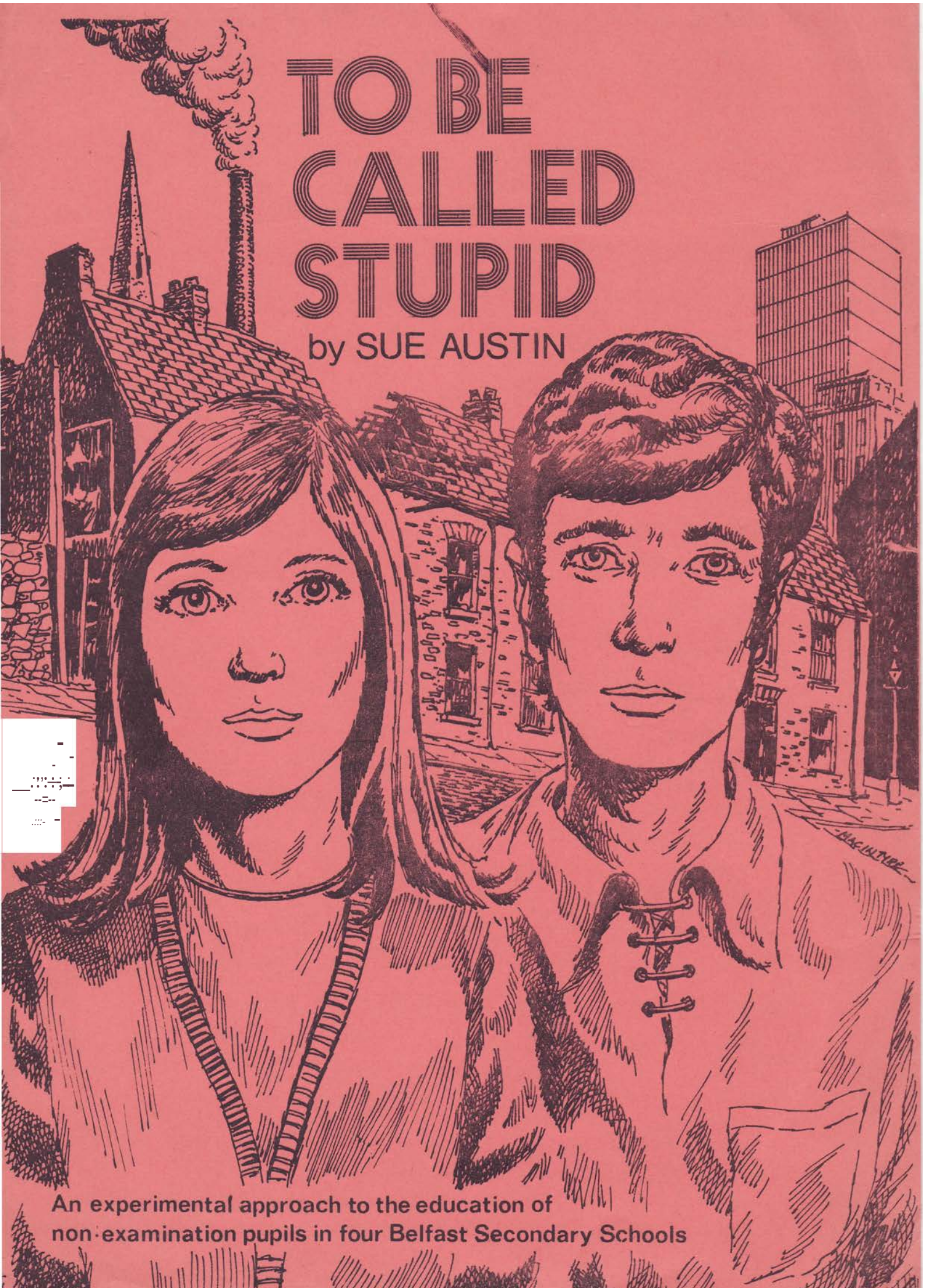
TO BE CALLED STUPID

by SUE AUSTIN



An experimental approach to the education of non-examination pupils in four Belfast Secondary Schools

"TO BE CALLED STUPID"

"To Be Called Stupid" is a 260 page account by Sue Austin of a research project in four Belfast Schools in deprived areas.

A "Group Worker" was appointed to each of four schools to develop more trusting relationships with some very 'difficult' pupils towards the end of their school career. The workers sought to raise the latters' self-esteem and contradict their teachers' unquestioned expectations of them; they dealt often directly with peer group structures which supported bullying and with staff attitudes opposing curriculum reform; and, by linking with community organisations, they sought to reduce the schools' isolation from their neighbourhoods.

The 'Group Worker' scheme highlights the importance of support and encouragement for teachers in inner-city areas or new estates who are concerned to foster the individuality, responsibility and latent creativity of youngsters who have had virtually nothing but unrewarding experiences from school.

This report on the scheme is one of the few descriptive and analytical pieces covering the struggle of those working for the written-off youngster in Northern Ireland, the non-examination teenager doomed in the eyes of so many "To Be Called Stupid". Its findings apply far beyond Northern Ireland.

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BY

Sue Austin

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CONTENTS

PREFACE

Every secondary teacher in Northern Ireland knows that his pupils who have found school work intrinsically interesting and rewarding or who have strong extrinsic motivation are not likely to be involved in sectarian rioting and violence. He also knows that most young people who are involved have had an unfulfilling school career. It would be simplistic to suggest that providing worthwhile education for pupils in all sections of the school community would in the short term contribute to better Community Relations: nevertheless there can be no doubt that in the long term such a provision is an essential prerequisite for a healthy society.

The failure of the schools with a section of their population is far from being a specifically Northern Ireland problem. Nor, clearly, is it the failure of schools alone. Numerous writers, in Britain and America have drawn attention to socio-economic, family and personality factors as well as school organisation and teacher expectations, which have contributed to the creation of various deviant sub-cultural groups: in Northern Ireland the political situation simply adds another dimension. Since the publication of the Newsom report, recognition of the failure of society and its schools has led to widespread innovation. Such innovation usually focuses on the school curriculum or on areas of school organisation. Of late there has been a multiplicity of new courses for 'school leavers' or 'ROSLA' pupils, and experimentation with different forms of pupil grouping and of time-tabling abounds. The primary objective of the innovation discussed in this book was not the remodelling of the school curriculum or the re-shaping of school organisation. It aimed, rather at offering pupils, towards the end of what was for them an unrewarding school experience, the possibility of a fuller and richer relationship with a teacher.

Clearly a teacher could only hope to discover the new role which such a relationship implies if he was freed from normal commitments and constraints of time-tabling and class-teaching. The idea, therefore, in 1970, when the experiment was first considered by the Schools Project in Community Relations, was to try to improve the staffing ratio in a few schools in socially deprived areas. This would mean that a teacher could be released from his normal commitments to meet school leavers individually and in their friendship groups not only Tn the school building or during school hours

but in their homes, at the street corner and in their club, and in the evenings and at week-ends.

When the first school was approached about the appointment of an extra member of staff it turned out that because of its reputation as a tough inner urban school it had insufficient applicants to fill the number of posts it was entitled to. To improve its staffing ratio would then in practice be of absolutely no help. This was in itself a significant pointer to the cumulative effect of adverse factors such a school has to face.

The headmaster of the school could not therefore, release the senior teacher who might have developed the new role in this particular school from normal teaching duties. Fortunately one of the first two Northern Ireland graduates to take a ful 1 time course in Youth Leadership was prepared to join the staff. Initially the term Youth Tutor was used to describe the appointment but because of its different connotation in an English school context Youth Tutor was dropped in favour of Group Worker.

The experiment was, of course, seen as a new approach to youth work as well as school innovation. It was apparent in 1970 that a Youth Service which had long suffered from official neglect, was not going to be able to get in touch with a significant proportion of the young people who were likely to be caught up in violence. Schools on the other hand were, or had been, in touch with them all and it seemed an obvious strategy to strengthen the school's influence on them. The way chosen to do this was to appoint a teacher to give them the kind of open relationship they would have with a good youth worker. It was also intended that the Group Worker should keep in touch with them after they had officially 1 eft schoo 1.

The fact that a new and highly gifted but inexperienced teacher rather than a teacher from the school staff was the first appointment had considerable influence on the *v.wy* the role of the Group Worker has developed. In particular a tradition has grown up that it is a job for a teacher starting out on his career: only one of the six Group Workers now in post has had other teaching experience. Clearly there are advantages and disadvantages in appointing teachers straight from

College or University. On the one hand the young teacher may find it easier to free himself from traditional expectations and can bring a fresh radical perspective to the school situation. He may also more readily adapt to the irregularity of a life partly in school, and in the community during the evenings and at week-ends. From the pupils' point of view it is easier to relate to a person who has not been identified as a teacher and who does unteacherish things. On the other hand it has not been easy for Group Workers to cope with the demands of a pioneering role at the same time as finding their feet in their first job. They have also had greater difficulty in gaining acceptance by other teachers who have sometimes seen their more open relationships with pupils as a threat to traditional authority.

Evaluation of a project such as this is a mach more difficult undertaking than deciding whether or not the Group Workers achieved certain specific objectives. Detailed consideration has to be given to the status of the young people we are concerned with in a particular school and the role that they are expected to play. This demands not only understanding of its organisation and pattern of relationships but insight into its underlying assumptions and priorities. A Schooi for example, in which a highly developed counselling system reflected a total educational philosophy might offer a Group Worker a very limited and specific role - if it was appropriate at all that it should make such an appointment. On the other hand a school swamped by an accumulation of social and educational problems whose basic philosophy was nevertheless essentially meritocratic, might in fact fail to provide a Group Worker with conditions in which he could do a worthwhile job: he would both fail to get effective support from the headmaster and senior staff and find it virtually impossible to establish priorities among pupils' needs.

It was decided therefore that the best approach to evaluation was to appoint a participant observer who would spend a year with the group workers, in school, in the local community, in pupils' homes, in youth clubs, in the streets and during field trips.

On the recommendation of the Northern Ireland Social Science Research Institute Mrs Sue Austin was invited to take the post. She turned out to be an ideal choice. She was sympathetic to the aims of the project, and warm and supportive to the

group workers and yet she managed to retain a due measure of objectivity and detachment. As well as working towards an overall summative evaluation she was alive to the need to allow on-going evaluation to contribute formatively to the project. In her contact with group workers individually and at their fortnightly meetings she helped them to reach a clearer under - standing of their role and to participate in evaluating their achievements.

The group workers, teachers in the four schools,many 'early leavers', and a number of parents are greatly in her debt.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO THE GROUP WORKER SCHEME

This scheme entailed the appointment of an additional member of staff to four secondary intermediate* schools in Belfast, two being Roman Catholic schools and two state schools.

The distinctive feature of the appointments was that the extra 'teachers' (they were given official teaching posts and salaries) were not to be subject to any timetabled duties at all in school in order to enable them to devote all their energies to investigating the needs and potentialities of the older non-academically inclined pupils in thei schools. Additional funds for the project were obtained from an independent education Trust which also agreed to help to finance the appointment of a research worker to evaluate the project through the final year of the experimental three year period. This book represents the research worker's assessment of the scheme.

Du.ring the first two months of her appointment, corresponding to the last two months of the 1972 summer term, the research worker concentrated on getting to know the schools involved and the different areas of the city in which they were situated as well as finding out about the aims behind the project and the methods currently employed to meet them. Detailed evaluation of the scheme which entailed monitoring the group workers' programmes throughout a complete school year began in September 1972.

The initial appointment was made in August 1970 when David a qualified teacher and youth worker joined the staff of Benton Secondary a co-educational school in a Protestant working class area of central Belfast. Malcolm, a recent graduate with youth work experience gained a temporary r,ost in SL Marks Secondary Intennediate Boys School early in 1971. By

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*r ;;, cunddYY intermediate schools are the equivalent of secondary rr11,dern ;chool.s in England.

the middle of 1972 Janet had joined the scheme operating from Meadowfield, a girls state secondary school, and at the same time the team agreed to include for comparison an assessment of the work of the 'Head of Counselling and Peripatetic Service' recently appointed in St. James's, a Roman Catholic Boys' Secondary school in another district of the city. This school had been the scene of ccn-siderable pioneering work especially in connection with provision for the young school leaver and the teacher seconded to the new post had already built up a wide experience of working with less academic-ally inclined pupils. Eugene's new post released him almost entirely from formal teaching duties and could therefore be regarded as equivalent to the group workers' appointments for the purpose of the evaluation.

Aims of the Project

First of all it should be pointed out that the immediate aim of the project was not primarily to mix together children from either side of the religious divide in Northern Ireland nor to force the pace of 'integrated education' (in Northern Ireland this refers to uniting the two parallel schooling systems - one for Protestants, one for Catholics - at present in operation in the province.) despite the 'Community Relations' title of the parent project. Rather than charge full tilt at what would inevitably be the "brick wall" of non-integrated education the group workers resolved to build a firm bas_s of school - pupil - community co-operation. David neatly packaged their objectives as:-

1) to work towards creating a deeper awareness among staff of the needs of individual children - especially those of low status - and ıı wider acceptance of their responsibility to them.

) to work towards a timetable and curriculum that takes more account of these needs und the opportunities to meet them.

J) to creute and develop more links with the local community and incredse the lines of communication between school and community.

This is not to say that a 'community relations' aspect was entirely absent from the project: improving communication links between the two educational systems, Protestant and Catholic, was undoubtedly one of the basic aims underlying the original scheme when one post in a school representing each side was created, and the subsequent attempts to keep group worker appointments going in state and Catholic schools simultaneously are further evidence of this intent. But the chief object was to focus on common problems and unmet needs rather than trying to reconcile specific differences. As the Director of an experimental project initiated by an external agency (the Northern Ireland Ministry of Education) the initiator had the advantage of being able to approach schools under both types of management with impartiality and this was fully exploited. Several meetings of the Headteachers of the schools taking part in the project were arranged by the Project Director and information about it was circulated to the Heads of all secondary schools in the province, over fifty of whom attended a meeting held to discuss the project and its possible expansion. Student teachers from the five teacher-training institutions in Ulster serving both types of school were also told about the scheme and a number of them gave valuable assistance to the group workers in school. On the pupils' side some joint visits and residential sessions outside school for both Protestant and Catholic pupils were arranged between group workers. Finally regular fortnightly meetings of all the group workers apart from the constant informal contact, amounting at times to daily phone calls between them may have made some contribution towards breaking down barriers: certainly some ingrained prejudices, even among the 'enlightened' group workers, were revealed and worked through in the course of these sessions. Perhaps one last comment on the 'community relations' aspect is that the research worker came to the project as an outsider to both the communities as a native of England with no experience of living in Northern Ireland prior to her appointment. It is debatable whether a more permanent Northern Irish in.hctb.itant would have met with such ready acceptance from pupils, Lr!achers r.md p.1.rents on both sides of the divide; it is extremely difficult - and dangerous - for an Ulsterman to claim neutrality on the reliqLous issue.

Research Design

Appendix I contains a detailed breakdown of the various aspects of Research Design and the following brief outline will give some idea of the techniques employed.

The approach adopted was an 'action research' one along the lines described by Halsey in his assessment of the E.P.A. programme entailing 'case-studies with evaluation in the weak sense of orderly description of the area, the schools and the action programme'. One of the chief methods chosen for this objective was participant observation of the project. This method was chosen as the most suitable means of assessing the kinds of change hypothesized, covering personal areas such as self-confidence, emotional stability and social competence in the type of children involved, who tended to be either inarticulate or unco-operative in answering questions in oral or written form and whose expressed statements of feelings or attitudes were thus highly unreliable or at best imprecise sources of evidence. This limited the use of questionnaires and of formal interviews except for those of a highly unstructured nature. The opinions of the most 'verbal' adults close to the experimental sample, i.e. their teachers, about the young people's personal adjustment were often equally untrustworthy since one of the hypotheses, indeed one of the original reasons for setting up the project, was that relationships between the pupils concerned and their teachers were often unsympathetic if not outrightly hostile. Modifications in behaviour and attitudes thus had to be inferred from the researcher's observation of and interaction with the sample pupils rather than being discovered by direct or indirect questioning as would be possible with a sample of college students.

