

OBSERVATIONS ON THE THEMES OF IYY '85 – from a social ecological perspective

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INTRODUCTION

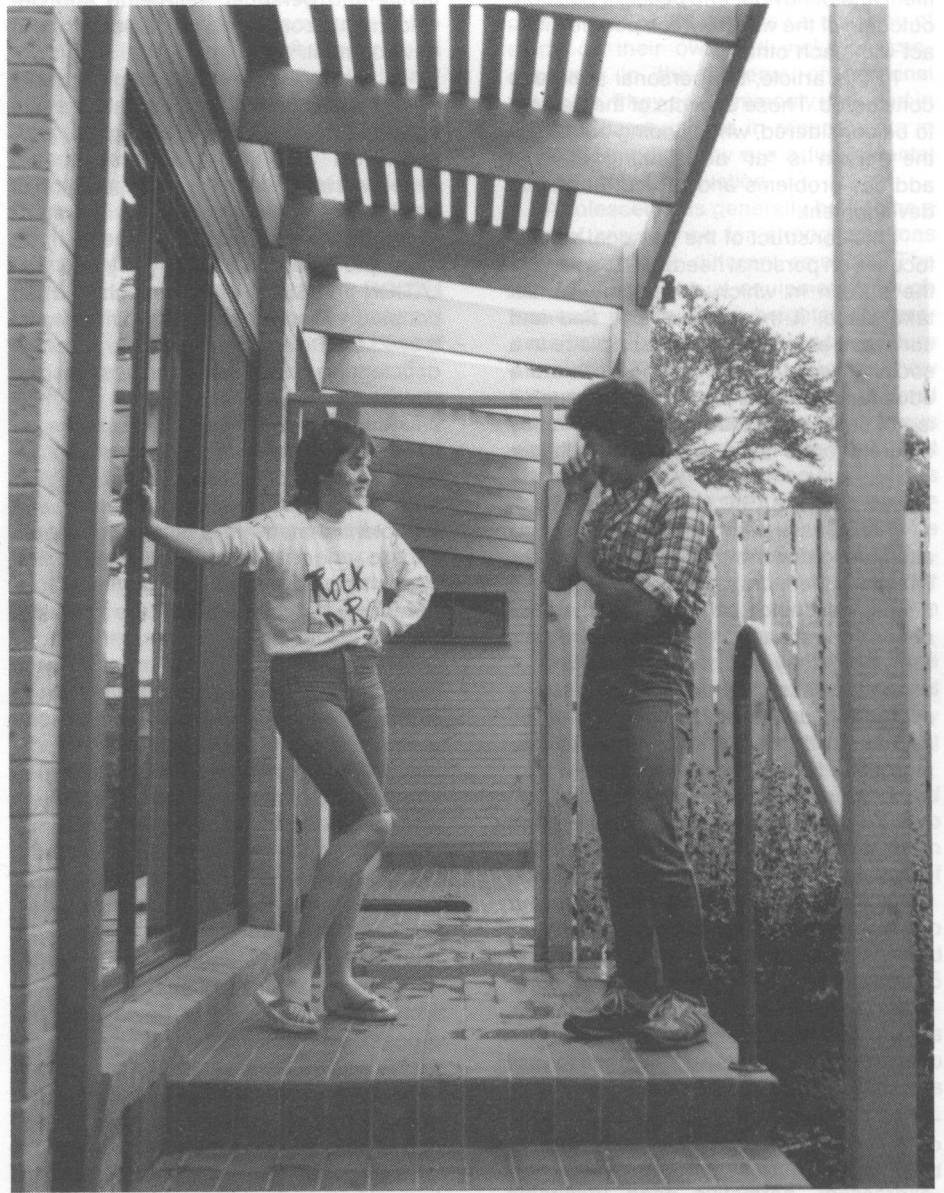
The writer has come to share with other recent contributors to this journal, a liking for social ecological approaches to human development and the problems besetting individuals along the way. Like them, he has been attracted to the work of Bronfenbrenner and Garbarino as it seems to reflect in an explanatory way, the variety and complexity of influences, effecting outcomes encountered in practice with adolescents and their habitats. Bronfenbrenner points out the importance of considering development of the individual in a context and proposed a series of systems surrounding the developing person—micro, meso, exo and macro—systems—in which decisions are taken; events occur; and quality varies according to their composition; all impacting on the development of the individual. Garbarino extends this thinking to include concepts of sociocultural risk and opportunity. Using such approaches it becomes possible to consider the way in which young people develop through participating in a social environment. The nature of their interaction with kin, peers, significant others and the organisations and institutions around them is also worthy of study from the point of view of maximising peaceful human relations at both the micro and macro level.

