Roger White and David Brockington

IN AND OUT OF SCHOOL

The ROSLA Community Education Project

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In and Out of School

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The world at his feet. . .

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This book is especially dedicated to
Jean, Mary, Meriel, Nan, Ros and Alan,
the group leaders, for all their support
and commitment over the years;
and to all those people who,
if the project works at all,
keep it working from day to day.

Preface

This book is the outcome of practical experimental work with groups of fifth-form leavers. It describes a project based outside of the school institution, but in co-operation with it, that has explored methods and courses which might offer meaningful education for these children. Though this project has been primarily concerned with the non-academic urban adolescent, the blueprint of 'living, experiental' teaching and learning proposed here is appropriate to the education of children of all ages and abilities.

It is a book about community resources: how they might be better employed, and how education could be taken out of the classroom to extend 'schooling' beyond the schools. There is a vast untapped resource of both people and buildings outside the school walls, which could be incorporated within the existing learning framework.

It is about the training of 'professionals' to work with adolescents—particularly trainee teachers and social workers—and how involvement with such an experiment constitutes a fundamental and necessary preparation for their future roles.

It is also a book urging an extension of social policy with respect to education; an extension of provision achieved largely through the reallocation of existing resources, which we demonstrate as having already worked on a small scale in our city. This is an ideological as well as a practical perspective, and the book is both a polemic and a procedural manual suggesting workable approaches and ideas.

Acknowledgments

Our thanks are due to many people whose practice and ideas have so much influenced us as fellow travellers, and who have helped us during our four years of involvement with this project; and to all those–group leaders, volunteers, teachers, advisors, administrators, students and other friends–we would like to extend our gratitude.

To everyone who read this manuscript during its many draft stages, and gave us such useful criticism and advice–particularly about what was wrong–we are indebted for the appropriate corrections.

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Abbreviations

AMA	Assistant Masters' Association
CCETSW	Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work
CDP	Community Development Project
CEO	Chief Education Officer
CI	Community Industry
CQSW	Certificate of Qualification in Social Work
CSE	Certificate of Secondary Education
CSV	community service volunteers
DES	Department of Education and Science
EPA	educational priority area
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
FE	further education
GCE	General Certificate of Education
HE	higher education
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
HMSO	Her Majesty's Stationery Office
ILEA	Inner London Education Authority
IT	Intermediate Treatment
LEA	Local Education Authority
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NAHT	National Association of Head Teachers
NAS/UWT	National Association of Schoolmasters and Union of Women Teachers
NAYC	National Association of Youth Clubs
NCSS	National Council of Social Service
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NUT	National Union of Teachers
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education
ROSLA	raising of school leaving age
SSRC	Social Science Research Council
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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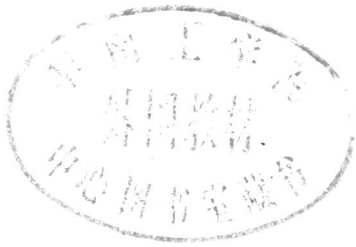

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Introduction: Setting the Scene

The raising of the school leaving age could mean little more than the extension of a struggle between pupils, who feel that school has little to offer them, and teachers, who feel that they meet little other than boredom and resistance.

Dame Muriel Stewart, *Young School Leavers*, report on an enquiry carried out for the Schools Council (HMSO 1968).

State education is in its infancy. It is little more than a hundred years since the first Education Act of 1870; so it is hardly surprising that we are still groping in the dark, experimenting with a variety of curriculum models to meet the rapidly changing demands from Western society. Steadily, successive governments have increased the period of enforceable schooling.

Now, for the first time in the history of the English educational system, children are compelled by law to remain at school till the age of 16. In 1972 it was deemed necessary to legislate for extending the period of statutory schooling by an extra year—a gem of educational thinking and planning fought for over many years.[1]

Since the core educational curricula of this country are modelled on a pattern established by the public-school system a century before and appropriate for an elite minority of rich men's sons (and latterly daughters) who were being prepared for leadership roles in society, it might well be true that this pattern is now outdated. If the educational justification for extending the period of compulsory schooling was the value and appropriateness of the extra content of an additional year, then it is reasonable to examine this content carefully.

Most children would have opted for this extra year quite voluntarily

anyway, (54·8 per cent of the 15-year-olds in 1970 stayed on for at least one more year—a percentage almost twice that of the figure ten years earlier). For the 'A'-level candidates, the technical college entrants and the trade apprentices, acceptance of extended schooling would follow as a matter of course. But it was not these pupils and leavers that the Act was aimed at. In the words of John Newsom it was

> the boys and girls who form the majority of pupils in the secondary modern school, or who are in the middle and lower forms of comprehensive school—and amongst whom there is much unrealised talent, especially where potential is masked by inadequate powers of speech and limitations of home background.

