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EDUCATION AND THE ADOLESCENT

by

DR LIM HONG KUAN
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS IN EDUCATION
FACULTY OF EDUCATION
UNIVERSITY MALAYA, KUALA LUMPUR

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Consumers' Association of Penang
87 Cantonment Road
Penang, MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The adolescent is a dependent; therefore, he has no social status in his own right other than that defined for him by his membership of an educational institution. He is either a 'student' or a 'drop-out.'

His problems are related to the fact that he is still growing and developing. The growth aspect is a personal issue and peculiar to his rate of maturation whereas the developmental aspect is systemic and influenced largely by the environment. The illustrative data from Lim (1974) and Chiam (1978) supported by data presented in 1982 at the National Conference on Adolescence indicate that the main adolescent problems are developmental in so far as they are related to their responses to the school experience. Their primary concern is not with their own physical growth and maturation but with examinations and their anxiety in coping with them. Their role in society is thus to be a good student and to behave well according to the expectations of their parents and teachers.

However, the problems of the adolescent are compounded by the fact that teachers are alleged to be 'wives and mothers first, teachers second' and that parents are constantly interfering with the teachers in the performance of the latter's duties.

The paper takes the view that to enable the education system to help adolescents solve their problems and prepare them for their role the teachers and parents have to co-operate positively, starting with the ending of finger-pointing at each other. It is suggested that an avenue exists for both teachers and parents to bring about co-operation, i.e. through the activities of the Parent-Teacher Associations. In order for this co-operation to be meaningful one has to recognise that it is not possible for all children to pass examinations and parents must be realistic enough to seek alternative means of educating their children if the latter 'drop out' not due to intellectual incapability or laziness. This pre-supposes that both the school and the parents have tried within the framework of co-operation provided by the PTA to overcome the 'problems' of their adolescents. What it means is that the youngsters are not to be written off because teachers are indifferent and parents interfere too much.

A number of steps are suggested whereby the members of PTA can help the adolescent, ranging from giving tuition, arranging car-pool, providing medical services to sharing hobbies and allowing the adolescent to acquire work experiences through apprenticeship or observation in the members' work places during school vacations. Even the idea of a 'Service Bank' or 'Service Exchange' is being thrown in for the consideration of the PTAs.

Through such co-operation as mentioned above and the consequent reduction of tension due to the pressure of exam-oriented schooling, the school and home can provide further positive experiences in the interest of giving the adolescent (1) a sense of competence, (2) a sense of significance, and (3) a sense of power.

Ultimately, for the education system to improve, society has to come up with a vision of what adulthood will be in the 21st Century in which the present adolescent will live out his or her life; and to begin to lay the groundwork now. Perhaps the 'diploma disease' will find its own cures in its own good time. Society owes it to the adolescent to be committed to improving the education system through co-operation --- and to be optimistic about it.

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1.0 Introduction

The theme for this Seminar is 'Education and Development' and I have been given the following items to focus on:

- (a) Problems of adolescents in Malaysia and their role in society.
- (b) Is our education system helping adolescents solve their problems and preparing them for their role?
- (c) Suggestions on improving the education system in relation to the above.

I shall endeavour in this paper to confine myself within the parameters given and be as relevant as possible within the context of present day realities. To begin with I would like to point out that the concepts of 'education' and 'adolescent' are understood in different ways by different people depending on the perspectives they hold on issues related to them. For instance, our Education Departments are called 'Jabatan Pelajaran' whereas the Education Faculty of the University of Malaya is named 'Fakulti Pendidikan.' Some participants at the National Conference on Adolescence held at the Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, on 2nd-5th August, 1982, voiced their preference for the word 'Pendidikan' and according to them the Ministry and Departments of Education should be named 'Kementerian dan Jabatan-Jabatan Pendidikan.' ¹

1.1 Definition

In general, 'Pelajaran' refers to all aspects of learning in a social institution; 'Pendidikan' refers to the upbringing and training in morals and personality in addition to formal learning of all kinds. In English, the word 'Education' is used for both (e.g. Ministry of Education, Departments of Education). Therefore, it poses no problem other than that of what it means in specific contexts. I do not wish to belabour this point as the various papers presented at this Seminar point to their specific usages.

