueprint for action or a solution to any so-called problem of youth will be disappointed. All they may reasonably expect is that through viewing one unique situation from a special vantage point, their thinking about their own unique situation may perhaps be helped.

There is, however, a more fundamental reason for striking a firm note of caution at the outset, and this is highlighted in the distinction drawn by G. N. M. Tyrrell⁽²⁾ between what he terms 'convergent' and 'divergent' problems. Convergent problems he describes as created by abstraction. When they are solved the solution can be written down and passed on to others, who can then apply it with no mental effort. In contrast, divergent problems are lived through and their only solution is death. Their nature is bound up with reconciling opposites into a living tension, and, says Tyrrell, they force a man to strain to a level above himself. They require a commitment of the personality, not just of the powers of reason.

The problems with which this book is concerned are at root divergent and continuously concerned with the reconciling of opposing tensions, particularly between leadership and democracy, between the individual and the group, and between freedom and responsibility. In essence this is a working document, a tentative account of a grappling with divergent problems, produced, not in isolation, but concurrently with that grappling. It is the story of an organisation and an idea, as well as being, in part, my own story.

It is in some ways ironic that Sevenoaks should have been one of the seedbeds for the development of community service as an idea of importance in the education of young people. It is in many respects a favoured place. Its population of something over 20,000 is situated just far enough south of London to avoid suburbia and benefit from the fine Kentish countryside, while at the same time being just near enough to the capital to avoid at least some of the rigours and expense of long daily acquaintance with the vagaries of British Rail. It is thus a favourite haunt of the wealthiest commuters, a fact which is reflected in extremely high property values, even for the South East.

Yet in the same town I know a severely disabled 90 year old who still has to bring in her water every day from an outside tap. It is perhaps the great numerical imbalance between these two sides that accounts for the social fragmentation which many comment on as a marked feature of life in the town.

Almost inevitably, then, the town is basically conservative, in politics—it is one of the safest seats in the country—as in character. It has seen comparatively little property development in recent years, thus mercifully escaping some of the less endearing features of suburban blight, but also paying a price, as the growing decay of the High Street indicates. If I return to my own home London suburb of Sidcup now after ten years, I can barely recognise either shops or houses. Sevenoaks is much as I remember it from fleeting visits of 15 years ago—with the notable exception of the bypass, a few more houses and a few more empty shops.

It is strong in tradition. Many people have lived there for many years, although this may be changing as the young are forced to move in search of cheaper pastures. Religion seems a stronger and more established part of town life than one might expect. If one cannot say for certain whether Sevenoaks is like stepping back 20 years or whether the rest of the South is just 20 years out of hand, the feeling of a discrepancy and a sense of return to a more settled environment are strong.

There have been some changes. There has been some growth in industry and a number of small industrial estates have sprung up on the outskirts of the town. Local government reorganisation has brought links with the markedly different communities of Edenbridge and Swanley. But notably absent among the changes has been the development of much in the way of community or youth facilities. Of an evening it is a remarkably dead place.

It is also worth noting that the town itself is ringed by outlying villages of a few thousand or so people each. The area is pock-marked by inaccessible large country houses, many now turned over to social welfare purposes. Transport thus becomes one of the dominant organisational problems that a group such as VSU has to solve.

Possibly nowhere is the essential character of the town more clearly illustrated than in its education system. Its schools have been stubbornly single sex (until recently even some primary schools), stubbornly tripartite, and stubbornly independent. The private sector is especially strong. To an extent this has relieved the county council of the need to make full grammar school provision in the town, but even so, some 700 children are transported ten miles or more each day to selective school places in Tonbridge. The issue of comprehensives has produced bitter and long-fought controversy.

Not surprisingly, then, it was in the independent sector that VSU took root, at Sevenoaks School, the leading boys public school, which achieved a particular reputation for creative innovation in education under the headmastership of L. C. Taylor.

At the beginning of the 1960s his thinking turned towards finding ways in which his boys, instead of simply being prepared for future service to the community in the best public school tradition, could have direct experience of service *now*. He took his inspiration from Kurt Hahn at Gordonstoun, where boys ran coastguard stations, mountain rescue services and an auxiliary fire brigade, and from Alec Dickson, the founder of Voluntary Service Overseas.

As he later explained to the Headmasters Conference, Taylor hoped to give tangible expression to the values of the school, to provide a rallying point for youth which did not presuppose a commitment to uniforms or promises, and to help young people understand society. He concluded:

'A great many boys feel that for too long they are barred from doing anything useful or practical. It is as though, having extended babyhood through years undreamed of by previous generations, we have devised compulsory education to help with the babysitting.'⁽³⁾

Taylor recognised that to achieve his aims he had to give community service '*a place of honour*' in his school and he began to turn his ideas into reality by collecting 20 jobs. He was insistent that the jobs had to be real ones, not jobs just concocted for educational purposes, and he found them at the hospital, a blind school, a children's home and the almshouses just outside the school. Each had to be worthwhile and to require about two hours work a week for at least a term.

He then recruited from his older sixth form 20 volunteers to tackle them. Or, to be more precise, he found 19 volunteers and twisted one arm which seemed twistable. In that too there is a lesson!

Perhaps, besides his vision, Taylor's gift was in finding people to share it, and, successively, in Neil Patterson and David Howie, he found two teachers with the energy and insight to turn his vision into something larger and more far-reaching than perhaps even he had imagined.

Over the next ten years the seed which he had planted blossomed through their efforts to encompass most of the secondary schools in the town, state or independent, selective or non-selective, and 'special' or not. The fruit is VSU, which today regularly involves 600 young people from 15 schools in any one week, seven days a week.

Partly this link-up of schools represented an attempt to co-

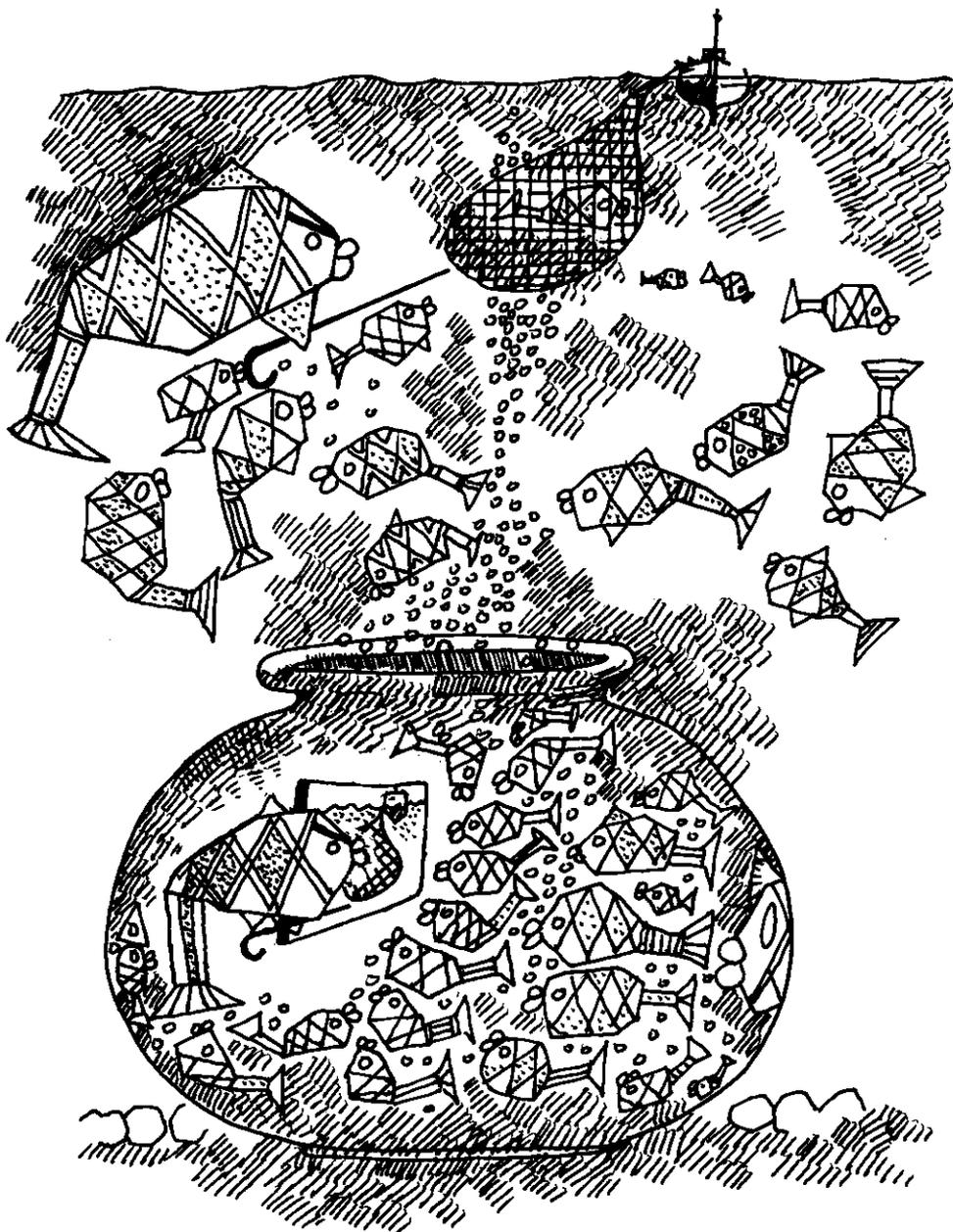
ordinate efforts sensibly to the common good, and partly it was a tangible expression of a philosophical shift and a growing awareness that there are no 'ends', whether 'giving' or 'receiving'. Each person in each group has something to contribute and particular needs to be met.

The culmination of this increasingly complex organisation and this developing insight occurred in 1973 when Kent County Council Education Committee adopted the Unit. They did this by appointing to it a teacher, designated a Youth Tutor.

That title may be misleading, for it is one which is fairly common, and indeed used elsewhere in Kent, but to mean something quite different. This tutor was to be based on one school in the town but with a specific brief to work with all local schools involved in the Unit and to co-ordinate and develop community service within and without the curriculum through an oversight of VSU. It was, in fact, an unprecedented appointment for a local education authority to make.

Life Class

The educational basis of community service



'This is no preparation for the good life.'⁽⁴⁾ With these words Dr. Rhodes Boyson condemns the decorating of old people's houses by boys from his former school. He believes their involvement has more to do with riding round in vans with pretty girls than with meeting social needs.

I shall examine later the question of motives and attempt to establish its irrelevance. For the present let us examine more closely Dr. Boyson's sweeping dismissal and ask with what justification have schools in Sevenoaks, and more widely, embraced the activity of community service when their business is the education of the young? How legitimate is the claim of community service on the time of the secondary school?

The case must rest not on any 'good' that is done to society, but on the contribution made to the learning of the individual pupil and on the type and quality of that learning. This is not to say that the benefit to the welfare of society is unimportant, nor that community service can succeed as an educational enterprise if it fails to enable pupils to make a real contribution to real needs. In that case we would have no more than an elaborate charade, a simulation game of a peculiarly dishonest type. Social education can only be achieved in society, the community can be the only vehicle for community education. To both, real community service has something to offer, but the touchstone of its success and its validity can only be its contribution to the education of the individual pupil.

'To identify schools with education', is, of course, as Illich has pointed out, *'to confuse salvation with the church'*.⁽⁵⁾ Nevertheless, if the two are not identical, there are at least points of overlap, and I wish to suggest that community service is both a component of the task of the secondary school, as presently and in some respects misguidedly conceived, and also that it has an important part to play in helping to reformulate the concept of education.

In particular, community service re-emphasises the place of first-hand experience in learning and stresses the need for participatory learning and co-operation between teacher and pupil and between pupil and pupil. It reminds us that the average British secondary school has remained too much a childish place for its own good and for that of its pupils.

The statement to which I always return when I start to get confused about what I am doing as an educator in schools is, ironically, one that was formulated not by an educationalist, but by a very perceptive civil servant, the late Derek Morrell:

'This is the purpose of education: to foster the growth of loving persons, who are aware both of their individuality and of their membership one of another; who accept one another, and who, understanding their own interdependent nature, choose to use their experience creatively in co-operation with one another.'⁽⁶⁾

It may not be the form of words chosen by every taxpayer or every employer to express the return they are looking for on their investment in schools. It is unlikely to be spoken by the average pupil or parent as they seek the means of upward social mobility through qualifications. It is unlikely even to be spoken by the average teacher, caught in the remorseless round of classes and marking. And yet it does encapsulate the ideal to which many would subscribe. If . . . if only it were possible . . . if only there wasn't something more pressing . . . if only exams were not so close.

What Morrell's statement does, for me at least, is to embrace and fulfill all of those smaller aspirations, to provide the overview and final perspective. We need both the large vision and small objectives if we are not to lose our way. I do not wish to suggest that community service provides a school with the means to achieve this grander aim. To that end all its activities and all its life must contribute. Community service does nevertheless have a part, a distinctive part, to play.

As a society we have both chosen and been forced by circumstance to progressively lengthen the period of dependence of our young in education or unemployment. We have, as a result, created a limbo called adolescence which is neither childhood nor adulthood nor anything. '*Childhood*', comments the historian J. H. Plumb, '*is a European invention of the last 400 years*'.⁽⁷⁾ Adolescence is much more recent.

We may call adolescence a threshold before stepping out into adult life, but we have shut it away from adult life in a place called school, as we once shut away the insane in asylums. It is our standard remedy for superfluous groups. The young, however, are not superfluous. They are our future.

Through this incarceration we say many things without having to speak to them. The medium is the message. We imply that learning cannot take place outside school, ignoring that prodigious period of learning which is babyhood. We foster the illusion that most learning is the result of teaching. We imply that education finishes with the end of schooling, disregarding all of the little we can see of future society. And we create that largely rootless subculture of the young which seeks its own expression because it is deprived both of any model or contact with adult society, and of any means to communicate its view of the limitations of that society.

Community service can provide a counterbalance to all this. Among the benefits which it can offer to young people are increased self-awareness and maturity, increased identification with the needs of others, and the opportunity for responsible and effective action involving a valuable and necessary contribution to society. These are benefits appropriate to all young people, of whatever level of

academic ability and whatever background. Regrettably that truth has often been ignored by those of us who have been practitioners of community service and accepted it simply for this group, the RoSLA pupils, or for that group, the unwilling CCF recruits. We have understated the universal case, and that is not the same as to argue for compulsion.

Community service opportunities for all pupils can bring experience of the adult world and of adult relationships, and in a much more real way than mere work experience, which appears to mean the opportunity to watch, occasionally to imitate, others at work. Community service emphasises involvement, and from this can spring self-knowledge and the beginning of wisdom. A good community service scheme is able to offer that stretching and straining above yourself which contributes to the formation of character.

Through this involvement, the young can begin to break down their isolation. As they meet others with the barriers down and the roles changed, empathy can follow and the ability to put yourself in someone else's position. The comments of young people themselves make this point most strongly:

'I think we're getting to understand older people and their feelings and that. Say we had to look after our mothers or that when they're older, we got some idea what to do if they go funny or something like that.'

'I'm not frightened of them anymore. They've got minds of their own.'

'I think it's taught me quite a bit about the way children think, so if you have children of your own, you might understand them a bit better.'

'It's made me more aware of adults, of their opinions and views. You build up more respect for adults.'

And even:

'You don't just think of your teachers as someone up there looking down. They're more human!'⁽⁸⁾

Empathy does not just grow, it arises out of action. So does conscience, at least more often than the reverse. In this is the beginning, not the end, of moral and political education. Community service stresses the need for action and expects other things to follow from that. In doing this it touches the need in each of us to feel wanted. It grants responsibility and trust to those to whom it is often denied. It says by implication 'We know you have something to offer and will make space for you to try'. Thus it will make use of skills, abilities and knowledge which the individual already has, and in the process these can become enhanced and developed. To these may be added knowledge of formal and informal social

structures and of human development. This action to meet the needs of others is, incidentally, a healthy subversion of the hidden curriculum of secondary schools whose dominant motif tends to be that you look out for yourself.

In all these emphases, community service departs significantly from community study, the attempt to arouse concern or inculcate knowledge which stops short of action. Community service is likely to involve study, but community study does not involve service.

Many curriculum subjects have, in the search for relevance, attempted to tackle matters of social significance. They have sought to arouse the concern of adolescents about everything from prejudice through to pollution. At the end of the allotted number of lessons the matter is left and the next topic brought relentlessly forward. But to arouse such concern at an impressionable age and not to provide an outlet for it, is to run the risk of reinforcing feelings of inadequacy and apathy, which not even yet another charity collection or sponsored walk can assuage. Worthy and necessary as these may on occasion be, and beloved as they are of the editors of local newspapers, it is, in the final analysis, unworthy and damaging to suggest to our young that money will solve all problems. We need to stress more the wisdom of Gibran:

'You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of yourself that you truly give.'⁽⁹⁾

This is all very well. *'The trouble is, it is very difficult fitting children into the timetable.'* This real complaint of a real headmaster might perhaps form the epitaph of our archetypal British secondary school. He is, of course, quite right. It is extremely difficult. But maybe he, and the purveyors of community studies, are working on the wrong problem. It would be far less difficult and infinitely more productive to fit the timetable to the children. The assumption that every young person must be prepared for every eventuality which may, or may not, face them in later life has begun to tear the curriculum apart, amid plaintive cries of 'More consumer education!', 'Legal education', 'Educate for leisure!', 'What about welfare rights?'. I even picked up a textbook lying around in the staffroom the other day and honestly read in the blurb on the back that *'we must take steps to educate our young people in the skills of home decorating'*. I did not wait to gather its title. It opens up a whole new slant on painting by numbers! Not only is it physically impossible to meet all the demands in the time available, the chances are it will be either forgotten or obsolete information by the time it is needed in real life. Does everyone really need to know everything?

Sooner or later those of us working in schools have to ask ourselves really serious questions about what is of lasting value in secondary education. My guess is that the answers we turn up will not be to do with information about this or information about that.

They will be to do with attitudes like curiosity and adaptability and with skills like knowing where to find things out or how to make decisions, the ability to act, to be an effective group member and to effect change. I also suspect that there is a remarkable coherence between the skills and attitudes I have turned up and those which the current protagonists of this or that bit of knowledge are actually deep down hoping to establish. They are skills and attitudes which are best developed through direct first-hand experience and many of which are especially enhanced through responding to a situation of real human need.

In a diligent reading of the most recent discussion document⁽¹⁰⁾ on the curriculum for 11-16 year olds issued by the Department of Education and Science, I could only discover two explicit (and fairly trivial) references to community service. Nevertheless, through the document's identification of eight areas of experience central to the curriculum, and, more especially, through its almost unnoticed assertion that all are of equal importance, including the social and the moral, it may not be stretching the imagination too far to suggest an intrinsic identification with the sort of argument I have tried to develop. The granting of parity of status to all eight areas would result in a major realignment of secondary education. In that would lie the fruition of the sentence which, more than anything else, tipped the balance for me when I was deciding whether or not to work for VSU:

'If we believe in a caring and participating society, we must educate towards that end using first hand experience as the most important ingredient.'⁽¹¹⁾

It might also render unnecessary the careful disclaimer at the start of the discussion paper. *'Nothing said is to be construed as implying Government commitment to the provision of additional resources.'* And that thought forms the theme of my final chapter.

The school which recognises the contribution community service might make to its present and future aims, and which chooses to make it one arm in an overall strategy to foster the growth of loving persons, is likely also to find its attention drawn to other facets of its involvement with the wider community. It will realise that, if it is correct in believing that help is not a one-way process, then the community will also be helping the school. Superimposed on a pattern of pupils going out from the school will be a pattern of the community coming into the school, both for help themselves, perhaps as pupils, and also to help the school in its task of educating the young. As the wall of separation breaks down, the sharing of resources becomes logical and natural. Schools can no longer be a law unto themselves. The resources, human as well as physical, which are, often literally, locked up inside, belong to the community. This imprisonment makes no economic sense and little educational sense.