Research Plan

Reference to Appendix II will reveal a comprehensive study of the plan which was evolved. The researcher divided her time between the schools participating in the project, but focussed for the central case study on the school initially selected for the project, where the group worker had been in office for two full years previously.

On her visits to the schools, the researcher talked informally to pupils, teachers and Headteachers, besides joining in group sessions arranged by and involving the group worker, and discussing his recent activities with him. She also investigated activities arranged by the group worker with the pupils outside school, visiting community service placements and local groups, and taking part in residential sessions.

An analysis of the general objectives of the project and of individual group workers showed these to lie broadly within the field of personal and social development of the individual pupils with whom the workers were concerned. A sample of these was observed over the school year, both inside and outside the school; the group worker's interaction with them was recorded, and most of their homes visited. In addition, the Bristol Social Adjustment Guide was used by teachers and students to describe these pupils' behaviour and records of their attendance at school were compiled. These methods were adopted with the object of noting any modification of behaviour or attitudes during the period of contact with the group worker. The other main aspect of the evaluation concerned detailed recording of the group workers' various activities designed to meet their objectives to try to assess the relative importance of each and thence to define the distinctive features of the overall approach. The means employed here included observation by the researcher; assessments of the group workers by others with whom he was working - staff, Heads, parents, local residents - personal records kept by the workers themselves and regular fortnightly meetings of the group workers, the project Director and the researcher throughout the year.

CHAPTER 2

The Schools

Although the education system in Northern Ireland is based on that of England and Wales, it differs from it in certain respects. The peculiar political position of Ulster within the Government of the British Isles, with a separate Northern Ireland parliament up till 1972, meant that Ulster has to date been responsible for its own education legislation, supervised by its own Ministry of Education. In practice, however, the statutes relating to education closely followed precedents set in England, usually after a lapse of a few years.

Selection for a grammar school is by means of an 11+ examination, last revised in 1966, which includes a verbal reasoning test and assessment by primary teachers of ability in Arithmetic and English. In 1973, 25% of the 11+ candidates passed the exam, this proportion is about the average.

The most obvious characteristic of the Northern Ireland education system distinguishing it from its English counterpart is the almost total separation of Catholics and Protestants in the schools. While there is no official policy of segregated schooling, in practice Protestant parents have tended to send their children to state schools, and Catholics to those run by the Church. This practice has been accelerated over the last few years, although a small number of schools with a 'mixed' intake remain. On the whole, however, the 'county' or state schools cater for Protestant children, while the Catholic Church provides parallel infant, primary and secondary schools and also its own teacher training institutions. The same system of selection for secondary education operates in both structures. Although there are still a few private Catholic secondary schools, the majority receive considerable financial support from the Government. There is no policy to help schools in depressed urban districts, however, on the pattern of the English and Ame ican schools

of the 1960's. In fact representations'have been recently made to the Ministry asking for certain qistricts of Belfast to be designated an 'Educational Priority Area' since they meet all the criteria for such areas in England. So far the Ministry has stated that they prefer to consider each school as an individual case on its own merits.

There are grounds for hope of some modification of the present education system in Northern Ireland in the near future. The selection procedure in particular has come in for some harsh criticism recently. The 1963 Advisory Council report on Primary Education recommended that the question of selection should receive urgent attention, and the Seventh Advisory Council was subsequently appointed to examine both the age of transfer from primary to secondary education, and the existing selection procedure. The Council reported in February 1973; their major recommendation was that 'the Minister of State make now a declaration of intent to eliminate selection at 11+ as soon as possible through a restructuring of the educational system. Having considered various forms of non-selective school orgai1isation the Council came to no final decision in favour of any particular one, but presented the respective advantages and disadvantages of several possible systems. In the light of the evidence submitted to the Council it concluded that some change in the system of secondary education in Northern Ireland was essential: "the impression of a widespread belief that comprehensive developments are needed is inescapable". These are encouraging words; but the Advisory Council, as its name suggests, has no power to act on its recommendations; implementation is left entirely up to the Ministry. One major obstacle to any move towards comprehensive schools is the opposition of the voluntary grammar schools. Another obstacle to reorganisation is the enormous cost which would be incurred in converting school buildings; the building programme for several years hence in Belfas for instance, which includes a number of new secondary intermediates, is based on the assumption of a continuation of the existing system. Having established the educational background against which the four project schools must operate it is now proposed to give some details of each school which help to highlight problems encountered by the group workers. The schools are examined in the order of their incorporation into the project.

BENTON

Benton Secondary School is a co-educational state school with a population of 5--600 pupils, serving a tight-knit Protestant community in central Belfast. The school was purpose-built in 1957 to rehouse an existing secondary school when the old school buildings were taken over by the primary school.

Some of the longer serving teachers recall nostalgically the days when the school had a considerable intake of successful eleven-plus candidates and a respectable showing in the 'O' Level results. They blame the recent decline in academic standards since then on the Corporation's proposed redevelopment of the area, which has prompted the most "ambitious" and "intelligent" families to move out to new housing estates, leaving the "dregs" to occupy the low-rental condemned houses.

To an outsider, the catchment area for the school appears a very closed and inward looking community. It consists of a maze of interlocking streets lined with small terraced houses, two up and two down, opening straight onto the street.

It stands as one of the last traditional parts of Belfast left intact, having housed 'respectable working class' citizens for many generations. The grannies, aunts, uncles, cousins and married siblings of Benton pupils were often found to be living round the corner or down the next street and are visited several times a week. In addition a large proportion of parents of Benton pupils attended its predecessor, and have personal memories of several of the longer serving teachers at Benton. The familiarity is limited to anecdotal stories brought home from school by pupils and corroborated by parents however, casual contacts between parents and teachers is virtually ruled out by the teachers' preferred method of transport, private cars, which whisk them in and out of the area in a matter of minutes. Unfortunately the school site is not ideal in that it stands on the dividing line between Protestant and Catholic communities and in the present troubled situation this position is often exploited by terrorists obviously endangering pupils lives and disrupting normal school activities.

TheEeis one primary school and one nursery school - with incidentally the only patch of grass in the whole area. There are three voluntary playgroups, one tarmac'd playground and three youth clubs, of which two are mixed and cater mainly for junior members, and the third is for boys only up to the age of eighteen and sometimes beyond. A community centre located in the heart of the area was built by members of the local Community Association and now provides adult recreational facilities and several services for old age pensioners as well as housing a playgroup. Its use isft however restricted to persons over the age of eighteen years.

Benton school is streamed from the first year, and boys and girls are on the whole taught separately. Average class size is about twenty four, smaller than in many comparable secondary intermediate schools in the city. A special remedial class exists in the first year only. The numbers in the lowest streams in each year are kept deliberately low to help the teachers, there were fourteen pupils each in 3B and 3G in 1972/73.

The present Head of Benton took up office in 1971, having been appointed from another secondary school in the city which has an excellent academic record.

There is a nucleus of long-serving staff holding the senior positions, both the Vice Principal and Senior Mistress have been in office for over twenty years. The turn-over amongst the rest of the staff is fairly low, probably lower than in many schools of similar type, though currently the geographical position of the school is tending to deter new applicants, and the staff quota in 1972/73 had to be made up with temporary teachers. A good number of the teachers at Benton contacted by the researcher showed a genuine concern for the welfare of individual pupils. Due to the scheduled demolition and rebuilding of the school during the next decade Benton has not kept abreast with modern ideas on decor and as such is rather a gloomy place - to the detriment of both pupils and teachers.

In 1970 Benton school was invited to take part in an experimental project entailing the appointment of an extra member of staff who would not be timetabled for normal teaching duties, but would concentrate his efforts on working informally with the low stream pupils during their last years at school, following them if possible into their first experiences of life and work outside. The idea was taken np by the present Head's predecessor, then serving his last year of office at Benton. Consultation on the type of duties the extra member of staff might perform then took place between the Head and the originator of the project, but the rest of the school staff appear to have been left out of the negotiations. The subsequent resistance to the new appointment from certain teachers could perhaps have been anticipated. The group worker was seen by some teachers both as a gimmick and as a threat: the implication that formal teaching methods were failing to meet the needs of the pupils was bound to cause resentment, especially among the more experienced. The situation was eased somewhat by the knowledge that the group worker's above-scale payments for the job would be paid by an outside body independent of the local education authority, so that at least none of the special allowances available to the rest of the staff were jeopardized. This external financial backing for the group worker, guaranteed for three years, proved to be a distinct advantage in helping him to develop his job with fewer restrictions than might otherwise have been the case. The professional qualifications of the person appointed to the new post, David, also helped to distinguish him from an ordinary teacher; besides a university degree he held a post-graduate diploma in youth and community work (one of only four such diplcmas held by residents of Northern Ireland at that time). Some members of staff were thus more ready to accept him as a professional colleague from another field, rather than a presumptious young teacher with new and scatterbrained ideas. It was however undeniable that the group worker owed his appointment directly to the good offices of the Head, and this could have identified him as the latter's protege, creating problems in his relations with the rest of the staff: but fortunately David's independent personality, coupled with his being allocated a mobile classroom some distance from the Head's office, meant that he was able to gradually develop a distinctive role for the group worker

within the school structure.

St. Mark's

St. Mark's secondary school is a Roman Catholic Boys' secondary intermediate, built 16 years ago in the North West of Belfast. There were about 470 pupils on the roll in the year 1972/73. The school building is in a state of some dilapidation, teaching space is cramped, the present school population having long past exceeded that for which the building was designed.

The catchment area for St. Mark's was originally fairly wide-ranging, taking in the whole of the parish, but with the worsening of the Troubles in the district Catholic families from previously mixed districts on the outskirts of the area moved further in, while pupils from more distant districts dropped away, so that now the large majority of pupils live in the close vicinity of the school.

Originally, the area was one of mixed Protestant and Catholic housing, but severe intimidation at the beginning of the present Troubles, in 1969, polarised the two communities and produced clear boundaries. The resultant inward-looking mentality which has developed among the Catholic inhabitants means that many hardly ever venture outside their home district, even to take a bus into the town centre. The parents' insularity rubs off onto the children, many of whom are literally terrified of coming face to face with a Protestant while off their guard. However, because of the small geographical size of the region and its close proximity to Protestant communities contact between the two sides is unavoidable, especially among the children attending the four schools, two Protestant, two Catholic (of which St. Mark's is one) which are all situated within five minutes of each other on a main road. Confrontations between groups from each side, taunting and throwing stones at each other, are now almost institutionalised and in fact reached such proportions that in 1970 the Headmasters of St. Mark's and the neighbouring Protestant State secondary school agreed to stagger the times of starting and finishing their school days in order to curtail the daily incidents which occurred.

In common with other Catholic schools in the province the government of St. Mark's is in the hands of the Church. Besides defining fairly rigidly the subject matter, and to some extent how it is taught, the Catholic Church also effectively determines school policy through its control of the Management Committee. As a 'maintained' school St. Mark's is governed by a committee of which one third of the members are Local Education Authority nominees, and two thirds local representatives, elected by the managers. The senior parish priest is generally nominated as Chairman; in any case his influence in the area is such that he is largely responsible for decisions taken by the committee, which include the selection and appointment of staff and applications to the LEA for additional resources.

There is a nucleus of long-serving staff in the school, most of whom have fairly traditional ideas about discipline and teaching method. One of the most frequent complaints made to the researcher by teachers about the school was the high rate of absenteeism among the pupils, most among the lower streams, frequently reaching 30 per cent. In 1971/72 the average attendance for the bottom third year stream was 77 per cent; for the bottom fourth year 67 per cent (allowing generously for fifteen days lost to the whole school because of the trouble in the area). This is patently discouraging to a teacher trying to gc through a syllabus for the year. The usual penalty for persistent offenders on their return to school, is a few whacks across the palm or the legs, corporal punishment being used to varying extents by different teachers.

In January 1971 the group worker in this study was appointed to St. Mark's. The circumstances were not comparable to those in Benton, since the job fixed at St. Mark's was that of a supply teacher, needed to make up the school's official quota of staff. The Director of the School Leavers Project suggested to the Head that a group worker might use-fully be employed in his school. Although the group worker was officially appointed as a supply teacher, the Headmaster agreed in principle that he should not be timetabled for normal teaching duties, but should be free to develop his own approach to pupils in lower ability third and fourth year groups, in an attempt to establish

relationships which could also be maintained during the year after they left school.

The person appointed, Malcolm, a Catholic from Belfast, was a recent graduate with some practical experience of youth work though no formal qualifications. Right from the start Malcolm encountered problems, the trying teacher conditions inside St. Mark's and the constant danger and tension abroad in the outside community, combined to undermine the group worker's efforts considerably. Also the hard pressed Headmaster often resorted to using Malcolm as a replacement for absent teachers and thus while being willing to help on these occasions Malcolm found that opportunities for worthwhile group work activities were hard to comeby.

This raises a basic issue concerning the project as a whole, i.e. the feasibility of a temporary member of staff whose role in the school is not clearly defined being able to develop a different approach to pupils from the formal teaching one. The group worker at St. Mark's was keenly aware of his ambiguous position as a teacher without a timetable, and yet lacked both the status and the sympathetic climate needed to enable him to establish a more distinct working method. With the Head being so over worked, the onus fell on Malcolm alone to explain and justify his position to the rest of the staff, many of whom seemed resistant to any new ideas, showing a defeatist resignation to the schools faults which they acknowledged. The common excuse given for poor attendance by the less academic pupils, their lack of interest in school work and the justification for strict discipline in the classroom, was the violent situation in the neighbourhood outside. With the weight of armed guerillas against him, what could a single law-abiding teacher hope to achieve? Moreover at this early stage the group worker's job was not easy to defend in terms of concrete results, since his proposed programme of work was constantly being interrupted.

Small wonder that some of his colleagues were initially sceptical of the group worker appointment.

MEADOWFIELD

Meadowfield Secondary School is a state school for girls with 750 pupils on the register for the school year 1972/73. The buildings are of relatively modern design, featuring large expanses of plate glass.

The school is located on the edge of Meadowfield, one of the newest estates in Belfast and serves the daughters of residents on this estate and two neighbouring ones as well as pupils from an older busy part of Belfast.

The catchment area is thus wide and sprawling, rather than constituting a well-defined neighbouring unit. This means that Meadowfield takes girls from a number of primary schools, impeding primary-secondary school liaison. It also means that the catchment area overlaps with that of two other secondary girls' schools, a few educationally ambitious parents in the area prefer to send their daughters to one of the other schools which has a highly acclaimed grammar school stream. A limited range of subjects at 'O' Level and 'A' Level are offered at Meadowfield, and approximately 50 pupils each year stay on for a 5th year.

The corresponding boys' school, stands a little way up the road from Meadowfield with playing fields sepdrating the two institutions. In the days of elementary schools the sexes were taught together under one 'elementary' roof, but in 1956 a new secondary school was opened for boys only, the equivalent girls' school being completed in 1962.

Set in the heart of a staunch Protestant area, both schools are reasonably protected from sectarian outbursts, though the Army is much in evidence (a local primary school has been taken over and converted into an army post, for example)•

The present Headmistress has been in office for three years, prior to which she taught at the school and its forerunner for twenty-six years. She is ably supported by a male Vice Principal. There are

forty-six members on the staff (of whom five are men) including eight part-time employees. A number of senior teachers, including most of the Heads of Departments, appear to occupy positions of some prestige and influence.Hardened by years of facing classes of hostile or pathetic pupils, they tend to fall back on traditional principles in their approach to teaching, stressing the need for strict discipline, good order, punctuality, neatness and industry, while admitting openly that they see no hope at all for the vast majority of pupils ever 'succeeding', which in their terms means passing a public exam.