As regards the word 'adolescent' I have written elsewhere on its different usages. ² In this paper, taking into consideration the items given me to consider, I would define an 'adolescent' as a youngster who is not in a position yet to play a full adult role in society, and 'adolescence' is what adolescents experience and what people who interact with adolescents experience. ³ Admittedly these are very loose definitions but they will have to serve for the purpose at hand.

2.0 Problems of adolescents in Malaysia and their role in society

Adolescents, like children and adults, have problems related on the one hand, to their personal growth, and on the other hand, to their responses to their environments. Normally growth and development are considered together even though psychologists have distinguished between them. For example, Sandstrom says that 'growth refers primarily to physical development: the stabilization of the skeleton, increase in height and weight, changes in the internal organs and so on' and 'we mean by development the processes that lead to greater strength and stability;' the processes being those relating to the interplay of 'heredity' and 'environment.'⁴

2.1 Maturation and Development

The problems of Malaysian adolescents can broadly be considered from two perspectives: the maturational aspect and the developmental aspect. Maturation occurs throughout life but is most rapid during the growth period from infancy to late adolescence. Maturation is the unfolding of innate abilities and capabilities such as learning to crawl, to walk, to talk, to reason, etc. It includes the process we call 'growing towards maturity' which may never be completed until senility sets in in some people.

Adolescents, therefore, encounter difficulties in their physical growth which makes them podgy or awkward at certain ages. According to Erikson adolescents experience an identity crisis.⁵ Others like Larkin point to the cultural crisis experienced by present day adolescents.⁶ Owing to inexperience they do not know how to handle their bodily changes and environmental influences. They may thus suffer from emotional upsets and social 'blunders' due to a lag in their socialisation in comparison with the achievement of their peers and the expectations of the adults - expectations which they have internalised as part of their socialisation. Piaget's work on cognitive development and Kohlberg's theory on moral development highlight the fact that adolescents have yet to achieve the higher levels attained by adults.⁷

2.2 Adolescent 'problems'

These various maturational considerations tend to create problems for adolescents especially if these problems are problems from the point of view of the adults but are not being regarded as such by them. For example, if to be thin or fat is regarded as 'undesirable' by the adult community, the adolescents perceive their being 'too thin' or 'too fat' as a problem especially when they see adults 'go on a diet' in

order to look presentable or beautiful. A chubby child is generally a happy child until he reaches adolescence and realises that being chubby is no longer 'acceptable.' In the same way if the educative process (which includes schooling as the central mechanism) places tremendous value on academic achievement and certification, then the related anxiety and the possibility of achievement or non-achievement of academic status become perceived as problems by adolescents.

They are pressured to conform to a standardised view of adolescent growth and development and as a result the high achievers and the low achievers encounter problems of 'adjustment' to the cultural norm as set by peers and the society at large. If society allows differential rates of growth and development and differential 'definitions of the situation' without imposing value judgments or standards, problems of adjustment would not be as acute as they tend to be in a modern, technological society, the hallmarks of which are standardisation and componentiality (apprehension of reality in terms of components) to name but two of its characteristics.⁸ Societal or external influences from peer, adult and material environments that are of concern to adolescents constitute the developmental aspect which can be distinguished from the internal influences which form the maturational aspect that is part of an individual's fulfilment of genetic possibilities facilitated or retarded by the environment.

2.3 Local studies

A number of local studies based on data obtained by the use of the Mooney Problem Checklist or adaptations of it have been reported or published. For example, Chiam has published about 'Problems of Urban Adolescents in Peninsular Malaysia'⁹ and Lim, and Chiam et al. have reported findings at the National Conference on Adolescence held at the University of Malaya in August 1982.¹⁰

As illustrations of the kinds of problems Malaysian adolescents are faced with, Chiam's data (1978) pertaining to 57 Form Four boys and 37 Form Four girls in Seremban, Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh are given below. For comparison, Lim's data (1974) obtained from a sample of 732 Form Four girls and 658 Form Four boys in Melaka list nine categories of open-ended responses. The 1982 data presented at the National Conference mentioned above supply sets of information which are quite similar. The use of the Problem Checklist has the drawback that it supplies the cues to the adolescents and there is the possibility that they may indicate a problem which they would otherwise not have thought of as a problem at all.