The pursuit of the educational vision I have described clearly requires more than digging 18 gardens a week. It is a vision which the schools of Sevenoaks have attempted to work towards through the creation and development of VSU.

VSU has been rare among the youth action groups of the last decade or so in springing from and retaining deep roots in schools. Its structure and channels of communication are pretty well wholly dependent on the school, which are the only formal members of the Unit. Its administrative base has always been inside a school, making it an organic part rather than an occasional outside intruder. The head teachers of member schools see themselves in some sort of special relationship with the Unit and meet once a year specifically to discuss it. County council funding comes through the schools branch rather than the Youth Service.

How far this close link with schools has contributed to the continued strength of the Unit is difficult to assess objectively, but it does seem significant. At the very least the Unit has been spared the worst problems of trying to gain footholds because it has been seen to work from inside. It has been given a ready organisational framework and ready access to every young person of school age in the area. To judge by the extra difficulties found in working with young people not attached to a member school, or when a school has chosen not to lend its support, the base provided by this special relationship should not be underestimated.

At a more general level schools also offer one of the few remaining foci of community life. They offer a physical presence, which is a resource in itself, as well as containing other resources and having a wide network of contact. A substantial proportion of the community has an immediate and active interest in schools as parents or employers. Added to these vested interests is a general concern for the wellbeing and development of the young. All of this can readily be tapped by a school-based organisation.

Yet there may be a price to be paid. What would happen, for instance, if VSU members felt it right to become involved in activities of which their schools disapproved? I do not necessarily mean this in any sinister way. Two examples from six years spring to mind. A campaign to achieve cheap bus passes for the elderly produced immediate accusations and long-standing suspicions about 'unhealthy', 'political' involvement. For similar reasons one headmaster wished pupils withdrawn from a survey of empty accommodation being made on behalf of Shelter.

In neither case was there destructive antagonism on either side, nor was the Unit thwarted in its long-term intentions, whatever the immediate difficulties. A healthy relationship between Unit and schools will involve tensions, hopefully creative ones, and requires continual nourishment on both sides. So far each has felt the effort worth making.

If it is clear that community service is a legitimate and important concern of schools, and if VSU has benefitted organisationally from its close relationship with schools, it is equally true that over the years VSU itself has grown to become more than the sum of its constituent schools.

While I believe there are principles of universal validity which underlie what has happened at Sevenoaks and that there are valid arguments for the particular way in which they have found concrete expression in local circumstances, it does not follow that an identical solution is necessarily appropriate anywhere else. It seems right that individual circumstances should warrant different means of achieving the same ends.

In Sevenoaks, a unified organisation for school-based community service has brought, I believe, the following benefits. In the first place it acts as a counterweight to the fragmented school system, offering opportunities for contact and co-operation between schools and between pupils. It needs also to be set against a general shortage of facilities for youth in the town.

Secondly, VSU can provide a concerted voice and outlet for young people, one that can carry considerable clout in the town because it is wide-ranging, constructive and respected. As a result, young people sit on many committees in the town, including the Community Association, Age Concern, MIND, the Holiday Play-scheme and the Volunteer Bureau. There are problems of continuity and very many frustrations, but it is a significant recognition.

Thirdly, VSU provides unique opportunities for leadership by young people. The importance of this is considered more fully later. While schools may provide similar outlets through prefects, school councils, games teams or whatever, it is noticeable that young people in VSU regard it as something different and do not appear to equate it with the innocuousness of the average school council.

Finally, a unified organisation can enable the various community efforts of schools in a closely defined geographical area to complement rather than cross one another. It is therefore economically much more efficient and educationally improves the quality of tasks which are available to young people, since it allows a consistent and co-ordinated approach to other agencies and organisations.

This may mean, for example, that it is possible to see that the same group of senior citizens do not receive six harvest festival parcels while others in greater need receive none. It may mean that a hospital can readily arrange a meeting of senior staff to review young volunteer projects involving several schools. It may mean that a new idea is easier to implement because of wider resources or established confidence. Or that a school which for one reason or another experiences difficulty in establishing its work in any one

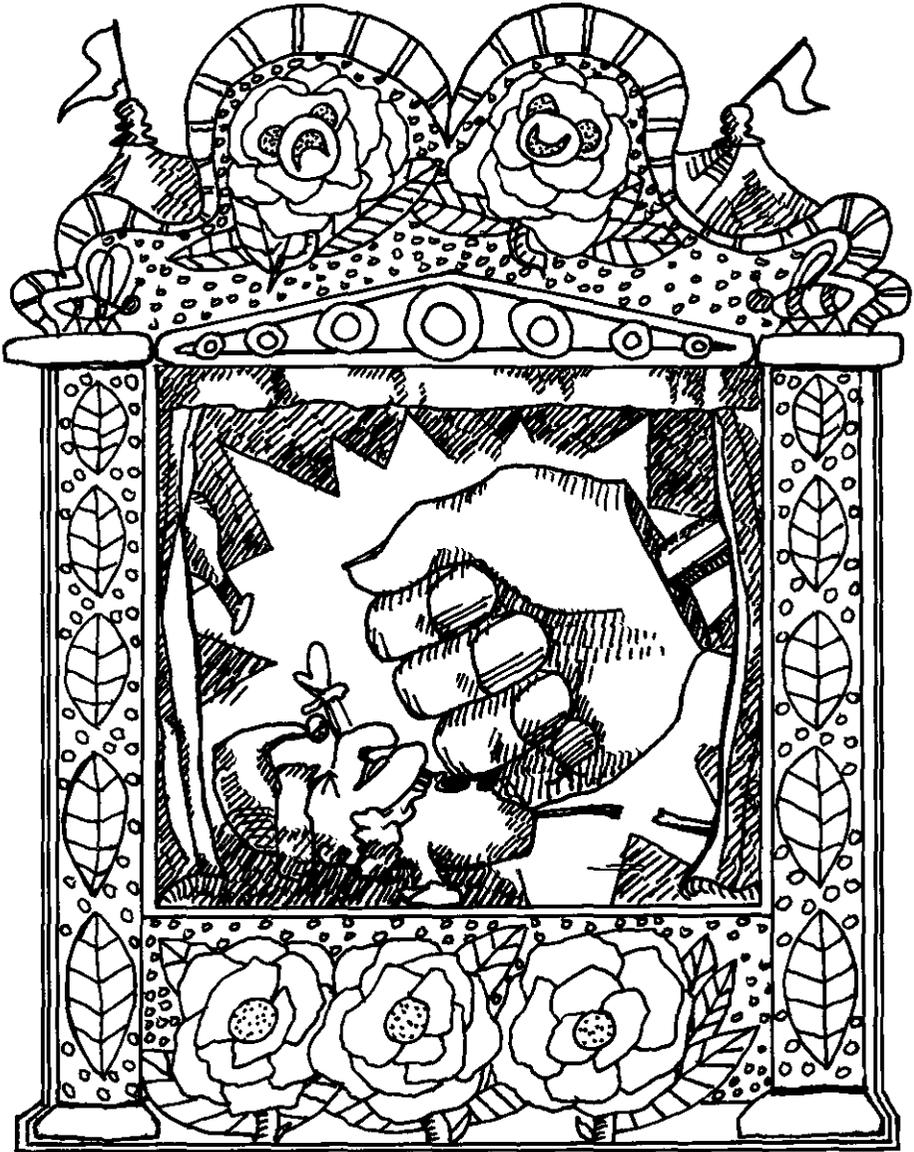
year, does not have to rebuild from scratch but has a ready made framework of support.

One consequence of all this which VSU has not yet been able to tackle satisfactorily is the question of young people leaving school and wishing to continue their work. In fact about 40 do so each year, but they are not well served. The number could be considerably higher if the Unit had the resources to establish an appropriate communication and support structure. In theory the Volunteer Bureau in the town could do this, but it is my experience that the age group we are talking about, say 17 to 21 years, requires different provision from that which is at present offered by either organisation. A simple clearing house is not sufficient for most. Group projects and social contact between volunteers are still important, and personal support and practical help, say with transport, may be more necessary than with older volunteers. It is a challenge which one day must be taken up.

In general, however, VSU and its member schools have achieved, within particular local circumstances, an educational alliance of mutual self-interest. Within that alliance lies a powerful tool in the education of the young. Within that alliance, too, lies the potential for a much-needed re-alignment of secondary education, if others are able to learn, along with VSU itself, from the achievements and failures of its work.

The Helping Hand Strikes Again

The death of an image of community service



'A report out today suggests that many elderly people prefer to continue in their own way, often in very difficult circumstances and sometimes risking accidental or lonely deaths. There should be no scandal if an old man is knocked down by a car going his own chosen way, nor if an old lady, having elected to live alone, dies after a fall or a heart attack.'⁽¹²⁾

It was a very small paragraph in the morning newspaper, but perhaps nonetheless a pointer to a growing awareness of the dangers of trying to do too much for other people, and especially of trying to override their own powers of choice. The helping hand strikes again!

The dangers are particularly acute for those individuals or those organisations who make their vocation and purpose in life the provision of help for others. We come to depend on—perhaps even create—a supply of lonely old ladies whom we can visit—because of course we like, or feel a need, to visit lonely old ladies.

I do not wish to suggest that there are no lonely old ladies, nor that some of them do not enjoy or even need a regular visitor. But there are insidious dangers in looking on other people as help fodder. The point was made in even more striking terms at a recent conference of social workers.

One social worker suggested from the rostrum that a major cause of the recent increase in child-battering (or, as they say in the trade, non-accidental injury to children) was, perhaps, social workers. An odd suggestion. The problem solvers were not problem solving, not even neutral bystanders, but actually problem intensifiers. The reason, the speaker argued, was that anxious visiting by social workers—anxious, that is, to do good—left parents feeling inadequate and resentful, and their resentment was acted out on their children. Whether or not that explanation is statistically correct, it does seem to me to contain an important psychological truth. We all need to feel respect for ourselves and for our ability to contribute to the need of others. Those of us who have sought to be in a special sense 'helpers' have not always recognised this, and fallen instead for what I shall term the 'Lone Ranger' image of doing good—an impersonal, superior, one-way process.

It is an image which the very name 'community service' almost instantly brings to mind, and has in the past been steadily fostered by the rhetoric of the community service movement. Without doubt the Lone Ranger style characterised the early days of VSU, and, on a wider scale, the literature and project names tell the story. Youth to the Rescue! Youth Helps Age! Wessex Young Volunteers Ever Ready to Help Those in Need! Hi Yo Silver!

Equally without doubt, this image has been enormously helpful in winning adult support and help. I still find it has an almost

magical efficacy today, not necessarily in delivering the goods, but at least in establishing a sympathetic identity. It is, however, easy to be trapped by your own propaganda, and what needs saying clearly now is that those of us involved in community service by young people come to see them as something more human than white knights or masked riders, and those they help as more than objects of salvation. With this awareness our education can begin.

To express this changing concept, the term 'community involvement' has gained currency as a substitute for community service. I have chosen here to retain the original formula, both because I believe it is still more common, and because I believe the idea of service or help does contain important insights missing in the word 'involvement'. We must, however, take care to understand the notion of service correctly.

The success and failure of VSU in getting to grips with this issue and turning 'helping' into a personal, reciprocal activity is best illustrated through its relationship with special schools. The search for a sound understanding has entailed both an organisational and a psychological shift. Neither has so far proved either permanent or complete.

The organisational shift has meant that those special schools which had merely been receiving help from VSU in one form or another, became equal members of the Unit with a contributing as well as a taking role. They have carried out volunteer work themselves and provided pupil members on the organising committees.

This has posed difficulties. Perhaps inevitably because of their smaller size and remote geographical location, the special schools have remained on the fringe of activities, and therefore individual pupils from them have been able to contribute little to planning and policy-making. Some pupils have on occasions been embarrassed at discussing work with those with similar handicaps as themselves, and a few undoubtedly alienated by the crasser attitudes sometimes revealed by inexperienced young committee members with no handicap. Yet others have felt no wish or need to undertake volunteer work for a whole mixture of reasons.

All of these factors have been further accentuated by the changes now steadily taking place in the composition of most special schools. In all of those with whom VSU deals, both the severity and range of handicaps has increased markedly in recent years, and led to a corresponding decrease in the potential for this sort of involvement. VSU has not yet grasped the nettle of community care since, with its present resources, it is organisationally best geared to deal with groups and units rather than scattered individuals. There is, however, clearly some re-thinking due here which cannot now be long postponed.

The majority of actual volunteer work carried out so far by

handicapped young people has been undertaken on their own and comparatively little has occurred in conjunction with other young people. A notable exception has been the joint visiting of elderly people by blind and sighted young people. Less successfully, physically handicapped young people have attended some discos for the mentally handicapped as volunteers.

But, if the evidence and the success are slight, there are signs that for the minority of handicapped young people who, arguably more maturely, do wish to move from a receiving and dependent relationship, the potential is very great. This is most clearly seen in the possibly somewhat grandly designated 'art class' run each week by a small group of spastic volunteers for a group of mentally handicapped patients. Talking to those volunteers is probably the best instant tonic for jaded volunteer organisers. As one said to me, in stumbling speech but with a conviction that rivetted the attention:

'I wanted to work with mentally handicapped people because I wanted to prove that I could help others in spite of my physical handicap. In school I only meet people like myself. I wanted to meet others and understand them. People sometimes tend to think we're stupid, but we're not, and we want to give as well as receive.'

The psychological shift which has occurred in VSU's thinking has meant that more emphasis has been placed on the needs of volunteers and the benefits they will draw from their experience, and also on what help they may receive from those who can be somewhat clinically termed 'clients'. That is, VSU attempts to recognise that everyone has the same need for creative human relationships.

In dealings with special schools, this has primarily meant endeavouring to create situations where 'handicapped' and 'normal' young people meet as equals to share common interests, whether by attending a weekly coffee bar or by arranging fixtures—swimming, bridge, ice skating, bowling and war games have all proved successful. Yet hang-ups are present on both sides. Handicapped young people can be unaccustomed to the reactions of others of their own age and consequently reticent, and those they meet are wary of their own fears and embarrassment, and uncertain how to handle a relationship without being patronising or causing offence. The most effective way I have seen this overcome is by putting mixed groups through an adventure training course in which everybody is so disorientated and challenged by things they do not know how to do that the barriers just collapse because everybody's in it together. It does seem a pity, however, that quite such drastic lengths are called for.

In part, all of these difficulties are inherent in the concept of 'special' education. Most special schools work with supreme dedication to meet the needs of their pupils. But their task of helping

pupils achieve as 'normal' a life as possible is perhaps hindered more than we realise by their structure, their geographical location, their isolation—their 'specialness'. All of those connected with VSU are situated in large mansions well away from, often impossibly far away from, the mainstream of community life. This has certainly hindered both the involvement of young people from those schools as volunteers alongside other young people, and even simply the provision of opportunities for common meeting. And yet those handicapped youngsters have the same right to contribute to the community as have all young people, and arguably their need to do so is greater.

The whole complex and subtle psychological difficulty at which I am driving I recently found pinpointed in a brief exchange in a novel:

'Is it so bad to be different?'

'It's not being different really that's bad. It's being special. If you're special you're not part of other people. They don't always want me, but I want them.'

This came out almost as a cry of pain.'⁽¹³⁾

The danger of community service is that it can be seen to be reinforcing rather than bridging that divide. It is a trap into which we have too readily fallen.

Community service died for me when I was 17. There were a group of us, all young. We had ideals. And we had an inkling that high ideals might become tangible in small ways, in the concrete and the practical. Changing the world might begin with changing things for one person. And we were ready and willing to do that.

But where to start? We searched around and found an organisation which had the same idea. We asked them what to do and they gave us an address, a house, a bedroom ceiling to decorate for an old lady living alone.

One Friday night, six of us turned up on the doorstep armed with an assortment of borrowed equipment, a vague recollection of the rudiments of decorating and considerable enthusiasm. We worked for four hours. The old lady was delighted and that was good to see. The ceiling did make a difference. One of us put into words the thoughts of all.

'Look, if you'd like, we'd all really like to come back next weekend and then we could paint the walls and the room really would be different.'

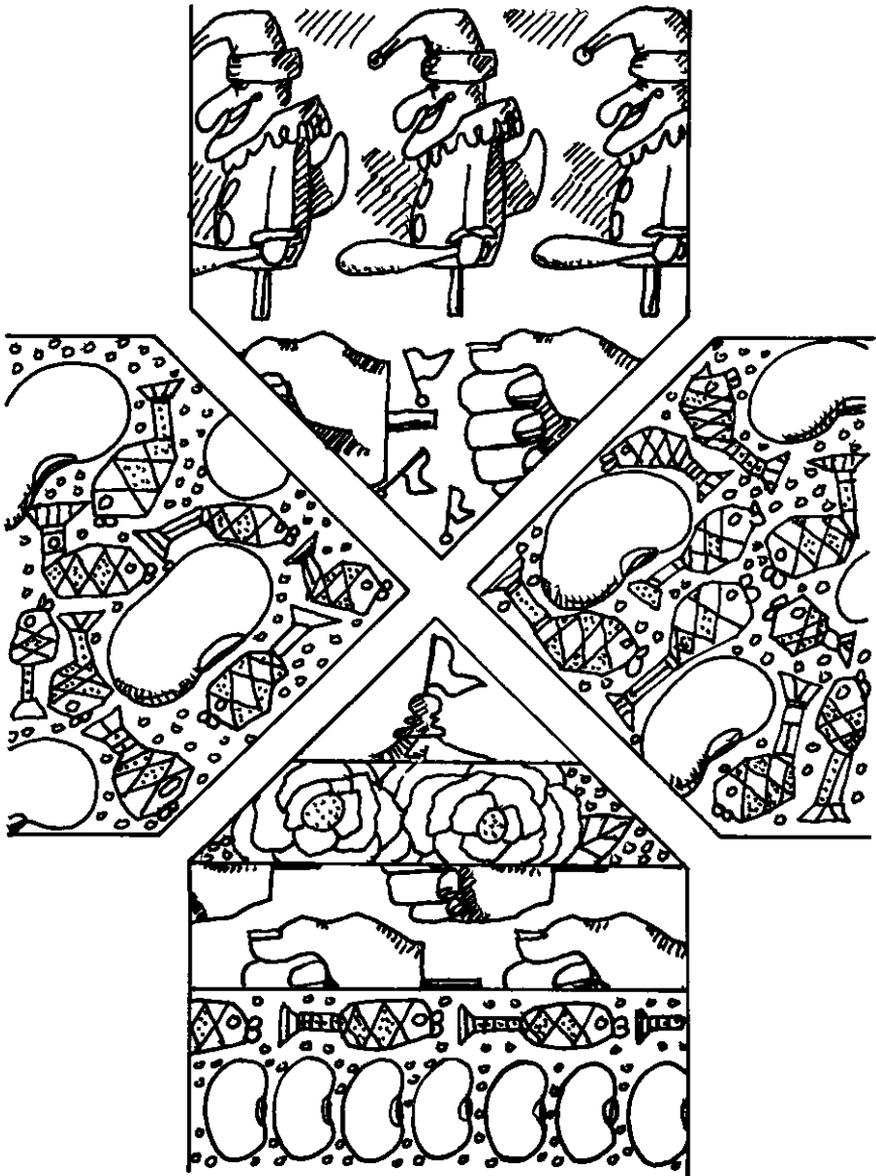
'Oh, that's alright dear. Not to worry yourself. The council are coming on Monday to do that.'

We were choked. We didn't stop to ask why the council couldn't paint the ceiling. We took a fumbled leave and never again went decorating for old ladies.

That has too often been the story of community service. A good idea that never quite made it. Idealism sold down the river of half-baked philanthropy. It doesn't have to be that way, but it took me a long while to discover that. The Lone Ranger has a lot to answer for.

