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### The educational divides in society



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#### LEARNING EXPERIENCES: We now have a wide choice of day, residential or international schools

GOOD schools and universities provide a large range of opportunities for growth -- for the living and learning experiences within the institutions. Such opportunities for growth are available in different kinds of schools, public and private, residential and day, national and international schools.

From the tremendous learning energy that comes from social memberships, schools become communities of engaged learners. Ideally, schools are not institutions where children come out with uniform knowledge, but institutions which offer learning as the key to the world, and where children are self-directed, creative, adaptable and uniqueness is recognised.

Elitist residential schools were once established for the children of the privileged in society to be the leaders in government, business and industry. With the democratisation of education, other residential schools were established to assist the children of the poor, who were disadvantaged, particularly, in their rural environments. Privileged opportunities and enlightened egalitarian policies to assist the poor were at two ends of the purposes of the establishment of residential schools. Today, in Malaysia, residential schools begin to be schools of choice.

In the past in some societies, the religious or secular purpose of residential school was to educate, "civilise" and eliminate all aspects of rural culture. Residential schools and colleges provide a certain kind of discipline, regulated and even regimented. They provide independence and the opportunity to live and interact with different kinds of people during the school semesters. The disadvantage of residential schools is

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that students are less involved with family but more involved with a larger number of less-involved friendships, and more active social life.

It is a myth that day school students are not as disciplined as those in residential schools. Day school students wake up early, take buses, travel the roads to and from schools, often with all kinds of people in buses, if they do not take school buses. Everyday they are exposed to all kinds of dangers to and from school. They have to manage their own finance and healthcare regarding junk food in school canteens and outside school grounds. Also, they have to manage the ordinary conflicts with parents, siblings, relations with the community and do a host of household work.

Students who go to day schools have more opportunities to learn and play side by side with students from other races and religions. Also, parents whose children stay at home have more responsibilities of looking after the children and influencing the character of children.

There may be the prestige of sending children to residential or international schools but there is great love in families eating together and caring for each other at home.

There is reflective poignancy in later years when children who become adults themselves remember the sweat, toils and sufferings or sacrifices of parents they observe in family life during the growing up years. Those in day schools have more of the fund of memories regarding family life.

Typically, Chinese and Indians do not send their children to residential schools in Malaysia, both because of policy dictates, and, because of the question of affordability as well. Therefore, children grow up with their families until they go to universities or the world of work. Indian and Chinese families tend to be closely knit with siblings developing close friendships and much family bonding, whatever their lot. Rich Malaysians, however, do send their children to some of the best residential schools abroad.

The purposes of the establishment of preferred educational institutions have to do with the aspirations of families and the policies of governments. Expatriate schools were established for the children of expatriates residing in the country. Private schools were established for the children from families who can afford to pay for the education considered of better quality.

Such schools may or may not be residential and are exemplified by Yayasan Saad College, or Sri Cempaka.

In Malaysia, there are over 92 international schools, with many more to be established. Recent policy changes have now seen an increase of Malaysians in international schools, an early example of which is Tengku Jaafar College.

Schools and universities are intentional communities designed as learning communities. The specific time cycles of schooling and tertiary education are stages for identity, character and competence development. The politics and sociology of educational choices across the lifespan are about the unarticulated paradoxes of power, and control by government, the aspirations and choices by families and the continuing, sometimes escalating, educational divides.

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