Table 1
SOME TYPICAL PROBLEMS CHECKED BY A SAMPLE
OF ADOLESCENTS IN MALAYSIA

| Problems | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| 1. Not spending enough time in study | 78.9 |
| 2. Worrying about examinations | 71.3 |
| 3. Trouble with Mathematics | 60.6 |
| 4. Don't know how to study effectively | 57.4 |
| 5. Worrying | 52.1 |
| 6. Afraid of failing in school work | 52.1 |
| 7. Parents not understanding me | 51.1 |
| 8. Not interested in some subjects | 51.1 |
| 9. Wanting to earn some of my own money | 46.8 |
| 10. Can't keep my mind on my studies | 46.8 |
| 11. Losing my temper | 45.7 |
| 12. Not taking something serious enough | 45.7 |
| 13. Lacking self-confidence | 45.7 |
| 14. Forgetting things | 44.7 |
| 15. Being lazy | 44.7 |
| 16. Afraid of making mistakes | 43.6 |
| 17. Unable to discuss certain problems at home | 42.6 |
| 18. Too little chance to do what I want to do | 41.5 |
| 19. Finding it hard to talk about my trouble | 41.5 |
| 20. Being careless | 41.5 |
| 21. Can't forget some mistakes I've made | 41.5 |
| 22. Wanting advice about what to do after school | 41.5 |
| 23. Having to ask parents for money | 40.4 |
| 24. Wanting to buy more of my own things | 40.4 |
| 25. Not telling my parents everything | 40.4 |

(Chiam Heng Keng, 'Problems of urban adolescents in peninsular Malaysia',
Manusia dan Masyarakat, Universiti Malaya, Jabatan Antropologi &
Sosiologi, Siri Baru, Jilid 1, 1978, Table 2, 54)

Table 2

THINGS THAT ADOLESCENTS WORRY ABOUT MOST

| | Percentage |
|--|----------------|
| 1. Worries relating to school studies and examinations | 42.7 |
| 2. Worries about ambition and employment | 15.8 |
| 3. Financial worries | 12.1 |
| 4. Family problems | 7.5 |
| 5. Personal problems | 3.4 |
| 6. Local and World problems | 1.6 |
| 7. Interpersonal problems | 1.2 |
| 8. 'No Worries' | 8.5 |
| 9. No Answer | 7.3 |
| | <u>100.1</u> # |
| | ===== |

exceeds 100 due to the rounding off of decimals.

(From Lim Hong Kuan, 'Profiles in Value Orientations: Common Ethno-Cultural Values and Some Class Differential Values of Malaysian Students - A Survey of Form IV Pupils in Melaka,' unpublished M.Ed Thesis, Fakulti Pendidikan, Universiti Malaya, 1974:5)

Therefore, based on available data, it is seen that the overriding problem of adolescents seems to be their pre-occupation with school studies and examinations. The first four items (as well as some other items) of Table 1 deal with school studies and examinations. In Table 2 above, 'worries relating to school studies and examinations' top the list of problems. There is no doubt that being in school is not an enjoyable experience for a large section of Malaysian adolescents. The other problems that they have may be regarded as normal human problems that the young and perhaps also the old regularly face.

Be that as it may, I wish to caution against accepting these empirical data at their face values. We simply do not know enough about the experiences of adolescents at school and at home to draw extended inferences to enable us to understand the root causes of problems such as indiscipline, delinquency and deviance, and the reasons why the majority are apparently healthy mentally despite the pressure of examinations and studies. There is, of course, the

tendency for parents and teachers to apportion blame when things do not turn out right, e.g. when a child fails or misbehaves.