A Four-fold Path

Patterns of community involvement



'Quot homines, tot sententiae', my old schoolmaster was fond of saying when he felt we were in need of a bit of culture or discussion had degenerated into unseemly argument. He might well have addressed himself to social educators. There are almost as many approaches as there are practitioners. It is still difficult to talk about social education in any coherent and generally agreed way. Any framework of analysis remains incomplete.

Community service is a part but not the whole of social education, and to an extent is caught up in the wider confusion. In trying to make sense of what has happened in Sevenoaks I shall make use of a framework which gives me a few landmarks in trying to relate specific local circumstances to more general patterns of development. The framework is not absolute. If it helps others to take a location fix, well and good, if not, well there is nothing lost.

VSU has been, by inclination, eclectic in its approach to developing a strategy of community service opportunities for all young people in the town. It has been notably opportunistic, keeping an eye for the quick chance. It has made use of ideas and approaches which seemed to 'fit' locally, and, on occasions, chosen to follow a less than ideal course, theoretically, in order to achieve a hoped-for practical gain. An example of this was the introduction of community service into the curriculum of one school where, for a short time initially, an inadequately resourced compulsory course was tolerated in order to establish the benefits which a properly constructed course might bring. In that instance it worked, at other times it did not. These are the risks of compromise which are an inevitable part of innovation.

I think I can distinguish four modes or settings by which the practitioners of community service have attempted to put their ideas into practice, and I find some echoes of each in what has been attempted in Sevenoaks. I do not wish to argue that one or other is right or better, although I do maintain there is some truth and value in each. I simply wish to explore some of the problems and advantages of each of the four approaches and to relate them to my own experience.

1. The open setting

This is where it all began. The roots are still strong in the alternative phrase 'voluntary service'. The community service agent—for our purposes let us, to remove hints of espionage, call him (or her) the teacher—touts his wares on the open market, perhaps a school extra-curricular activity or a youth club, and offers them to anyone willing to do business with him.

This approach has the advantages of immediacy and informality. It gives great flexibility to the time and place of operation and so enables the tackling of those situations of most need. Those who

take part are in a real sense volunteers and may well give greater commitment to the transaction because they have chosen to be part of it in their own time. It is, incidentally, worth noting that many young people want something more purposeful from their spare time than the traditional offerings of youth clubs. The open market for community service is also healthily subject to the discipline of the market place. The wise buyer can vote with his purse, or, in this case, his feet.

For VSU the open setting accounts for just over half its work. It has drawn strength for this from its roots in schools, which have enabled ready access to young people and provided a network of support and communication, and manages each week to attract the involvement of several hundred young people aged 14 to 18, mostly drawn from the middle of that band and slightly more girls than boys. It does this without competition, without external reward, uniform or rules. It is almost casual in its approach. Someone who is doing something belongs and someone who isn't does not. Its resources are open at any time to any young person who wishes to make use of them. It asks no membership subscription as such—schools as a body form the only formal membership of the Unit—and it tries to turn no-one away. That makes it an administrator's nightmare, but it does generate an immense tide of enthusiasm and sense of identification.

The freedom and flexibility that this implies is not the same as being undisciplined or uncommitted. The Unit attempts to offer within its programme a blend of activities for individuals and groups. Some, like a disco at a mental handicap hospital, can act as a taster. Young people can try it out and come and go as they please. It will not unbalance the project. Others, like a drama therapy project for handicapped children, require a quite specific and consistent commitment sustained over a pre-determined minimum period.

This mix is intended to enable each individual to begin at his or her own level. For some it may well be their first taste of success of any sort. The trick is to make that level a springboard and not a platform. Volunteers who so wish should be able to grow as people and progress in their capacity as volunteers. The failure to recognise this is possibly the most serious criticism of the garden-digging syndrome.

It is difficult to assess the success of the Unit in promoting this growth, for clearly a large organisation can, through its sheer size, disguise a high-fall out of possibly bored volunteers by its rate of turnover and recruitment. Clearly, many do progress and not a few fall out. Against the enthusiasm that can be generated by the informal organisation must be weighed the difficulty of keeping track of what is happening to individuals at any particular time.

The Unit also relies for its motivation power, and for fulfilling

its educational aims, on involving young people directly in its management, organisation and policy-making, from the lowest level to the formal management committee which includes six young people among its 15 members. VSU does not believe the young are there to be told what to do in the community, or even charismatically inspired. On occasions both may have their place, but primarily young people have the same right as anyone else to work out whether, how, and on what terms they wish to contribute to the community.

Equally, to expect that the necessary urge to contribute, or the knowledge of how to do so, will arise through some mysterious process of spontaneous combustion, is naïve in the extreme. The young, therefore, need help and support which is quite different from that required by adult volunteers and which will involve a subtle blend of direction and withdrawal on the part of those who attempt it.

The first part of that task is to arouse interest. Often, I believe, this means holding up a quite specific job for inspection, sometimes suggesting but never predetermining a response. It is the concreteness of the need which is the only yardstick the individual can have of his or her capacity to meet it.

I once met a youth officer who was convinced that young people, on the whole, did not wish to contribute to the community and that, therefore, it was not part of his business to encourage such a contribution. He claimed to have formed this opinion on the evidence of a substantial survey. Further questioning elicited the information that this survey consisted of a written questionnaire given to a large number of fifth year pupils which asked, among other things: *'Which activity do you most want to take part in; table tennis, ice skating, community work?'*. Not surprisingly, since there was no rink for 20 miles, the overwhelming answer was ice skating. It was a nonsense question on which to base a policy. For to ask, as he effectively did, *'Hands up everyone who'd like to do community service'*, will almost certainly be to draw a blank and perhaps to reinforce feelings of inadequacy.

It has always seemed to me more helpful to phrase an approach along the lines: *'Would you be willing this weekend to help paint the house of an 84 year old crippled lady in West Street. She's lived alone for ten years and the neighbours won't go near her. We'd like to see if we can make contact and draw her out a bit'*. Note that all the information is there and the commitment is not open-ended. With that information about the need, a possible approach and a defined commitment, it may happen that, as in the case I am thinking of, the old lady gets a brighter living room. It can conceivably happen, as in this instance, that an ongoing friendship develops between the painters and their old lady, to the benefit of both. And it may also happen that the painters are led by this to

ask questions about why anyone has to live in such conditions anyway. Those questions are questions about oneself and one's own attitudes, as well as about society. It is important that someone is on hand if they want any help to work out the answers.

To bring about such a sequence of development requires organisation and it requires insight. It means knowing about and understanding this particular group of young people and it means knowing about and understanding this particular community. It means ferreting around, keeping an ear to the ground and tipping the wink to the right group of people at the right time. It is a skill which itself needs time, energy and support.

The community service teacher as salesperson and tipper of winks may revel in his independence and confound the youth officer with the response he can draw. But he may also from time to time begin to wonder if many of those who could most benefit from what he has to offer are not tending to stay away from the market place, perhaps because they do not have enough of the ready to do business with anyone. He may then begin to eye more closely the school from which most of his customers are drawn, and in particular cast long sideways glances at the curriculum. There, under one roof for long periods of time, are all those who could avail themselves of his wares, a captive market.

2. The approach through the school timetable

The teacher who, quite reasonably, pursues this line of thinking has all the arguments about the educational value of community service to support him. He also knows that for the pupils the acid test of what the school takes seriously is what it puts on the timetable. No amount of assemblies extolling the virtues of service to others will cut much ice when the dominant message of the timetable is work hard, get your exams, look out for number one. It is therefore not unreasonable to challenge the school to put its timetable where its mouth is and recognise community service alongside all the other subjects which are the legitimate concern of the school and demonstrated to be such through the explicit curriculum.

At once, however, this stance puts the teacher on the horns of a major practical and philosophical dilemma. On the one hand a part of his case needs to be that community service is an appropriate and necessary activity for everyone in the school at some stage in their career there. It is neither the preserve of an academic elite nor a ghetto of so-called relevance for early leavers. Otherwise, as has been demonstrated in all too many schools, the likely result is either an alienated activity or a debilitated one. In neither case is it seen as worthy of serious attention by the majority.

On the other hand, the sensitive teacher will also be aware that he cannot force his concern on every pupil. A helping relationship

can only be entered into without undue pressure. There is a gulf between need and response which must not be bridged by teacher coercion. To recognise the need for all young people to have opportunities to give of themselves to others is not the same as compelling them to do so. Translated into money terms, the difference is about the same as between paying a fine and making a bequest.

The obvious resolution of this conflict lies in enabling all to have the opportunity to choose whether they wish to take part in such an activity. Choice indeed has an important and underestimated part to play in education, even, on occasions, choosing badly. It is a part of that training in trust which is one of the lessons community service has to offer schools. To advocate choice, however, is not to advocate a total laissez-faire approach. Choice, to be effective, requires its own rigorous structure.

With the resolution of the philosophical conflict through the mechanism of choice, the practical problems are just beginning. Teachers constructing a timetable cannot, as things stand, timetable pupils to do nothing if they so choose. Equally, they cannot, in professional conscience, write off some of those in their charge from achieving the benefits they believe community service potentially has to offer to everyone. The practical challenge is therefore to devise an integrated range of opportunities, each of which is likely to contribute to specific educational objectives concerned with the transition from school to adult life, and the range of which is likely to cater for the needs and interests of every pupil without assuming that a period of caring service will be appropriate for all. Teachers may encourage but not force that issue.

This range of choices will need to be balanced. There must be no soft options. All choices will have to make varied but equivalent demands. All choices must be available to every pupil. Inevitably the search for such a balance in each situation will lead its own way. But it is possible to illustrate from the experience of one Sevenoaks school what might be entailed.

Hatton School, a girls' secondary modern school, when seeking to implement a community service programme open to all, found its first difficulty with the timetable. Given the will to take time out of every pupil's week in the fifth year to use in this way, the school quickly realised that an uninterrupted half-day a week is the minimum realistic timespan if any benefit is to accrue to the pupil and to those with whom she works. Both need to gain if the activity is to fulfil its educational potential.

Each pupil needs that amount of time for at least a term. In some cases it is only just at that stage that an individual pupil has found her feet. It is part of the deal that more is required than just observation. A job must be taken on and responsibility given. That, incidentally, is quite in keeping with maintaining the full

professional status of anyone whose job is supplemented by young volunteers, not least because they become, in part, an educator.

Many pupils, and placements, would welcome longer than a term, although that is all Hatton has found it possible to make available. A longer period would certainly aid continuity. If more time were available, however, it ought to entail some progression and sequence of development built into the work. This may mean a new placement which makes use of past experience but adds new demands, or it may mean the development of the present work and the encouragement of initiative. Either way the progression cannot be left to chance.

There is ideally a need for further time over and above the half day to enable pupils to talk about their experiences. I deliberately left the teacher out of that sentence. He will certainly need to create the conditions in which this can happen successfully and to ensure that it does happen, but his prime task is to help individuals find their own way through whatever situations are thrown up, not to prescribe the answers—even assuming that he knows them!

The fact that Hatton has not successfully achieved that extra time does not mean it is unimportant, just that it is irrelevant without the experience. Instead Hatton has been forced to 'ad hoc-ery', conversations in minibuses en route, systematic encounters in the lunch queue or common room, and once-a-term withdrawals from the placement for group discussion.

It has been, I suspect, a popular assumption on the part of harassed timetablers that the absence of a significant number of pupils from the school premises provides the opportunity to ease staffing problems elsewhere. This is a classic misunderstanding, at least when applied to community service, which, to be effective, requires not a less but a more favourable staffing ratio than classroom based work. Experience suggests that one teacher to 18 pupils represents a minimum. This can be supplemented by an enterprising school, which may also face transport problems in getting pupils to their placement, by recruiting parents or others in the community as drivers. With encouragement those adult volunteers can also play a support role to the young.

The task of those teachers assigned to the programme will be different and the demands on them more subtle than those they meet in other areas of their work, but certainly no easy ride for the conscientious as they become contact person and support to both placement and pupil.

Hatton tackled the issue of balanced choice through the involvement of the craft and physical education departments. These areas suggested themselves partly because of the interests of particular teachers and partly because of the way the rest of the school curriculum was structured.

At a theoretical level, two developments were involved. One has been termed the 'humane application of knowledge'. This principle seeks to make every aspect of the curriculum relevant to the immediate needs of other people as well as to the future needs of the learner and of the examiner. It encourages teachers and pupils to apply their developing skills and knowledge to community problems, and incidentally thereby increase their own mastery. The other development is most commonly known as tutoring. Older pupils take responsibility for helping young ones learn skills they are themselves acquiring, thus often making learning more effective for both participants. It is worth pointing out to teachers, many of whom in my experience seem to take exception even to the suggestion of such an idea, that this does not constitute an attack upon their professional integrity. The tutors are not 'teachers' in the classroom sense. They are 'teachers' in the everyday sense that we all regularly show things we know to people who don't. The tutors are, in fact, amplifiers of the professional skills of the classroom teacher, an asset to those with the insight to use them. That is a skill itself, of which more will be said later.

In practice, these theories led first to the formation of a community craft workshop, which attempted to develop creative skills in pupils by looking for ways in which those skills were needed by the wider community. Most of the initial impetus came from the teacher, who discovered needs for toy renovation and repair at the local hospital, at playgroups and at children's homes. But as pupils gain confidence and skill they are encouraged to investigate needs themselves and to make proposals for meeting them. Delivery of completed work and observation of its use and value are important parts of the process, as is the professionalism with which the task is accomplished. The workshop provides training in responsibility, an understanding of the needs of others, a maturing in confidence and ability to feel useful, and the satisfaction of a job well done.

The second practical expression of the theories was attempted by staff in the physical education department. They chose to offer to pupils the opportunity both to try out new and challenging activities not encountered elsewhere in school, for example skating, rock climbing or orienteering, and also the opportunity to share new skills with someone else. As a regular part of the course various groups have come into the school for joint sessions and instruction from girls. In turn, girls have visited those who have been their guests. Swimming classes and rounders with blind children, wheelchair games with the physically handicapped, trampolining with primary schools and netball with the mentally handicapped have all been regular projects. The idea of the course is not to become a great games player, but to get to know more about yourself and perhaps to enlarge the horizons of other people in the process. It is noticeable that girls who are not conspicuous in their enjoyment of

PE shine when, say, it becomes their responsibility to assist a blind child swimming.

Hatton School has found that these craft and games activities, together with a range of community placements in schools, homes and hospitals of every sort, provide a reasonably satisfactory range of choice for the whole spread of fifth year pupils. It is, of course, natural that refinements and shifts of emphasis occur each term in the light of experience and the demands of different groups of pupils.

The search for suitable placements and activities is an ongoing and time-consuming task. It entails establishing a clear understanding with each group of the purpose of the exercise and what is expected as their part in it. They need to understand that it is a two-way process, in which a benefit is offered to them in return for which some investment of their time and skill is sought. That joint understanding is fostered by half-yearly individual visits and annual group meetings of all involved. Such nourishment means that the occasional difficult pupil can be accommodated without destroying the relationship at a stroke.

Hatton has also discovered that girls who have to make the choice between these alternatives must, if the process is not to go wildly wrong, understand clearly what each of the alternatives would entail. Here, I believe, an element of compulsion becomes appropriate, both for the sake of the programme and for wider educational purposes. They must know before they can choose.

To provide that grounding prior to choice the school has incorporated the community service experience into a two year course undertaken by every pupil in the fourth and fifth years. It is by no means intended solely as a support to the term spent gaining first hand experience, but it is intended that by the end of the fourth year each pupil will have some insight into her own talents and abilities and some direct knowledge of the sorts of experiences from which she will have to make a choice.

It is hoped that the eventual choice will be a considered one based on knowledge. Time for thought is essential. The 'hands up' approach is, once again, simply not good enough. Girls are required to complete a detailed form outlining the reasons for their choices. Several days are allowed for its completion. During the summer holiday one person sifts all the choices, consults with teachers concerned and irons out difficulties. The choices are not divided artificially into sections, games, craft, community service. The precise activities are listed, but they are not necessarily pre-packaged. There is scope for individual flexibility. Choices can form any combination of activity and a pupil can normally expect to receive one of her first three preferences.

At the start of her fifth year, each girl is offered a place based

upon the choices she has indicated, and, if she accepts, this forms the basis of a contract. She has been offered an acceptable activity and is expected to see her choice through and give of her best for the term, unless very special circumstances arise. If she disagrees with the offer, further discussion, including a full explanation of any problems (on both sides) has to take place. While changes of mind at the start of the fifth year are not uncommon, serious problems are (about five per cent on average). Once accepted, the girls write their own letter of introduction to the placement. This has been especially welcomed by those who receive them, giving the opportunity for a little advance planning. The need to plan their work on the assumption of having a volunteer is something that is stressed to placements. The school must therefore accept its own responsibility to do all it can to make that as easy as possible.

Much of the success or failure of the term can be traced back to the quality of the matching process that has taken place before it begins. It is a process which requires time and care and knowledge on the part of the person who carries it out. Of almost equal importance is the support given to girls once they have started, and this is considered more fully in a later chapter.

The best account of the strengths and weaknesses of this approach is perhaps the analysis given by the girls themselves. What follows is a resumé of the comments made by one term's set of 50 girls in a series of tape recorded discussions. A representative cross section of views from the whole range of community service placements has been grouped around the questions which seem most pertinent to the development of the work.

What difficulties have you encountered?

'If you don't talk to the patients' (in a psychogeriatric hospital) 'they don't like it. And you mustn't care what they say, even when they talk out loud about you and gossip. You have to go along with them. Whatever they talk about you just try and think of something. And if you don't understand what they're on about, you say 'Oh well, back and see you in a minute'.'

'They like to hold your hand as well, and some people flinch, 'Please don't touch me'. You know babies like to touch, well, the nurses said to me when you get old you like to touch young persons. But you mustn't get too attached to them, 'cos they die. About four old ladies have died since we started. And we liked them. There was one last week and that really upset us. If you get too emotionally involved, it's not going to work.'

'We tended to patronise people. 'Are you alright, dear?', this type of thing. But you get far more by respecting them.'

'You have to put some effort in. You can't just sit there and hope it's going to come to you. Two people dropped out of our

project and that's where they went wrong. I think. Because they didn't put anything in and just expected to get it back.'

'In the playground you get the problem of children bullying each other. And you really have to decide for yourself what to do, whether to ignore them because they want attention or whether to go and see if there's really trouble.'

'Usually when I tell them a story they're really absorbed. But last week it was raining and they were really noisy. And there was one boy causing chaos and I told him to stand up and tell us a poem, thinking he wouldn't know one. But he did Humpty Dumpty, so everyone laughed. I just gave in. I didn't know what to do.'

What benefits have you gained yourself?

'The value of the course? Sue feels this as well, so it's not just me. It's very difficult to analyse—but I think I don't judge people so much from their appearance. You realise that everyone can teach you something. It's given me a greater degree of perseverance than I had before and more self-confidence. And I've overcome an irrational fear of mentally sick people. And I don't treat people as complete idiots, because we often found that we were trying to explain something to them and they knew it and it was us that was wrong. It was stupid of us.'

'I suppose I've learnt how difficult little jobs like getting things out of the cupboard are for the handicapped. It's made me a little bit more sympathetic. But it's also made me a lot more scared of them.'

'I'm a lot less scared than when I first went. First I didn't know what to say at all, now they're friends to me and talk to me and I can talk to them. They tell me lots of things perhaps they wouldn't tell anyone else.'

'I think you learn to stand on your own feet. Rather than being in school and depending on your friends to give you confidence, you were just pushed in there, and if you happened to be without your friend one week, you were on your own and that was it. You had to carry on.'

Would you like more help and preparation?

'I'd like to be told exactly what to do. For Mrs L. to come up to me and say 'I want you to take her', and not, well, she just left me 'cos I was away the first week and then I was a bit scared she'd ask me to do something I didn't want to, so I just kept in the background.'

'I'd like more help in what to expect, how to act. We never really thought about it in a big way in the fourth year.'