Towards the end of the swmner term of 1972, the Headmistress of Meadowfield was approached by the Director of the School Leavers' Project to enquire whether the school would consider employing a group worker as an extra member of staff. The potential applicant for the post was Janet, and it was a matter of some urgency to place her in an appropriate school. Meadowfield's Headmistress agreed to interview Janet, and subsequently to appoint her on a temporary basis. This was Janet's first teaching post after studying for a higher degree, but she had considerable experience of youth work and community action in a voluntary capacity. Both the director of the project and the group worker at Benton, now nearing the end of the second year of his appointment, had prior consultations with the Headmistress to explain the nature of the group worker's job. Partly as a result of these discussions it was agreed from the start that Janet would not be timetabled for any classroom teaching at all, but would concentrate all her attention on the 'B' streams of the fourth year (amounting to some 60 pupils), working with them in any way she wished. In addition she would also try to build bridges from the school out into the community service scheme for the fourth year leavers.

Unfortunately, the school timetable for the year 1972/73 had been finalised before Janet's appointment, and the only time in the week that could be made available to her was three periods on one morning a week. For classes with a reasonable average attendance this would have presented no problem, for the group worker would have been able simply to withdraw from the class the number of pupils she wished to

work with at prearranged times, as happened for example, in Benton school. Indeed one of the original distinctive features of the project was that the group worker was not timetabled. But at Meadowfield exceptionally high absenteeism in the lower stream fourth year classes meant that for Janet to see a small group of girls often deprived another teacher of an entire class. This in turn meant interference with the weekly quotas of hours of classroom teaching required of each teacher, and thus provoked some resistance. The group worker at Meadowfield came to be very thankful for her one official timetabled session a week with a 4B class which involved her in no begging or bargaining with other members of the staff. Her position was not helped by the deliberate total lack of briefing for the staff from the Headmistress about this experimental approach to early leavers; the Head maintained that it was important for Janet to devise her own tactics without a detailed list of duties set out before hand. From the point of view of the project, this was an ideal stand to take; it did, however, make Janet's position on the staff and the staffroom rather ambiguous at first. Equally, the Headmistress's generous offer of a word of support and a sympathetic ear for the group worker at any time could have been misconstrued as a privileged access to the Head, beyond the station of a probationary teacher, - who any way seemed to spend more of her time in the corridors than inside classrooms.

The base from which Janet operated was an ordinary classroom on the first floor, close to the staffroom. After a dispute with one member of staff who had unofficially appropriated it for her classes, the room was allocated for Janet's exclusive use, except in the event of an emergency shortage of accommodation - which did arise occasionally during the year. The room was not ideal for a group worker's purposes; its large size and conventional furniture of desks and chairs, a teacher's table and blackboard made it difficult to disguise from any other classroom. The absence of any storage space and the impossibility of locking the room were added obstacles; there was a year's delay in obtaining a filing cabinet and Janet was reduced to keeping all her records and project materials in and around a small pigeon hole in the staffroom. Another handicap was the unavailability of a private phone; to make or receive calls Janet had to walk down a flight of stairs

through the entrance hall and along a corridor to the secretaries' office in order to use the school's single line.

ST. JAMES

St. James's is a relatively new Roman Catholic boy's secondary school opened in 1963 and built to accommodate about 1,000 pupils, there were 750 in the year 1972/73 replacing several smaller voluntary schools. It is situated in spacious grounds, behind its sister school in a relatively peaceful suburb of Belfast. The school's playing fields adjoin the modern buildings, which are well-equipped with facilities for non-academic pursuits, such as gardening and photography, and with workshops for vocational training, as well as for the more conventional subjects.

The school's catchment area takes in seven parishes, varying considerably in social character, ranging from the semi-rural settlements on the outskirts of the city through pleasant suburbs to the traditional working class Catholic ghettoes of the inner city. These last are currently falling into a state of :d:ilapidation; due to slum clearance as well as sectarian violence. The wide catchment area means that many pupils have long bus journeys to and from school and this physical separation of home and school has several implications. On the one hand it removes and insulates the children living in the 'riot-torn' areas from the tension of their home lives, brought about by the daily threat of violent attack, and the constant heavy Army presence, over and above the normal social and economic pressures suffered by families in this type of area. Teachers claim that the school represents a haven of peace and order to such children. Also, by mixing pupils, albeit of one religion only, from various districts and requiring many of them to leave their home area to go to school, St. Jarnes's may be helping to weaken the strong ghetto mentality characteristic of inner urban communities, especially in Belfast; and by bringing into close contact children with very different social backgrounds and experience the school may be sowing the seeds for future communication and co-operation.

The recent worsening of the Troubles, including stoning matches between pupils of 'rival' schools on the way home, has forced the authorities to introduce special bus services to transport children to and from St. James's. A concomitant fall in attendance among the pupils affected is partly explained by this: few pupils having missed the school bus would be foolhardy enough to brave public transport in order to get to school, and it only requires the special buses to be delayed a few minutes, or for a rumour of 'trouble' in the vicinity for the whole queue to dissolve into thin air. Even before the Troubles though, there was a long-standing tradition of high absenteeism among pupils from certain areas - which the recent unrest has simply accentuated. One positive outcome of the present situation has been the formation - largely instigated by the field worker in this study - of a 'Transport Committee' in the areas, comprising local mothers, who supervise getting the children on and off the buses each morning and afternoon. The group worker is often present at the bus-stop in the morning too; it provides a convenient meeting point with parents and 'mitchers' (truants).

As a new purpose built secondary school, St. James's enjoys certain advantages over its longer-established counterparts. Besides the obvious ones of better facilities and equipment, the first Headmaster capitalised on the opportunity to hand pick all his teaching staff, without any need to concern himself with interstaff rivalry or just-desserts for long-serving teachers. Nor was he bound by any precedent in the matters of school organ-i:Satibn-: or timetabling. The first Headmaster in any school has considerable scope to create the atmosphere he wishes within a school, and inevitably stamps his personality upon it. St. James's was fortunate in obtaining an extremely impressive man for its first Head, intellectually distinguished and with progressive ideas about education, which he showed himself determined to implement in St. James's. As already mentioned, he took immense care in selecting his members of staff, searching out people sympathetic to his ideas as well as being academically capable and proficient teachers. (There was no shortage of applicants for posts in the new school, which rapidly gained a high reputation and developed into something of a show-piece for the city).

Amongst the Head's prime concerns and hence one of his most significant contributions to the school's development was attention to the needs of lower ability pupils, which he acknowledged to be different from those of the more intellectually gifted. In the junior classes their main need was for remedial teaching; attending such classes was made more attractive by allocating a special room to the remedial group and fitting it out more comfortably and informally than an ordinary classroom. Further up the school the less academic required realistic careers advice and an introduction to the adult world of work and leisure, gradually weaning them away from the sheltered environment of the school. And throughout their school career these pupils (and others too) needed sympathetic and available members of staff with whom they could chat informally and possibly discuss any personal difficulties which might arise at school or at home.

The Headmaster spent some time seeking out the right teacher who would be able to offer all these services for the benefit of the slow learners at St. James's. He found him (the group worker in this study) having just completed the Diploma in Special Education, after nineteen years as a primary school teacher. Eugene was thus one of the original members of the staff at St. James's, appointed with specific responsibility for the 'slow learners', including remedial provision and personal and careers guidance. From the start he enjoyed the Headmaster's full confidence and encouragement, so that the way was wide open to him to develop his work in response to the needs he identified. Thus it was that a complete block within the school complex came to be devoted solely to the early leavers', that a separate curriculum was evolved for them, and that the original teacher was ultimately joined by two more colleagues to work almost exclusively with these pupils, teaching, advising and simply befriending.

On the practical side, extra facilities in the school for the early leaver were made possible partly by St. James's relatively high points score on the Local Authority scale, partly by incessant pressurising by the Head. But none of these facilities would have been likely to have been provided but for the priority status accorded to the lower ability groups in the school by the Head, together with the trust he

placed in the teacher initially appointed, and the latter's consequent standing with the rest of the staff. Here the worker had certain personal advantages too; in particular his considerable previous experience of teaching, and his recently acquired diploma. The overall pattern of school organisation was designed to avoid the worst evils of streaming while maintaining ability grouping in the upper classes.

The first Headmaster at St. James's was succeeded two years ago by a senior member of staff in the school. He differed somewhat from his predecessor in the emphasis he placed on provision for the slow learner, being more concerned to bring together the two 'sides' in the school, the academic and the non-academic. He had recently led a research team of members of staff on a team teaching project to this effect, attempting to design an integrated formula for both subjects and staff for all the pupils in a particular school year. But the impetus for special and separate provision for the less academic third and fourth year pupils continued under the new leadership nonetheless; and during 1972 the programme for the fourth years was extended with the introduction of a fully blocked timetable, on which such subjects as 'Leisure' and Arts and Crafts occupied whole mornings or afternoons, and 'Linked Courses' for various trades were arranged in conjunction with the local Technical College. Groups of pupils attended weekly sessions at the College on a rota basis alternating spending twelve weeks in each of the three main sections; Mechanical Engineering, Construction Engineering and Electrical Engineering. This was an experimental scheme in which several other schools in the city participated, but in some cases at least it was the bright exam candidates who were sent, rather than the less able, (who might tend to give the school a bad name). In St. James's however all the pupils had the opportunity to attend - partly due to pressure from the group worker. He regularly accompanied groups of boys he was involved with to the College, where he often found a chance to talk informally with them. He also managed to organise a series of three-session 'Further Education Awareness' courses at a local Adult Education College for fourth year pupils which the group worker again supervised personally.

The third year non-exam classes also received extra attention in the year 1972/73. St. James's was one of four schools chosen for a pilot scheme Careers Awareness course designed by th€ Schools Council, and as a result six periods a week from the non-exam pupils' timetable were allocated to the Careers and Counselling staff for this project.

CHAPTER THREE

The Pupils

Now that the reader is familiar with the background to setting up the project and the terms of appointment of each of the four workers, it is time to look more closely at the pupils with whom they were to be chiefly concerned. As explained earlier, the mere enrolment of a child of 11 years in a secondary intermediate means that he had already lost out in the educational race by failing to make it to grammar school. In Belfast, as in other large cities in the UK before the introduction of comprehensive schools, secondary modern pupils are less likely to feel this stigma if they live in the less desirable, lower income districts, where the majority of parents themselves received a minimal education and have few aspirations for their children. In these areas an overwhelming majority of the children go to the local secondary school, which takes on the character of a neighbourhood school, and here it is the few grammar school pupils who are rejected, the 'snobs' as Jackson and Marsden have demonstrated. This holds true for three of the schools involved in this project, Benton, St Marks and Meadowfield. Each of the three schools is streamed from the first year upwards, initial allocation to the various classes being based on eleven-plus performance and primary teacher reports.

St. James' has the most enlightened approach of the four to school organisation: the forward-looking Head appointed initially, while accepting a need to rank pupils according to scholastic ability, was anxious to keep this grading to a minimum, and this has been continued by his successor.

All the schools have clearly found it necessary to cream off the brightest of their pupils in order to coach them up to exam standard. In view of the prestige attached to the 'O' Level record of a school, important for attracting additional finance from the Ministry as

well as sufficient teachers, this attitude is perhaps understandable, but a careful look at the exam results in the various schools raises doubts as to the justification of this concentration of the school's resources. In Benton the combined numbers of the fifth and sixth forms i.e. the pupils with a chance of sitting examinations, amount to about 7 per cent of the whole school population. This figure does not include entrants for Royal School of Art examinations in commercial subjects. A conside able number of girls from 4th year upwards sit for typing and shorthand tests at various levels: the entries here seem to be more realistic than for 'O' level subjects, and a pass rate of at least 50 per cent is usual. Thus although one third of the pupils spend their school lives being groomed to sit for public exams, a fair number of even these favoured ones leave as soon as they can, before they have a chance to enter for the exams. Over the last few years there has been a slight increase in the proportion of pupils staying on to the fifth form: (Appendix 4 Table A3). But the picture looks less rosy when one studies the results achieved by these pupils in the examinations. The 'O' Level pass rates, (an average of 40 per cent of the candidates getting through) are not impressive. A breakdown of the statistics shows that almost half of the candidates failed all the exams they took; these pupils and their parents, might well take a sceptical view of the extra time they had spent at school.

One explanation of a high early leaving rate and poor examination results in these schools is to blame them on the current political situation in Northern Ireland, and its wide social repercussions, which by diverting people's energies into other channels may be reducing the motivation of children and parents towards educational goals. To investigate this possibility, reference was made to school records for the year 1968-9. The present outbreak of violence in the province is generally assumed to date from August 1969, so that figures from the previous school year may be taken as representative of the situation before the 'Troubles' erupted. The figures show that in this year the fifth and sixth forms together in Benton School amounted to only 4 per cent of the total school

population. The '0' Levels which these pupils took produced an overall average pass rate of again 40 per cent. Things do not therefore seem to have altered materially since the outbreak of violence.

It is impossible to disguise a two-tier exam system, just as it is impossible to pretend that it will not perpetuate a two-tier organisation of secondary education.

The future examination candidates then are the stars of the secondary intermediates. Their names are read out at Prize Day (still held in St. Mark's and Meadowfield), they are allocated the most senior teachers for much of the day, and it is their parents who may take an interest in their children's progress. To the rest of the pupils, not destined for the exam table, they are like people from another country, speaking a different language; they even look distinctive, dressed in their smart school uniform, hair tidily brushed back, hands and faces clean and shining. They behave differently too; in class they are attentive, alert, eager to learn and ready with questions. Their relationship with the staff at best can be a working partnership, in which both parties share the same goals and are aware of the hard work needed to reach them. The pupils are encouraged by knowing that they represent the school's hopes, its investment for the future.

Dividing the children on their entry to secondary school into graded classes in this way is an extremely effective method of isolating almost totally the 'brainy' ones from the 'dunces'. The only chances they have of seeing each other, apart from formal occasions such as morning assembly, are during the mid-morning break, the lunch-hour, or on their way to and from school. And such brief periods of free time are much more likely to be occupied with friends from one's own class, or its near equivalent. It is unlikely that children who were friends at primary school for example will remain close to one another if the secondary school ranks them differently. Asked the question "Do you get on well

with the pupils in the 'O' Level group?" only 36 per cent of the fourth year at Benton gave a definite "Yes" for their answer. Considering that slightly over one-third of the sample were themselves in the 'O' Level class this is a telling comment on the amount of contact which takes place normally between the "chosen few" and the rest.

This is not to say that placing pupils of different abilities, and those who work at different paces, is a simple matter. In Northern Ireland as elsewhere, the controversy as to the relative merits and disadvantages of mixed ability teaching compared with selective classes continues to rage. Some alternatives have been tried; it is not as if there is a total unwillingness to explore new methods. So far however the experiments have been cautious: in Benton mixed ability groups are confined to the technical subjects, Woodwork and Metalwork for the boys, Domestic Science for the girls where exam successes are not awarded such a high priority. Moreover, already among the staff involved one can detect an impatience with the scheme, a reluctance to give it time to prove itself.

Before the first trial year was up, considerable dissatisfaction with the performance of the mixed ability groups had been voiced, and a return to the old system was being urged. Teachers argued that most top stream pupils had a good school record right across the board, including work in the practical subjects and it was unfair to them to be forced to mix in with the rabble, who inevitably created distractions and diverted the master from his real task, that of instruction. Certainly experience elsewhere indicates that mixed ability teaching requires special training, planning and guidance for the staff involved: students training in Northern Ireland have at present no opportunity for this. But it also seems something of a vain hope to place together for a few periods a week children who have been completely separated for three years, and expect them immediately to mix freely, with each other, and to settle down dutifully to work in harmony together.

And what of the remaining 60 to 75 per cent of the school's population?

Unfortunately for them they do not match up to the school's picture of the ideal or even tolerable pupil. In their first and second years at secondary school the majority of these young people are fairly docile, some quite earnest about their schoolwork, and most give some semblance of attention to the teacher, once he has shown that he knows how to control them. At this stage it is high spirits and girlish giggling which are most likely to interfere with learning. Setting foot inside the big school is an over-awing experience for any first year pupil; the most that he gets to see of the new school while at primary school is a quick glimpse on a lightening tour with a strange member of staff. Children entering secondary school for the first time can be highly confused to find bells constantly summoning them to different parts of the vast complex to be confronted by a series of unfamiliar faces, some smiling, some glowering. Primary education in Northern Ireland is not particularly child-centred by English standards, the main emphasis being on getting as many pupils as possible through the eleven-plus, nonetheless the children do spend a large part of each day with one teacher, and several of even the fourth year pupils at secondary school recalled with affection a particular teacher at their primary school, often the one who had taken the most senior class. It is a major transition to switch to a relatively impersonal system, where each master or mistress is concerned with teaching a specialist subject, and few have time to get to know their pupils individually except in terms of their schoolwork and their general behaviour in class.

