



Assumptions Made By Proponents of Mandatory Community Service Programs in Schools

(The following is taken from a conversation that took place on the CyberVPM online discussion group in February 1998. Subscriber KS of Seattle, Washington, had asked another subscriber who is against mandatory community service what the difference is between requiring physical education classes and requiring that students "volunteer".)

KS:

You asked what the difference is between requiring a PE class and requiring community service. There are two differences:

PE is a class, supposedly teaching skills for keeping fit --- while service is labor, it's work. Whatever ostensible good one is doing, it is still a job, tasks, working for someone.

AND community service is intended to teach *values* along with skills and knowledge, whether a specific value re contributing to a community need or the general value of volunteering. Whether we like it or not, not everyone agrees with this value. Why are we so willing to set it up as an absolute in spite of others' beliefs? Would we be so sanguine if someone else decided their "absolute value" should be enforced on us? Heck, several people went ballistic on this list over someone simply sharing his political point of view re gun control. What if the majority decided teaching all kids to use guns was important to teach them to be self-reliant and defend their family and property? I somehow doubt you'd be so quick to defend the forced teaching of that value.

Believing we should or must make community service MANDATORY assumes several things:

- 1. Making community service mandatory assumes that young people cannot be trusted to develop the value of community service on their own.*
- 2. Making community service mandatory assumes that you can make someone value something by forcing them to do it.*
- 3. Making community service mandatory assumes that individual's right of choice will be respected. (I'm particularly skeptical on this one since their right of choice as to WHETHER isn't being respected, why should their right of choice as to HOW?)*
- 4. Making community service mandatory assumes that everyone will be able to do it, that they have the time, the transportation, the ability, or that every school district will have the money to provide (buses, time away from school, tools, access) it.*
- 5. Making community service mandatory assumes that the best possible use will be made of the young people's times and talent and that the experience will be relevant to their schoolwork.*
- 6. Making community service mandatory assumes that local volunteer programs will have the volunteer opportunities, the staff, the recordkeeping ability and opportunity, the funding, the knowledge of how to work with young people, the willingness to use these volunteers productively.*
- 7. Making community service mandatory assumes that young people will feel comfortable objecting or dissenting to defend their own personal values when faced with authority or peer pressure..*
- 8. Making community service mandatory assumes that religious, political and social organizations will not take the opportunity to proselytize.*
- 9. Making community service mandatory assumes that opportunities to volunteer will exist for ALL the young people, including disabled kids. (I see reluctance to work with disabled adults --- why would young people be any different?)*
- 10. Making community service mandatory assumes that everyone SHOULD believe volunteering is an absolute good. Not everyone does, nor do I have the b***s to demand they do.*

I don't think any of those is a given.

I honestly believe that modeling is the appropriate way to teach the value of community service. Modeling shows that you care enough about something to live it. And it shows you respect a young person and trust them to observe, make choices, act on their own volition.

Volition --- volunteer, same root. "Willingness".

Your PE example may come back to haunt you. I did take it. It was required. I did hate it. I did resent being forced to take it. My disability put me at a disadvantage --- I did poorly and was tormented by other kids. I still hate PE. If I had a kid who wanted out of PE, I'd do anything I could to help him/her get out of it. I have never participated in a single sporting activity again in my entire life. I don't support sports programs. I don't vote for new stadiums. I tune out when sports news comes on. I don't buy Nikes.

No one forced me to volunteer. My mother volunteered. I had a very good first experience with volunteering. I love it. I put in at least 10 hours a week doing it. I speak and write constantly on the benefits of volunteering. I share my pleasure in volunteering with everyone. I even make respecting my volunteer work a condition of hiring me.

Granted, it would be poor reasoning to assume being forced was the only element to consider in each example, but it does make you think.

Apples and oranges.

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(Excerpt from conversation about mandatory community service in schools on the CyberVPM online discussion group, Wed, 18 Feb 1998 .It was reprinted along the other posts in the [Journal of Volunteer Administration](#). See the conversation in [CyberVPM Archives](#).)

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Last updated 04/19/00 .

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