'But you really have to do a lot on your own. You're with a teacher but you're on your own. You go into a class where you

don't know anything or anyone or what they do or how they're going to react. You're on your own.'

'I don't think the school can help us, because I don't think you realise until you actually sit down with a child what's involved.'

'I think it's something we have to get over ourselves. No-one could really help us. They can tell us what to do, but I think it's a good thing having two girls brought in and told to get on with it. It taught us we had to get the children undressed, how to get them in the pool, what to do in the pool. We had to make it up for ourselves out of our heads.'

'Last week we went up to a ward to help but the staff didn't really welcome us and we just sat there and didn't do anything.'

'The staff's attitude couldn't really be better. They treat us as absolute equals in everything.'

'The staff are really nice. They say, you know, if it's not too much trouble, have you got some material at home 'cos we're making a blanket to raffle. The lady I work for says 'Oh yeah, go into the office and make some tea, just help yourself'. Everyone says hello and everything and they just trust us to go anywhere whenever we want.'

3. The community education approach

Those enthusiasts for community service who were more perceptive, or perhaps they were just more supremely arrogant, came to believe that what they were really on about was very much closer to the heart of what schools ought to be about than struggling to lay hold of one tenth of the week for one or two years. A much more thorough infiltration of the curriculum was called for than the adoption of some subjects into a community service programme in the way that Hatton incorporated craft work and physical education.

This view is based on a realistic appraisal of the need to reduce pressures on already overcrowded timetables. There is little future for anyone in trying to create yet another subject with all the attendant battles to be fought. It would be much more practical and far more in keeping with the principles underlying the notion of community service to try to relate it to every activity of the school, to bring to each subject a community dimension. It becomes the task of the science teacher to explore the community dimension of his subject and apply its principles to situations of human need. Ditto the historian, ditto everyone.

The most significant development along these lines in a Sevenoaks school has been the growth of an A level Design course. A requirement of the examination is a practical design project to be undertaken by each student during her two years of study. The course teacher

has drawn on links with VSU to enable those students who wish it to discover the needs of people in the community to which a design solution might be applicable. The course is still only in its earliest phases and the first group of students have not at the time of writing taken their examination. It is therefore only possible to make preliminary observations.

Four students out of ten chose a community basis for their project, redesigning science and domestic science equipment for use by spastics, creating a personal mobility aid for a physically handicapped girl, and designing a page turner for bedridden readers. One early observation is the tension between the needs of the learner and the needs of the person with a problem. Stress is laid on the need for real problems with no known solution. If the student then fails, for whatever reason, to develop a solution, then expectations have been aroused on the part of those in need which may lead to severe disappointment and disillusionment when they are not met.

The curriculum-centred approach to community service is not then an easy one and will require considerable imagination and patience if it is to achieve a significant infiltration. It will, in my view, complement rather than obviate the need for the sort of individual placement experience which Hatton incorporated into its timetable, but it is surely sound in its insistence that service is not a thing apart but intrinsically bound up with all activities in school and in life.

The curriculum is of course only one part of the structure of a school, and there is, as a number of teachers and educationalists have seen, no reason for community infiltration to stop there. There are economic, social, and educational arguments for school buildings to be much more open and available places and for the artificial division of statutory schooling to be broken down. The school then becomes a focal point of community life. As Henry Morris, the pioneer of Cambridgeshire village colleges, envisaged it: *'There would be no leaving school, the child would enter at three and leave only in extreme old age'*. Inside the school the citizen would find *'all educational and social agencies, whether statutory or voluntary'*.⁽¹⁴⁾ The former architect to Nottinghamshire County Council goes further: *'Education should be seen as a process that involves people at various stages of their lives and does not distinguish between vocational, recreational and academic studies.'* Then he goes on: *'But even this in my view is not enough. Perhaps what is needed is a central community service in which education itself is only a part.'*⁽¹⁵⁾

In some areas a complex to fit this large bill has been built, but not at Sevenoaks. Although several schools have recognised that their responsibility to the community is wider than just the provision of appropriate teaching for 11-16 year olds, and consequently

sought ways to make their resources more generally available, this has not become formalised into a community education policy. As a result, progress will be slow, but there may also be seeds of a healthy caution.

The danger of the community school must be that it becomes a gigantic sponge, soaking up all that is around, absorbing the community rather than enabling the community to meet its own needs. In too many cases it appears that the 'coming in' of the community is not matched by a 'going out' from the school. If that happens the community school may become the enemy of true community education.

4. The radical critique

While VSU, and others, have pursued their work along all of these paths, their approaches have not been without criticism. John Rennie describes the Schools Council Social Education Project as a reaction against the *'then-popular (still-popular?) community service schemes—usually involving either helping old ladies or doing dirty clearance jobs by hand—in which teachers satisfied their own social consciences through the efforts of the kids'*.⁽¹⁶⁾

It is a sad reflection on the communication skills of community service practitioners that such a renowned authority in the field of social education should hold such a badly stereotyped view of community service. Rennie goes on to describe the Project as stemming, in his view, from the *'fairly radical belief'* that youngsters have within them the ability to identify their own objectives and to take decisions about reaching them. It sought to produce not involvement but *'creative indignation—a potent force for change'*.

It is not a belief I personally find all that radical. The worrying thing about such rhetoric in practice is that it is subject to exactly the same dangers of imposing a set of values and vicariously satisfying the teacher's conscience, as the community service schemes that it seeks to criticise. If it serves as a reminder that there is more than one way of reaching the same end, and that considerable imagination is needed in recognising the contribution which young people have to make to society, then its point is well taken. If it serves as a warning that too much community service tends to be apolitical in its awareness, then its point must be grasped. There is nothing in my experience more likely to set warning bells ringing among head teachers than suspicions of political involvement. Trying to persuade a local society to change its long-hallowed methods of running a dance for the handicapped is, in fact, as political an act as lobbying councillors to provide cheap bus passes for the elderly. But there is no doubt which is more acceptable in schools.

For me, the acid test is the question of manipulation. Both those who would call themselves social educators and those who would see themselves as community service teachers can be guilty of working out their own conscience through their pupils. Instead, the common goal of both ought to be the autonomous functioning of their pupils as caring and responsible members of society. It is neither that the young will passively accept the perennial fate of real old ladies, however much they actually do need real friendship and help here and now, nor that they will automatically assume that every problem they encounter is per se an argument for major social change. Some problems will just recur and have to be met at an individual level.

Young people need a width of experience before they can sort out the appropriate response, and to discover the response they need to reflect on that experience. That, for me, is the nub of the radical critique. There is not enough reflection in community service.

As far as VSU is concerned, it has seen its priority role as attempting to provide a range of experience and to begin to encourage reflection on it. It does not achieve as much reflection as it would like, but there is no use reflecting on experience you haven't had, and a start must be made somewhere.

The provision of conferences has been an important strategy in kicking off that reflection process. Most take place at weekends, usually once a term. Occasionally they have been residential. Most recently, however, conferences have been promoted as a part of the school day, and it is here that I think future curriculum development will take place, if anywhere.

As yet that is still an embryonic hope. One conference has so far been developed aimed at those young people at the end of their third year who might be thinking of becoming volunteers in their own time. It seeks to give some experience of the range of opportunities available and also to encourage thought about the nature of, and attitudes to, handicap and normality.

Schools are much more readily willing and able to release pupils on a once-off basis. It is certainly possible to achieve much more in a whole day than in the same amount of time spread out in small doses over many weeks. It is also possible in a conference to create a different atmosphere and a greater range of experience than is normally encountered in a classroom. The long-term hope is to develop a series of such days directed at different age groups and interest groups.

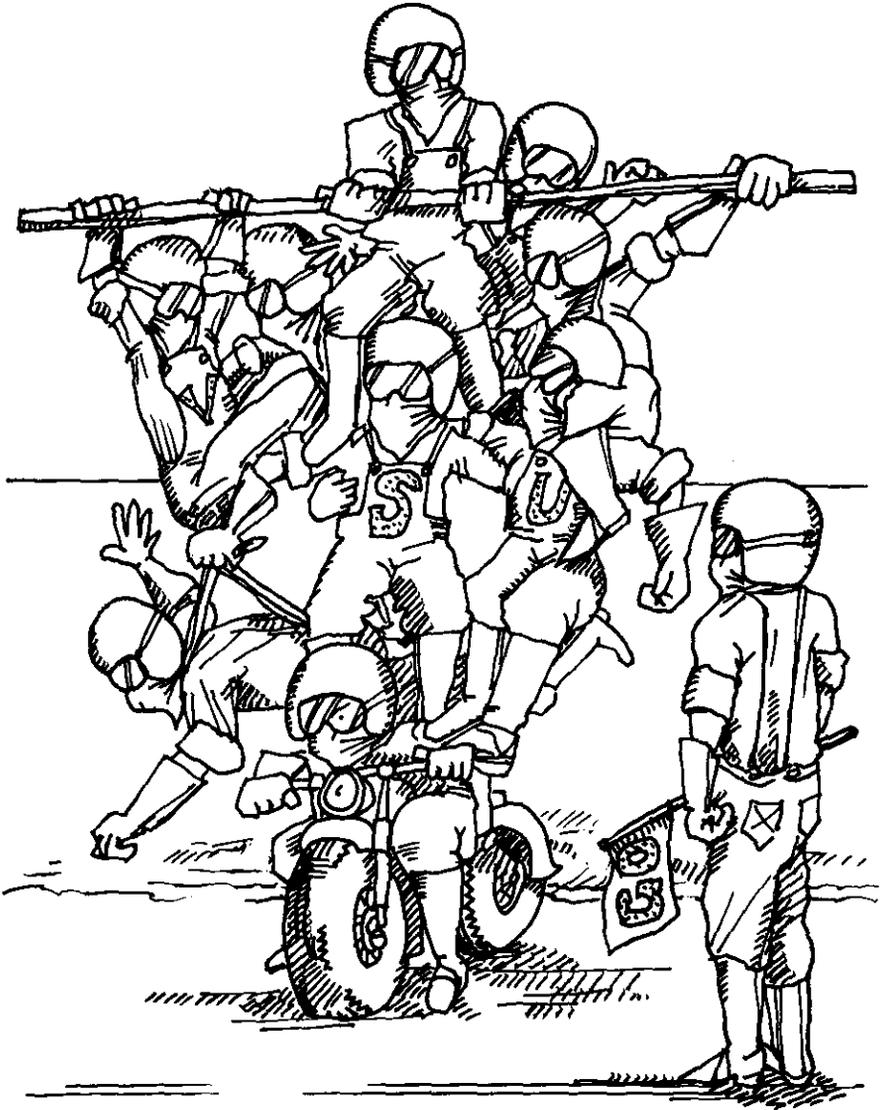
Arising out of this overall summary of four approaches to community service, it seems to me a number of key statements can be made.

The opportunity of community service should be readily available to every pupil in secondary education. This can happen within and without the curriculum, and that should probably correctly be viewed as both/and rather than either/or. Whichever way it may be, properly structured choice is a vital ingredient. The role of the teacher is prompter, partner and enabler, rather than instructor. It is important, however, that young people have the opportunity to reflect creatively on their experience. Finally, the notion of community service and community involvement needs to permeate every aspect of the life of the school, but not in an all-consuming way.

It must be emphasised that the four-fold path to community service I have outlined is not an exclusive one. None of the routes alone can provide a completely satisfactory journey. Each has a particular contribution to make. Each, moreover, would benefit from a good deal more exploration.

Doing your own thing

The practice of participation



A platitude, someone once said, is simply a truth repeated until people get tired of hearing it. The need for participation by young people is in danger of becoming another modern platitude. It would not matter if the repetition of truth guaranteed its understanding and its transmission into practice. But that is rarely the case.

To judge by the comments made by visitors to VSU, one would imagine that asking young people whether, how, and on what terms they wish to become involved in the community, and helping them to work through the implications of their decision, is a novel approach. But it has been one of the longest established traditions of the Unit that it is not just an organisation *for* young people, but primarily an organisation *of* and run *by* young people. Some visitors comment, a little disparagingly, that it must only be possible because of the type of youngster one gets in Sevenoaks. I do not agree. I believe it has worked primarily because of a commitment to make it work, to accept the extra effort entailed, and to thrash out over a long period of time the inevitable problems. Participation in Sevenoaks has not just happened, it has evolved over a good number of years.

As a result, the problems faced in VSU today are not about how to make participation happen, but about how to relate that principle to an organisation of great size and complexity. To cope with that growth, a periodic shake-up of the approach to participation has been needed. The most recent began with a group sitting round on the floor late one night at a party idly discussing the issue.

I recently passed a train journey reading *'Wheels'*, Arthur Hailey's novel of the Detroit motor industry. I was struck in passing by the value major car manufacturers appeared to place on providing informal meeting situations, in special dining rooms or wherever, for their design and planning teams, in the hope that casual discussion will spark a flow of creative ideas. I do not know whether that actually happens in the higher echelons of the American motor industry. But, if it does not, it certainly ought to, for it provides the very lifeblood of a developing organisation.

At that party, the seed was sown that it would be good to provide an opportunity for volunteers, particularly those who were not 'secretaries' (the VSU jargon for those pupils holding posts of responsibility in each school), to talk together about the direction and development of the Unit. As a result, a half-day conference was held and for nearly three hours some 60 volunteers talked as one large group about how they saw VSU. A group of that size is not well suited to sifting and resolving the mass of ideas which such a meeting can generate, so, afterwards, Dick, student chairman at the time, decided to try to form a small group to continue the discussion. The group had no special status or authority except that

the members were deliberately chosen to provide a genuine cross-section of age, background and experience.

It met three times for a couple of hours on each occasion. The first meeting highlighted the problem—could volunteers be brought into a greater understanding and a more direct role in the projects in which they were involved? A secretary told how the first she heard of VSU was when a member of staff approached her in the dinner queue and asked her to take over leadership of the school group. Another admitted she had spent four months trying to recruit volunteers for an ongoing project without having the remotest idea what the project was actually about. Several volunteers spoke of a lack of continuity and contact between themselves and the professional staff alongside whom they were working. Confessions of ignorance abounded, the need to do something was clear.

The second meeting produced some suggestions for dealing with the problems. These were drafted into the form of a discussion document which was circulated and discussed, first by the secretaries then by school staff representatives. The views of volunteers were sought through the Unit magazine *Jigsaw* and through school meetings. Finally, the proposals were put to the advisory committee, the trustee body of the Unit, for ratification. The whole process took little more than a month and the think-tank which produced the proposals was mandated to implement them.

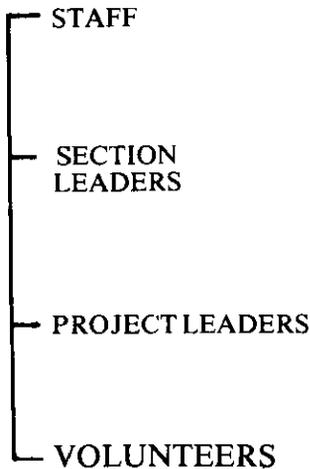
In order to understand the significance of the suggestions they made and to explore the notoriously complex and treacherous concept of participation, it is necessary to retrace our steps to the earliest days of the Unit, and, in outlining the major organisational shifts which have taken place since then, to open up some of the thinking which lay behind them.

Stage 1—within Sevenoaks School

While the Unit was contained entirely within Sevenoaks School, a structure developed which still exists today. This was governed by the fact that the school has a timetabled community service afternoon option and also by the particular difficulty that the size and spread of the school made it almost impossible to get all of the one or two hundred boys who would be involved together in one place at one time on a regular basis.

The solution which emerged was to appoint to each project a boy in charge and to each group of related projects a boy designated as section leader. As a guide, about 20 boys might constitute a section. Section leaders and project leaders still work as volunteers, but they also meet regularly with the appropriate school staff to review progress.

STAGE ONE



To work well, this system has two requirements. The first is that leaders will stay in close touch with what their groups of volunteers are thinking and feeling, and will communicate both the views of volunteers to section leaders meetings and vice versa.

The second requirement, which follows from this, is that there is a sufficiently large number of capable leaders with the experience and confidence to play this role effectively. This assumption did not hold good in all Unit schools and, with expansion of the principle of participation to other schools, allowance had to be made for this fact in order that none should feel unequal.

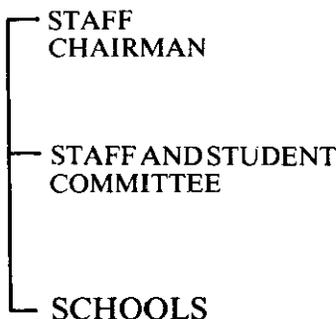
Stage 2—the early federal structure

As other schools in the town caught this pioneer interest in community work and began to join in, some framework for co-ordination became desirable to prevent overlap and to use most effectively the contribution which each could make. In the earliest stages this meant two pupils (the secretaries) and a member of staff from each school met together once a fortnight to discuss activities and plan developments. At this time the work was still heavily dependent on and growing out of the Thursday afternoon curriculum activity at Sevenoaks School.

Despite the fact that little documentation of this period now remains, two problems appear to have led to the alteration of the system. First, it seems it was felt that the growing number of schools involved had led to large and unwieldy meetings. Secondly, the feeling emerged that discussion was thought to be inhibited by the joint presence of teachers and pupils. Certainly in the few

extant minutes, it is staff comments which appear to predominate. Perhaps this difficulty arose from the limited experience then available of the essentially subtle role staff are required to play as animators rather than controllers in a democratic structure.

STAGE TWO



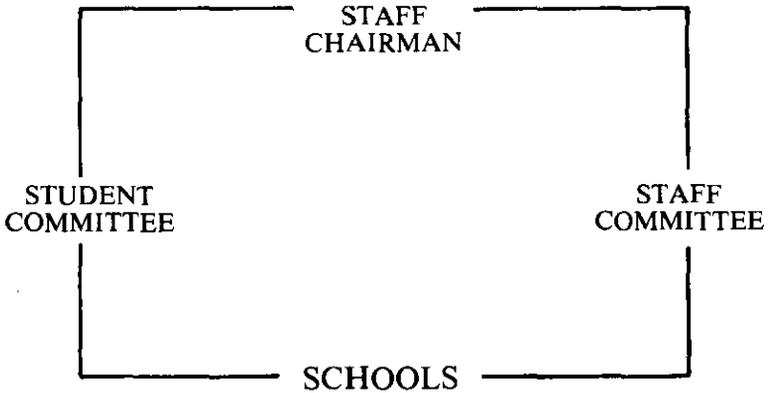
Stage 3—separate staff and student committees

As a result of these reservations, the federal VSU committee was divided into two—a staff committee and a secretaries committee. The secretaries conducted the day-to-day business of the Unit, initially under the chairmanship of a member of staff. The staff committee was concerned with matters of finance and general policy and oversight. Co-ordination of the two groups rested in the hands of the staff chairman.

Over the next few years, the secretaries committee evolved in a number of important ways, three of which can be singled out for special attention. First, the imbalance of experience between secretaries from Sevenoaks School and from other schools was acute. An attempt was made to counteract this by inducting new secretaries more carefully into their work. Half day conferences were arranged at the end of the term before they took office to discuss the working of the Unit and the job secretary, to answer questions, and to provide informal social contact as the basis for good working relationships. In addition, a directory of VSU was produced to give everyone essential information at their fingertips.

Secondly, some schools appointed what came to be known as 'split level secretaries', which meant simply that they appointed an older and a younger secretary in the expectation that the younger could remain in office for two years and thus bring to their work and to meetings a greatly needed maturity second time round. Alongside this, more careful thought was also given to the actual process of selecting volunteers for office.

STAGE THREE



The problem here is always to seek quality while at the same time providing genuine involvement by volunteers in the selection process. Different schools have in fact pursued different policies. In some the decision has been made by the staff member alone and justified by those who chose this course on the grounds of their superior knowledge of, and influence over, pupils who would be able to do a good job. Others have paid lip service to democracy and summoned a meeting of volunteers to elect representatives by show of hands or ballot slips. There is some evidence that this apparently egalitarian system is not conspicuously successful. It does not necessarily follow that everyone present even knows the names of the people they are asked to vote for, let alone their capabilities. A method which combines direction and ballot seems in general to work better than either method alone.