With the above in mind, a series of three articles has been prepared to focus on individual development for youth; secondly, on those aspects of the environment in which young people participate and which greatly influence development and behaviour; and thirdly, on the quality of interaction between young people and their environment. It is intended that they should bring together some basic concepts, in an overall framework within a social ecological perspective, which might enhance the understanding of those dealing with young people and their problems as they use their lifespan to develop lifestyles which for them will lead to a satisfying lifecourse.

PART 1 – DEVELOPMENT

In this article the focus is on some broad dimensions of the person which influence development and behaviour.

When thinking of youth, the notion of development conjures up in the writer's mind the allied ideas of genetic endowment, undergoing progressive change through maturation and exposure to developing experiences. This change for the individual is set in the context of his or her lifecourse, proceeding in stages from



conception to cremation. It alters direction from time to time through transitional events and decisions made at these times and a wide variety of environmental influences. The outcomes of the multitude of risks and opportunities encountered by the individual daily depend on his or her personal perception, personal coping skills, personal resources and influences present in the social network or environment surrounding that individual.

In attempting to grapple with the problem of normalising institutional environments for children and young people, the writer has engaged in a process of conceptualisation and reconceptualisation. This actually was directed at search-

ing for concepts and frames of reference which might be of benefit to workers in the residential child and adolescent field. Attention was drawn to three major areas for consideration. Firstly to a set of basic concepts of relevance to understanding the development and behaviour of individuals. This was called the personal sphere of influence. Secondly, a set of concepts was sought, which might more adequately describe the many sources of environmental influence which exert pressure on the individual, or from which, the individual draws strength and resources to develop and behave in his or her idiosyncratic way. This was called the environmental sphere of influence. Third-

ly, it was seen as helpful to find a set of concepts which more adequately explained the things which go on between the individual and the environment. This set was termed the transactional sphere of influence. Each of these sets of concepts accords with the IYY themes. *Development* in terms of personal development, *participation* in terms of those aspects of the environment which influence development and behaviour and *peace*, a possible outcome of the way in which people interact with each other.

In this article, the personal sphere is considered. Those aspects of the person, to be considered, when finding out where the person is "at" and finding ways to address problems and promote ongoing development.

This construct of the personal sphere focuses on personal needs and aspects of the person in which development must take place, if the person is to find and survive in a ecological niche, a place in a social network. An ultimate goal of mature adult functioning is presumed, although it is acknowledged that it might take many different forms in many different cultures.

THREE CORE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

There have been quite a few good attempts to describe basic human needs. These range across biologically based needs, psychological needs and social needs and vary according to the purposes for which they are being classified. A connection has often been made between needs and drives or needs and motives and some effort has gone into distinguishing needs from desires, wishes or wants.

At the biological level, we all experience some physiological imperatives arising from the need for food, air, water, sleep, excretion of wastes and avoidance of pain and discomfort. Sexual behaviour appears to relate to biological incentives and psychological and social learning. In the psychological area, Maslow 1954,² listed basic needs as physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and the need for self actualisation. Bradshaw 1972,³ has analysed need according to four dimensions – expressed need (what people ask for), felt need (what is felt but not usually expressed), normative need (desirable standards that are relevant in a given culture) and comparative need (how a specific need is defined and dealt with in varying cultures). Parad and Caplan 1965,⁴ posited four basic needs relevant to mental health when considering a child growing up in a family.

1. Love for one's own sake;
2. A balance between support and independence with respect to tasks;
3. A balance between freedom and control with respect to instinctual expression, and
4. The availability of suitable role models.