The pupils' natural reaction to being treated with this apparent indifference may take one of two forms, depending largely on the child's own personality, he may act up in front of the teacher, trying to impress his classmates by asserting his command of the situation in order to disguise the uneasiness he feels inside, or he may deal with his feeling of insecurity by withdrawing into a private dream world where he is happy and sure of himself. When a child gets no encouragement either at school or at home, this withdrawal response can lead to longer and longer periods of absence from school, with or without parental consent. There are several

examples among the case studies selected for this book.

Truancy is commonly associated with delinquency and general rowdy behaviour, but in fact persistent absenteeism is most often found among 'timid, unstable and fr endless children', the quietest pupils who seem incapable of making satisfying relationships with anyone be it teachers, parents or fellow pupils. The roots of the problem can often be traced back to early childhood, and generally the home must take some share of the blame; mothers who are over-protective and indulgent, or too care-worn to give the child attention; fathers to be feared, and obeyed rather than respected. But the school has a responsibility too, which it has clearly failed to meet when a child chooses to stay away for longer and longer periods of time. Only rarely is the extrovert child absent without cause; if he stays off school it is usually because he has something planned with his mates, who will also take the day off. These generalisations seem to be less true of pupils in their final year at school. Attendance in this year by the lower stream pupils as a whole falls off quite strikingly, the majority taking odd days off here and there, until by the summer term only a few staunch regulars are to be found in each of the lower classes. In the past this steady decline in attendance was encouraged by permitting fourth year pupils who had reached the age of 15 by a certain date to leave at Easter: there was little incentive for the rest of the class to keep on coming to school. The practice is to be continued for sixteen-year olds under the new legislation: the disruption which Easter leaving means for the whole of the final year's syllabus seems to have been overlooked by the planners. A glance at the attendance figures for the various fourth year classes in the project in recent years demonstrates this point. (Table A2). In every case attendance decreases with grade of class. Reasons could of course be put forward for individual cases of poor attendance in these classes, but the overall trend is obvious enough to require no further comment. For one reason or another, most of the 'non-examination' pupils have decided after three years that they have had enough secondary schooling. But, can one really blame them? 'Non-examination', 'less academic', and more recently 'Newsom'

and 'ROSLA' pupils - none are particularly complimentary descriptions of these children, indeed they are poorly-disguised euphemisms for 'failures' and 'drop-outs'. As long as teachers and educationalists focus on the negative talents of these pupils, so long will stereotypes of these children and what to expect from them in school persist among those who try to teach them. So long will resentment and hostility be the reaction of some pupils, for despite the impression given by some teachers, these children are as sensitive and perceptive as they grow up of the feelings of other people about them - and especially those of adults in authority over them - as any others.

One accepts that it is difficult for teachers to adopt a radically different approach for the pupils who can never hope to attain the kind of success the teachers themselves value, as opposed to the one they use for the bright exam hopes.

By the third and fourth years many pupils are confident that they could easily be earning a good weekly wage instead of coming to school. When the entire fourth year at Benton including the top streams was asked to comment on the statement 'school is a waste of time', the majority (57%) considered this to be 'sometimes true'. The high proportion of pupils who traditionally leave the project schools as soon as they are legally permitted, (Table A3) is further evidence of the school's failure to get over to more than a small minority the lessons it is supposedly trying to teach, such as how to find any information they may want, how to pursue any particular interests they may have, how to exercise responsibility within the school. Why do so many pupils choose to leave as soon as they can? The main reason given by the Benton girls and boys in the questionnaire replies was 'I want to earn money for myself' (75%) the next most important 'You're treated more like a grown-up when you've left school' (54%) then 'All my friends will be out working' (49%) and 'My parents want me to start earning money' (45%) (Subjects could agree with as many answers as they wished). The reply 'The teachers here don't really want me to stay on' received only 13% of the pupils' votes.

To judge then from the pupils' responses, external pressures on the

young person from family and friends to go out and find a job would seem to be more influential than a sense of rejection by the school or hostile feelings towards teachers, in the decision to leave at the first opportunity. Although the overall rate of unemployment in the province is high, the majority of these early leavers have little trouble finding work locally, provided they will accept, and most of them do, a low starting wage, poor working conditions and few prospects. Indeed the clothing mills, the small firms and the factories in the areas surrounding the project schools rely on an annual labour force mainly of girls being churned out from the local schools. Jobs for boys as mates to plumbers, mechanics, joiners, bricklayers, etc. are available too if one knows the right people, though full apprenticeships are harder to come by.

A survey of the 39 fourth year leavers from Benton who could be traced in February 1971, having left in 1970, revealed that 34 were in full-time paid employment and only one was unemployed. Nor does the common assumption that the unskilled early leavers drift from one dead-end job to another hold water on this data. Seventy-six per cent of the boys who had jobs had been in the same one since leaving school.

Of the Benton fourth year sample in 1972/73, 36% had spent some time during the previous week doing a part-time job. The first taste of work had evidently not put them off and had certainly supplemented their pocket money favourably: apparently it had just whetted their appetites for earning more.

The jobs which the boys expected to be doing when they left school covered a wide range, the most popular being various types of engineering and working as motor mechanics (Table C6). On the whole the boys showed a realistic appreciation of the opportunities which might be available to them, and most seemed to have a clear idea of the trade they hoped to go into. It is interesting that the highest aspirations - to be a doctor, were expressed by two Pakistani boys at the school. The girls' choices were more limited; the overwhelming majority placing a secretarial job as their first preference. It is

not clear how far these replies represented a realistic estimate of future employment since a number of pupils began their courses with 'I would like to be•••'. From the general pattern of female employment in the area, it would seem likely that more girls than imagined while at school would in fact end up as 'stitchers' (operatives in the clothing factories) or working in one of the local tobacco factories, and that fewer would reach the dizzy heights of a secretarial post than expected.

But apart from a few pie-in-the-sky job ambitions, what was striking about the replies was the certainty of most of the pupils when only at the beginning of their fourth year of the kind of employment they would be taking up two years later. From a sample of 121 pupils, only one admitted that he did not know what job he was likely to have. Apparently by the age of fifteen the minds of these young people were made up. Nor had their choices been influenced much by anything the school did or said. When the sample was asked which people they would go to for help in finding a job, the person who received most choices was the respondent's own father (mentioned by 97 per cent of the sample). It is to the credit of the Youth Employment Service that their officer received the next highest number of choices (83 per cent): predictably it was the pupils who stood some chance of getting paper qualifications who placed the Y.E.O. high on their list of helpful agencies. But the majority of the prospective early leavers felt that they would be able to walk straight into a job - given the right contacts - any day they chose, and thus the last year at school - especially when they realised that it had been postponed a year - was seen largely as a kicking heels period. Teachers for this 'ROSLA year' are at a disadvantage from the start with the young people in the classroom under suffrance only, and neither pupils nor teachers in the project schools viewed the prospect of the extra year with anything much beyond gloom and despair.

With the exception of St. James, the schools have been slow to face up to the fact that a majority of their pupils are simply not interested in the kind of learning the educational system is offering.

However recent introductions of blocked timetable methods at the other

schools indicates that at last some progress may be expected towards more relevant teaching of fourth year classes.

What is clear from these developments is a final admission that the traditional 'stodgy repetitive and pseudo-academic' curriculum offered to the young school leavers was not satisfactory either to the teachers or to the pupils. The fourth year at Benton were very fair in commenting on their lessons. The majority considered that at least some of the things they learnt in school were useful, and also that some lessons were interesting. These were not necessarily the ones which the educationalists would choose, however. From conversations with the non-exam pupils it emerged that one of the most popular lessons - apart from P.E. for the boys - was maths, taught in the traditional manner, and promising a right and a wrong answer to every question. History and Geography, whether called 'Humanities' or any other fancy name were less attractive, and the new 'Liberal Studies' and 'Leisure' periods were viewed with considerable scepticism. It was painfully evident that the pupils themselves had not been consulted about the design of the new courses. Their criteria demand that what is learned in school must have an immediate and obvious relevance to their every day lives: Maths makes the grade with its practical applications in quick calculation and money transactions. In the junior classes English lessons may also be seen to serve some purpose in teaching children to read and write - skills most people accept are necessary to survive in the modern bureaucratic world. But once these basic skills have been mastered interest wanes for the majority of pupils coming from homes where the only reading matter is tabloid newspapers, womens' magazines or children's comics, and T.V. has replaced books as the source of information. In fact an alarming number of pupils in the bottom fourth year groups at the project schools were found to be barely literate having either 'forgotten' how to read or never having learned properly; at their age this handicap caused them some embarrassment though, and they were certainly not the ones eager for more English lessons.

Another reason behind the pupils' indifference towards certain lessons was boredom, which in some instances at least appeared to be justified. The work which some low stream third and fourth year classes were doing

was in fact merely a repeat of the syllabus they had already covered, in their first and second years. According to teachers, many children had forgotten, or at least could not easily recall, the basic rudiments of arithmetical calculation for example, so that any further progress was impossible. This was probably true of a number of the low-stream pupils: without frequent practice, and more important with no incentive to retain them,any skills are liable to grow rusty. Other members of the class who had not forgotten were able to perform the required tasks almost mechanically, and were consequently bored . and even those who did have difficulty, like the poor readers, were well aware of being condemned in the eyes of the school as idiots, signified by the babyish work they were set. Many times the researcher heard these pupils comment spontaneously: "We're the duds"; "We're just stupid anyway"; suggesting a complete conditioning to failure.

And yet it is not as if these young people themselves were lacking in imagination or curiosity, as group sessions with the project workers revealed. How was it then, that the special courses introduced at Benton and St. James' designed to encourage these qualities, had met such an apathetic response? Had the new courses not been adequately 'sold' to the pupils? Or was it that they were perceptive enough to see that the new names were merely glossy covers for the old content: History and Geography disguised as Social Studies, Religious Education and Careers as General Studies? Or else they could provide an excuse for teachers to make use of the pupils' labour, or simply a chance to sit back and chat with their classes.

Of course inadequate resources in the schools for all lessons, but especially for such ambitious options as 'Leisure were partly to blame for the imperfect way in which they were conducted. This was one reason why few outings or educational visits were included in the lower classes' syllabus. Neither St. Mark's nor St. James' had any transport of their own: Benton and Meadowfield had a minibus each, but hardly any staff who were both willing and able to drive them. The political situation in the city ruled out the use of public transport, and security pre-cautions restricted the number of places which could be visited. But one had the feeling that these excuses were a little too glib an argument for teachers, convenient reasons for not doing· anything outside the

classroom. Moreover the teachers who did arrange excursions for lower ability groups often met considerable opposition from their colleagues who had to cover for them back in school nor could these experimental subjects be expected to produce immediately spectacular results, or to be properly appreciated by those at whom they are aimed. It did seem that in most cases the new courses had been tacked onto timetables without sufficient forethought being given to the materials which would be needed, or to the kind of skills teachers would require in order to make the lessons really productive. Not only were the pupils not consulted on the kinds of thing they were interested to learn about: the teachers themselves hardly had any joint planning sessions to consider the distinctive nature of the new approaches. With traditional methods of teaching being used by the same teachers who already taught the pupils Maths and English, and with the guinea-pig pupils doubious from the start, what chance was there for stimulating new ideas to emerge?

There is another area of the fourth year leavers' syllabus which has only been touched on so far. This is the time given to vocational guidance. It can hardly be called careers advice since as shown earlier most of the pupils have already decided by the time they enter the fourth year what they hope to do when they leave. But 'Careers Guidance' still features in the Meadowfield and St. James' timetables for the low stream fourth years. Prior to the outbreak of the current Troubles a nwnber of visits by fourth year pupils to factories, bakeries and other places of employment were organised. Recent tightening of security measures had reduced these visits to a minimum in 1972/3. Careers teachers in the four schools, with the exception of those at St. James' have limited time allocated to them for the job, and understandably therefore spent most of it with the pupils who have more ability and ambition; the teacher tends to see his role as enabling a few gifted children to rise up out of the stunting envirorunent from which they come. For the rest, who have no such opportunity the assumption is that most are already resigned to and likely to be reasonably content with the kind of job their fathers and mothers have.

Recently however there has been an attempt by the schools to help young school leavers, the boys at least, in their choice of a trade, by offering them a Linked Course with the College of Technology in Belfast during

their last year at school.

The value for the pupils' later lives of the time spent at the Technical College is obvious of course; and this must explain its immediate attraction to both young school leavers and their parents. It is a pity that the schools have not capitalised on this parental interest aroused in the school to open up better communication with pupils' homes.

The chance offered by the Linked courses for pupils to learn in a more adult environment alongside older students who are there on day release from industry, or voluntarily, may have some bearing on the popularity of the courses. The attraction is not simply that the pupils have an official excuse to spend a morning or an afternoon out of school - though this may account for the initial appeal - it is also that the whole working atmosphere is different at the College. The fifteen year olds have outgrown their school surroundings, both physically and mentally.

Struggles are perhaps more overt among the young school leavers than their exam-destined contemporaties: the latter can afford to delay growing up while safe within the shelter of the educational establishment. Many academically gifted children are late developers emotionally, compared with their contemporaries who will soon be out at work, but they find their responsibilities as well as their rewards inside the school. In contrast, the early leavers find no answers to their adolescent fears and anxieties and few chances to obtain adult approval or encouragement within the classroom. Instead security is sought within the peer group, and to conform to the behaviour and values acceptable to the group is thetoppriority. Hargreaves comments 'Conformity thus becomes more important than in the academic subculture, where the boys are united through individual effort in academic competition. In the delinquescent subculture self-esteem is a collective product, since it can be obtained only in relation to the group as a whole - that is, through conformity to anti-academic group pressures - whereas in the academic subculture boys can develop self-esteem on the more individ-usalistic basis of academic competence.'

Once the teacher has been rejected as an appropriate adult model in this

way, there is little he can do to ease the difficult process of social and emotional maturation. Boys preparing to leave school emulate not teachers but older brothers or friends already out at work; the way they imitate their behaviour on the streets outside school is evidence. Girls are more concerned to show their maternal instincts, looking after younger children in the neighbourhood, and how to make themselves most attractive to the other sex than idolising their teachers, whose domestic lives must seem rather remote.Boys and girls are experiencing an awakening of hetero-sexual feelings: 58 per cent of Benton's fourth year go to a disco two nights a week. Twenty-six per cent each of the boys and of the girls claimed that they sometimes went out with a member of the opposite sex. 25 per cent of the girls and 20 per cent of the boys admitted to sometimes going with a mixed group of boys and girls. With the exception of Benton the pupils in the sample had no opportunities at school to meet members of the opposite sex: though Meadowfield, St. James' and St. Mark's were all within easy distance of their brother or sister school, contact between the two was minimal. Even at Benton, where they were under the same roof, boys and girls (except in the 'O' level classes) were only permitted to meet briefly in playground or corridor. And yet most whispered comments in the class-room naturally concern who is reputed to be 'going with' whom, who smiled or stopped to chat, or who will be at the disco tonight. The schools seemed to have no definite policy on sex education, and it was left to the discretion of individual members of staff - most of whom had had none themselves of course. To their credit a few teachers had spent sometime out of other lessons giving lower stream classes some basic information, often at the pupils' request; but those spoken to readily admitted the inadequacy of this casual approach to the subject, and all were appalled at the ignorance of most of the young people.

The School'sCouncil Enquiry "Young School Leavers" found that teachers saw the main problem presented by the raising of the school-leaving age in straightforward terms of keeping order in the classroom. 'For them the most frequently mentioned concern was how to prevent, or deal with, disciplinary problems arising because pupils were bored or resent being in school. Their anxiety was: 'How to teach children who would

be rebellious about staying on - who already resent the fourth year now'.