In outline, this means that volunteers are asked to make suggestions for those they think best suited to the task. As these are not binding, anyone can join in, thus resolving the difficulty of defining the electorate without a formal membership. The outgoing secretaries and the member of staff then sift these suggestions and invite for interview those most favoured. In some cases they have added a name to the list they felt had been overlooked, in a few cases they have taken away one they felt unsuitable. That is largely a matter of judgement and rests on the confidence with which they know their volunteers and their volunteers know them. If they make a mistake it is likely that volunteers will vote with their feet.

The purpose of the interview is both to explain to the candidates what would be involved in taking on a post of great responsibility as well as to assess those most suited to the task. On this basis secretaries and staff together make the choice. The system has been likened to that once used by the Tory Party. That notwithstanding, it does seem, properly executed, to produce better results and to be fairer and arguably more democratic than either of the alternatives.

The third and most significant change to take place in the secretaries committee in this period was the creation of a student chairman, both to take the chair at meetings and to work alongside the youth tutor in the leadership of the Unit.

A succession of extremely able chairmen developed this post into a key part of the life and structure of the Unit. The chairman became a figurehead who had to engender the confidence, enthusiasm and respect of secretaries and volunteers. He needed a finger on the pulse of the disparate elements of the Unit and established a close partnership with the youth tutor, involving at least a weekly meeting and often much other informal contact.

The chairman was elected directly by the secretaries. To enable this to happen effectively, his year of office had to hang over by half a term the yearly change-over of secretaries which normally took place at the start of September. Because of the heavy workload entailed in the job, his secretarial duties were customarily taken over by a new secretary.

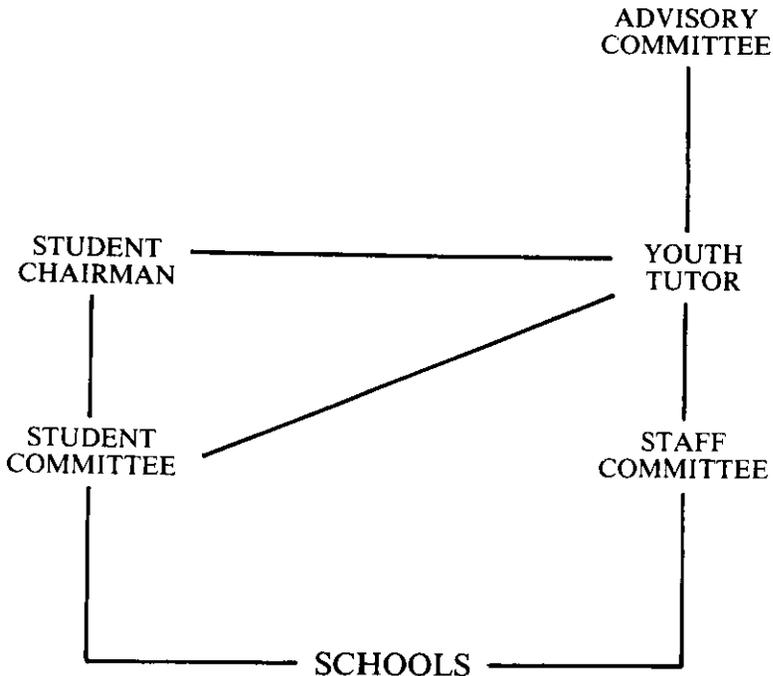
Stage 4—the creation of the advisory committee

While these developments were taking place, other changes were occurring within and without the staff committee.

In 1972, in the year's interregnum which preceded the first appointment of a youth tutor, head teachers of member schools, who had been particularly concerned in the negotiations and planning for the new appointment, felt a need to clarify the organisation and accountability of the Unit and proposed, for the first time, a constitution which set up a formal management committee, something quite new to VSU.

This led to some misunderstanding, being seen by a few secretaries and staff as striking at the heart of a student-run organisation. For a time feelings ran high. However, the finally adopted constitution, to which all existing committees agreed, took great account of the views of young people. The committee which it set up, termed as a conciliatory measure the advisory committee, now includes six young people among its 15 members, the remainder comprising three headteachers, three members of staff, the youth tutor, the organiser of the town's Volunteer Bureau and a co-opted treasurer.

STAGE FOUR



Soon after the advisory committee was established, it decided to seek registration of the Unit as a charity, largely to give psychological reassurance to those who were being approached to give money to VSU, and partly for a minimal tax benefit. As the Unit has expanded, however, the importance of having taken this step has become more apparent, for it has given both status and structure. As a result of this move, some modification of the original constitution was needed, particularly with respect to the definition of the aims of the Unit. But as a result of that thinking process, and also with the passage of time, the role of the advisory committee became

much clearer to all. It began to function in the formulation of broad policy, for instance in attempting to produce an agreed manifesto which sought to define more carefully the responsibilities of member schools, and in general financial oversight.

One of the early difficulties that had to be overcome was that this committee, in effect, assumed the role previously exercised by the staff committee. This left staff members as a group without any clearly defined purpose and led to much questioning of the place of teachers within the Unit.

A tremendous subtlety is in fact expected of teachers who assume a responsibility within their school for VSU. Their role and relationship with pupils must, of necessity, be quite different from that which is assumed in other aspects of their work.

There are two quite opposite reactions to the participatory nature of the Unit which must be avoided. Some staff have joined and expected to be able to operate their normal pattern of control and authority and take prime responsibility for the growth of their school group. Others have taken the notion of democracy to mean that, in effect, they have no job to do, and their pupils are abandoned to go their own way.

It is the perceptive teacher who realises there is a different but nonetheless vital part to play. In the first place, he is the direct friend and adviser of his secretaries and volunteers, offering encouragement, guidance and enthusiasm. He is also a major influence in gaining the sympathy of staff colleagues in his school. He may provide particular skills, such as driving a minibus or advising on an entertainment programme. He has a width and breadth of contact with pupils not open to the average secretary, and he offers continuity in the face of the annual turnover of secretaries. Far from resenting this role, most volunteers seem to welcome the unique sort of partnership with a teacher which this work entails, and to resent, above all, its absence. However, it was realised, staff were offered no induction whatsoever into this new role.

The twice termly meetings of staff have come, therefore, to be seen partly as a training opportunity, providing opportunities for them to experience and discuss the sort of situations and problems which their volunteers might encounter, and partly as an informal monitoring group on the progress and development of the Unit and its constituent parts. The Unit is also attempting now to build an in-service training programme for these staff with the co-operation of head teachers. It is also seeking greater recognition from member schools of the status of this post. The time and skill and energy required are quite different from that involved in running the school tiddlywinks club, and should be recognised as such, perhaps financially, perhaps in terms of timetable or duty concessions, certainly in terms of motivation and commitment.

Stage 5—the reorganisation of the secretaries committee

The suggestions of the think-tank referred to at the beginning of this chapter grew out of this history and background, and the continuing adaptation both to greater size and complexity and to increased understanding.

The think-tank's document began with the shallowness of much volunteer work at ground level. It complained:

'We do not give any sort of systematic induction to new volunteers or encourage them sufficiently to evaluate their work and to suggest changes. The reason for this serious failure lies with the secretaries. Their failure, however, is not one of effort. Many work exceedingly hard. Rather it is a failure caused by having to bear too many, too varied, and, sometimes, too trivial demands, with too little preparation. In other words there is a bottleneck which must be rapidly eased. It is notorious that over the years secretaries' meetings have grown unwieldy and uncondusive to reflective and informed discussion. It is necessary to increase the number of effective decision-makers and to reduce the size of meetings as well as limiting their brief.'

The document went on to suggest replacing the existing secretaries committee with four action groups, to each of which, each school would be entitled to send a representative. Three of the groups would be responsible for major areas of existing activity: work with the elderly, work with children and young people, and mental health work. In addition to young people, it was suggested that each group might include four others: a member of staff, a representative of other organisations, a representative of interested professional staff and a 'client' representative. Attempts to implement this in practice fizzled out.

The fourth group, the general secretaries, would come closest to the development role envisaged for the old committee. It would, however, be *'more purposeful because relieved of much day-to-day administration, and would be responsible for jobs not covered by the other action groups, for reviewing the progress and development of the Unit as a whole, and for innovation'*. Co-ordination of the activities of all four groups rested in the hands of their elected chairmen, assisted by the youth tutor. The secretaries thus embarked on a system of corporate management not dissimilar to that which was a feature of local government reorganisation. Like that, it has revealed both potential and some difficulties.

It has led to an increase in the amount of work undertaken by the Unit and it has led to much more informed discussion by secretaries about projects for which they are responsible. It has brought a greater sense of unity between schools, and those secretaries who experienced both the old system and the new

expressed a preference for the new—with some reservations. Those reservations may be summarised as follows.

First, any system is only as good as the people who operate it. The change to four groups meant recruiting twice as many high calibre volunteers to take on responsibility, and some smaller schools have found that difficult. Where secretaries fail to provide sound leadership, the system is no better than any other and may well be worse.

The second reservation also applied to the old system, but still continues. Secretaries are chosen to represent their schools, but also in a sense represent the activities for which they are responsible. Someone in the group must know about each activity at first hand. Yet it has proved persistently difficult to achieve this dual representation and the only partial solution discovered has been, where necessary, to co-opt into a group a volunteer who has special knowledge or expertise in a field of work not familiar to the rest of the group.

Thirdly, it has still proved difficult to achieve adequate direct communication between secretaries and volunteers within their own school. This is really a key task of the general secretary, who is viewed as the senior of the four. His task, and the task of his group, is an amorphous one, yet as soon as thought is given to abolishing it, it becomes clear that a gap would remain. It is his task to ensure that the school group functions as well as possible, that the particular communication problems posed by that school are solved, by noticeboards, by assemblies, by meetings or whatever, but above all that personal contact is sustained with all active and potential volunteers.

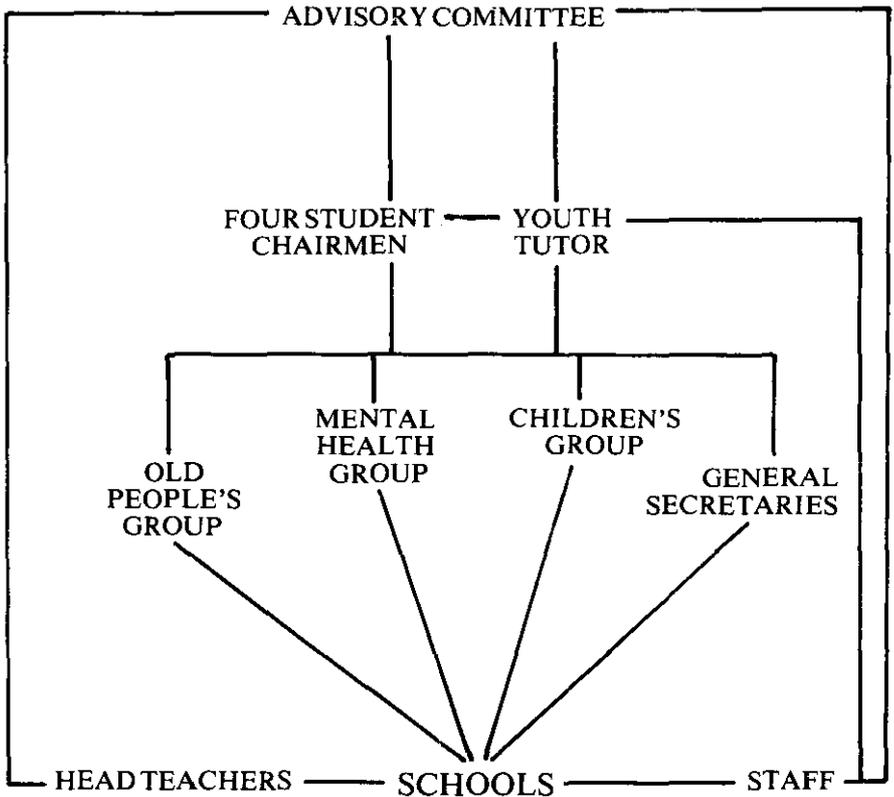
The new system has called for a sense of humour in order to prevent the icy hand of bureaucracy taking a grip, as, for instance, when somewhat arbitrary divisions of work had to be made. To which group should a home for mentally handicapped children belong? It also called for the realisation that the system was intended to provide room to grow. It therefore took about three years to finally settle down.

Within that period, one other important change occurred, the devolution of a share of the Unit budget to the four groups. Each group is responsible for spending each year a sum of money agreed by the four chairmen and ratified by the advisory committee. Each in turn is also charged for its use of common facilities like mini-buses. Without a profit motive, it may seem a slightly unreal exercise, but it has given much greater weight and independence to the decisions the groups have to make, as well as giving a clearer perspective on fund-raising.

The four-group system is now well established and the benefit of hindsight shows that, despite the teething troubles and the extra

administrative work involved, it has been a considerable asset to the development of the Unit.

STAGE FIVE



At each stage of its development, VSU has tried to translate into practice the ideal of a truly participatory young people's organisation. It is still, even after very many years, learning how to do that. There is no magic formula, and doubtless fresh insights and development will take place in the future. The tradition is now well ingrained into every level of the Unit's operations. It is interesting to speculate, however, how far the local education authority, which foots two-thirds of the bill, would formally recognise the right of young people to determine how that money should be spent. It is a question few, if any, authorities have had to face. Working out the answer could be interesting.

The ideal of participation is one which requires careful understanding and close scrutiny. I have always been suspicious myself when I have heard others disclaim the existence, sometimes even the panacea, of their various youth democracies. Such claims can indicate either total abdication or an infinite capacity for self-delusion on the part of those who make them.

The reader must judge. A case could be made for saying that such delusions exist in Sevenoaks. It could be pointed out how the initial impetus for VSU came from adults and how a succession of talented teachers has provided the energy and driving force behind the Unit which has carried the young in its wake. Furthermore, as the Unit has grown in size and gained its own full-time staff, it has become increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for a young person to grasp, let alone control, the complexity of the organisation. The position becomes worse if one adds that the lifespan of a volunteer from raw recruit to leaving from a position of senior leadership may be as little as 18 months. Finally, attention could be drawn to the numerous commitments which have been assumed, over the years, to particular individuals or groups in need. These cannot simply be shrugged off by an incoming group of organisers without irreparable damage to the confidence in which VSU is held by those outside. So, as each year goes by, secretaries have more and more work to cope with and less and less room for manoeuvre. If you add to all that a perfectly valid belief in the innate conservatism of the young, does not the tradition of participation look more than a little tattered?

All those arguments contain a portion of truth. But there is a counter-argument and a balancing truth which points to the delicate complexity of the real situation.

The tradition of participation does not mean that no adult ever takes any initiative, nor that every passing whim of volunteers is automatically adopted by the organisation. The role of adults is, and has been, to provide a framework, to motivate, to open up possibilities, not to force a response. It is precisely at those points where an interest is triggered, but the response not predetermined, that something creative happens.

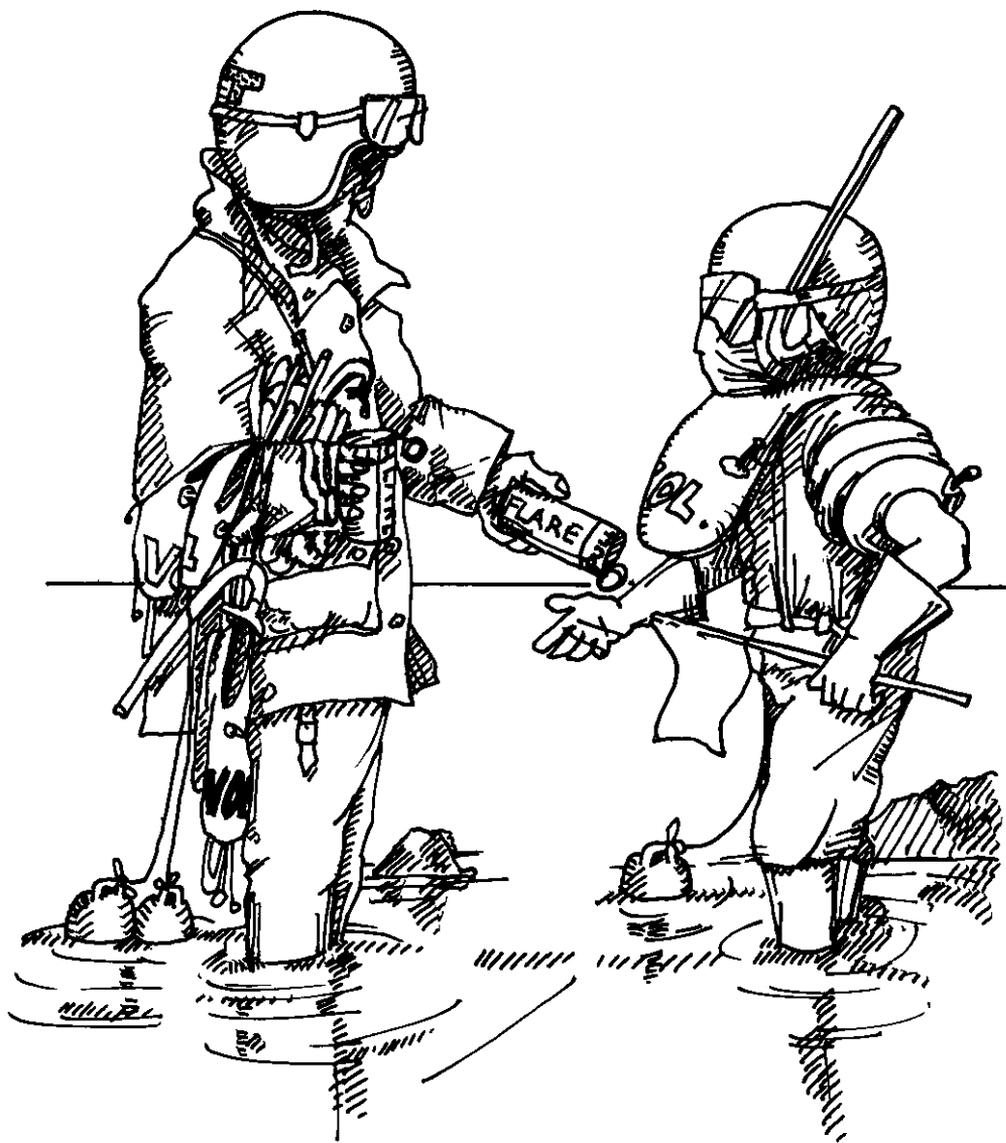
So it can be argued that, providing the role of the youth tutor is correctly understood by all concerned, the provision of a framework for substantial areas of routine administration, such as the organisation of transport, by a central office, can free a young person to concentrate on major areas of decision. But that in turn does not mean that no routine administration is carried out by a young person, for this is an important ingredient in the educative process of participation. It does mean that the responsibility is assumed by the youth tutor for seeing that all play a part in all aspects of the life of the Unit, but in a balanced way and in such a way that important matters are brought into focus and made manageable.

I believe that democracy, like other activities in school, is a process into which pupils are initiated by teachers. It is not an automatic process. It may even be that a lack of this specific awareness is a major cause of the decline of our systems of government. Certainly an appreciation of this provides the clue to understanding correctly the tradition of participation in VSU.

While again I believe that the specific methods of organising this that have been adopted are in response to particular local needs, and may not necessarily be readily transplanted to other situations, I believe even more strongly in the need for some means of participation by young people in each local situation in the direction and management of their involvement in the community. At the same time, there is a corresponding need to provide a framework of adult support which will understand and steadily foster that participation. Both are essential prerequisites of community service, whether school-based or not. Without such provision a group is not only not realising anything like its full potential, it is arguably failing in its task of educating the young. Without that education it is indeed only papering cracks.

