

## YOUTH IN THE SERVICE OF THE COMMUNITY: THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL

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The process of socialisation begun in the home in early childhood is carried on and completed by the community. When the child crosses the threshold of adolescence he steps into another world; in the same way when he leaves the home he steps into another world, a world of events, people and changes that we call the community. This normally consists of the family, the church, the school, the place of entertainment, the place of work and the civic committee. Each in its turn contributes something to the moulding of the youth's personality.

Our young people know that they are living in a world which is both powerful and weak, capable of the best or the worst, faced with a choice between freedom and slavery, progress and decline, brotherhood and hatred. Torn between these opposing realities many young people ask the most fundamental questions: What is Man? Why must pain, evil and death persist in spite of progress? What is the use of our hard-won conquests? What can a man offer to Society? What can he expect from it?

### Community service in general

The purpose of educating our young people is the promotion of social growth. Our society can add another dimension to the methods by which schools work towards this purpose, namely, it can help towards the development of personality and a sense of social responsibility through practical experience.

All of us know that young people need to feel that they are playing an important and purposeful role in a happy and understanding environment. Therefore, every country must utilise all its resources - not only its raw material and other economic assets but also, and, above all, the human resources represented by its youth.

The idea of voluntary service by young people has, over the past few years, gone through a radical change. It is no longer the privileged few who are involved but many are those young people, coming from a wide social background, who are asking what they can do to help others.

Community service work should not be limited to voluntary organisations. It should also be extended to schools. In schools such service provides one way for the pupil to move from the security of the class into the highly complicated world of the adult community. The student finds himself involved in real situations, where he can no longer rely on some one else to tell him what to do. In this way he inevitably gains some responsibility and in his work he discovers more about his own capacities and potentialities. Community service provides a chance for young people to experiment and find their proper place in the adult world. These suggestions for community service in schools call for planning, organisation and imaginative efforts.

Furthermore, through the experience of community service young people become more involved in the community of which they are a part. They see it as a network of interdependent relationships in which they are not passive spectators but active participants. For these reasons the practical commitment required by community service is likely to be worth far more than any second-hand knowledge acquired in their classroom about their community. The students come to realise, through action, either individually or as a group, how they can effect changes. What community service provides is not knowledge but the experience that personal action can change a situation of helplessness.

Community service in its nature is not intended to be vocational. However, it could serve as an introduction to a career for some young people. A girl, for instance, working in a hospital for the mentally handicapped may think of taking up such work professionally. If community service can convince young people that they can take action now, it may also give them confidence to take an active role in community work later on as adults. We are at a time when more emphasis in social work is placed on community care and organisation. Thus, the role of schools in helping young people to understand how they can be participant members of the community is very important.

### Involving the students

Many are those young people who are offering themselves to give some service to the community through voluntary organisations here in Malta. But thousands of others show no interest. Why not? It is, perhaps, that we adults cloak the idea of service in terms of such little meaning for young people that the majority feel as if it has nothing to do with them. Our young generation

should be able to share in the satisfaction that comes from helping others. For such work satisfies a deep need to give that is fundamental to human nature. Most of our young men spend much of their time in schools and we cannot afford to send them out without letting them have some experience of giving. Young people seem to need the opportunities to serve others and we know that there are opportunities. What is difficult, perhaps, is to bring young people face to face with more particular situations of individual and social need where they can make a contribution.

### Community service as part of the curriculum

I have mentioned, however briefly, community service through voluntary organisations. We know that in our country a large proportion of young people engage in socially positive activities in the framework of their family, the church organisations and other established organisations such as the Scouts.

My intention in this paper is to discuss the possibility of introducing community service in schools. The voluntary organisations are already doing splendid work in this field, but we cannot ignore the fact that this service can form a part of the curriculum. This programme in schools may be advocated for various reasons. For example:

- (1) We must admit that it is a relatively small proportion of young people who belong to voluntary organisations. The experience of sharing and caring may be extended beyond the few to the great majority of young people.
- (2) Civics as provided at present by the educational system can be greatly enriched if we introduce this idea of community service.

Social service must have a positive connection with the curriculum. The service outside the school must not remain an isolated activity otherwise a great deal will be lost. Practical work in the locality can reinforce and make more meaningful the work of the classroom. Community service work and work in the classroom can each support the other, but only when it is clear to the student that both in conjunction can make their education useful.

## Civics linked with community service

Civics, as provided at present by the educational system, is taking a new form. Revision of the civics syllabus is being considered and therefore this seminar can be very useful to those concerned with this revision. Here I should like to outline the main objectives of civic education to show to what extent it is related to community service.

The aim of civic education is to prepare the young person to become fully integrated in the complicated society in which we live in order to ensure his personal happiness and social usefulness. This means that:

1. We are trying to make the student aware of the necessity of his personal contribution to the welfare of society.
2. We make him aware that his personality emerges only through his relationships with others (community service).
3. We try to convince him that human relations are fundamental and vital.
4. We explain how in today's society people seek to solve problems in human relations by dialogue and understanding rather than by force.
5. We give the student a sense of involvement in the human condition in which he finds himself.