Most schools - and the project schools are no exception - provide ample opportunities for pupils who are that way inclined to flout the accepted standards. School uniform is an obvious example, nominally required to wear official shirts, ties, grey flannel trousers or skirts and blazers, the older low stream pupils can be easily identified by their illegal if colourful attire; striped sweaters and floral shirts were especially popular in 1972/3. For boys the symbol of rebellion is to wear jeans to school: all the project schools' Headmasters condemned this strongly, to the extent of sending home pupils who were caught - rather a self-defeating exercise since many of them simply stayed there. As with other behaviour, conformity to the class norm, rather than eccentricity, is the rule: on the whole it was the informal group leaders who wore the most conspicuous clothes, and the others followed suit in a more sober manner. Hairstyles were another bone of contention: the top stream boys and girls even if their hair was long, tended to wear it neatly brushed and out of their eyes: while many of their contemporaries seemed to have taken considerable effort making themselves look as dishevelled as possible. For some teachers, often Headteachers, among them, this is like a red rag to a bull, giving an immediate excuse for pouncing on the young person. It seems as if they are siezing on an untidy appearance as symptomatic of deeper-rooted disrespect and malicious intent. Pupils often complained about being 'picked-on' for no apparent reason other than that they were obeying the dictates of fashion rather than school uniform. But it is one of the few tangible signs of rebellion available to the staff.

Breaking other school rules of punctuality, showing respect to teachers, not smoking, are further symptoms of a disregard for the school's standards. The over-restrictiveness of the school environment is sensed by more than just the lowest ability pupils. Of the Benton fourth year pupils, 54 per cent considered that there were too many silly rules at school. They have progressed beyond the stage of complying docilely to having their whole day ordered for them, having to be in certain places at certain times, being expected to move submissively about the school

on being let out of a classroom where they were compelled to sit silently, speaking only to answer the teacher.

Of course not all the non-exam pupils showed outwardly aggressive behaviour or tried constantly to provoke the teachers, others stayed away for progressive periods; others again appeared to submit and acquiesce. 'Children in schools whose educative function becomes diverted by the overriding need to contain and control are likely to respond in one of three ways. First, they may submit to the authoritarian system of the school and apparently accept it; second, they may be overtly hostile and rebellious; and third, they may withdraw from it in one way or another'. All three responses were observed among the pupils in this study; they will be elaborated more fully in the individual case studies to follow.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Role of the Group Worker

One of the original ideas behind the project was to investigate the feasibility of various new roles for teachers in secondary schools. As can be seen from the descriptions in the preceding chapters,the four group workers, during the period of their appointments, found themselves playing an extremely wide and diverse set of parts both in school and outside in the local conununity. It can be seen that this process of trying out fresh approaches to old problems, which had so far been inadequately dealt with or totally ignored, was the essence of the whole job. That this was not an easy task, however, can be seen from Janet's description of her first year. The remainder of this book deals with the working out of these roles in practice, both in the school and outside it. This chapter however, concentrates on the problems of defining the role and an examination of the role of the group worker per se. The experiences of Janet, the newest group worker, and her reflections on her first year form the basis for the exploration of the problem of defining and establishing a role.

Janet's description of the reaction of the school establishment to the appointment of a group worker highlights some of the initial conflicts to be faced by a new worker, Janet writes that;

> "It is true to say that most of the difficulties in my first year were associated with the need to establish an equal status with other members of staff and to make them aware of the role of the group worker. The resentment of the staff was aroused, not by malice, but rather at the quite justifiable sight of seeing a new, young teacher who had no duties, no classes and who

> seemed to spend all her time wandering round the school, touring the area, or talking to one or two girls. To teachers who had to face classes of 30 girls or more it was hard to see how talking to one girl could be called work!"

Janet describes her relationships with the staff at the beginning as,

> "One aspect of the group worker job is that, at the beginning, it entails a lot of working and you might have to sit alone for quite a while before girls come to accept you and come at their own initative. This inevitably creates a tension as you want to show that you working and at the same time you feel the need to wait and not force the pace with the girls. The resentment of the staff towards me showed itself in indirect ways of non-co-operation rather than by direct attack".

The group workers' brief has been to concentrate on the needs and potential of the lower ability third and fourth years and it was thus perhaps inevitable that they should get stereo-typed as the person in charge of the drop-outs and receive the resentment of staff. This was true of the other workers, during his first term at Benton David met several comments like, 'I hear you're trying to get to know 4S - good luck to you'; 'the only thing they're interested in is how to avoid doing any work'. It was the usual attitude of the disillusioned senior member of staff who's seen it all before: the new young idealistic teacher with all kinds of hare-brained ideas about how to get the pupils on his side by winning their respect for him as a person, not by issuing threats of physical punishment. In the group workers' case the scorn of the die-hard section of the senior staff was more marked. They were aware that they had less power to influence the new person than they would a junior member of their department, and

they also recognised the challenge to their own established methods of teaching implied by the presence of the group worker in the first place. There was an underlying assumption that the old ways had been tried and found wanting; for many teachers this was taken as an accusation of personal failure, a rebuttal of their professional raison d'etre - and consequently fiercely resisted. For however much the staff in these schools appeared to dismiss the older non-academic pupils as lazy and malicious, the teaching they were providing every day was what they thought to be in their best interest, given the pupils' extreme limitations. It was to be anticipated then that the group workers would meet a lot of cynicism at first and appreciation of their 'successes' with the pupils would be grudging. Nonetheless the fact that a continuing dialogue about these young people between group worker and the other staff who taught them persisted throughout the workers' appointments was a very healthy sign: attitudes do not change overnight, especially when they are as deep-rooted as some teachers beliefs in the non-academic secondary pupil as a self-styled drop-out in every sense.

Janet herself found that, towards the end of the year, the staff were becoming aware of the variety of roles her job involved and comments such as,

> "do you know Janet, I think the reason people wern't helpful to you last term was because they thought you had an easy option"

indicated the appreciation of some of the staff that the job of a group worker was certainly hard work.

The two initial problems with the staff, therefore, were those of status and roles. Had the position of the group worker been explained more fully prior to their appointment some of the initial misunderstandings might have been averted. Janet herself noted, however,

> "as I had no exact plan of campaign for the first month or two it would have been hard to explain one to other people. The staff showed a greater understanding of my job throughout the year and by Easter I felt that I had been accepted as someone 'different'. Those people who then disagreed with the post were those who had differences on the grounds of a different approach to educational principles and methods".

It took time, therefore, for the staff of the schools to accept the group workers as fulfilling a different role to the teachers especially in respect to their community contacts, but as being an equally valued person in the school system. The issues of the acceptance and the status of the group workers were closely allied. The whole question of the terms of the appointment and the educational background of the group worker were key issues for it was these which gave them the status to be accepted as an equal by other members of staff. Thus the appointment of the workers to full-time teaching posts was a crucial factor since it established their equal status with the rest of the teaching staff, an important consideration when it came to trying to persuade their colleagues to adopt measures which the group workers themselves had found to be effective with the lower ability pupils. If the group worker had been employed as a professional social worker or a Careers and Guidance Officer attached to the school it would have been easier for teachers to write off his recommendations as impracticable and to dismiss him as a hopeless idealist or a crank. Both criticisms were applied to the group workers at various times of course, but the teacher's professional loyalty helped to temper these to muttered comments from individuals. If on the other hand the workers had only been employed part-time on the project and spent the rest of their time doing formal teaching, little in the way of discovering new approaches could have been hoped for. One difficulty would have been lack of time: the group workers, for whom a sixty-hour

week was not unusual, were constantly complaining that they had too little time to do everything they wanted, and that certain areas had had to be neglected.

One aspect of teachQng life which the group worker was freed from was the class teaching, as a necessary prerequisite of the job was that it was untimetabled. If the group workers had been timetabled for classroom teaching their freedom of action would have been considerably reduced, lessening opportunities for them to take groups of pupils out of school on visits or residential sessions during school time and preventing them from being immediately accessible in an emergency, perhaps making them unavailable when they were needed most - to see a child who had run away from home, to speak in court for another or to put the local residents' case to the authorities at an official meeting. In fact, although none of the workers was officially allocated any classes to teach (with the exception of Eugene, who took third year classes for 'Careers' and 'Social Awareness') all of them at some time or another were called on to deputise for other teachers. Malcolm was the one most affected by this since a combination of a permanent short staff and a harrassed Headmaster at St Mark's landed him quite frequently in charge of a full class. Eugene faced this problem too later in the year when a Maths vacancy appeared unexpectedly. As a qualified and experienced teacher Eugene was asked to fill the temporary gap by teaching eleven Maths periods a week. Unfortunately the vacant position had not been filled by the end of the summer term and Eugene's readiness to step into the breach to help his colleagues out deprived his pupils of quite a portion of his time in school. On the other hand, all the workers felt that even a few periods taking a normal class enhanced their reputation with the rest of the staff, who could no longer retort that the new person didn't really know what he was talking about, having never been in the position of an ordinary teacher.

So far the discussion has been concerned with the group workers relationship to the school system and their role compared with other teachers in the school. As has been noted the extent of the contacts made between group workers and teachers is examined in detail in Chapter Seven. Another and indeed the most important aspect of the group workers role, however, was the work with the pupils themselves. Case studies of the group workers contacts with individuals are given in Chapter Six and the work with groups is described in Chapter Five. Janet's account of her first year's work indicates the attitude of the group worker to the pupils and the way in which the group workers role was introduced to the pupils.

> "The establishment of relationships with the pupils was an easier task than relating to the staff had been and indeed my acceptance by the girls came fairly quickly. In the first month of work I interviewed most of the 60 girls I was to work with and tried to find out their attitude to school, feelings about ROSLA, home background, evening activities etc. The pretext for interviewing was to establish a rota for community service activities and the pupils first saw me as 'the nursery lady' ie., someone who would send them out of school. This role developed, through contact and organisation of the community service rota, into my being someone who would send or take them out of school or, at the very least would excuse them from classes they didn't like. Difficulties naturally arose, it was not always possible or desirable to take or send girls out every time that they asked and tensions with other members of staff sometimes developed. It was necessary to achieve a balance so that the girls were in school for at least some of the work and didn't come only to escape".

Janet goes on, however, to describe how she saw her role developing throughout the year and she stresses the value of the group worker in being untimetabled in order to do this.

> "My role during the year was to be used by the girls, either as friend or as counsellor. At first the girls used me to get out of classes they disliked but this developed into coming to me to do something they liked or to follow up a project they were interested in or to talk about a personal problem. Many of the girls showed a genuine desire to 'do some work' but it was work on their terms and was more easily accomplished on an individual basis, as their choice, rather than as a fixed duty during a timetabled lesson. The girls gradually found that instead of going to the nursery to 'get out of school' they were going because they were developing a genuine interest in and commitment to the children of the nursery or playgroup. Generally staff were willing to excuse girls from their classes to come to do some project work or survey or for a counselling or group session. However some teachers saw me solely as a desriiptive influence spoiling their plans for a fourth year timetable. To this it can be replied that the truancy rate among the girls was high and going out on community service, far from diminishing the size of the classes, was often the sole reason why the girl was at school. For me a basic premise throughout the year was that I was there to be used (but not abused) and to help the girls do what they wanted rather than what I thought they should be doing. It must be admitted, however, that their ideas of choice and

> experience were limited and so it was often up to me to suggest a place to visit or a survey to do. An element of compulsion also entered into the area of writing up reports of visits but my overall aim was to bring the girls to the point where they themselves could develop ideas on their own initiative. Examples of this happening were the old people's party, planned and carried out by the girls with no help from anyone as a result of a survey of pensioners they had conducted. Another example was where the girls themselves sat down and wrote letters to the Housing Authorities complaining of bad housing conditions they had seen, that this was done with no prompting and no help from me was a step in the right direction".

The aim of all the group workers was to 'aid in the personal and social development of the young person' and examples of some of the group Brojects undertaken and the various forms of community service are contained in succeeding chapters. Project orientated work and surveys were of course only one way in which the aim of 'social development' was pursued. Indeed, this was expressed by Malcolm and Eugene in a jointly compiled article they wrote in which they stated, 'The role of the group worker is one of many different faces. In the course of the day he will become a counsellor, a group leader and tutor, an organiser, a supervisor and a shoulder to cry on. The most important of these faces is that of sympatheti,c adult - someone within the school structure to whom the young person can come with a problem, be it academic or personal. To become established in this role is the first priority.'

Janet for example filled this role by encouraging the fourth year lower stream pupils to come round to see her each morning after Assembly. They might have only the briefest chat before she sent some out to nurseries and playgroups and the rest off to their

normal classes. But it provided the continuity of contact with a sympathetic adult which a lot of the girls were looki g for.

The question arises, at this point, as to the extent that the roles assumed by the group worker were already bei_ng fulfilled within the school system. Why couldn't the form teacher the counsellor or the ROSLA teachers assume the roles which the group worker was using? In other words was the group worker really necessary within the school system and did they in fact provide a unique contribution;

Firstly it can be noted that the role of the group worker differed from that of the teacher placed in sole charge of a 'ROSLA' class, such as are being appointed in a small but increasing number of schools in the U.K. The occupant of such a post, something like that of a remedial or a primary teacher, certainly has a chance to get to know his pupils individually, and may be able to organise all kinds of different pursuits for their school time, from table tennis to overnight stays in the country. But the dangers that the pupils will become too dependent on their teacher, and also that they may become totally segregated from the rest of the school population, pupils and staff, are very real. No matter how impressive the facilities given to these 'less able' young people, no matter how flexible and exciting their timetable, the knowledge that by putting them in a special class they have been rejected as incapable of benefiting from the education offered to their contemporaries is still theirs. The three non-exam fourth year classes at St James', provided with a fully blocked timetable including subjects like Careers and Leisure, workshops and facilities for hobbies like car maintenance, radio work and photography, what was for Belfast an extensive programme of industrial visits, and weekly sorties to the Technical College, nevertheless, commonly referred to their classes as 'Reject 1, 2 and 3. It was decided at the start that the group worker was not to be appointed as the form master of a lowest ability third or fourth year class but rather as an extra assistant, an adviser to the rest of the teaching staff who continued to

take the pupils for normal lessons, but allowing individuals or small groups to be withdrawn by the worker for sessions in school or projects outside. In this way the bottom stream pupils and the staff were kept in contact with each other. Unproductive as this contact sometimes appeared to be, with pupils and teachers entertaining mutually unfavourable opinions of one another, it was ultimately the only hope for modification of existing prejudice. The group worker's role as a thorn in the flesh of the rest of the staff had to be played with great diplomacy. Initially all four found the most useful approach was to consult individual teachers about particular pupils seeking out their opinion of the child by asking how he behaved in class, and whether the teacher had noticed any symptons of trouble at home or difficult relationships with peers in school. Teachers often volunteered helpful information about pupils as well as the way they dealt with them. When the group worker was at the stage of getting to know the classes he would be working with, this kind of data was valuable in assessing needs and potential. Later when the worker had established relationships with a number of individual pupils he could feed back reports on their behaviour on projects and in groupwork to the teachers who saw the child during the rest of the week. This happened IOC>st often when the child had made good progress with the worker of course; the primary intention of this group worker-teacher interaction was to try to moderate the teacher's negative stereotype of the non-academic pupil. The worker might also consult a teacher about a pupil with whom he did not seem to be getting anywhere, in the event that the teacher might have observed similar or additional evidence, or indeed that he might be having no trouble at all with the child. The latter could well be true: none of the workers claimed to be supermen, and the question of personality entered into the group worker - pupil relationship as into any other. In some cases a young person might develop a rapport with one of his teachers which was not extended to the group worker, who was felt to be less sympathetic - or as was more often the case, as too 'soft'. An ideal remedy for the possible incompatibility of young person and adult was provided in St James' where a team

of three Counsellors/Careers teachers was available for the lower band third and fourth year pupils to gq to. The three people (of whom Eugene was one) agreed that this was a very satisfactory arrangement; each of them had a different approach to the pupils and found they could 'get through' to different individuals as a result. In this respect, therefore, it can be seen that the group worker did in fact fulfil a different role to that of the ROSI.A teacher and the two were by no means working in competition. Indeed, as will be shown in Chapter Seven the co-operation between the group worker and teachers was regarded as a growth point in the project. Similar comments can be made regarding the relationship of the role of the group worker to that of other sympathetic teachers in the sc ool eg. the form teachers and the counsellors. Unfortunately the practice of class periods had been abandoned in the project schools and so the amount of contact with the form teacher was limited. The counsellors were perhaps the most obvious people to work with the group worker. In all the project schools the group worker liaised closely with the counsellors, indeed in Meadowfield and St Marks the group worker was instrumental in helping to set up the counselling system. The counsellors were all timetabled teachers, however and did not have the same freedom that the group workers had. One was a form mistress at Meadowfield the other a part-time teacher at Benton. The crucial factor in their success seemed to be the personal and genuine interest they took in the pupils, easily conveyed by the manner they used with them. The pupils were quick to appreciate and respond to this concern. But an additional help, which they readily acknowledged was the presence of the group worker in the school, available for consultation on specific cases, for referral to agencies outside the school, as sources of additional equipment, or just for general support and encouragement - which were often unforthcoming from the rest of their colleagues. Such teachers in turn helped to reinforce the group workers in their task: both morally and practically, for instance by taking parties of lower ability pupils on outings or away on residential trips, accompanied either by the group worker or by a colleague. They sought the co-operation of the group worker on particular projects planned with the pupils; such as a series of visits to churches of different denominations

by the Meadowfield girls, several of which visits took place on outings with Janet, or the fourth year football team, which was arranged jointly by David and the P.E. master, and culminated in a week-end trip to a cottage in the country with David.