Waving or Drowning?

Preparation and support for volunteers



The occupational hazard faced by all teachers is that they become someone who knows. Because of the immaturity of their charges, they have to exercise control, and they have therefore to tell. A large part of the art of survival in the classroom lies in acquiring the behavioural patterns of someone who is in authority and knows it. It all too easily becomes a lie in which both teacher and pupils collude.

One of the arguments of this book is that community service is in part about young people taking a share of responsibility themselves. It is a lesson which I believe has a wider application in giving sense to secondary education today, but it is one which is currently at odds with both the instincts of teachers and the conditioning of pupils.

The community service teacher who attempts to put into practice the philosophy underpinning this concept has to learn a new sensitivity. He is like a lifeguard who, having allowed his pupil into the open sea, has to decide when to stand back on the shore and when to be in the water alongside. And when he is waiting on the shore, he needs the vision to determine whether the movement of his pupil's arm, just visible in the distance, is a wave of success or a cry for help. The community service teacher has therefore to find a new point of balance in holding together creatively the opposing tensions of discipline and freedom.

In trying to locate where that balance might be found, two stories may be helpful. They approach the same point from different sides, the side of the pupil and the side of the teacher. Taken together, they do not offer a final solution for the teacher who wonders about the signals he is picking up from his pupils and how to respond to them appropriately. They do highlight the sort of considerations which need to come into play and to which he must be sensitive.

The first story is that of Emma and Louise, two 15 year old girls. They were walking to school one day when they found by the kerbside a grey-haired lady who had obviously fallen. They stopped to help her up. She seemed rather unsteady on her feet and they offered to help her home. She lived in the same road. Still worried when they left her, they returned after school to see if all was well. They stayed to talk and it became obvious that all was far from well. The lady was clearly very lonely, appeared to have no friends, was at odds with her neighbours and tremendously depressed. Later experience confirmed all these impressions. They went back next day, and the day after, and every day. When, six weeks later, they went on holiday, they arranged for some friends to call in their place.

After the holiday they became increasingly worried about the lady's apparently deteriorating mental condition, as well as the

physical state of the house. They began to find her drinking and with increasing heaviness. Her depression did not seem to lift. By the time they had begun to seek information on alcoholism, she had turned to meths.

They sought help from the Social Services Department. With some difficulty they persuaded a social worker to visit. When the anxiously awaited report was received from the social worker and suggested simply that the lady could possibly do with some extra coal supplies for her open fire, their concern turned to anger.

One day, not long after, they found her dead. The inquest recorded a verdict of accidental death from a combination of drink and drugs. A little while later the Social Services Department discovered her file. It had been mislaid during a move to new offices. She had, in fact, been known to town welfare services since her discharge from psychiatric hospital 20 years earlier. In the end no-one could help her.

When it was all over, Emma, Louise and a small group of friends who had become closely involved in the episode, began to think over their experience and to consider in particular the aftercare of psychiatric patients. Surely, they reasoned, if she had not just been discharged and forgotten, the tragedy of her life might have been avoided. They came upon the idea of group homes, small houses where groups of ex-patients could live as part of the community with mutual support and some help from professionals. A group home in Sevenoaks became their aim. In the end the task was beyond them and they finished up raising £100 towards a home that was being established in a neighbouring town. But the account was squared in part.

One story cannot tell it all. But I believe this quite true one suggests a three stage pattern which can be useful in considering the developing awareness of a young person involved in community service, and the sort of role which teachers can play in helping it along. It is not a growth or progression which they can originate or produce. At best they can be midwives. It is a pattern which is characterised by the words, *concern*, *commitment* and *change*.

In the beginning the girls showed *concern* for a real human need presented with immediacy. They chose to respond; they were not compelled. They could have passed by. They need not have returned. In this instance the need presented itself to them and they made their choice. The community service teacher has to respect that space for choice.

In doing this he will need a quiet optimism. The head teacher who said to me at the start of my teaching career '*Always expect kids to kick you in the teeth. That way you'll never be disappointed, and very occasionally pleasantly surprised when they don't*' would have had a hard time over community service. You don't have to

believe all are saints to believe that all can grow. There are quite a number of pleasant surprises.

Once Emma and Louise had chosen to express their concern in the way that they did—and it should be clear that this was no predetermined track—they developed a *commitment* to the work they had undertaken. They felt a personal responsibility and identity which no-one could take away. The motives for this involvement may well originally have been very mixed. It was, in all probability, too good an opportunity to be late for school to be missed. But by this stage their motivation was changing.

Most of us do most things from mixed motives, and it has always been the belief of VSU that motives are an irrelevance. It often seems that what are apparently the worst motives in the beginning may lead to the deepest commitment in the end. The problem and the philosophy are demonstrated most clearly in a regular disco run at a mental handicap hospital. Up to 80 volunteers might attend this on a Sunday afternoon, and it is a recurring complaint among the dedicated few that many are coming simply to enjoy themselves or to pick someone up. Of course, if that ever becomes entirely true and the patients are ignored, then the dance quickly turns sour. But the essential perspective was provided for me by the volunteer who commented: *'Yes, but if people are going to a mental hospital to enjoy themselves, to enjoy themselves, then hasn't something tremendous happened!'*

Whatever their commitment, Emma and Louise were not experts, and as the problem grew more complex—and their commitment increased accordingly—they needed support from outside. They turned to me and they turned to friends of their own age. We all had a part to play. Both types of support are important and both need to be readily to hand in a community service project. The role of peers as a source of counselling and advice is, however, often unrecognised and undervalued.

Many late night sessions took place in back rooms, and just a very few more formal 'counselling' sessions. The girls wanted to understand what alcoholism was, they needed to know how to approach the social services, and, when they felt they didn't get a square deal, they needed someone to follow up their request for a meeting with the social worker. It may be argued that this is an unfair advantage to them and that they should be forced to battle on as 'ordinary' members of the public. I suppose there may be circumstances where that is the right course, but I believe the young do need encouragement and often, regrettably, their claims for attention are not taken all that seriously by professionals unless some muscle is added. Also, in this case the problems of the lady were paramount. Regular channels had been followed and now action was needed.

The girls also needed the opportunity to talk about dying and to sort out their own feelings of failure and guilt, and they felt a need to think deeply about the implications of their experience. They didn't need textbooks or worksheets or essays to write. They needed most of all to talk, and to lots of different people. Again, it is the job of the teacher not to do all the talking, whether formal or informal, but to enable it to happen and to see that it does happen somewhere.

Written records can have a place and, certainly within curriculum work, VSU places some emphasis on a weekly diary sheet. Even there, however, talking takes precedence and the attempt is made to tape record a group discussion for all participants in the course. This extract from one of those tapes is interesting for the light it sheds on pupils' own views about the support they require. It lends some justification for my own view that there is a definite place for the 'deep end' theory of learning and that we should not be over-protective towards pupils, while ensuring that they are not going out completely unguarded.

Four girls are talking about their experience of a term's community placement as part of a curriculum course. Jackie, Alison and Ann all spent the term at a school for physically handicapped children, Ginny was at a primary school:

Ann:

'You're dumped in. But if they told us all about it, you'd be apprehensive. But they just let us find our own way. I think that was best. We had to find our own feet.'

Ginny:

'If they'd told you 'When a child does this, or when it's awkward, do so and so', you'd do it. You'd tell it off. You'd praise it if it's good. But if you don't so much tell it off but just feel your way through, you'll do so much better.'

Alison:

'I don't think they could have told us very much. If they'd said 'One child is bound to do that, that's your set example', you'll find that's not always so and you think, what do I do here? They can't really prepare you. I think it was better the way we went—dropped in at the deep end. When we went we were told some will be handicapped in this way, some in that, but then just left to sort it out.'

Ann:

'They'd given us some basic advice on how not to do things. And you'd find you were really hard on a child, really soft on a second, and you'd manage to balance it out depending on the child.'

Jackie:

'I don't know. I mean, I know you can't really predict children.'

But with the physically handicapped they could have told us more about the difficulties they have, maybe the kinds of diseases. I know they said 'Don't worry about scars', but maybe a little bit of background to the children.'

Alison:

'I think if they'd given you background, you'd have tried to pamper them.'

Ann:

'You'd feel sorry for them and you mustn't. They don't want you to feel sorry for them.'

Jackie:

'Not feel sorry for them. Just a little bit of knowledge so you know where you are.'

The balance for the teacher between withdrawal and intervention is delicate and always changing. I think that conversation indicates something of the complexity, and also that the pivotal point is slightly on the withdrawal side.

For Emma and Louise, the two girls who stumbled on an alcoholic, their initial concern and ongoing commitment led to a third stage, which can be characterised by the word *change*. They were not happy to accept the state of affairs where they were left to happen upon problems and struggle to pick up the pieces. As a result of their experience they began to think constructively of the wider problem and of possible solutions. It is doubtful whether they could have done that in quite such an effective way without having the experience first. A stirring talk about psychiatric aftercare might conceivably have started something rolling, but it was their personal involvement which give this problem its edge.

They also failed to achieve their aim in effecting the change they sought, at least in the immediate story. That is not to deny the importance of their effort. Recognising the need to modify or limit your aim in certain circumstances is sometimes necessary, and is not an argument for complacency. Equally, their task was far harder than it need have been because they lacked any sort of power to effect the changes they sought. Even their interest was resented by some adults with whom they had to deal.

The logic of the picture of community service we have been building up is that it is, above all, we who have to change. If we accept the importance of young people having the opportunity to make real contributions to situations of human need, and if we see that as a valuable part of their education and maturing and encourage them to reflect on their experience and grow through it, then it is no use just offering a pat on the head as the end result. Those same young people will reasonably expect to continue to play a responsible and contributing role more widely in their lives,

their homes, their schools, their society. For that, at present, we seem to show little enthusiasm.

The community service teacher will not always be able to rely on his pupils passing the right street at the right time for their concern to be aroused. He is likely, therefore, to attempt to arouse concern by presenting to his pupils concrete, real and immediate openings to which they can respond.

My second story begins then from the teacher's end rather than the pupil's. It is a shorter and much less dramatic episode concerning a visit I made recently to the geriatric ward of a hospital. I was going to see two volunteers who were just beginning work there.

They were attached to work with two occupational therapists for the session. The therapists introduced themselves but said nothing of what was to happen during the afternoon. They took the volunteers with them to a room and gathered together about 15 old ladies. They sat the ladies in two rows facing each other and an occupational therapist sat at each end between the rows. Nothing had yet been said to the volunteers about what they should do, so I suggested they took a chair and joined the rows.

One therapist produced a ball and for the best part of half an hour this was thrown backwards and forwards between the rows in somewhat desultory fashion. The volunteers joined in as best they could but the routine was clearly well known to everyone else. The volunteers left at the end of the session without much further communication from the therapists, their enthusiasm somewhat dampened, slightly bored, and a bit puzzled as to what it was all about. Nothing whatsoever had been added to the afternoon by their presence.

In this situation it is no use saying the responsibility is on the volunteers to make the best of it. The responsibility is on the teacher to prepare the situation more thoroughly or, if that has no effect, to change it.

The search for openings which might elicit the response he is seeking will lead the teacher to find out a good deal about what is happening in his community, perhaps initially through groups, organisations and institutions. This is a painstaking and time-consuming business, which is too often short-circuited as soon as the first remotely likely possibilities emerge. The groundwork laid down at this stage will do much to determine the success of his later activities with his pupils. That does not mean the removal of initiative. It does mean a full understanding on the part of those to whom help is offered of the purpose of the enterprise. They will need to know the extent and nature of the role they are taking on as co-educator. They must know what they in return can reasonably expect from the arrangement. It must be clearly understood what

task is to be accomplished, what this will contribute to both the receivers and givers of help and how this fits in to the overall purposes of each. It may not be an unhelpful discipline if this is viewed as a simple contract. It will need to be regularly renegotiated and the teacher needs to remember that in an honest bargain each needs to gain. He will cement his work more firmly the more two-way the agreement is.

If this process of negotiation is successful, it needs to carry through right from the hospital administrator and nursing officer to the two occupational therapists on our ward. Hopefully they would not see the presence of two young volunteers as a challenge to their professional competence or a threat to their jobs. They would realise instead that they have a unique and important tool, albeit one which they must understand how to use. There is a skill in using young volunteers, which is different even from the skill of using adult volunteers. This is in need of wider recognition and should be seen as enhancing rather than denigrating the professional status of those who develop it.

The therapists would then need to plan their work on the assumption of having volunteers, and the school would need to honour that commitment. They would need to spend some time with the volunteers instead of the patients, preparing them for the work, in order that in the long run greater benefit could accrue to the patients. They would spend a short time at the end of each session talking to the young people, assessing the work and planning for next week. Then, at the very least, they could have produced four footballs and had four groups of patients and staff or volunteers with each. The patients would have benefited from increased activity and interaction. The therapists would have been able to achieve more than they could on their own, and the pupils would have developed as caring and responsible people. But it would all hinge on the skill of the therapists. If that were removed for an indefinite period of time the whole edifice would at worst crumble, and at best fail to progress further.

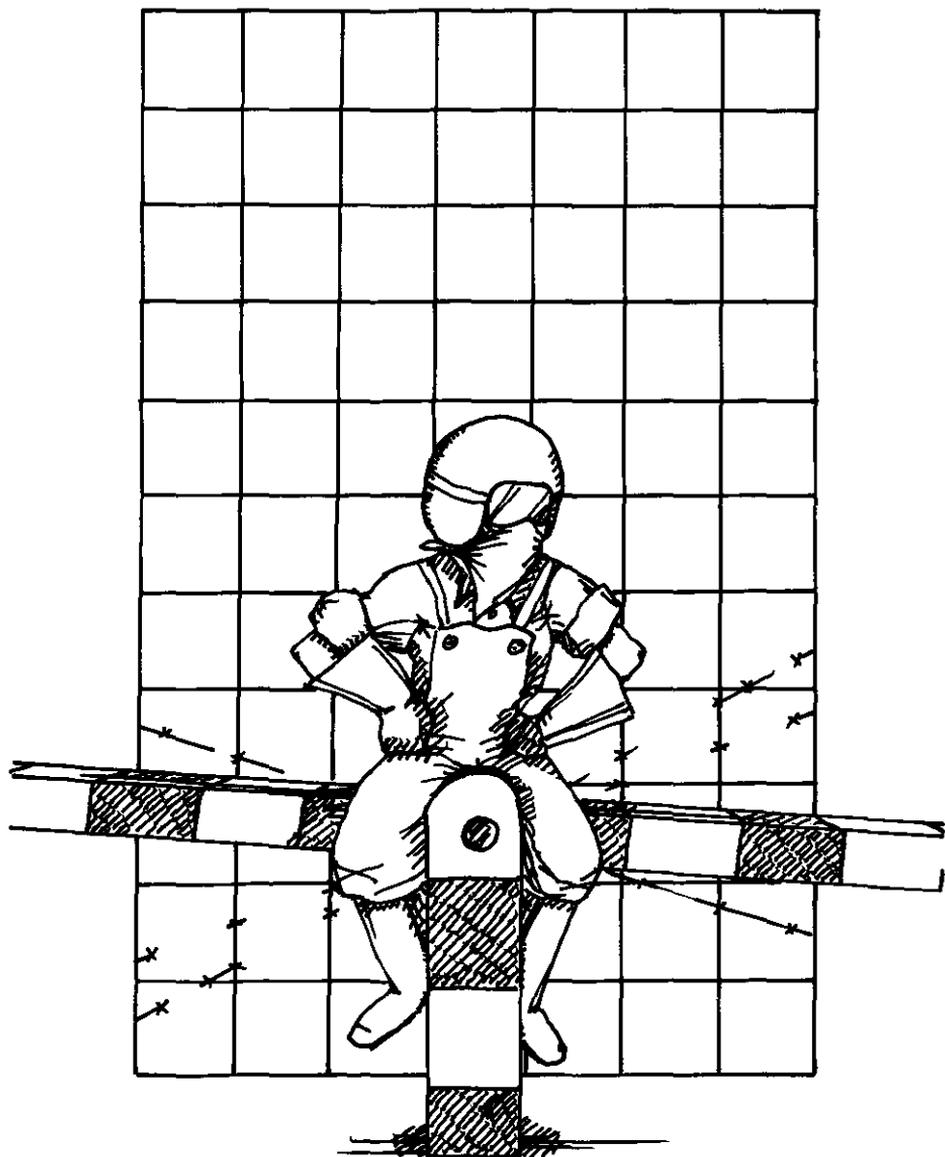
We have a long way to go before that sort of development and that sort of sensitive involvement of the whole community in the education of the young becomes the rule rather than the exception. It means that schools which undertake community service programmes must ensure their teachers have the time to establish this on a sound basis. It means regarding an hour spend talking to the occupational therapist at the hospital as being as important as a teaching commitment. It means wider and more sustained dialogue between teachers and other professionals and all other members of the community about the meaning of education and the sharing of responsibility for it. And it means, for most of us, a change in our attitudes towards the young.

There is one key word which might serve as the underlying theme to this chapter. That word is *'risk'*. Risk for pupils, risk for teachers, and also risk for the community. It is a word which does not figure very frequently in discussions about secondary education. It plays no part in any core curriculum I have seen. Classroom management techniques are supposed to preserve order. School routine and school structures presuppose tidiness and the pursuit of well-trodden paths. Risk is untidy, disordered and discomfoting. It is also a major contributor to personal growth, at least in my experience.

To deny that opportunity for growth is to do the young, and ultimately ourselves, a disservice. It cannot be forced and it cannot be pre-packaged. Schools ignore risk at their peril. Community service is one means of achieving it. The teacher who chooses that path chooses to become a manager of risk. Waving or drowning? He can't afford too many mistakes. He can—and must—through thorough preparation and careful support, keep the risk within bounds. He cannot—and must not—eliminate it.

Just for Good Measure

Evaluation and assessment in community service



Community service programmes in schools have no trickier balance to find than in facing questions of evaluation and assessment. This is especially true of community service within the curriculum, but it is no less important, if less immediately obvious, outside the curriculum.

On the one hand it is necessary to insist that the pass/fail concept, which has tended to characterise assessment in schools, is quite simply not appropriate to community service, even if it disguised as a grade from one to five. This is not because some pupils are not in some senses 'better' than others. They are, and both they and others know it. But the difference is neither absolute nor consistent nor measurable.

The educational subject of community service is the individual pupil, and no pseudo-objective external assessment can do justice to the complexity of that subject. We have no rod to measure the growth of persons and should not pretend otherwise. We have therefore no right to bandy failure labels in such an important area. Failing at maths or music may not matter that much, although some, like myself, still carry the scars of both to this day, despite knowing that the failure was not even real. However, being labelled a failure as a loving person matters immensely. No teacher has the right to make that judgement. To concentrate instead on the things that can be measured in community service—punctuality and appearance are among the suggestions I have seen on standardised pro-formas devised for this purpose—is an irrelevance and a deception.

Equally, on the other hand, no teacher can just let things happen and hope for spin-offs. Decisions about priorities are an increasingly important part of curriculum planning, and each claimant for attention must make his or her case in stronger and more persuasive terms than 'It's a good thing'. Not only must it be demonstrated to the school, the teacher himself must be sure he is actually achieving the results he set out to achieve for his pupils.

Nevertheless, the issue of assessment in community service is one to which little serious thought has been given. Perhaps in the Lone Ranger days of do-goodery it was not proper to ask how well you did good, let alone whether the good was in fact good or at least as good as it might be. In trying to come to grips with the problem, and in seeking the balanced solution we want, I believe we will need to depart from the image of the teacher alone as assessor in the guise of outside examiner. For the questions of assessment need to be faced by both the pupil and the client, as well as the teacher. It is in that partnership that the key will lie, and immediately this joint participation takes us into unexplored territory in school assessment. Initially, therefore, we may gain most help by looking at the place of evaluation in community service outside the curriculum.