These are some of the objectives which we aim at in civic education.

Now I should like to say a few words about the means to achieve these objectives, the development, that is, of a sense of total involvement, a sense of active and responsible participation in the community life.

In practice civic education has a threefold approach. The young man must:

- (a) know himself;
- (b) have a good knowledge of the world around him;

- (c) have some knowledge of how he can establish relationships with his world.

(a) the young man must know himself

He must have some knowledge about himself, that is, he must discover and develop his potentialities. Therefore, civic education is, in the first place, concerned with character formation and behaviour to enable the child to adjust himself to the world around him. Guidance at this age is very important. The best service that we, as educators, can render to the community is to produce mature young people. Along these lines themes like the development of personality, decisive thinking and decision making, the development of unselfish attitudes, a sense of responsibility for the common good, temperate emotional reactions, a balanced attitude regarding sex and, above all, ability to face the realities of life, are already being treated by some of us. Emphasis on these topics will be given in the new syllabus.

(b) the young man must have a good knowledge of the world around him

Knowing himself is not enough. The young man must have also knowledge of the world around him. Therefore civic education embraces a wide range of aspects of contemporary life, that is, knowledge of the various human associations must be well grasped by the student. These include the family, the school, guidance about careers, entertainment, the Church and the State.

A good knowledge of these social institutions will enable the child to render a good service to the community where he will not only learn by theory but, more important, he will learn through practice.

(c) the young man must have some knowledge of how he can establish social relations with his world

The young man must be taught how a relationship can be established with other human beings. Therefore, topics related to both civics and community service will include communications media, friendship, leadership, planning, guidance (may I appeal for more guidance officers in schools to ensure personal contact with our students), a sense of commitment to the group, human solidarity, international unity, and the rest. Along these lines

I am also inclined to suggest a course in public speaking for our students.

As I have indicated earlier, the committee in charge of redrafting the new civics syllabus is keeping all these considerations in mind. Perhaps the most difficult part is when the committee comes to the point of planning for voluntary service. That is: when to develop a community service programme, as a regular part of the syllabus; or, how can a community service programme be organised on the time table? There are also other practical considerations that must be taken into account, such as: where to find the jobs for the school children; how students should be grouped; what assistance can be offered by the local authorities (civic committee, organisation, etc.) or the parents. All these will have to be taken into consideration and we should appreciate your suggestions.

### Religion linked with community service

I have mentioned so far civics as the subject closely related to community service. But there are other subjects that are directly or indirectly related to community service. Religion, for instance, is one of these subjects. I still remember a sentence from a letter which I received some years ago from a friend of mine in which he said: "Young people are religious but in a different way," and he mentioned the work being done by teenagers for the welfare of mankind. It seems that the faith of the young people nowadays is a faith which is expressed in a sincere involvement in the human condition. We are moving towards what we might call a "fraternal faith", Needless to say there is also room for discussion, the link of community service with other subjects.

### What kind of activity?

It is easy to advocate the principle but when we come to practice the story will be different. However, community service does not necessarily mean the teacher taking pupils out of the school premises all the time. One example could be, for instance, academically brighter pupils tutoring younger or less-advanced pupils in a section of the classroom or school library. We can discuss what sort of work could be done by the boys and girls in, say, old people's clubs, hospitals, designing aids for the physically disabled, a children's holiday scheme and other activities which could be linked with this matter.

## The contribution of Voluntary Organisations

As I have indicated earlier, in our country we have a number of voluntary organisations that are rendering excellent service to the community. To mention but a few, we have the Youth Service Organisation, Din L-Art Helwa, Teens and Twenties Talent Trust, Young Christian Workers, Catholic Action, Youth Clubs, The Society of Christian Doctrine, The Centre for Social Leadership, and the Scouts. Each has its own distinctiveness, as well as similarities with others. It seems, however, that the services they render to the community overlap at times and in some cases there is a loss of energy and in other cases there is no energy at all. May I ask what is being done by the National Youth Consultative Council to organise regular meetings of these voluntary agents so as to discuss and, perhaps, plan youth programmes for the service of the community? Any school programme along these lines should be in conjunction with these voluntary organisations and not in competition.

## Training of Teachers

Training of youth leaders and teachers could take various forms, among them:

- (1) conferences to which representatives of voluntary organisations would be invited;
- (2) in-service courses for teachers run either by experienced Maltese teachers in this field or perhaps invited teachers or youth leaders from abroad;
- (3) training in the syllabus at the colleges of education;
- (4) regular meetings with youth service officers and others.

## Conclusion

We have discussed at length youth in the service of the community. We have long been aware of the important work that young people can render to the community and recognise that in our country most of this work is being carried out by voluntary organisations. But since a relatively small proportion of youths belong to these organisations we may, perhaps, discuss ways

and means by which this programme could become an integral part of the school curriculum. I have outlined, however briefly, the lines along which the committee of civics is working to redraft the syllabus of civics. Your ideas would be very much appreciated to help us channel young people's energies into constructive action, even though Malta is still free of many of the major social problems. Perhaps the basic reason why schools should develop community service work is that the community needs to use what the young people can contribute.