

## Adult learners are taxpayers

IT was really exhilarating to read of the speech made by Miss Ko Siu-wah on the need for a "clear adult education policy" in the Legislative Council in your paper (January 20).

Miss Ko brought up six pertinent points:

1. A well-defined policy.
2. Systematic plan for the funding of a) Voluntary agencies b) Teacher's salaries.
3. Use of school buildings.
4. Teaching materials.
5. Professional and supporting staff.
6. Co-ordination and co-operation between the Government and voluntary agencies.

The points are concrete and relevant:

1. A well-defined policy on adult education should be for the whole of Hongkong, not just for the Adult Education Section of Education Department. A broad attitude should be adopted.

2. a) Funding made to voluntary agencies can be in the form of bulk subsidy, paying for qualified teachers, subsidising rent. b) If the present salary scale for teachers in the Adult Education Section is low compared with that of the polytechnic, how much lower it is for teachers in the voluntary sector.

3. The present plan of turning 18 primary schools into secondary schools is a good opportunity to plan for evening usage of these schools for adult education. Policies should be set down at planning stages and not till the day-schools are in operation. Evening schools for adults also need rooms for administration, storage and the use of workshops and laboratories with cabinet space for equipment.

4. Teaching materials are needed for technical subjects and basic adult literary programmes. Many adults taking technical courses have a background of a Chinese education. If more technical books could be translated or written in Chinese, learning would be made much easier for them. Adults in primary school level should not be given books suitable only for primary school-age children.

Relevant teaching materials of a functional nature should be developed.

5. Professional and supporting help for voluntary agencies should come from the Adult Education Section. A separate inspectorate should also be set up to give professional help in teaching method and material to organisations registered with the Education Department.

6. The Adult Education Section of the Education Department can really do more than what it does by way of co-ordinating and co-operating with voluntary agencies. They would be more effective if they adopt the attitude of a considerate partner working for the same course and not an attitude of another shopkeeper competing for customers.

That leads me to disagreeing with Mr Topley on the term "consumer" used on adult education participants. The adult learners attend courses because they feel a need; either because they want to improve on what they already know or to learn what they do not know. They are not shopping around.

It is only recently that we have the polytechnic and an increase of places in the technical institutes and up to the present time our secondary school system turned out a mass-produced product of unskilled and bookish graduates. Further training is a necessity if any of them is to obtain a decent job.

Mr Topley sounded almost contemptuous that adult education is "part-time and largely of a voluntary nature in terms of student participation." What education is not of a voluntary nature in Hongkong? Is our primary education voluntary?

If society owes anything to anybody it owes adult education to the adult learners who are taxpayers, who might have had a warped education from our education system and who want to improve to be productive citizens.

**THERESE SHAK (MISS),**  
Co-ordinator,  
Caritas Continuing and  
Adult Education Service.