His report of 1963 justified a minimum leaving age of 16 because

> in our pupils there are reserves of ability, which can be tapped, if the country wills the means of extra time that could enable these pupils to grow up a little more as persons, to add to their general knowledge and understanding and to strengthen their attainments.

At the same time he emphasised that this would necessitate a shift from 'investment where emphasis is at present almost invariably on the higher education of the most gifted, towards increased investment in the pupils who leave at fifteen.'

Newsom recommended raising the leaving age; education till 16 became compulsory from 1 September 1972.[2] It was a golden opportunity to reappraise the 'system'. Hundreds of thousands of extra leavers needed to be catered for and offered an additional year that was appropriate and valuable. The exact figure is hard to determine, but DES Statistics of Education for examinations taken in 1973 estimate the figure for children staying on because of ROSLA as approximately 240,000—and add the wry comment that the number of children leaving with CSE or GCE qualification in 1973 was little affected by the extra influx, since 'those who are prevented from leaving will number few who are likely to have left with any such qualifications.' Millions of pounds were allocated for research—mainly Schools Council curriculum-development projects—and for staffing where, according to the National Association of Schoolmasters, an estimated additional 20,000 teachers were required to cope with the increased number of pupils. In addition £125 million pounds was allocated in April 1969 to

finance a three-year building programme to provide accommodation for the enlarged school population. Most secondary schools had the advantage of a new 'ROSLA' block adjacent to their existing premises. 'ROSLA' became the focus of educational debate, almost ousting comprehensive versus segregated schooling as the issue of the day.

Yet, sadly, ROSLA has turned out to be a disappointment. The new courses, the superbly equipped modern buildings, the freshly trained specialists and the extra allocation of hard cash have somehow not produced the desired results.

Truancy figures are still alarmingly high and possibly even rising. In January 1975 a DES survey on absenteeism produced the figure of 647,500 15-year-olds absent from school on one particular day, of which one-third were reckoned to be 'unjustified absentees', i.e. truants. At the same time the published attendance in one London comprehensive school was a mere 67 per cent. A more recent estimate in May 1977 produced the figure that out of 2 million absentees in one week, 800,000 were without good cause.[3] The estimated annual cost in terms of wasted resources due to truancy is set at about £200,000,000–and this does not include the cost of approximately 2,500 education welfare officers servicing the schools.

School violence and vandalism[4] are also purported to be on the increase. Although there are no statistics collected by local education authorities or the DES on violent incidents in schools, the NAS and NUT are both concerned that violent behaviour–particularly amongst those in the 14-16-year-old group–presents a very real threat to the continuity of the accepted classroom structure.[5] According to both unions, teacher unwillingness to be involved in the teaching of 'low-ability' pupils is certainly as endemic as ever. Until the economic crisis of 1975, teacher resignations, drop-outs from training colleges and cases of under-staffing in EPA school units were all on the increase.

Why, after all this effort and expenditure, has the legislated extra year proved so deplorably ineffective?

The explanation on one level is simple.

It was Crowther who suggested way back in 1959 that the education experienced by the majority of the population was 'inadequate both in terms of its quality and duration'. Though 'quality' may well have improved and 'duration' is obviously covered by ROSLA, there is a further concept which has so far been largely ignored. This is the *form* which the education takes.

Children who have experienced ten years of a compulsory system

that has channelled and labelled them as failures are not going to jump for joy at the prospect of an extended sentence. For these youngsters 'education' and 'school' have become meaningless bores, and their intention is to leave at the first opportunity. Unlike Dickens's Oliver, these Newsom children were asking for less, but getting more—and more schooling rather than more education.

The two are not necessarily synonymous.

It is too easy, though, to blame the schools for these 'failures'. After eleven years of schooling it seems incredible that many 16-year-olds have not advanced beyond the reading age of an infant—and it is tempting to point the finger at inadequate teaching. Yet school is just one side of a many-faced situation. Home, friends, illness, and intelligence all influence a child's engagement in learning. Inside our schools are many first-class teachers, with a lot of energy, enthusiasm and innovatory ideas, and most children take away some positive gain from a day in school. But to assume that school is all right for everybody is unrealistic. It is not possible, given the variations in human temperament and circumstance, to create an institution that suits all youngsters.