Perhaps the best evidence for the fact that the group worker managed to identify a new role in the school was the attitudes of the pupils towards the workers for here again the group worker scored by not being an official class teacher.

It was hoped that pupils in the lower ability groups would gradually come to differentiate between ordinary teachers and the group worker, when it became clear that the latter did not do any class teaching. From conversations with a number of pupils it appeared that those who had come into closest contact with the worker did indeed identify him or her as someone apart from the other teachers, though they found it harder to describe exactly where the difference lay. A third year boy at Benton commented 'He (David) doesn't talk too much', and then added 'Teachers should talk a lot though'. But another boy in the same class said of David 'He talks too much. He's always talking at you. Why doesn't he get on with <Jiving you some work to do?'

How then did the pupils see the group worker? One image which the worker inevitably acquired was that of dealing with the lame ducks of the school. David commented after one group session: 'how do I approach them - as someone who can help them if they need me? But then how do I get round me having to call them to my room for 'groupwork'i The response is likely to be 'Oh, does this mean we need help?' But one pupil at least, a girl in the lowest third year stream at Benton, had grasped whatDavid was there for and was able to express it very articulately: 'He helps you understand ••• (pause) He shows you how teachers are trying to help you, but you have to help them too... He shows you how your parents are closest to you.'

Of course as soon as it became known that the group worker was prepared to take groups out of school on visits and trips this be ame his identifying mark for many pupils. David, Malcolm, Eugene and Janet all suffered from being labelled as 'the person who takes us out places'. The presence of an extra adult in school who clearly did not occupy quite the same position as a teacher was bound to cause confusion to pupils. One of Janet's fourth year girls challenged the researcher openly on this 'What exactly is Miss S?' She's not a proper teacher, because I asked our English mistress'. Not satisfied with the reply she finally approached Janet herself when they were away on a residential session. The girl failed to understand why if Janet had so many qualifications to her name and had stayed on at school for such a long time she was content just to sit and talk to people like herself who were no good at anything, instead of teaching Maths or whatever it was she liked to clever exam classes. Whereas both Malcolm and Eugene were seen by most pupils who knew them as a kind of older brother or grown-up friend, someone who would first of all listen to what they had to say and then perhaps offer advice, if it was asked for. The comment "He's good crack' (ie. good company) was frequently passed about each of them, and since young people in both of the catchment areas could be said to be living under considerably strain, the role of confidant was perhaps the most pressing one for Malcolm and Eugene to take on.

'l'he roles that the four group workers explored and developed extended beyond the school situation and into the community. Indeed, alongside the need to help the personal and social development of the young person was the allied aim of establishing a link between the school and the community. A detailed description of the avenues used by the group workers is contained in Chapters Nine, Ten and Eleven. The aim here, however, is to complete the picture of the group workers roles and to consider those which relate to the outside world.

One use to which the group workers were made was that of minibus driver Indeed this might seem like one way of linking the school to its

environment but it could become an unnecessary burden to the group worker! What about transport? was the perpetual cry in all the schools when any excursion was proposed. To some extent the problem was a real one: the military situation in the city precluded the use of public transport for any but extremely local journeys, and sometimes not even for these. The boys from St Marks who went to help clean out a hall for a playgroup had to be driven there by Malcolm or another teacher though it was only one bus stage away from the school, as the route passed through alien territory. Meadowfield and Benton each owned a minibus; ostensibly for the use of the whole school, but for most of the time the minibus lay idle in the playground. Teachers seemed over-ready to quote the Troubles as the reason: it is true that the choice of places to visit in the city was restiricted by security precautions, but most of these only involved allowing a little extra time for a trip and the countryside surrounding Belfast is rich in natural and man-made interest; a well-preserved castle, a folk museum, the beautiful Lough Neagh. Many of these places were discovered by the group workers in the company of groups of pupils, and their activities did encourage a few other teachers to arrange expeditions.

Their selection of children raised some eyebrows, many members of staff believing that an outing sho•1ld be a reward for hard work and good behaviour, neither qualities for which the lower streams of the older classes were especially noted. In theory there was no reason why other classes should not be taken on trips, but in practice exam classes were very rarely interrupted, and few teachers found themselves able to arrange to spend a morning or an afternoon out of school to lead an expedition. Since it was not common practice the one or two who did make the effort could expect veiled criticism from colleagues who had to deputise for them. The offer of the group worker to take a party of lower stream pupils out for a few hours, on the other hand, was often willingly agreed to by the staff officially teaching them - as long as no other teacher was involved, and as long as the group worker drove the bus. While

giving the worker freedom to go where he or she liked on these trips, and perhaps permitting a slight relaxation of school discipline, being tied to the driving seat limited the amount of real groupwork which could be done on the journeys - when the pupils were often quite receptive and the presence of another teacher when it could be arranged was invaluable. The major practical obstacle to the use of minibuses by other staff was the shortage of teachers qualified and insured to drive them. This led to the situation, which wor3ened during the year as the idea of using the bus spread, of the group worker being asked to drive anyone anywhere. It was hard to convince teachers that despite his seemingly open and flexible schedule the worker was in fact just as busily occupied all day as they were in the classroom. But it was also hard to refuse teachers who were finally trying to widen their pupils horizons by arranging an excursion.

The group workers involvement in the community was far more than that of minibus drivers. In some ways it was the involvement of the group workers in the local areas that distinguished them most from the work of the other teachers. There are, of course, exceptions to this and the subject is described in more detail in Chapter Seven. The group worker assumed the role of community service organiser, community worker, home liaison worker, social worker as the occasion demanded.

For some period of their appointment at least, and ideally it should have been for the whole duration, all the group workers had their own cars: private transport was really a precondition for undertaking the neighbourhood liaison and home visiting which was an integral part of the job. Since they had no timetabled teaching commitments the workers were able to leave school during the day on a variety of missions, whether it was David or Janet calling round at the community centre to chat to the secretary while he was organising meals for local pensioners, Malcolm dropping round to a favourite haunt of truants, or Eugene

calling on the unemployed father of a pupil he was concerned about. Cars were also needed to travel across town in search of equipment or professional advice or to attend court hearings. They were also essential for arranging any outing into the area for small groups of pupils, other than brief walks to the park and back which Janet found she could fit into a timetabled period. For if the non-exam pupils were not to be separated from the mainstream of the school they could hardly be released for whole days at a time from normal lessons. This did happen of course with community service placements and for several days at a stretch when a group of pupils went away on a residential trip with the worker. Enough resentment was caused by these interruptions of the timetable amongst the rest of the staff, not to mention the jealousy of the pupils left behind in school, that for the workers to request extra time would have been unreasonable.

And so it became a familiar sight to see the group worker's car packed tight with children cruising round the vicinity of the school during the day. There was always something of interest to visit; a church hall where relief work for families intimidated out of their homes was going on; the 'saw doctor' or the blacksmith; or simply a tour of the neighbourhood locating houses which had fallen vacant in order to inform the Corporation. It is hardly necessary to justify the group workers involvement in the community. This kind of community work accompanied by pupils could serve several purposes.

1. It enabled the young people to think again about the place they lived in, perhaps to discover things they did not know about before, almost certainly to ask questions about the physical character of the district, leading to the type of housing, the range of employment and the public amenities provided. Plans for action to improve conditions for themselves and their neighbours could follow.

2. It offered an opportunity for the pupils themselves to take the lesson, since the worker readily admitted his own ignorance of the subject and asked the young people for the answers. This undoubtedly gave the latter a considerable feeling of self-importance and worth which had been steadily undermined in school.

3. It could simultaneously raise the status of the catchment area in the eyes of its young inhabitants who had picked up some of the denigration of the neighbourhood which teachers made no attempt to disguise, and which was echoed by even some of the residents. The group workers' tours in fact appeared to have some spin-off effect on the local adult community who began to wonder what it was that their children were learning outside rather than inside the school walls.

Several parents told the researcher with some pride in their voices that their children had been out on visits in the locality. The idea was used most by Eugene, who was helped by working in a central district of the city rich in local culture, an area of one-man businesses and small tradesmen. Eugene adopted the practice of regularly taking a small group of poor school attenders who lived in this district out on a tour of it to visit various places of interest: shopkeepers, self-employed tradesmen, the Redevelopment Advice Centre. The group workers role thus became extended into areas of adult education and the involvement of local people in the school curriculum.

The attitude of Headteachers to such outside-school activities by group worker and pupils was generally co-operative. The comparatively few 'bad' pupils (ie., those who were likely to get into trouble with the law while they were playing truant)were a constant source of worry to Heads: a proportion of pupils with criminal records was bound to reflect on the reputation of the

school. Educational Welfare Officers were officially supposed to deal with poor attendance but they themselves admitted that the task was far too great for one person: it reflected a whole subculture of rebellion against the standards of adult society. The Educational Welfare Officer's role was that of social caseworker, with a limited caseload of families to visit, that of the group worker was more a youth and community worker focussing on the needs and potential of groups of young people rather than individuals - though the latter were obviously more important on some occasions. The group worker also saw his clientele as comprising the healthy and well-adjusted in addition to the 'problem' children, the misfits in their society. By including a few 'difficult' pupils in groups of more self-confident and mature young people it was hoped that a more normal gradual adjustment to the local social code of behaviour than was likely with a caseworker approach might be achieved. The difference of approach was recognised sooner or later by Educational Welfare Officers and group workers themselves, and in all four schools a working partnership was achieved ultimately. Indeed in Benton and St Marks joint discussion groups with groups of pupils with poor attendance records came to be taken by the group worker and the Educational Welfare Officer together. Headteachers also seemed to appreciate that there was room for two people trying to deal with the truants who after all amounted to 10 - 20% of the total school population. They readily explained the group worker's absence from school by his being out 'truant-catching' or 'chasing the loosefooters'. Home visits by group workers aroused more suspicion among Educational Welfare Officers who feared encroachment on their territory, but anxieties were generally quelled by the workers promising to make contact only with the families of pupils with whom they had been specifically dealing, and it was generally agreed that the Education Welfare Officer would leave these families alone - unless of course the children's attendance fell below the legal minimum. Nonetheless liaison between Educational Welfare Officer and group worker could be useful for checking on the background of families with a

consistently bad record for their children's school attendance, or for exchanging information on the currently fashionable hide-outs for truants. Two of the Educational Welfare Officers attached to the project schools had been in their jobs in the same area for quite a number of years; in view of the rapid turnover of other social workers and professionals, including teachers, there, the Educational Welfare Officers experience was no small asset to the group worker.

The workers also tried to find out about any issues of general local concern and to offer their own services and those of the school towards finding remedies and solutions. Since the group workers were first and foremost seen as ambassadors of the school, many of the problems raised by local inhabitants were associated with the happiness and safety of school children in the district. Anxieties about the military danger to which children were exposed on their journeys to and from school, and concern at the lack of facilities for wholesome activities in the district, which drove the young people towards the unsatisfying and often hazardous life of the street were the most frequent complaints heard in all four cases. It was possible however to go beyond the currently popular moans about security and there being nowhere for the children to go, to parents' personal fears and ambitions for their children, as David discovered from his Advice Centre. The group worker's job was first of all to listen patiently to everyone's opinions to find out the exact nature of the problem, and how far the local people were prepared to go towards dealing with it and secondly to suggest steps which might be taken towards a solution - by the residents themselves. It was basically a community development approach, the worker offering to act as a mediator with the authorities at first if necessary but mainly trying to encourage the people concerned to organise themselves to get what they wanted through their own efforts.

A more direct way in which the group worker was able to offer not just his own services but those of the pupils and through them the school, was by organising a number of community service projects within the catchment area. David and Janet were fortunate in that

there were a variety of playgroups, nurseries and services for old people already existing in the area surrounding their schools. Malcolm and Eugene had to look further for theirs - and once they moved out of the catchment area difficulties over transport and safety presented themselves of course. Yet all the workers managed to fix up several types of placements for volunteer helpers from the older classes in the school. David held the record: by the summer term 1973 he had 78 placements a week on his books ranging from tutors at the local primary school to ward assistants at the mental hospital. He could also claim exclusive credit for widening the rota of volunteers to include the entire fourth year, even the exam candidates. The acceptance he had cultivated among the staff of the value of pupils spending one morning or afternoon a week out of school helping someone in the neighbourhood really came to fruition in his final year at Benton. David's final move in this year was to 'train up two members of staff to carry on organisation and supervision of the community service scheme'. The essential point was that these schemes of community action, whether they involved pupils or adult residents or both, arose out of the obvious or latent needs of the area, they were not the ideas of someone else from outside, as so many previous projects had been. In the same way the activities arranged for and with the pupils and ex-pupils were not of a pre-existing syllabus but evolved gradually, or rather in fits and starts out of constant contact between worker and young people.

It will be clear from the preceding list of the parts which the group workers could be called on to play in any one day that they tended to become many things to many people, a state of affairs highly satisfactory for implementing the project, but rather a burden to cope with personally. The risk of extreme isolation was very great, and all four workers confessed to experiencing it at different times of the year. The main problem was that the school, while providing a convenient base for their activities did not really provide them with a supportive reference group.

Amongst the group worker's colleagues were individuals who were sympathetic, but none was able to offer advice or guidance when the worker found himself in difficulties; they were more likely to come to him with their own setbacks. The rest of the staff had slowly to be convinced of the justification of the group worker being there at all. For him to appear unduly depressed in front of these teachers would have been to jeopardise the success of the whole project. The pupils offered some reinforcement when they responded to his approaches, but ultimately they were the guinea pigs: it was on their behaviour that the life of the scheme depended.

The same was true of the local residents: though they might make the group worker very welcome in their homes he was still 'someone from the school' as opposed to 'someone from the area'. Group workers had a different role to that of the professional social workers serving the area so where could they turn for help and support when things were not going too well? During the first two years of the project the two group workers, David and Malcolm kept in regular contact with the project director, who was working in Belfast. When Janet joined the team she followed suit, but with the arrival of the researcher and the inclusion of Eugene's work in the evaluation regular joint meeting of the four workers, the Project director and the researcher were instituted, taking place once a fortnight. These meetings were intended to meet three of the workers' main needs; for mutual support, both moral and practical, for in-service training and for the exploration in depth of certain issues that were raised by the experience of the workers. Some such issues were listed by David after two years in the job:

> pupils with home difficulties were not supported enough by the school.
>
> truants tended to be forgotten about or only punitive measures taken.

remedial work appeared to be very sketchy and lacking in back-up from the local authority.

resources, both financial and material, and other opportunities were not being directed towards the lower ability groups.