2.4 Adolescents' role in society

In line with the trend established by the developed Western societies, the adolescents find themselves locked into an educational system which postpones for them the playing of a more fulfilling and meaningful role in society. The desire is to continue to acquire paper qualifications, i.e. to go up as high as possible in the academic ladder -- to go on to Colleges and Universities and perhaps to continue attending training Courses, apart from lifelong formal education being a desirable aim. The end result is that an adolescent does not begin to play a societal role other than playing the student's role until he 'drops out' of the formal education system. As Cohen comments

A "dropout" is a reflection first on the school, secondarily if at all on the student. If students cannot be expelled, then they must be promoted to make way for the next year's barbarian invasion. And when they reach the school-leaving age, it is to the credit of the school if it can persuade the youngsters to stay a year longer.¹¹

The fact that parents and schools would like the youngsters to stay in school as long as possible is, to me, indicative of the absence of worthwhile roles that society can provide for them outside the formal schooling system. Except for those parents who need their children to help them in a trade and who perceive no advantage for their children in going above the basic 3Rs, the majority of parents undergo anguish to see their children drop out of school for one reason or another.

2.5 Role ambiguity

Even those who are capable of continuing in school experience an uneasiness with their role as students. In the background of their thoughts and awareness is the nagging doubt concerning their present and future roles. The adolescents are constantly reminded that they are being prepared for adulthood. What nobody is clear about is what adulthood is supposed to mean for them in a rapidly changing society. To the thinking adolescent, the adults are saddled with their own problems and, therefore, 'pass the buck' from one to another. The parents surrender them to the teachers who in turn would like to coopt the parents in organisations like the PTA (Parent-Teacher Association), and even so, if they fail to deal with the adolescents who 'deviate,' there are other social agencies that have been created

to handle their 'problems.'¹² This is part of the mechanism of a rational, technological society which relies on hierarchy and bureaucratic procedures, working through committees, counselling sessions, etc. What kind of role is given to an adolescent under the circumstances? It would seem that the passive role is the best for them; they would steer clear of controversies with the authorities and be rewarded with 'positions' in the organisation which carry no real 'power' to change anything unless they are tactful and articulate enough to convince the adults. Not many of them are that articulate, not even University students. A situation like this in a developed country like the United States of America has prompted Kett to observe that adolescents are characterised by passivity, anti-intellectuality and conformity.¹³ According to Friedenberg, another American writer,

A youngster who has abandoned the task of defining himself in dialectical combat with society and becomes its captive and its emissary may be no rarity; but he is a casualty.¹⁴

2.6 Cosmopolitan values and vision of adulthood

In our urban centres the adolescents are much more open to the modernising influences with the wherewithal to adopt cosmopolitan values and standards. Unless the developing countries like Malaysia hold up to the adolescent their vision of adulthood and what constitutes preparation for adulthood, there is the increasing possibility of them encountering the same problems of youth as those faced by the developed countries, e.g. anomie or alienation, hedonism, rebellion, and so on. The school may supply roles for adolescents to play such as being prefects and office-bearers of societies and clubs, but for the majority the only role they have is to learn their lessons without stepping out of line and, of course, to pass their examinations.

3.0 Is our education system helping adolescents solve their problems and preparing them for their roles?

The maturational (growth) problems are personal in nature while the developmental problems are systemic in dimension. I think that the personal problems are being dealt with by our education system through the proliferation of helping agencies such as the PTA (largely absent a quarter of a century ago), school counselling services and in-service courses for teachers and staff, to name only a few of the within school mechanisms.

3.1 The 'diploma disease'

But in so far as the main problem of adolescents relate to the requirement to pass public examinations the education system which is exam-oriented exacerbates rather than helps to solve this particular problem. As long as the employment sector (public as well as private) continues to use academic certificates as the yardsticks for purposes of promotion, hiring and firing, the parents would continue to demand that the education system play this role and play it well. What is often not realised is that the education system cannot grant certificates to every one; some will have to fail in order to enhance the value of the certificates of those who pass. If only the education system can pass every one, by a stroke of a signature on a certificate, the adolescents would be rid of a worrisome problem. This is not to imply that other problems would not come to the fore but that would be a different 'ball game' altogether. For them the 'diploma disease'¹⁵ finds its own cures. Even so one may ask whether their 'life in school' has prepared them for 'life after school'? This question can be asked of the successful as well as the unsuccessful; the only difference is the level at which they 'drop out.'