Little is known systematically of why young people themselves

choose to use their own time for community service. I can draw on my knowledge of VSU to guess, but my knowledge is based only on remembered fragments of conversations. Two factors are dominant in my memory. The first is enjoyment, though perhaps personal satisfaction is a better phrase. In fact, neither does justice to that blending of fun and challenge which the volunteer is looking for. Coupled with that is a sense of achieving something worthwhile, of being useful. As one volunteer put it, *'I want to meet people and have a laugh. I could do that at the youth club, I s'pose. But I also want to do something useful with my life. In VSU I can do both'*.

Certainly I think the absence of fun and the absence of achievement contribute more than anything to the premature departure of volunteers from projects. You can get by for a time without one or the other, but without both you're in trouble. The knack lies in finding the mix. Clearly the mere continuation of volunteers constitutes a very crude form of assessment. They must think they are getting something out of what they're doing. That does not take us very far, but it does remind us that young people will have their own goals and that these need to coincide, at least to a degree, with the goals of the project. Some sort of common understanding of aims is a prerequisite of assessing success in achieving them.

There is an almost archetypal story of a young volunteer who went to work in a mental handicap hospital. The volunteer was placed in a children's ward and asked to concentrate on trying to establish some rapport with a particularly severely handicapped child. Each week the volunteer spent up to an hour with the child and each week appeared to make no progress at all. He was totally ignored by the child and passed the time building a tower of bricks in front of the child, dismantling it and then rebuilding it. This continued week after week for about six months. Then, on one occasion, the child reached out a hand and knocked the tower down. By all normal standards it was an insignificant achievement, but by the standards of that child it was a very great success.

Not only is that a story of particular dedication which re-emphasises the need for the volunteer to understand at the outset the goals he is trying to achieve, it also suggests that movements towards a goal is often difficult to see, not necessarily because it is not there, but because it is not readily observable by our instruments of vision. The solution to that difficulty is not to ignore all difficult work or take on only that with tangible results. Instead we need to realise that in assessment we are not talking about a single once-and-for-all measurement, but a continuous process. In this particular case it is one in which the staff on that ward have a large part to play in offering guidance, encouragement and suggestion. The purpose of the assessment is diagnostic rather than judgemental. It is to aid the reaching of the chosen goal rather than to decree that it has (or has not) been reached.

Within VSU, overall project assessment is undertaken by the appropriate group of secretaries. It is they who will decide whether to launch the project and, in the final analysis, whether to terminate it. It is obviously important that they understand the need for close contact with both the projects and the volunteers for whom they are responsible. In this they will be supported by the youth tutor, particularly with respect to liaison and negotiations with projects, and by the staff representatives with respect to school volunteers.

Within that framework, the volunteers on the actual project need to discuss together and confer with, say, the ward staff, on a regular basis. This is much more difficult to achieve, and, for various reasons (notably the shift system), it has proved almost impossible to involve ward staff in this way in large hospitals.

A further method adopted by several projects has been the use of an outside monitor, someone not directly involved with the project, but with relevant expertise, who is willing to keep in touch with developments and from time to time discuss progress with volunteers from an outside perspective.

The key elements in assessment that we have identified outside the curriculum can be summarised as: the involvement of teacher and pupil and client; a common understanding of goals; continual review; and an emphasis on diagnosis and help as the purpose of the process.

If we try to apply these same principles to curriculum-based community service, then such a course would have to develop in participants the skills and willingness to analyse themselves and their achievements to their satisfaction. It would have to encourage every pupil to reflect on his or her own strengths and weaknesses and on the success of the particular work in which he or she is engaged. The task of the teacher is to see that this happens, to monitor the process and to ask the right questions at the right time. His methods would need to resemble the counsellor rather than the examiner.

That in turn would imply a significant change in the nature of the teacher-pupil relationship, possibly the most exciting contribution community service has to offer to the secondary school. There remains a good deal of work to be done to refine the techniques by which this could be accomplished, and assessment, while being no less rigorous, could become a co-operative enterprise.

The hallowed tradition by which teachers have approached their task in the curriculum by means of public examination, is one which many feel is the path community service must take. They suggest that, not only would it bring greater rigour and thought, it would also give status in the eyes of parents, pupils and teachers alike.

The argument has much to commend it to anyone who has worked in schools and knows the vice-like grip which the examination wields over the motivations and activities of teachers and pupils alike. I have already indicated my view that for community service, particularly because of its emphasis on intrinsic motivation, the answers are more complex. Is there scope for compromise?

Hatton School, in developing its curriculum-based community service course, decided, rightly, that the activity was of sufficient importance to be made available to all pupils as a choice. It was felt this could only be practically accomplished by incorporating this choice within a compulsory core course leading to a Mode 3 CSE. This issue had therefore to be confronted and an answer found.

At the time of writing, the first group of pupils have not yet been offered for formal assessment. It is clear that no final solution has been reached and it is only possible to offer an interim report on thinking and development so far. There is no doubt that considerable amendment and refinement will have to take place.

Two methods of assessment for examination purposes have so far been arrived at. The first comprises a weekly diary record of the community service placement. Guidelines are given but no formal structure. It is expected that this will be supported by an extended piece of research into some aspect of the placement. The diary itself is seen primarily as a means of self-assessment rather than a narrative account of experience.

The second method is an oral interview. For some time, regular tape recordings have been made of group discussions involving pupils engaged in community service. It is a constant source of surprise how refreshing pupils appear to find the opportunity to talk in this purposeful way, and how much thought has already evidently been given to their experiences. The task of the teacher is not to judge but to assist individuals in the group in forming and sharpening their own insights through the sharing, reliving and interpreting of experience, based on his first hand observations of their involvement in the placement. It is hoped that some way might also be found of involving the placements in the actual interview procedure. A mere written report from them could be used, but it is cold and impersonal and, more importantly, very difficult to make an objective comparison between different placements.

It remains to be seen whether these techniques can be refined into an instrument suitable for examination purposes, but also sensitive enough to the considerations we have established as important in evaluating community service. What seems likely at this early stage is that a certain amount of duplicity will be involved. It is certain that the techniques can produce the sort of assessment we seek. It is far from clear, however, how they can be validated in the objective terms of comparison which a public examination must, by definition,

lay claim to. My enquiries of the National Federation for Educational Research project on school assessment failed to turn up any school in the country where the issue of self-assessment has been worked through to this stage. The end result at Hatton may well be an examination, consisting of the diary, delivering, I suppose, a CSE in diary-making, with the assessment proper being made at a quite different level!

Why then bother with the examination? The school would argue, I think, that this is what everyone wants, and all that anyone will recognise. It has to play the game in order to maintain the credibility to offer the opportunity of community service to all its pupils. It is a sad but honest argument.

The same school has approached the problem elsewhere in its curriculum by reversing the process. Rather than using an exam to reinforce existing experience, it has offered a recognised exam course which may offer opportunities for community experience and develop skills relevant to community involvement.

It has offered to the sixth form the chance of an O level course in Family and Community Studies as examined by the Associated Examining Board. The unique feature of this course is that it is not concerned with any cognitive knowledge, but with the skills necessary for decision-making, with particular reference to community involvement. The assessment of this course involves every student in undertaking a special study of a problem in their local community, as well as a written problem-solving exam. The course can therefore help to develop in pupils the skills necessary to make a constructive contribution through community service and to develop strategies of problem-solving and change rather than simple acceptance of the status quo.

It is a pity, however, that I can discover from the examining board only one example anywhere in the country, over five years, of such a course of study leading to community action. This was the formation of a club for mentally handicapped adults arising out of an investigation of the needs of the handicapped in that community. The club continued to run well after the completion of the syllabus.

This dearth of examples suggests there is a danger that such a course still fails to bridge the divide between study and action. Teachers, and to some extent examiners in their choice of problems, seem to value study to the exclusion of action. The course remains, however, one of the only opportunities for serious work along these lines leading to a qualification which is open to schools.

The assessment of curriculum-based community service will never completely escape the contradictions inherent in an education system which, because of its similarities with the production line, has over-emphasised extrinsic reward to the detriment of the

intrinsic value in learning. There is something which sticks in my throat about applying the standard curve of distribution to the assessment of community service, which I don't think has anything to do with woolly-mindedness or a lack of rigour in the pursuit of excellence. Can curriculum-based community service survive in this environment and apply the lessons of assessment it has learnt outside the curriculum?

It is interesting to note that in other ways there has developed a two-way flow in VSU between the curricular and extra-curricular experience of pupils. Some pupils are stimulated to develop further curricular experiences through the extra facilities that are available to them outside. Others have gained experience as a volunteer in their own time and sought to strengthen or complement this through their curricular work. While some teachers would see this as a blurring of the educational line, or even a blurring of the youth work line, it seems to me a holistic approach which is sensible both for pupils and for their education. I wonder whether such a creative interaction can take place with respect to assessment, and whether, even, pupils themselves might not be the catalysts. And if that happens, I wonder whether the effects might not spill over into others areas of the curriculum, just for good measure.

Time to Grow Up

The way ahead for community service



The period which marks the life of VSU marks at the same time the period during which community service has appeared as a separately identifiable activity in schools. It is a comparatively long period, at the time of writing roughly 18 years. It is the span which, in our culture, marks for a human being his or her formal emergence into adulthood, and it is therefore a not inappropriate time to take stock.

Community service has clearly grown up a lot. I have tried to describe how that development has been arrived at and worked through in one situation. The lessons of that growth have not yet been universally recognised, but I believe it is fairly clear what the broad trends are.

We have learnt that community service is an appropriate and necessary activity for pupils of all abilities and all backgrounds. It is as potentially valuable for Lisa (an outstanding volunteer), expelled from one school for disruptive behaviour and for whom, as for her present school, her leaving date cannot arrive one minute too soon, as it is potentially important for Nick (an equally capable volunteer) who might well finish up with a first at Cambridge.

We have learnt this because we have come to see community service in the image of the Lone Ranger, as personified by the truly awful phrase 'helping those less fortunate than oneself', as a shallow understanding, distorting the human truth that we all share the need both to give and to receive.

Community service, correctly understood, can remind the secondary school of the place of first hand experience in learning. It demonstrates the need for trust and responsibility to be given to the young as a part of their education and in consequence suggests that changes may be needed in the structure of schools and, above all, in the teacher-pupil relationship.

However, to achieve these benefits, for both the school and the young person, community service can only be undertaken through choice and commitment. That choice must be made with understanding, but it cannot be compelled. Young people need to participate in deciding about the contribution they wish to make to the community and means have to be devised to enable this participation to happen.

It is equally vital that appropriate structures of support and evaluation are also devised. In neither case can community service follow the accepted and over-simple models favoured in secondary education. In working out its own approaches, centred on the concepts of risk and partnership, it may be able to help secondary schools sort out some of their current problems, provided that society as a whole is willing to modify its attitudes to the young.

In summarising the main arguments of this book, it becomes

clear how much growing up has still to go on before these key principles are accepted and applied. I do not believe we can wait another 18 years for this to happen, and those of us who have advocated a community service approach and seen its benefits in practice need to point to not how much we have progressed, but how little we have achieved in relation to the total task.

Schools have seen over the last 18 years an unprecedented period of tinkering with and expansion of the curriculum, and many much younger offspring, with sometimes less maturity behind them, are much more firmly entrenched in schools than community service. Of course, that may be no bad thing for community service if adaptability and validity are treasured. Acceptability can mean stagnation and complacency. But it may also be that this lack of recognition reflects more on the guardians than the child. It may be that we practitioners of community service have been less diligent than we ought in communicating our message and establishing our child with the proper credentials.

Unless it becomes widely accepted that the opportunity for practical and self-chosen meeting of human need is the right of every young person, and that this is a part of the heritage schools are required to hand on, then no number of organisations like VSU will be able to bridge the gap that exists in our society.

This is not to deny that VSU has a lot to offer as a model, given due adaptation to local circumstances. An organisation which straddles the divide between school and outside offers a unique opportunity, as well as bringing great flexibility and economy. It brings an impetus and independence and an ethos of its own. It is my own view that every school, either autonomously or in partnership, ought to provide a range of pupil-managed, outward-going organisations, including at least one business, as community enterprises. The participation and enthusiasm and learning experience which such an approach can entail have been amply demonstrated in Sevenoaks by VSU.

VSU has, of course, been fortunate in attracting sufficient resources and being allowed sufficient freedom to develop its vision. But that has not been achieved without going out to argue the case and to demonstrate the results. The importance of making time to establish sound public relations, in the widest sense, cannot be too strongly stressed.

VSU has also been fortunate in its relations with the local education authority, which has not just supported it in principle, but also provided both the right sort of financial help, namely the bulk of recurring salaries and administrative expenditure, without an annual fight through grant committees, but also the right proportion of finance, about two-thirds of the total annual cost of running the Unit. This has given the Unit both a minimum security and a reasonable measure of independence. It has enabled VSU to

concentrate on qualitative development in its work without continually peering over its shoulder. It has also given access to other local support and funding. The education authority has thus obtained more for its money than would otherwise have been the case, as well as a cost-effective co-ordination of work between schools. The financial arrangement has, in my estimation, been singularly beneficial to both parties.

Nevertheless, to exhort more local authorities to follow that example is likely to have a hollow ring to it in the present economic climate. The need for money is, however, not the case which I wish to make. I believe it is possible to accept and act on a commitment to developing community service as a much more established aspect of educational provision, without necessarily accepting a commitment to increased expenditure. For, at root, the argument of community service is about a re-thinking, even a re-definition, of secondary education, rather than about an addition to it.

Even that non-financial commitment by local education authorities is not one which will be made overnight. In seeking to bring about such a commitment, there is an interim task to be tackled. It is necessary to raise the general quality of existing community service practice and, in so doing, to develop its underlying theoretical base to relate it more closely to the concerns of education today. That means the eradication for good of both the garden-digging syndrome and the Lone Ranger image.

I believe that task must be approached at two levels. It needs hard graft on the ground and it needs a few stars in the firmament to shed some light. By that I mean there is a case for establishing a very small number of spearheading pilot projects pioneering particular lines of development. The results of such work must then be fed back into the developing awareness of the people who count, the practising teachers. One example of such a pilot scheme occurs to me from the experience of VSU. It may well be that others can develop their own examples based on their own experience.

From a chance conversation with the voluntary help organiser, I learnt that a mental handicap hospital was looking for a group of volunteers to attempt to initiate work on a locked ward for severely subnormal and mentally handicapped young men. A visit to the ward revealed a daunting prospect. It was bleak and sterile, the air was punctuated by strange noises and the wails of patients, and was strong with the smell of stale urine. It was meal time and the staff were struggling to feed the men, with much difficulty and a considerable amount of food on the floor. How could anyone expect a group of 16 year olds to cope with such difficult conditions, let alone achieve anything constructive?

The hospital had already thought about this problem and proposed to employ a team of community arts workers to work on the ward

for six half-day sessions to run imaginative play and drama sessions. The theory was that the volunteers would join the team for this period and, through the experience of working with them, be trained in the skills of communication and imaginative play, which would enable them to develop work with the patients on their own at the end of the six week induction.

The opportunity to work alongside professionals in this way was an undoubted benefit to the volunteers and enabled them to survive in demanding circumstances from which, unaided, most would have fled. In fact, of the original 15 who chose to take part on the basis of an explanatory afternoon, two never even set foot inside the door and two dropped out after the first session.

It was equally clear, when the six weeks were over, that the group, while immensely enthusiastic about the work, had no idea how to carry on. They had neither sufficient resources of equipment, nor enough confidence in their ability to take responsibility for the planning and execution of sessions. As they and VSU struggled with these problems over the next six months, and as methods of working and planning developed through much discussion and considerable trial and error, two lessons of overriding importance emerged which point the way to the significant qualitative development that is needed in community service with young people.

The first lesson is the vital role in such a project of the young volunteers and the contribution they can make to really challenging social problems. This project was able to progress because of the one-to-one ratio with patients which the presence of volunteers enabled. This permitted intensive and concentrated work beyond the scope of any individual, however highly qualified or talented he or she might be. It could only be achieved with volunteers, and young people have a particular part to play. They are not miracle workers, but they have not yet lost the natural capacity to be themselves nor the energy to throw themselves into something in a totally uninhibited way.

The second and equal lesson is that those young volunteers can only be fully effective with the right leadership and support. They cannot, in such a situation, be left unaided, even after six weeks induction. In recognising that, we begin to discover a new professional skill (in the best, not the elitist, sense of the term), the skill of working through young volunteers. It still requires an ability, in this case in play and drama therapy with the severely mentally handicapped, but it also requires the extra insight of being able to develop and amplify that ability through a team. It is a special sort of leadership which does not look on young people as work fodder, but which is sensitive enough to involve them in the planning and responsibility for the work, which does not dictate but sits down alongside, which is willing to be surprised and to learn and to guide and to support.

It is not a rare skill, or even one which is necessarily difficult to acquire. We do not need lengthy training courses or certificates supposedly to prove that someone has it. But it is a skill which we need consciously to foster if we are to raise the level of community service in schools.

That one experience of VSU, combined with trends in the rest of its work, suggest to me the possibility of injecting into one area either an individual or a small team of people to act as a resource to the community involvement of young people through creative skills, and to explore the relationship between community service and community arts. Monitoring the results of such an intensive input over, say, a two year period, and disseminating them widely, could do a great deal to raise our level of consciousness about the possibilities in community service by young people. That special large input would not need to be replicated elsewhere, only the underlying principles. But I am sure some such special impetus is needed if we are to make the urgent progress that is required.

It may well be that others can come up with different aspects of community involvement which would also benefit from such a special exploration. Such projects would, perhaps, attract the interest of some private trust. It is surely primarily what the Silver Jubilee Trust ought to be about, although they, for reasons best known to themselves, would preclude it in their guidelines. We must realise that it is not money to put batteries in old people's front door bells (reported by *The Guardian*⁽¹⁷⁾ to be, believe it or not, an authentic Jubilee project!) that the young need if they are to be helped to make an effective contribution to the community; it is skilled resource people to support them. Given the right sort of resources they will show what can be done, but it would require a positive lead from a trust. It will be clear to anyone who has followed the arguments of this book that the young will not simply come forward and ask.

The strategy of establishing one or two such specialist developments in community service will, however, be useless unless accompanied by proper groundwork and preparation on a national scale. The key to that is the development of in-service training facilities for community service teachers. They are virtually non-existent at present, and the only initiative I am aware of comes from a voluntary body, Community Service Volunteers, through its attempts to promote local Associations for Community Service Education. Thought might well be given at the same time to the training of teachers and to establishing dialogue with those other groups of workers who will need to become involved with young volunteers.

When a group of Kent teachers asked a local authority inspector why no training facilities existed and why no member of the inspectorate had any recognised responsibility for community

service, he replied, *'Because you've never asked for it'*. He had a point. Community service teachers have tended to stay quiet and do good deeds, often with inadequate backing from their schools. They need now to organise and be vocal. But local authorities, too, have a responsibility to give a lead, and that has rarely happened.

A similar inertia has characterised the Department of Education and Science. They appear to believe their duty is discharged by the repeated invocation of the magical phrase: 'Community service is a good thing!'

On the most recent occasion, the Secretary of State for Education in the Labour Government was asked in Parliament what steps she was taking to encourage community service schemes involving young people. Back came the old incantation:

'Much community service is organised under the leadership of bodies and organisations within the framework of the education service . . . I am glad to encourage all such endeavours'.⁽¹⁸⁾

But the question was about 'how?' not 'whether?'. Verbal encouragement is not enough any more.

It should be emphasised that the plea for more attention to be given to community service in education is not at this time a plea for more money, except from a private trust or two. It is a plea for fresh thought.