These and other issues were aired at many meetings in the progress of the year and various strategies for improving the situation usually by bringing it to the notice of people who might be able to bring about change, were discussed. The joint force of the group workers alone was not influential enough to be able to act as a pressure group, much as they would have liked to. The meetings did provide a professional home, a sanctuary for letting off steam, frustration and disappointment and receiving encouragement and advice from fellow sufferers in return. As such they were probably crucial in avoiding any serious mental breakdwon among the workers. For when all was said and done **the** job was an extremely strenuous one, demanding on time, energy and patience to a degree that many people would find overwhelming.

CHAPTER FIVE

Working with Groups

Since the crux of the project was the relationship the group worker was able to build up with his or her pupils, and since the chief medium for developing this relationship was the pupil's peer group in school, it is worth looking a little more closely at just how the workers conducted their small group sessions.

Though many teachers might think their task would be considerably lightened by a class of no more than eight or so pupils, in fact to produce anything constructive out of a group this size, beyond casual conversation, requires a definite skill and above all clarity of purpose. Directing an informal discussion, so that certain previously defined areas are covered while at the same time providing opportunities for other topics of concern to the pupils to come to light, are not techniques which feature strongly in a teacher's training: those who possess them have generally learned the hard way of experience.

Of the four people in this study only David had had any formal training for working with small groups, as part of his Youth and Community Diploma course. His specialised knowledge of group dynamics in contrast to the other work rs was very evident from sitting in on just one or two of his sessions•. His approach was a systematic one, based soundly on a theory of group process, which involved careful preparation for, and precise recording of each session, with a subsequent analysis of his own and the pupils' behaviour. He paid great attention to the initial selection of his groups, which then met regularly with him for a specified number of weeks. And he made it clear from the start that unless there wag a joint effort by everyone concerned to attend and make the sessions a success he was ready to discontinue them at any time.

Janet, Malcolm and Eugene were less particular about the membership of their groups and none managed to achieve the continuity of the groups at Benton. This was not entirely their fault: the tl,ree schools suffered from a consistently poor attendance among the lower streams which dogged any attempts to establish regular meeting with a specific group.

In practice only a small nucleus of stalwart attenders could be depended on to turn up fairly regularly at group sessions. This could have been due to the lack of a strict timetable for the sessions but was more likely the result of outside factors such as innninent rioting, bullying or even the attraction of a horse show or local celebration.

Largely out of necessity then Malcolm, Janet and Eugene ended up organising group sessions for all the representatives of a particular class who were in school that day. In the two lowest fourth year streams at Meadowfield and the bottom fourth year class at St Mark's this seldom amounted to more than ten pupils; if there were more they could be split up into smaller groups for project work. Eugene might have more, but he could call on his Careers Teaching colleagues. The size of the groups was a manageable one therefore; but unfortunately the membership of Malcolm's and Janet's groups did not remain constant: although there were in each case a number of old faithfuls there was also a floating population of irregular attenders. These were really the pupils whom the workers were trying to get to grips with, and they naturally found it hard to turn them away on the days when they did appear in school, although they tended to have a disruptive effect on the rest of the group. A persistent truant who turned up for one of Eugene's sessions succeeded in bringing the proceedings to the point of stalemate, with his constant interruptions and cynical comments. Eugene dealt with the situation effectively by inviting the boy to take over the group himself: once out in front of the class he lost a lot of his cockiness - but the session could not be described as ultimately

very productive for the group as a whole or anyone in it except the principal offender. To sununarise then, the lack of continuity in the membership of the groups with which Janet, Malcolm and Eugene worked necessarily affected the content of the sessions and the degree of intensity which they were able to reach. It thus seems wise to focus an assessment of the formal group work within the project around David's work since he managed to develop the technique to a highly significant extent.

On his arrival at Benton David concentrated his efforts on the lowest stream of the fourth year. By talking to them individually and getting them involved in various sociometric exercises, such as writing down the names of the classmates they would choose for their own football team, he was able to construct a pattern of friendship groupings within the class, and to identify both the very popular and the unpopular members. From this data he selected, together with the pupils, several groups which were to meet regularly with him for discussion sessions. Out of these discussions it was hoped that certain group interests and tasks would emerge, to be followed up where possible by inviting visitors to the school, and by outings and residential trips, to be arranged largely by the pupils themselves with minimum guidance from David. Examples of interest around which groups were formed in this first year were motor mechanics and job opportunities in the area. From time to time David would meet with the whole class to review progress and to decide on the programme for the next few weeks. A similar procedure for selecting groups was followed in the second year of his appointment, only this time he involved the lowest fourth year class of girls as well, besides collecting together a group of persistently bad attenders to meet with the Educational Welfare Officer and himself as regularly as possible. This year too David capitalised on his local contacts to organise a rota of community service placements for the lower ability pupils, and these provided a further topic for group discussion. By his third year at Benton, although the fourth year had been officially destreamed, David continued to work

with two groups of less able boys within it - one a friendship grouping, one a bunch of keen footballers - as well as holding follow-up sessions for the pupils from all classes who had been oa community service placements. He also spread his net wider to the two lowest streams of third year in the school, and concentrated much of his attention on trying to develop some positive motivation among these younger pupils. The two classes were already small in number, about fiteen pupils in each but David soon found that this was definitely too many to take altogether. The factions within the class were the main stumbling block. Each of the two classes had its bully, feared rather than respected by the others, who with a number of cronies to back him or her up held the rest of the class in an iron grip and could successfully terrorise them into an uneasy silence if he or she did not go along with David's ideas, which was likely to be the case, since David was trying to break down this stranglehold of fear. After several abortive attempts to get the classes as a whole to co-operate in examining the informal groupings within the class, he concluded that the only hope of getting anywhere was with sub-groups. Even then the boss and her first lieutenant from the girls' class had ultimately to be banned from the group for a time, they caused so much inhibition among their classmates. It only needed one threatening glance darted at a timid pupil questioned by David for the girl to clam up completely.

Within these smaller groups a lot more could be achieved. There is no doubt that in the course of the year David did manage to get across to the majority of these bottom stream third years a belief that they could do things for themselves, that they were not already condemned as hopeless failures, and that there was someone in school who they could go to at almost any time, who they knew would listen to them with real interest. The fact that these pupils were a year younger than the others with whom David had been dealing meant however that the young people were less able to cope with the somewhat sophisticated materials of role play and moral education which David had used with older groups;

it meant also that they were slower to respond to challenges demanding individual initiative and responsibility and it meant that the danger of their developing an unhealthy dependence on the group worker was increased. David was well aware of this last problem, which he found to the especially true of the boys' class. He tried to deal with it by adding to the group sessions some pupils from the middle ability third year class. These boys proved to be more self-confident, articulate and lively than those in the lower class, whose negative identity was made very obvious: 'We're only the duds. I gave up working when I was put in this class'. The boys in the lower stream did not object to joining forces with the supposedly brainier class in the same way that the girls did - in this case the protest was so violent that the idea was shelved completely - but they were clearly overshadowed by the more able boys in discussions or role play sessions. While the experience was no doubt a valuable experience for the 'hard men' in the bottom class as they liked to call themselves, it was less help to the shy inarticulate members of the class.

And so the experiment was abandoned. This happened constantly to the group workers: they tried a scheme, it misfired and had to be abandoned. Nothing daunted, David returned to his former practice of holding regular sessions with the three sub-groups of four or five pupils which had originally been chosen by the boys or girls themselves. In the boys' class these smaller groups developed a definite identity of their own, and some rivalry for the group worker's time and favour could be detected. David took each of the groups on outings and for overnight visits to a residential centre, but he made it clear that these expeditions had to be strictly rationed and would be arranged only after some really hard work in sessions in school had been produced. Even so, since having broached the possibility, he was plagued by one or two pupils coming round to his room at all times of the day to demand 'When are you taking us out, Mr Y?'

One of these sub-groups in particular aroused David's interest.

An early session with this group revealed that it was a tight-knit clique in which each member had a definite role to play: there was the 'hard man' (otherwise known as the class bully); the 'slegger' (the one who criticises and teases), the 'joker'; the scapegoat and the messenger boy (a highly skilled cleptomaniac and skilled gambler). The cabal of the hard man, the slegger and the joker held the other two boys in fear and trembling; they would dutifully run errands for the bigger fellows, take the blame for everything, and sit silently through a discussion period with David, not daring to open their mouths in front of the others. David set them thinking about the structure of their group, who they thought the leader was and how decisions were reached. Alec, the hard man, was unanimously acknowledged as the leader, but he protested that although he was always seen in this role, it was often against his will. 'If you're the leader you get blamed by the teachers for everything. And you have to act the hard man all the time even if you don't want to'. Alec was indeed recognised by the other teachers as a ringleader; the Head considered him a 'bad lot': his name was always mentioned first when the subject of the lowest third year class was breached among the staff. Alec complained to David: 'How can I reform when the teachers all treat me differently? Mr A. sent me out of the class to dig the garden and Mr T. sent me back inside again'. It was not that some staff had not tried to channel his leadership qualities. 'I was made form leader in the first year (by the form teacher) and I lasted nearly all year, but then I got fed up with being threatened with "I'll take your badge away from you if you don't behave".' There seemed to be a well-meaning and sensitive side to Alec which was struggling to get out. David managed to pierce the 'hard man' exterior a little way: for example by uncovering his great affection for animals. To encourage Alec to admit openly in front of his classmates that he would cry if his dog died was quite an achievement.

While doubts were being sown in Alec's mind about the need to act the ·boss on every occasion, the other members of the group were looking with David at their own positions, in relation to Alec and to each other. David impressed on them that they were victimising Harry who was a sucker for doing all their dirty work because he was scared stiff of being beaten up if he didn't. The rest of the group hotly denied the accusation; and in fact exposing it in group sessions seemed to make things worse for Harry; he was reported to have received the brunt of the Big Three's fury in the playground, on the suspicion that he had squealed to David. The lad became completely isolated and took to staying away from school for longer and longer periods. In Harry's case group work in school could be said to have failed: the negative pressures from his peer group counteracted the constructive effect that David's work might have had in the long term. Group sessions could only occupy a tiny part of Harry's school life; if his life was made a misery by his classmates · during the rest of the time his most obvious escape was to opt out of school altogether. With another member of the group David had more success. This was John, the 'joker'. At the start of the year he appeared to be as much in the thrall of the hard man as the others: he could be relied upon to laugh dutifully at Alec's feeblest jokes and to back up all his opinions. John was a slow boy, easily led on by the two dominant members of the group. But he was also extremely good-natured and considerate towards others, as was demonstrated when David took him along to deliver 'meals on wheels' to old age pensioners in the area during a spell of icy weather. He was persistent too: when the Woodwork master agreed to Alec and he building a wooden train for a local playgroup John was the one who kept at it week after weeek until it was finished. David tried to wean him away from his dependence on Alec, which proved fairly easy; but then he found that John began to substitute David for Alec as a reference figure. He would be found nearly every day hanging round the door of David's room on some trivial pretext, seeking the support and guidance which David had been

only too ready to give in the beginning, but which he realised had to be slackened off if John was ever to be able to fend for himself in the outside adult world.

David befriended George, the 'messenger boy' in the group, too. He soon found out that George, always scruffily dressed and often unwashed, came from a very poor family background, that he was teased about this at school - and that his chief love in the world was horses. David tried to draw him out on this, directing questions at him about horse shows he had been to recently, or asking whether there was still a trotting course nearby during group sessions. George, who generally cbntributed at best a series of mutters and grunts to the conversation, in the right mood could wax reasonably eloquent on the topic close to his heart. It was not that the boy lacked initiative; one week-end he arranged a trip to Glasgow - by plane - to watch a football match, and came back with a comfortable profit from his betting wins on the ground… But he rarely gave any indication in school of his worldly talents; indeed it was a great step forward for him to come out with the tale .of the Glasgow trip (with a little pumping from David) during a group session with his classmates. The occasion marked a significant development in George's relationship to the rest of the group by putting him, rather than Alec or any of his cronies, on a pedestal to applaud his cool execution of such a daring exploit. Another opportunity . for George to shine was provided by a day's outing to the horse fair arranged by David for the group. George had a chance to show off his expert knowledge in sizing up the exhibits; even if he did not say very much his connoisseur's approach was obvious to the others. What was obvious too was the respect which David had for George's expertise, demonstrated by his handing over the teacher's reins, he, David, being in the forefront in asking questions.

With the fourth year boys David was able to go into the concept of group membership in a more general theoretical way; analysing the obligations it imposed and the respect that was accorded to

different people in the group. David approached the subject by introducing fictitious characters: Willy, who had no close friends, and claimed to dislike everybody, yet was admired by a whole group of his classmates, who all maintained that he was their friend; or Sam, who admitted to no close friends either but was in turn rejected by everyone else. David explained the two positions by means of simplified sociometric diagrams which the pupils could draw themselves, or by using coins they placed on the floor to indicate the social distance between members of a group. The study thus became something of a game. After discussing 'what sort of a fellow is Willy? David would relate the role to the boys' own situation, asking: 'Is there always one leader in your group?' 'How does he control the other members?' One response was: 'He hits them: he's the best fighter'. But another was: 'Leaders aren't always the ones who hit hardest, they're the thinkers, the ones who get you out of things'. There was sometimes disagreement as to whether the same boy was considered the leader on all occasions. One boy felt that different people took the lead for different activities: when playing football a boy's individual skill at the game counted for most, while out on the streets the one who had a reputation for being fearless and daring would carry the greatest weight. Dissensions over who really was the leader among the members of a group suggested a certain amount of internal friction, and could be a sobering revelation especially to the boy who had considered his dominant position inviolable and even unchallenged. The uncovering of various unsavoury methods by which leaders got their way often made those so identified uncomfortable to the point of their denying that they liked being treated as the leader, protesting that they would rather hand the reins to someone else if possible.

In an attempt to bring out the 'sheep' of the group and encourage them at least to question the absolute power of their leader, David raised the possibility of a certain amount of bullying as one means for a leader to get others to do what he wanted. Rather than ask outright whether there was any bullying in their group David might

pose a more indirect question, such as 'How do lads react to being bullied?' indicating that he was well aware that it went on, and was just curious about how the boys dealt with it. The responses showed that a distinction was made between justified and unjustified bullying; in the former case the victim's mates would come to his aid, in the latter they might not.

In the case of this particular fourth year group one could not claim that the members benefited immediately from what they had learned about group behaviour in sessions like these with David by putting them into practice in their dealings with each other. However the investigation had had some positive effects: for instance on Richie, labelled by his mates as 'the thinker', and ranked variously in first and third position in the group by his fellow members. He had been diffident about accepting a leadership role: 'I don't boss them around at all'. But it was clear from his composed manner and his few well-thought out comments in discussions that he was by far the most mature of the group and a potential opinion leader. over the course of group sessions with David which Richie regularly attended he gradually distanced himself from the 'violent' cabal, and began to go around with just one or two of the quieter members of the group. An extremely successful placement in a playgroup helped to increase his self-assurance; it turned out that he was a 'natural' with children, having had plenty of experience looking after younger brothers and sisters. Richie did not however move into the leader's position in the group which met with David, as the latter had perhaps been hoping would happen; indeed he took little part in the plans for the abortive trip to Scotland which occupied quite a number of sessions, having explained that he would not be able to stay away overnight because he was needed at home. And so the benefit of his increased self-confidence and independence was a personal one rather than for the group as a whole: nonetheless it was a definite positive gain.

In other instances David's group work did culminate in a bullying leader being effectively challenged by his pears though. This might happen in quite dramatic fashion, as when one girl who had constantly monopolised all the organising of group activities, in this case fortnightly concerts for the patients in a mental hospital, was finally rejected so decisively by her 'friends' that she fled crying from the room. The rest of the group was left to decide among themselves how they could invite her back - on their terms.

