

A step backwards in our education system

IT speaks well of the independence of the academic world that an authority no less than the Vice Chancellor of my university, Professor Wang Gung-wu, registers his public displeasure at the cuts in education spending envisaged by the Government (*South China Morning Post*, March 19) and even goes as far as to criticise the bad planning of government in the late 1970s.

It is time that teaching staff, researchers and undergraduates joined the opposition to the backward moves being proposed by the Secretary for Education and Manpower, John Chan. How on earth can the academic world in Hongkong remain so silent to proposals to increase class size? Secondary school teachers are already hard-pressed and demoralised.

How can Mr Chan so unashamedly suggest that 40 or 42 students in a class is an acceptable state of affairs?

The wave of student suicides in Hongkong serves as a grim reminder of the failings of this education system. Despite the levels of familial and peer support available to Hongkong students, many are so traumatised by the educational experience of our schools

istic didactics via Instep programmes.

- Students are not encouraged to be vocal either in class or outside it. Problems mount and find no expression except, in a growing number of cases, vandalism, triad involvement and self-destructive tendencies (drug abuse and, yes, even suicide). Teachers must take the lead in getting students involved in the educational process.

- Students are given a false picture of the world revolving around academic merit and attainment being measured in terms of grades. The present system induces a feeling of failure in the majority of students and should be replaced by an approach which promotes success for all (by changing the criteria of success from a societal to a personal gauge).

Hongkong University is blessed with a number of experts in all areas of education. It is now time for them to follow their leader and oppose the reduction of Hongkong's education system to a Third World or, at best, a Japanese model.

GEORGE ADAMS
Researcher
Department of English
University of Hongkong

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

WRITE: South China Morning Post, PO Box 47, Hongkong.
TELEPHONE: 5652292 - FAX: 8111048 or 8111278

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(uniforms, roll calls, detentions and the ever-present demands of a mindless devotion to marks) that suicide appears attractive.

The extraordinary manoeuvres to assert blamelessness on the part of school authorities sound more hollow and desperate with each new tragedy as do the efforts of the Education Department to produce guideline videos on how to spot a potential suicide victim.

What is needed is a new charter of schoolchildren's rights to be integrated into the present system:

- Schoolchildren are whole personalities, not learning machines and are entitled to professional help in developing into real people.

Many students arrive at our

universities incapable of independent thought or expression, immature and prejudiced in a number of respects regarding sexual behaviour, emotional health and whole-body awareness.

- As I have proposed in the last four years, all teachers should at least be trained in basic nurturing skills and the rudiments of child development. This would appear in the present climate to be more important than teacher's academic standing.

It is noteworthy that the former Extra-Mural Department of Hongkong University has been transformed into a crammer for promoting accountability and other professional qualifications and has reduced its support of human-

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