There have been older and more extensive lists like Murray's 1938 list of 12

viscerogenic needs and 28 psychogenic needs.⁵

Commonly in the social dimension, when services are being considered, needs are translated into social goals such as employment and income, physical and mental health, basic material needs, education and learning, protection and preservation of the environment, protection and safety of people and property, family and personal well-being and development, community organisation and development.⁶

In seeking some connecting concepts of high relevance to the personal domain but capable of spanning biological, psychological and social dimensions, the writer was impressed by the description of basic human needs posited by the ethologist Robert Ardrey 1966. These three concepts of needs are IDENTITY, STIMULATION and SECURITY.⁷ Especially when coupled with other personal dimensions, these serve to alert caregivers to potential deficiencies and opportunities in the socialising environment which may be effecting personal responses. It is of interest to note that Ardrey posed an opposite to each of these needs arising from their non-satisfaction and when seen as potential motivators or noxious states add to understanding. For identity the opposite is anonymity, for stimulation-boredom and for security the opposite state is anxiety.

These three core human needs have been placed in a central position of the model in respect to personal dimensions of explanatory and opportunistic importance. When dealing with youth in the 12-25 age range, workers need constantly to evaluate the ability of the young person to obtain and maintain, a sense of security, the channelling of energy as youth seek stimulating emotional experiences and the frequent self concern and behaviour related to issues of identity and self worth.

The development process, which when considering societal needs is also the process of socialisation, is largely directed to the achievement of a positive identity. As Conger 1979 put it, "The ultimate aim of any process of socialisation should be to permit each adolescent to develop his or her unique potential as a human being consistent with the rights of others".⁸

There can be little doubt in the minds of workers with youth that much behaviour derives from the search for pleasure and avoidance of pain, seeking good feelings and escaping from bad ones. The trap for the adolescent in much of this is the opting for quick outcomes without seeing or heeding the subsequent negative consequences of some quick sources of gratification or relief. In these stimulating experiences behaviour is learned and sometimes habituated therefore forming an important part of the developmental process.

Finally the need for security forms the base from which the individual operates. The assurance of basic sustenance pro-

vides the energy and departure point for wider exploration of life's possibilities. Ability to cope with novel encounters is often determined by the presence or assurance that a safe refuge is accessible. The fact that home exists somewhere, or that some adult with commitment is on stand by to pick up the pieces adds to the confidence of the young person tackling tough developmental tasks.

FOUR DEVELOPMENTAL ASPECTS OF THE YOUNG PERSON

Another set of basic concepts occupies a position of crucial relevance in understanding and assisting young people to develop lifestyles which lead to a satisfying and productive life course. These concepts are the PHYSICAL self, the INTELLECTUAL self, the EMOTIONAL self and the SOCIAL self. The human being is an acting, knowing, feeling and relating entity and each of these conceptual components is inextricably bound together with the others. Nevertheless, there is benefit in regarding each of these concepts as a focus for our understanding of processes and events if full benefit is to be obtained from existing knowledge and experience.

Some heed has been paid to what are termed the developmental tasks of adolescence. One of the better known exponents of life stages, Erickson 1968, describes them along the following lines.

- Achieving independence from parents.
- Establishing new working relationships with peers of both sexes and adults.
- Adjusting to sexual maturity and changing roles.
- Achieving personal educational choices and vocational choices and goals.
- Preparing for active citizenship.
- Developing a philosophy of life.
- Developing a sense of one's own identity.⁹

Donnelly 1979 describes them as, "learning an adult sexual role; achieving independence from parents; developing a conscience and moral values; getting along with age mates of both sexes; and developing intellectual skills."¹⁰

There have been a variety of contributors to development theories of childhood and adolescence although it is a difficult area of research to pursue. Considerable common understanding exists about the stages of physical maturation (Sandstrom 1979),¹¹ there are viewpoints about cognitive development (Inhelder and Piaget 1978),¹² psychosexual and psychosocial development (Freud 1900-1930),¹³ Gesell 1940, 46, 56;¹⁴ Havinghurst 1962;¹⁵ Erickson 1963),¹⁶ and moral development (Piaget 1932,¹⁷ Kohlberg 1970),¹⁸ social and emotional development (Warren 1966)¹⁹ and sociocultural development (Baumrind 1980,²⁰ Bronfenbrenner 1979).²¹

In dealing with whole human beings from a practical point of view, the writer often finds it helpful to consider each of

the four aspects when endeavouring to understand what is happening to a particular individual.