To return to the methods used by David with his groups in general. Role-changing was a common technique, its aim being to get the young people to put themselves in someone else's shoes, especially those of the various adults with whom they had to deal. Numerous enactments of home situations, such as a child coming home late to face his or her parents' wrath, were prepared, played out and discussed by the small groups with whom David was working. The experience undoubtedly gave the pupils an insight into the reasons why their parents reacted to their children's behaviour as they did; they also demonstrated the variety of opinions which could exist within even one class about what to do in a specific situation. In a peer culture which stressed conformity to the point of uniformity on most occasions, such a broadening of outlook to include consideration for other people's points of view could not but be productive, particularly in Northern Ireland, where tolerance is so urgently needed, but also in other areas of the United Kingdom where different ethnic or social groups are at odds with each other. Eugene and David also used role play to analyse school situations and to encourage pupils to see the teacher's point of view. David got a fourth year group of boys to act out various teachers discussing a child's progress in the staffroom after the boy in question had admitted that he would like to do better but seemed to lack the incentive. The 'teachers' suggested several ways to encourage the boy to put more effort into his work, arguing over the relative merits of bribes and rewards or threats and punishments. Eugene arranged the reenactment of a playground brawl which had taken

place earlier in the day, following it with a discussion of the cases for both parties. Role play was not original to the project of course; its use in schools was already being developed elsewhere, particularly through the Schools Council Moral Education project. The director of the group worker project was a key figure in designing a set of materials in the Moral Education framework relating specifically to Northern Ireland, and these were circulated and used to varying degrees by the group workers. However Janet, Eugene and Malcolm all found that their pupils were more responsive to talking over recent real situations which they had happened to them personally, rather than these simulated ones, and passed the Moral Education materials on to other members of staff, notably those teaching English and Drama. On occasion David too expressed some doubts of the validity of placing these young people in circumstances artificially created for them when they were already subject to immediate and urgent pressures on them within their local area to act in certain ways about which they might have severe personal misgivings, and he wondered whether it might be better to concentrate on helping the young people more directly to cope with these circumstances. But on the whole David found the more stylised role-playing sessions beneficial, partly as an exercise in group participation (the groups were small enough to be able to insist that everyone had a part) and partly for the ideas that they sparked off in the minds of a number of pupils. It was not always easy to draw out personal confidences from a group who were with him for only one period; it was a brave young person who spoke up first for all his mates to ridicule him or her Acting out an imaginary situation on the other hand was a more superficially anonymous activity though of course in practice, if the session was a success, the pupils would behave similarly to the way they and the adults in their lives normally did. And in the discussions following the playlets when the pupils were criticising the realism of each other's performance, more personal attitudes would show through. Finally David might ask if they had ever been in a similar situation themselves, and by this time many would be prepared to speak up.

One other successful approach was to work with appointed group leader

within a class group who met between sessions with David to review and plan the class material.

Sometimes David would try out role-play situations on the group leaders to test out the response. For example, he found that the girls could readily call to mind a time when they didn't know what to do immediately giving as examples coming home much later than promised; breaking a glass door; or playing truant. They were quite prepared to act out these situations too. But they found it much harder to think of a time when they felt they had been treated well, suggesting that this would be a non-starter with the groups. David was able to adapt his programme for future sessions with the whole class accordingly. Most of these lieutenants took their responsibility seriously, and responded to the more adult approach which David adopted with them. The gravity with which they discussed the behaviour of their classmates was ample evidence. David was pleased with their attitude, but at the same time anxious to avoid their becoming identified as his favourites: he explained to them that the rest of the class was likely to feel some resentment about the extra meetings he arranged with them. He charged the group leaders to use their utmost diplomacy in reporting back to their groups after seeing him: he even got them to act how they would approach their classmates in order to gain their full co-operation.

The type of role play just described differed from that mentioned earlier, of course. The initial sessions had been concerned with acting out a situation which had already been outlined by David, requiring the young people to put themselves in someone else's position and then think what would be the best thing to do. Sometimes these sessions misfired: when a class of boys were asked what they would have done as soldiers in the First World War for a comrade placed in solitary confinement for refusing to fight, the majority of the role plays consisted of daring rescue escapades in the best wartime film style, rather than any arguments for or against pacifism. The other kind of situations used for role play concerned events which had actually happened to one at least of the actors, and required them to think out the

circumstances first, before going on to act. Eugene used this technique to try to sort out gang rivalries, as mentioned earlier. David experimented with it too, but discovered that on the whole it was too much to expect the pupils, certainly those in the lowest third year streams, both to remember and articulate a time when they had experienced a certain emotion, '\ and then to reenact it in front of their classmates. The young people found it very difficult to act 'naturally', whether in David's room or the Assembly hall, how they would behave in a given situation outside school. T e role play could thus be quite unrealistic, but it took someone familiar with the local culture to detect this. On one occasion David asked third year boys to act out how they would behave towards a newcomer to a youth club. The first group went up on the stage and began shaking hands with the stranger.David immediately stopped them.

'Hold on; that's the first time anyone's shaken hands in Belton Street Club for years!' The boys were performing as they thought David wanted, perhaps as they had seen people act on T.V., but not as they would behave normally. This was hardly surprising; the art of dramatic representation is given to only a few, and the majority are considerably inhibited by the prospect of performing in front of their friends. David could not really expect a true representation of what would really happen in a said set of circumstances. The most he could hope for was a glimpse of a recollection in the discussions afterwards that something similar had once happened to one of the participants: the details would be missing and the rest of the group indifferent about helping to fill them in. On the other hand, such personal reminiscences were unlikely to emerge at all in the course of a normal school day: certainly Counsellors and form teachers were rarely aware of them. It was perhaps one of the least inhibiting positions for a child to find himself in at school, to be surrounded by a few friends who were also making confession of times they had felt lonely, time they had been afraid, drawn out by the few encouraging and sympathetic remarks of the group worker, sworn to secrecy if necessary. David himself would often join in with his

own personal experiences: like the time he'd gone home after smoking against his parents' orders terrified in case his breath smelled and gave him away. Little touches of personal feelings used a lot by all the group workers, helped to make them into ordinary people to the pupils, as distinct from the teachers, few of whom were prepared to admit to doubts and weaknesses, at least not in front of classes such as these.

The whole approach of the group workers was intended to involve adults and young people in a joint learning exercise; learning about themselves and their relations with others through practical demonstration; learning about themselves by talking about their own personal experiences, perhaps for the first time; learning how they interacted with other peers by analysing the structure of their 'gangs' and the roles people played in them; learning about their wider responsibilities in the community and how, even though they were classed as drop-outs by the school, they could offer constructive and positive help to a variety of people outside.

In all these learning experiences the group worker was constantly stressing that he or she was just an ignorant outsider, who ha just as much, probably more, to learn as the pupils. The enthusiasm with which he wanted to learn, about the image the young people had of themselves and each other, and about the lives of the local residents, was infectious. But it was difficult for pupils to respond at once to this liberty, this deliberate lowering of the 'teacher' to their level, exposing his or her personal feelings and inviting them to do the same. Likewise it was a completely novel experience to be asked to participate in running the lesson and sharing the responsibility for its success or failure. For some pupils, the third year bottom streams especially, the challenge was too great: liberty was interpreted as license and many sessions produced little more than sullen silence or trivial chatter. The mood of the class was an important factor to be taken into account here: this fluctuated from day to day according to recent events affecting the whole class either externally, such as harsh criticism

or punishment from a member of staff, or internally, such as a confrontation between rival factions. The group worker had to be on the watch for such tempermenta.l variations and might have to try to get to the root of them before he could go on to more positive work. It might well be that his original plans for a session went by the board if a more pressing issue, uppermost in the pupils' minds, came to light. Not that the groups were always prepared to talk openly about the trouble to the group worker: often he had to dredge it up from the other teachers or from a single pupil with whom he got on well.

This willingness to be diverted from the planned topic or the course of the discussion raises another question: whether the formal group work approach used by David was sufficient to draw out innermost anxieties and develop individual potential, or if it was over-directive, tending to stifle the pupils' faltering steps towards self-expression. The other three workers clearly thought that one of their most important roles with the groups was to encourage the pupils to talk about anything they liked, seeing themselves as safety valves for letting out pent-up steam resulting from the young people's school and home situation. Thus Malcolm, Janet and Eugene would let a conversation ramble on for a whole period without noticeably reaching any conclusion or making any plans for action. Being just a sympathetic ear did not satisfy David however. He came to each group with a plan in his mind, not just of the topics he wanted to cover, but also of the relationships between the members which he wanted to explore and possibly modify; with an idea of the pupils he wanted to draw out and the ones he wanted to make sit and listen for a change. In his zeal to accomplish these various tasks David was in danger of missing a cue indicating something pressing on the pupils' minds; and he certainly ran the risk of a whole session being a write-off because the group decided they did not want to co-operate. But did the other workers really get further with their groups? They may have got more talk out of the pupils, but who did the talking and what did they talk about? It was probable,

though the workers did their best to avoid it, that the dominant individuals, the ones who did all the talking normally, would monopolise discussions with the group worker too. They were more self-assured, more articulate, and quick to break into any comments offered by the mice of the group. And the topics discussed, if left to the discretion of the young people, were likely to remain in the 'safe' area: moans about other members of staff; complaints about R O S L A ; blow-by-blow accounts of the latest local events in the Troubles. The sensitive areas of personal development, social and emotional maturation, were left well alone. Of course private confidences from individual pupils to the worker did emerge from time to time but usually when the young person could get the worker on his own. For without the preliminaries of formal groupwork (i.e. simulated situations of loneliness, fear, not knowing what to do,) broaching these areas directly to the pupils was unlikely to get much of a response.

When the group's co-operation with the worker could be obtained using these more formalised techniques, as happened with the middle ability third years and with several groups of fourth years with whom David worked during his time at Benton, the partnership could be highly productive. From an exploration of individual emotional development and social behaviour it was possible to make the group more task-orientated by drawing up plans for outings or visits from people outside the school - a policewoman, a nurse, a playgroup organiser. Expeditions where possible were arranged to coincide with particular interests in the group: with girls it was inevitably babies, especially sick or handicapped ones; with boys it might be fishing or a trip to the abattoir where several of them wanted to work when they left school. Ideally the pupils themselves should have made all the arrangements for these outings; David made attempts to encourage this by supervising them to write letters to request permission from the various authorities; but ultimately he ended up with most of the paperwork and phone calls to fix up the details himself. This was a reflection of the way society functioned

outside, rather than the fault of the group worker: a letter scrawled in juvenile script was likely to receive less attention than one typed on official school notepaper. Similarly with phone calls: the matron of a hospital was less likely to admit a party of school-children to tour her establishment if one of the pupils spoke rather inarticulately to her on the phone, even if she had been assured by the group worker that the request had been officially approved by the school and once permission had been refused there was no second chance. But David did manage to get some of the fourth year boys he was working with to do their own preparatory investigation for projects. They wanted to help old people in the area, they said. So David gave them a list of residents who would be able to provide them with information on where old people lived and what their needs were; the pupils each chose a person to go and visit, and all undertook to come to the next session with some information to report back. In the end only two out of the six actually achieved this: the others made excuses that their person had been out or they had not had time to call round. As a group they were certainly not remarkable for their persistence - but then that was one of the reasons they were in the non-exam classes, they had lost hope in themselves achieving anything, and had a very low opinion of their own capabilities.

Nevertheless there were a lot of expeditions which were successfully organised for groups of pupils by the workers. Some were arranged for part or whole of a school day, some as residential sessions lasting several days and involving the pupils catering for themselves and planning their own programme of activities in one of the Centres in the country. As explained earlier, the amount of preparatory organisation which the pupils themselves could do for these trips was limited, but the workers did try to give them the maximum opportunity to decide among themselves what they wanted to do and how to arrange it. The expeditions were thus very different from most school outings, where the programme of events is carefully mapped out by the teacher beforehand, and the pupils are expected to follow

docilely behind. Often the pupils, unused to such freedom of choice, would abuse it by demanding the impossible. The girls at Meadowfield were for ever plaguing Janet to take them to Bangor, the nearest seaside town, so that they could spend the day on the amusements. Although Janet said she might do this once she could hardly make a regular habit of it, without incurring severe criticism from her colleagues and extreme resentment from the rest of the pupils.

Their choice again illustrated the pupils' narrow experience of the world prior to their contact with the worker: a day trip to Bangor was to them the height of adventure. One could not have expected such young people to propose a mountaineering expedition or a sailing course and yet the workers were anxious not to deprive these young people of the chance of more exciting and challenging experiences just because their original ideas were unambitious. Malcolm took a party of bottom stream fourth years on an Outward BoWld course in Wales, partly to show the staff and pupils that these boys were just as capable of profiting from the strenuous activities as the more 'intelligent' pupils who usually went. Some of them failed to make the grade with various activities: giving up was one of the lessons they had learned most thoroughly at school. But others surprised everyone by sticking out until they reached the top of the mountain or finally successfully manoeuvred a canoe. Quite often these were boys who had showed few sparks of initiative in school, while the ones who gave up were the cocky lads back in the classroom.

Often the young people abused the freedom they were given, which they did not know how to cope with. The most common examples were excessive smoking and drinking: because there was so much emphasis at home and school on the evils associated with alcohol, and so much repression of smoking, the attractions of both were magnified, and young people had no chance to develop any inner controls on their consumption. It was the group workers' intention to develop these controls by helping the young people - predictably it was the

boys who were affected worst - to talk openly about their experimenting, and to recognise their own limits. Many discussions were held on the topic; but the boys were loath to admit that they had ever found alcohol distasteful or that there were occasions when they would rather refuse a cigarette. The two habits were symbols of rebellion against the accepted codes for 'children' at school and home, and a show of manliness within the peer group. It took considerable strength of character for an individual to stand out against the crowed by running down drink or cigarettes, particularly as they formed such a large part of the boys' everyday conversation.

Whenever a group was out on a trip where they were allowed to smoke the barter in cigarettes was a constant undercurrent among the pupils interspersed with graphic tales of the last time someone had got hold of some drink. And yet if this was not checked by the worker but allowed to work itself off it was remarkable how the subjects faded from the conversation. There was only time for this state of affairs to occur on residential sessions of course: the first night of these was generally quite a gruelling experience for the group worker, surrounded by clouds of smoke and plagued with incessant pleas to be allowed to go out to buy drink. But after a long night's larking about, and with no money left for cigarettes, interest waned, and the group could get down to more productive activities. The most successful of these were often the least planned.

However much discussion there was about the programme for these residential sessions the decisions were rarely unanimous. As far as possible the workers would try to go along with everyone's wishes, allowing some people to be left behind while the others went off on an expedition, for example. This was not always feasible if the worker did not have adequate adult helpers to be able to split the party. Nor was it advisable to make it too easy for pupils to opt out of the activities suggested: the apathy prevalent in their behaviour at school was ever ready to reassert itself, especially with a little support from one's friends.

Sometimes the best policy was just to bundle everyone into the minibus regardless of protests, which generally subsided after a few miles. One of the worker's objectives in these outings was to provide challenges, to put the pupils in situations where they had to fend for themselves such as leaving them in a wood to find their own way back, or taking them to a rope bridge across a chasm and daring them to cross it or opening up areas of expertise that certain members could offer the group.

One way to encourage more group participation for everyone on these residential trips was to arrange a duty rota for cooking, washing up and cleaning the kitchen and dining areas. Only in David's case did this work out very successfully: the other three seemed to let a provisional rota drop rather too easily when they got one or two sullen refusals. All the workers ended up doing a lot of the chores though, because they were not prepared for everyone to suffer for the non-co-operation of a few. If on the other hand something slightly different, like a barbecue, was proposed, these same pupils could prove remarkably helpful.

Residential sessions, it was agreed by all the workers, provided an ideal opportunity for getting to know individual pupils in a relaxed and informal setting. Late night discussions produced some personal confidences which the pupils were expressing out loud for the first time; away from the school environment hopes and fears related to their private lives rather than to their public ones in school came to the surface. Strains of living at home; pressures from older boys to join in illegal activities; an earlier sexual experience which had left a deep emotional scar; such were the kinds of revelation the group worker could expect. But personal case studies deserve a chapter to themselves.