3.2 Socialisation

Apart from the 'diploma disease,' the other problems of the adolescents can be ameliorated through better child-rearing practices and socialisation (provided what is said above about having a clear vision of adulthood and preparation needs have been disseminated as 'our way of life'). However, it is not suggested here that socialisation is an easy process to use in 'social engineering.'¹⁶ The school generated problems (such as the 'diploma disease' and others) need to be identified. Some of the innovations introduced after Merdeka require time for their effects to be determined although the shortcomings are generally known and attempts have been made to remedy some of them through public and private initiatives (e.g. the setting up of residential schools, schooling abroad, private tuition, private schools and private colleges).

4.0 Suggestions for improvement

There seems to be a crisis of confidence among the better educated sector of our population regarding our education system (witness, for example, the demand for education overseas, even for those of tender age, and the pressure for private tuition and entrance to costly private schools).

4.1 School level improvement

Unless the adolescents in playing the students' role can see the light at the end of the tunnel, there is nothing much the school can do to help solve this problem. In the meanwhile, what the education system can do is to supply what Jones regards as being important for American adolescents:

- (1) the need to experience a sense of competence
- (2) the need to experience a sense of significance
- (3) the need to experience a sense of power.¹⁷

Through the fulfilment of these needs while 'waiting' for societal roles, hopefully they may prepare themselves for adulthood.

4.2 Parental role in improvement

In considering directions for improvements in our education system I would like to address three issues which involve the parents for the reason that most of us are also parents.

- (1) Can parents avoid involvement in the education of their children? In other words, can parents leave to school teachers the task of teaching (and educating) their adolescents without lending a hand?
- (2) What are the expectations of parents towards their adolescents?
- (3) What can the parents do about the tensions experienced by the adolescents because of the pressure to perform well academically?

4.3 Role of PTAs

As regards the first question about parental involvement it must be pointed out that as recent as 25 years ago many schools did not have Parent-Teacher Associations. Through the PTAs schools have a channel of formal and informal communication with parents and the education authorities. Generally, PTAs do not attract more than a handful of concerned parents.

In a New Straits Times report of a paper presented at the Methodist Head Teachers' Conference in Kuala Lumpur recently, a complaint is made about the interference of parents. In truth the writer was referring to a mere handful of articulate parents from among the minority who take the trouble to liaise with the schools.¹⁸ On the one hand, he laments that there 'is no emphasis on moral education, no character-building and the pursuit of noble objectives' and that 'constant interference from parents and sometimes the community at large makes it difficult for the teacher to carry out his duties

consistent with the noble objectives which he (the teacher) would like to strive for.' On the other hand, he is 'appalled' that teacher trainees are told that the teaching profession is 'the noblest profession in the world.' It is hard to believe that anyone would make such an unqualified statement. Nevertheless, how can teachers have noble objectives when he is never told that the profession is a noble one, if not the noblest, in terms of personal services and sacrifices entailed in the teaching of the young including putting up with parental interference. Notwithstanding what is said about parental interference the point is that parental involvement in terms of numbers is not as great as may be imagined, and that there is scope for the majority to be involved to neutralise the deleterious effects of the vocal minority.

Parents interfere with schools for a variety of reasons but mainly due to anxiety over the 'paper chase' or the repercussions it has on their children who may not perform to their own or their parents' expectations. Agreed that teachers are often 'wives and mothers first, teachers second' but as parents are they not also subject to the same anxiety?

4.4 The demand for quality education

On all hands, the demand is for quality education, but such an education is perceived to be beyond attainment; thus the frustration and the finger-pointing. Perhaps it is futile to blame one or the other party; what is needed is the sincere revitalisation of the existing system through existing organisations such as the PTA which should be steered clear of cliques and politiking of all sorts. This suggestion may sound like 'wishful thinking' but a start has to be made somewhere.

In the past many parents did not find it necessary to pay teachers to give private tuition. Nowadays parents are worried. Why is it so? Is it because the school teachers can no longer be trusted to carry out their duties and functions and hence the parents fancy that 'they know as much, if not more than the teachers'? Why do children require extra tuition outside school hours, even those who perform marvellously in school? Any improvement to our education system can only come from answers to questions such as these.