Many teachers appreciate the paradox of providing extra schooling for the non-academics. For instance the NAS report *Ready in Time*, published in 1966 about planning for ROSLA, acidly commented that

> Teachers in primary school may wonder why all this extra money is being spent in an effort to provide the right conditions for a group of pupils who would much rather not be in school anyway, instead of remedying the desperate state of many existing primary schools.

Letters signed by numerous heads, fearing the disruption caused by coercing a quarter of a million disenchanted youngsters to stay on, and pleading for a rethink, flooded the national press.[6] Some heads made an attempt to cope with the problem, but we think the central point is that for many 'Newsom' children being in *school* is the problem, so that more of that structure (as currently organised and conceived, and however lavish the equipment and luxurious the surroundings) will never provide a solution. On the flyleaf of the Newsom Report is a comment from a boy who had just left school and was asked by his former headmaster what he thought of the new buildings. 'It could all be marble, sir,' he replied, 'but it would still be a bloody school.'

Indeed the studies of researchers like Hargreaves[7] evidence the truth

of a fundamental proposition that disenchantment and rejection of school and school values arise to a great extent not from low ability or background problems, but from the organisation of the school itself—the form the education takes.

Hargreaves details the way in which conflicting subcultures are developed from within the school structure:

> For boys in high streams life at school will be a pleasant and rewarding experience, since the school system confers status upon them. This status derives from membership of a high stream, where boys are considered to be academically successful, and are granted privileges and responsibility in appointment as prefects and in their selection for school visits and holidays. The peer group values reflect the status bestowed on such boys by the school as being consonant with teachers' values. Conformity to peer group and school values is thus consistent and rewarding.
>
> In the low streams boys are deprived of status in that they are double failures by their lack of ability or motivation to obtain entry to a high stream in the modern school. The school accentuates this state of failure and deprivation. The boys have achieved virtually nothing. For those in low streams conformity to teacher expectations gives little status. We can thus regard the low stream boys as subject to status frustration, for not only are they unable to gain any sense of equality or worth in the eyes of the school, but their occupational aspirations for their future lives in society are seriously reduced in scope. . . . Demotion to the delinquescent sub-culture is unlikely to encourage a boy to strive towards academic goals, since the pressures within the peer group will confirm and reinforce the anti-academic attitudes which led to demotion, and the climate within the low streams will be far from conducive to academic striving.
>
> In order to obtain promotion from a low stream, a boy must deviate from the dominant, anti-academic [norms of his peers].

If this analysis is in any way accurate, and the organisation of schools does play a substantial role in producing the disenchantment of a vast army of children, then it becomes imperative to investigate new patterns of school and educational organisation which might reduce the incidence of these phenomena.

At a very fundamental level it seems sad that education, which could provide the excitement of fostering lifelong interests, often only

succeeds in being nothing more than a drudge for a significant number of children. To prevent this it is imperative to rethink school structure, so that real possibilities emerge, and that the extra year's compulsory attendance might actually promote growth not boredom.

Arguably, at least a quarter of those in their final year at secondary school are completely disenchanted with the educational system. This 25 per cent includes the under-achievers, the phobics, the non-academics and the truants, who might well be the most likely recipients of any policies of positive discrimination–the educational priority areas, the national Community Development Project, now defunct, and Urban Aid programmes, which, in the words of Michael Meacher, would be 'disposing of expenditure totalling only about 1 per cent of the educational budget'.[8]

It is with these children, who have rejected and been rejected by the school system that we have developed an experimental project which embraces the extra statutory year as a positive step–as an opportunity to rethink educational provision and organisation of learning. The success of this model *could* be measured just by the attendance statistics of the youngsters themselves, not to mention their obvious enthusiasm. Truancy within our system is usually negligible, incidence of violent behaviour is slight and, instead of hesitancy, there is keen involvement by pupils and teachers who want to participate.

We believe that solutions to the problems posed by the raising of the school leaving age are difficult to see because they tend to challenge our assumption barriers. One such assumption, for instance, is that there is a unique learning and teaching place called school; or that there are only particular times to teach and learn; or particular ways in which to teach and learn; or even particular things to teach and learn.

If we cast aside some of these assumptions, we might solve many of the problems associated with children coming 'unwillingly to school'. To succeed with these pupils any educational offering must be clearly meaningful as well as interesting.[9] Schools do try in the main to offer this but with certain children are almost bound to fail unless they alter the pervading atmosphere of preoccupation with examinations. They are trapped by the pressures from without (employers, Further Education institutions and vociferous parents) which encourage them to concentrate on academic goals; and they are hindered in developing innovatory courses by many teachers within the system who cling to well-tried curriculum models, where success and failure can easily be measured by exam achievement. In an institution where the emphasis

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