It is not pleading for a longer school day or a new addition to the present curriculum. It is a plea for a different way of spending the time we have. It is not pleading for more teachers. It is a plea for using differently the ones we have, and for involving many others in the community alongside them. It is not pleading for more or bigger or better buildings. It is a plea to use properly the schools and youth clubs we have, and perhaps to think imaginatively about the surplus primary schools currently appearing on the market. It is not pleading for more books or paper or equipment. It is above all a plea for educational and administrative vision.

Of course there is a crunch. Re-thinking and re-allocating time and resources means change at a fundamental level, and that can be harder than trying to find extra money. If one even *thinks* in over-simple terms of questioning the stranglehold on the timetable of, say, six periods a week of Maths or English, one knows at once it will be hard. But perhaps not as hard as all that. One of the bewildering experiences of my first year teaching was to hear the able, experienced, elder statesman Head of Maths say he could give no justification for teaching Maths to every pupil beyond the third year. I could never fathom how he managed to stand up in front of a fourth year class! But he did, and he would not budge from insisting on his full quota of time to do it!

The luxury of the empire is one we can no longer afford. That is

not to argue the abolition of Maths or English, or to say the school should become little else but an agency of community service. It is to say we have to go about things differently and that, as a priority, for the good of society and the maturing of young people, thought must be given to providing real first hand experience of trust, responsibility, caring and involvement, as a part of education, within and without school. In that the qualitative development of community service has a role to play.

And it can be done—even in a minus growth economy! It occurs to me, as a sort of monetary footnote, that some community service is, anyway, actually a marketable commodity and can pay for itself at cost price given a bit of entrepreneurial skill!

In the end, though, it is not money but action which is required—action from teachers, from headteachers, from the inspectorate, from local authorities and from government. And it requires something else from all of us by way of a change in attitudes towards the young and towards education. But, if we believe in a caring and participating society, we must educate towards that end, using first hand experience as the most important ingredient. There's no better time to start than right away.

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The Role of the Teacher in Community Service

by Mike Bolton



The role of the teacher in the development of community service has been and continues to be crucial. Most schools' community service programmes owe their existence to the initiative and enthusiasm of individual teachers. In contrast to many curricular developments, community service has been neither planned nor directed from above. Apart from a few persistent advocates at a national level, and a few enlightened local authorities and head teachers, it has been the classroom teacher who has been responsible for giving the concept flesh and bones. This has been both a strength and a weakness.

There is something to be said in favour of the grass roots, somewhat piecemeal approach, which takes into account individual school and local circumstances. It has allowed expansion to occur when needs dictate, and has also given the energetic teacher the opportunity for initiative and the chance to share in the excitement of working in an area of new and unfamiliar ground. But there have also been accompanying dangers to this pattern of growth. There have been no blueprints to follow and there has been little in teachers' professional training to prepare them for the crucial role they must undertake. There has also been little in the way of published material to guide them and few people with the necessary expertise from whom to seek advice. Ill-equipped and working in isolation, teachers of community service have muddled through. Judged from the viewpoint of the number of schools now engaged in community service, there has been tremendous progress. Individual schools have established a reputation for community involvement. Much work has been imaginative and enterprising. Yet there are grounds for believing that community service is still in a backwater and not in the mainstream of school life where it ought to belong. Even though the climate of educational opinion has moved in favour of social education, early hopes that community service would be accepted as an integral part of secondary schooling have not been fully realised. In most cases the individual teacher has been left single-handed to fight the battle for recognition and resources.

It is a battle that is by no means over in many schools. Some teachers struggle against almost impossible odds. Even where the activity has found its way into the curriculum, its position is still not completely safe. It has never thrown off its image as a fringe activity, and its low priority in many schools makes life particularly difficult for teachers involved in this area of education. Unfortunately, the belief that community service can be achieved on the cheap is still prevalent in many schools. The teacher of community service is expected to teach a full time-table and somehow cope with the rest in his spare time.

This dual role is difficult but not impossible to fulfil. The running of community service places a considerable extra burden on the

teacher, and calls for additional expertise, but it is not inappropriate for teachers to exercise this role. Some would argue that the two jobs are best separated; a non-teacher possibly working outside the school has a better chance of establishing a rapport with a volunteer than somebody whom the volunteer meets as an ordinary teacher. I am not sure that this necessarily follows; the most important task of the organiser is to know the volunteer as well as possible. Here the teacher, because of his daily interaction with volunteers, is in an especially strong position. The outsider does not have his knowledge, nor does he have an intimate acquaintance with the running of the school, nor ready access to volunteers. Finally, to divorce the organisation of community service from the mainstream of school life, is to automatically devalue its educational importance.

There are two main questions that schools have never fully resolved. One is how much time community service should be allowed, and the other is for whom is the activity available?

Obtaining a suitable span of time within the curriculum for the activity to take place is likely to be the biggest stumbling block facing the teacher wishing to develop community service, since it will almost inevitably mean that something else will have to be sacrificed. The organiser will often be arguing from a position of weakness and it may be necessary to accept a makeshift arrangement as a basis for future progress. However, the sooner a definite allocation of time is made the better. Many schools have found that a complete afternoon works quite well, although it is possible to make do with a shorter period where placements are close at hand. The main criterion is that it should be given a respected place within the framework of the school, for without this nobody is likely to take the activity seriously.

The other question to resolve is which groups are being offered community service. In one sense this is a practical problem, because the school will only have the resources to cope with a certain number of pupils and there will be constraints due to the timetable. These difficulties have provided just the excuse some schools have been looking for, and so community service has become a convenient dumping ground for the less able and more troublesome pupils. Similarly, the activity is often denied pupils who are following examination courses, on the grounds that it is too time consuming and unimportant. This is educational discrimination of the worst kind. The benefits of community service should be available to all pupils, and teachers of community service have a duty to fight to establish this principle. In practice this does not necessarily mean that 11 year olds, when arriving in the secondary school, will be timetabled for community service immediately. Involving young pupils raises all kinds of practical difficulties, not least of which is the need for considerable staff supervision. At the moment, most schools are unable to provide this. This does not mean that we should not try to find ways of involving pupils at a young age. Why

shouldn't the junior orchestra play at an old people's home? Why shouldn't games fixtures be made with Special Schools? These are only two of many unexplored possibilities.

The organiser's starting point once these questions have been resolved is the provision of suitable placements. People who are unfamiliar with school-based community service are often surprised that there is enough work to be found. In fact, there is usually more than enough to do and schools in remote areas have proved that the difficulties are not insurmountable. There are numerous ways of finding work, but a start could be well made by a visit to the local Social Services Department, or an agency like the Volunteer Bureau. This will need to be followed by more detailed discussions with representatives of possible placements. There is also the possibility that other schools in the area are involved already, so care will have to be taken to avoid duplication.

Finding outlets for students to carry out work is very much easier today than it was when community service first began in the 1960s. There is now a greater readiness for caring institutions to accept volunteer help. Once a start has been made and the scheme is operating, other possibilities for work begin to show themselves. Volunteers themselves are often the first to alert one to a new need. To give an example from recent experience; Sevenoaks School has recently built an observatory. Quite soon after the observatory was completed, a local school for handicapped pupils, which already had links with VSU, made a visit. Sevenoaks pupils then visited the special school and one of them began to run an astronomy club which has now functioned every week for nearly a year.

The success of that project led to the idea that it might be possible for pupils studying science to devise a series of elementary experiments that could be carried out in local junior schools. A pilot scheme has just been completed and there are indications that the scheme will be expanded in the future. The knowledge that these two projects were being carried out generated another development. Two boys, who have obtained amateur radio licences, are now passing on their knowledge to a man who has been recently forced to retire due to a stroke. This type of project may have wider application for other people who are house-bound. And so it goes on in this exciting fashion.

The real difficulty facing the organiser of community service is not in finding enough to do, but in ensuring that potential jobs are suitable. What yardstick does he use? The tendency to accept unquestioningly all requests for help must be avoided. The teacher has a duty to protect volunteers from potential exploitation. Even where the job is obviously genuine and worthwhile, a judgement must be made as to whether the volunteer has the necessary capacity to tackle the task. Even the jobs which appear quite simple on the surface are often full of practical difficulties. The job of

decorating somebody's room sounds ideal for an energetic bunch of 15 year olds. It is as well to ask, however, have they got the necessary expertise and equipment? Who is to pay for the materials? How are the equipment and volunteers to be transported? How is the job to be completed if only one afternoon a week is available? Similar questions have to be asked about every possible project.

Consideration must also be given to the balance of the overall programme. A phone call to Age Concern could elicit a hundred gardens to be dug, but this is not what is required. Instead a whole range of varied activities needs to be made available to give the volunteer a genuine choice. In addition to searching for areas of need, or sitting back waiting for requests to arrive, it is sometimes just as fruitful for the teacher to ask what interests and skills volunteers have, and to see whether they can be utilised in some way. Many young people initially lack confidence in relating to others, or find the prospect of working, let us say in a mental hospital, daunting. However, the task of establishing a relationship with a mentally handicapped adult is made easier by working through an existing interest, such as art or music. Any group of pupils will have an amazing pool of talents and skills which the observant teacher can tap.

The careful vetting of projects must also be carried out from another standpoint. In agreeing to send or to receive volunteers it is vital that both sides are aware of their obligations and responsibilities. The teacher has a duty to ensure that volunteers are briefed on the nature and purpose of the project. It is neither wise nor fair to expose young people to situations of potential stress without a good deal of information and preparation. There are various ways this can be done, even where no formal time has been set aside. Pupils can make preliminary visits to placements, or staff from institutions can come into school to meet volunteers. It is sometimes useful to provide volunteers with written information. Very often such booklets are best put together by experienced volunteers themselves. At Sevenoaks School one has just been completed on working in local primary schools. It gives basic information about the type and size of the schools we visit and an indication of the kinds of work carried out. There is a section on the relationship between volunteer and pupil, and between volunteer and teaching staff. Finally, there is advice on what to do if a project is not succeeding.

It is probably better if a more thorough introductory scheme can be built into a community service programme. We try to do this with all fourth formers who spend a term learning about VSU. Every Thursday each pupil spends the afternoon either working with regular volunteers on a project, or on community linked activities at school. This might involve listening to guest speakers, joining a role-playing exercise or playing football against patients from hospitals for the mentally handicapped. So far we have also

made two television films for use as part of this introductory programme. A group of older volunteers were given special permission to film inside a local hospital for the mentally handicapped. The film they made discusses the national provision for handicapped people, the nature and causes of handicap and traces the daily routine of three particular patients. The other film looks at the way society views physically handicapped people as seen through the eyes of handicapped adolescents. These films have had far greater impact than professionally made documentaries which we have sometimes recorded from television.

The aim of this introductory term is to make pupils better informed about the needs of their local community and to make them more aware of their own potential. The teacher must also be satisfied that the pupil is ready and willing to make a contribution. Finally, organisations have a right to expect the school to send information on who is to work with them. Once the project is under way, the teacher must agree to monitor the volunteer's progress, and ensure regular attendance.

It is the people who will be working closely with the volunteer who need to be briefed as to why the pupils are helping. I recall hearing one hospital worker claim that the young people who came into the hospital each week were sent as a form of punishment. Misunderstandings like this are quite common. Volunteers should be made to feel welcome and feel a worthwhile part of a team. Full-time staff can give all kinds of advice and support. Built in to all projects must be the chance for volunteers and staff to evaluate their progress. This may mean setting aside regular time to hold such meetings. Community work raises all kinds of questions and it is vital to be able to talk these through.

Once these preliminary arrangements have been made, the teacher has the job of selecting pupils for each task. Life would be much easier if this could be done in an arbitrary fashion. In practice, the whole operation can verge on a nightmare. What can easily happen is that the majority of pupils opt for two or three activities and leave the rest undersubscribed. One way out of this is to get pupils to make four or five preferences and to state the reasons for the choice. Even then, it is a most complicated task fitting the pieces into the jigsaw. Inevitably a few will be disappointed, but however much we would like to satisfy their wishes, there are constraints such as numbers and transport. In addition, it is usually helpful to blend new and experienced volunteers. This provides continuity for the future. Beyond this there are not many guidelines. Of course, at the back of one's mind, there is always the fear that the boy in IV G who regularly terrorises his teachers, and has a habit of setting fire to his desk, might run amok in an old people's home. But frankly, choosing volunteers on the basis of school behaviour is not very satisfactory. The most unlikely pupils

often turn out to be outstanding volunteers. There is simply no way of telling unless they are given the chance.

If he is not careful the teacher organising community service takes on the appearance of the second rate variety entertainer who endeavours to keep 12 plates spinning simultaneously. The harassed man can be seen dashing from plate to plate desperately trying to keep them from falling to the ground. The picture of the overworked teacher trying to cope with too much is not uncommon. Yet the job ought not to rest solely on the shoulders of one person. Unfortunately, community service is regarded by some head teachers as a convenient way of coping with large numbers of pupils with the minimum number of staff. It comes as quite a shock for them to learn that the activity really needs just as many, if not more staff than conventional subjects. Where community service is an important part of the curriculum, there is a strong case for insisting on adequate assistance.

However, things are never quite this simple. Activities soon spill over into evenings, weekends and holidays. Persuading colleagues to give up a Saturday evening is not calculated to gain instant popularity, and the ability to twist arms is an essential part of the organiser's make-up. Ironically, it is often more difficult to cajole a colleague into helping out than it is to get his pupils involved. Community service remains a mystery to most teachers and even where assistance has been offered, there will be a need to give considerable guidance. There is a tendency to assume that the job ends after volunteers have been checked off on a list and distributed to their place of work. There is, however, nothing more discouraging for a group of young people than to be abandoned at the door of a mental hospital, for example, by a teacher who spends the rest of the afternoon sitting in his car planning the next day's lessons or marking a set of books. The most effective staff I know take a positive part in the various activities. The larger the operation, the greater is the need for delegation. In jobs where quite a few volunteers are working, it may be convenient for one member of staff to assist permanently. In other cases, staff may have a wider responsibility for looking after volunteers working in dispersed but similar jobs, such as visiting the elderly or working in hospitals. It is possible for some teachers to be based almost entirely at school. The drama specialist, for example, can offer advice to pupils preparing an annual Christmas pantomime, or the woodwork master can give assistance to pupils making educational games for a local mental hospital.

In all these ways, and many more, staff have a constructive role to play. Yet there are definite limits which must be observed. They must be on hand to tender advice and give support, but it is the job of the volunteers themselves to plan and carry through their ideas. Community service provides enormous scope for initiative and

responsibility, and an organisational framework must be developed which does not stifle this. Great emphasis must be placed upon pupils managing their own affairs. The four school secretaries at Sevenoaks are key figures. They not only represent the school at a federal level but have direct responsibility for supervising all school-based activities. They publicise events, recruit new volunteers and review activities. They also call meetings of section leaders who are senior volunteers in charge of particular projects. Another senior pupil co-ordinates all Thursday afternoon's transport arrangements and another organises the fourth year introductory programme. Responsibility of this kind is extremely time-consuming and there are sometimes instances where the teacher must step in to prevent conflict with other school commitments.

What is aimed for is a partnership between staff and pupils. This may take some time to develop. Pupils are often surprised to find their teachers working with them on an equal basis and coping with the same difficulties. Equally, in its own way, dancing with the mentally handicapped or playing games at a party for children in care in front of the pupils he teaches, is likely to be doubly difficult. Certainly both teacher and volunteer will discover quite a lot about each other in the process. What makes participating in this kind of way especially difficult for the teacher is the fact that on the one hand he is simply part of a team of volunteers, but on the other hand is responsible professionally for the pupils and their actions. This contradiction is often most acute where the teacher is participating in activities after school. How far is it possible to apply school rules to events which pupils voluntarily attend in their own free time? Difficulties like these arise in many activities and can probably only be resolved by an individual teacher in the particular circumstances.

There are times, nevertheless, when the teacher must exercise his authority. On occasions it may be necessary for pupils to be withdrawn from a project. If the organisation is working properly this ought not to arise very often. It is usually more a reflection of the project's failure than the failings of the individual volunteer. There is sometimes a breakdown where there has been a lack of sufficient encouragement or inadequate support. There are times when volunteers have just lost interest in what they are doing. I suspect that teachers are not always alert enough to this situation. There is a tendency to stress the overriding need for continuity and a consequent failure to recognise that tasks sometimes lose their challenge and interest. We really need to spot the danger signals more quickly and steer pupils to tasks which are likely to be more demanding. In my experience, there may be a few occasions when it will be necessary to remove a volunteer because his or her behaviour has been unacceptable. This is a regrettable, but nevertheless essential duty. It happens very infrequently because most pupils respond to community tasks in a conscientious and responsible way.

Few schools are fortunate enough to be able to accommodate all their pupils with jobs in the immediate vicinity. The bigger the undertaking, the greater the chance that pupils will have to travel considerable distances. There are limits to how far volunteers can walk, cycle or use public transport. This problem of movement soon becomes the organiser's greatest concern. At Sevenoaks School, over half of the regular 200 volunteers need transporting to their destinations. We can only do this by mobilising all of the school's minibuses, borrowing vehicles from other schools, relying on staff to use their own cars and, above all, using a rota of parents who have agreed to help. The whole operation never goes smoothly. Sometimes visits to projects are cancelled at short notice and the drivers cannot be alerted in time; occasionally drivers forget to turn up. Vehicles have an inconvenient habit of breaking down and often volunteers turn up late and keep drivers waiting. There is more time and energy spent on this particular problem than on almost any other aspect of the organisation.

Adequate transport costs money, and while it is not the only item of expenditure, it is probably the most costly. Schools have a responsibility to ensure that what they teach is given sufficient resources. We have not yet reached the stage where the history teacher has to raise money to provide teaching materials. By the same token we should not expect the teacher organising community service to raise the money to enable this aspect of the curriculum to function. Unfortunately, most community service programmes are never given a sufficient allowance, and so they are forced into the task of raising funds for themselves. There is nothing wrong with a touch of self-help, but it is worth stressing that it is a time consuming business which can absorb energies better employed elsewhere. It may not be necessary to go to the lengths of one community service organiser I know, who cycled from Land's End to John o' Groat's to raise funds, but raising money is likely to become an ever increasing aspect of the teacher's work. For the teacher, the interest and excitement of community service lies in the unending challenge it throws up. He can become the catalyst for change.

As schools have grown in size and resources, they have become more self-contained. Making rooms available for a few evening classes seems to be about the extent many schools are prepared to go to in sharing the use of these expensive and under-used facilities. It doesn't take tremendous imagination to see how playing fields, workshops and art rooms can be utilised for the benefit of the wider community. Community service may be the key to unlock these resources.

It is striking how few schools, even within the same town, have much contact with each other. Many remain in total ignorance of each other's community involvement. Community service can offer an ideal base for co-operation. Sevenoaks has developed its own

sophisticated and highly advantageous link-up. Elsewhere, it may be possible initially for different schools to release pupils for community service at the same time and then to organise joint projects.

There is a danger that community service will grow up divorced from other aspects of the school curriculum. In reality, it naturally straddles most subjects which are taught. The community service teacher has a vital role in making colleagues aware of these links. At Sevenoaks School, links have been successfully established with music, television, woodwork, drama and science. Perhaps less obviously, pupils in mathematics have worked out the queuing distribution at the Post Office and sent their findings to the authorities. Students taking business studies have investigated the take-up of welfare benefits.

Educational innovations are notoriously short-lived. Community service has not run out of steam so far, but the possibility that that could happen must remain unless some action is taken. It is wrong to rely almost exclusively for continued progress on the ingenuity and goodwill of the individual teacher. Someone needs to appraise the whole position of community service in our schools and place it on a firmer foundation. The position of the teacher undertaking community service work needs investigating. At present, schools are in a trap of their own making. The activity comes so low down the educational pecking order that it has been largely ignored by teacher training establishments. In turn, schools are forced to recruit community service teachers from among their most inexperienced staff. In consequence, community service becomes a wasteland for teachers. Those who spend time building up their expertise in this field are often forced to seek professional advancement by returning to their initial academic subjects, or by leaving schools altogether. The result is a vacuum which cannot easily be filled.