One study in a school in Petaling Jaya in Selangor has shown that adolescents have less than two hours a day free time.¹⁹ In truth, like the motorists in the streets of the national capital who overtake and jam up traffic during rush hours, parents 'compete' to

give advantage to their young ones. So the children of parents who do not receive 'private tuition' are left behind because school teachers may not need to repeat lessons taught by tutors so as to avoid boredom for the few. At any rate 100 percent passes for everybody has never happened. This is the reason behind parental anxiety because there is as yet (in the eyes of parents) no satisfying alternative role for the young to play if he fails in his student role.

In the case of those who fail, can their parents accept that they are stupid? May be that is so, may be not, because intelligence cannot be equated with examination results. But this is no consolation for the dropouts and their parents.

4.5 Need for positive strategy

Until and unless both sides, the teachers and the parents, realise the futility of blaming one another, the psychological scenario is going to be, on the one side, the teachers saying to themselves that as long as they have informed the parents of the weaknesses of their children they are not guilty; while, on the other side, the parents feeling guilty that perhaps they should have spent more money on 'private tuition' for their children. Both sides are in a dilemma and the youngsters who have failed feel humiliated and 'hated' by one and all. A positive attempt to see this problem through is needed.

4.6 What parents and schools can do

The first step towards an improvement of this scenario is for all concerned to recognise that, after all solutions have been tried and the adolescent still does not make it, may be the school system as presently constituted is not suitable for him if he is not by any chance a stupid or lazy person. One alternative is to put him in a private school that offers a different curriculum (assuming, of course, that the education authorities do not demand that only the national curriculum is to be followed by the private institutes without modifications).

Another alternative may be in the form of cooperative effort by members of PTA who offer apprenticeship training in their firms or businesses. In the United States of America the concept of a Service Bank has been tried out. The 'Bank' is established with subscriptions from members who then proceed to register the kinds of services they need or they can offer in return. For example, if a member needs a Maths teacher for his son he telephones the 'Bank' which will go

through the register and contact the tutor for him. The rates fixed for the tuition will represent the amount of 'withdrawal' by that member who will in future be contacted to 'deposit' the equivalent dollar amount of service to repay his 'debt.' No money changes hands and only book entries need be kept by the employees of the 'Bank' which issues monthly statements of 'credits' and 'debits' to all members like any regular bank does monthly. Whether this concept can be put into practice by PTAs is left to the wisdom of such organisations.

Step two

The parents of the adolescents can determine whether their sons/daughters need medical attention. In this regard, may be the members of PTAs who are medical doctors can volunteer their services, if not free, perhaps on a 'service banking' system. For example, there is evidence to show that a maturational lag in the development of the frontal lobe system of the brain can result in neurophysiological dysfunction and in delinquent behaviour.²⁰ Ponitus, in an earlier study (1972), found that it is not so much their cognitive function that is impaired but that they cannot act on the basis of the knowledge they have.²¹ Sheppard cites cases of (1) too much insulin in the blood which keeps the blood sugar count too low resulting in restlessness and inability to think or act rationally, (2) hearing impairment, (3) hyperactivity from hyperthyroidism, and (4) abnormal brain wave patterns which cause behavioral problems.²² Medical problems such as these may lead the adolescents to be backward or delinquent and a system of monitoring such symptoms helps to avoid the kinds of parental frustration mentioned earlier.

Step three

Parents and teachers can determine whether or not their adolescents who do not have breakfast are unable to concentrate. Owing to our schools having double sessions, the morning sessions begin at 7.45 o'clock and adolescents usually get up as early as 5.00 or 6.00 in the morning if they were to catch the bus and beat the traffic jam. Some school buses do not go direct to school but make detours to collect passengers. Therefore, by the time the adolescents reach the school they may feel indisposed. A system like a 'car pool' organised by the parents may ensure that these students do not sit for hours in a crowded bus.

4.7 The scenario at the societal level

It is symptomatic of the times that parental expectations are rising each year. Related to the symptoms of the 'diploma disease' is the fact that in a modern technological society the economic system

is subject to periodic inflation and recession and thus jobs are not easily available for youths when unemployment for adults remain high; full employment is seen to be almost unattainable. The youths find themselves having to prolong their education for 'dropping out' means social and economic problems for parents and the community at large. Parents have two high expectations: (1) that education facilitates social mobility, and (2) that education guarantees a decent job.

In the coming decades, what kinds of education promotes social mobility and will education guarantee suitable employment for the next generation in the twenty-first century? According to Alvin Toffler in the 'third wave' which is said to be overtaking the fate of the developed countries, the patterns of living are said to be changing very rapidly.²³ Ways of thinking and behaviour are also subject to rapid change when the third wave obliterates the effects of the second and first waves. Inflation within a recession is, to him, a sign that the second wave is on its way out. Malaysia straddles the first (agricultural) and second (industrial) waves because our economy is still dependent on agriculture while we move on into the arena of high technology, the kind of technology spawned by the industrial revolution of the second wave that the developed world is perhaps keen to pass on so as to enable them to ride the crest of the electronic and computer revolution of the third wave.

Our children will live in a world perhaps quite different from ours. Are we confident of the preparation for the future through the education supplied by our present educational system? The world is faced with problems that are not amenable to being controlled by one person or agency. For example, drug addiction and indiscipline are among the problems faced by adults as regards adolescents.

4.8 Parental and school role in helping adolescents to cope with tension

What can the parents and the schools do about the tensions experienced by the adolescents because of the adults' emphasis on examinations and certifications? Tensions build up as the adolescents are pressured more and more to forego leisure hours or to spend them unprofitably. The feeling of anxiety leads to conflicts between adults and adolescents. Taking a cue from Jones let us consider the following possible steps.

Step one --- developing a sense of competence

Those who cannot or fail to achieve in any field in school experience a sense of incompetence. If left undetected problems of social interaction and learning tend to follow. However, if one

recognises the importance to the adolescents of feeling competent, the school and the parents can provide experiences whereby certain amount of confidence in themselves is generated. For example, an adolescent can be given roles in school or at home where he can perform responsibly and well such as planning school outings and exhibitions and paying bills and managing household budgets. Perhaps members of PTA can share their hobbies or skills with groups of youngsters during the long school holidays.

Step two -- developing a sense of significance

Much of the work in school may be felt to be unimportant if the adolescents fail to live up to the need to pass exams. Those who are bored are not motivated to achieve higher. If school learning is important for parents and the school and not so important for the adolescents, they may very well play truant and violate school rules and family discipline. The task of persuading them that school work is relevant and important to them personally is being negated by the fact that school learning is not directly 'applicable' to the jobs that they may obtain on leaving school.

However, if members of the community can offer 'apprenticeships' or 'observations' to these selected few in their offices, jobs or businesses during vacations when they can hang around and help out, the adults may impress upon them that what they do in school is significant after all if they want to 'get on' in the world.

Step three -- developing a sense of power

Adolescents in school are often made to feel small. They are unable to assert themselves in ways that the teachers may not misunderstand. For example, for 16 times a day in school, once at the beginning of a 40-minute lesson and once at the end, they have to stand up to say 'Good morning/afternoon' and 'thank you.' They have been doing this since they enter kindergarten until they come up to Form VI; no wonder in class after class and in school after school they do not perform the ritual with conviction and enthusiasm. They have to ask for permission for practically everything they do in school. If the bigger children were to be accorded different treatment, the question is 'where to draw the line?' Based on differential factors in homes and schools, the developing adolescents should have a sense of what they can and cannot do independently of the 'big stick' wielded by the authorities. The prefectorial system and co-curricular activities give selected adolescents some measure of a 'sense of power' but this is restricted to only a minority. Through frequent dialogues between parents and school the adult community may create more opportunities for adolescents to play meaningful roles to attain 'a sense of power.'

5.0 Conclusion

Unlike during the 'first wave' when adolescents work and play alongside adults,²⁴ the adolescents of the 'second' and 'third' waves spend a long period in educational institutions far removed from the realities of the working adults. The roles assigned to them do not give them the sense of competence, significance and power. As a result they experience being constrained and, therefore, occasionally rebel. A few suggestions for helping them cope with their lot have been outlined above. Ultimately, the whole concept of education has to be overhauled if one is serious about giving the adolescents roles other than those related to their status as 'students' or 'drop outs.'

Notes

- ¹ Proceedings of National Conference on Adolescence, Fakulti Pendidikan, Universiti Malaya, 2nd-5th August, 1982, forthcoming (in the Press).
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