THE PHYSICAL ASPECT

Adolescence is the time of puberty, growth spurt and sexual maturation. Bodily features, so important for self image and identity, undergo dramatic change. Legs, arms, head, trunk, hair, shape, sex organs, voice following messages from the central nervous system and endocrine glands undergo a remarkable metamorphosis which converts child to adult in many ways.²²

Kids are not so easy to catch and control any more unless they are mesmerised by a mirror or sorting themselves out in the bathroom. The problem of adjusting to changing sizes of legs, arms, feet and fingers sometimes brings on bouts of clumsiness and awkwardness. Early and late maturers are often thrust into inconsistent social situations. Changing appetites and bursts of vigour and fatigue puzzle those around them. Some old physical skills have to be reworked with new images and gear and new skills can be tackled. Potent sexuality appears with genital changes and secondary sexual characteristics and the results have to be coped with in terms of the reaction of parents, comparison with peers and the attention of the opposite sex. In addition, the success of sexuality as a marketing device provides ample models for cultural ideals. The adolescent has to reconcile these with his or her own new body which by now is taking on the shape and size which will remain through much of adult life. At least it will not get very much better in terms of performance potential once the closing stages of our defined age group has been reached.

The biochemicals, the cells and the tissue, organised into their intricate and inter-related systems, gear up for inter-dependant interactions with the world at large providing the owner with relative advantages and disadvantages is getting his or her needs met. The way in which this bodily equipment is perceived by self and others will have a great deal to do with the developing identity and the ways in which the individual finds or learns to overcome any physical deficits, genetic or accidental, will influence the future choices available in the ongoing life course.

Workers must be prepared to understand the implications for the person of any such deficit and the means to overcome them, or at least be alert for the potential for such problems and sources of help where required. Too often, neglected or misunderstood physical problems snowball into major disadvantages.

The undetected hearing problem can become a major educational and behaviour problem and so on. Not infrequently problems with a physiological base are misunderstood as moral problems or psychological problems and in so doing they may become so. Sometimes

also problems which originate in other domains such as the social, are amenable to correction by some physical adjustment such as diet, exercise, physical training, drug therapy or surgery.

THE INTELLECTUAL ASPECT

This aspect includes the store of knowledge accumulated by the individual and changes in his or her mode of thinking. Adolescence is a time when the breadth and depth of the knowledge of the individual is extended in secondary and tertiary education. As a result of significant choices, life course is altered as certain areas are chosen for specialisation and others discarded.

In Piagetian terms the individual is expected to arrive at the formal operations stage of cognitive development, a change in mode from a concentration on "what is" to being more able to consider "what is possible" through capacity for abstract thinking.²³ This represents a significant expansion in thinking power. Our understanding of the way the brain works to provide us with faculties such as memory and reasoning is still, relatively speaking, in infancy. It is quite clear, however, that the power of intellect has placed the human being in an amazing position in the natural order of things. With the capacity to obtain, store, process, retrieve and communicate information, through thinking and the use of language, spectacular mastery of much of the natural environment has been achieved by the human race.

The state of the individual's knowledge, his relative ability to acquire it and use it, will often determine many opportunities. It will also considerably affect the probability of particular outcomes in particular situations. It may affect the person's place or niche in society and will often affect behaviour in combination with other characteristics. Along with the way the individual feels, his or her knowledge about a task or anticipated event, provides a major component of motivation, competence and confidence in handling it. Workers with youth are familiar with the need to check the state of the young person's knowledge before reaching conclusions about their reasons for doing or not doing things.

There are differences in intellectual endowment and these are overlaid to a considerable degree by learning opportunities. The combined result at the present time has a marked effect on the range of employment opportunities and opportunity for further education and training. A variety of approaches and a considerable amount of knowledge has accumulated about human abilities, particularly in the fields of educational and industrial psychology. Much more, however, remains to be discovered and the means of describing the present state of the art is still somewhat complex and to some extent confused. Much has been written in the field of intellectual disadvantage and learning difficulty and

there has been some attention given to so called "gifted" children.²⁴ The writer believes, however, that much remains to be done in the area of identifying and capitalising on the intellectual capacities of many youth.

THE EMOTIONAL ASPECT

Emotions are an accepted part of life and they contain physiological and cognitive components. They form such an important part of life that they are worthy of study on their own and inclusion conceptually in the scheme of personal variables. They are commonly included in art and literature and in recent years in scientific study. They are a fundamental component of motivation.

Adolescence is generally held to be a time of resurgence for strong emotions and qualitatively different emotions. The arrival of new sexual equipment through maturation at puberty heightens awareness in the sexual domain as the culture permits, albeit sometimes grudgingly, new experiments in excitation, arousal and orgasm. Double standards of various kinds add to earlier experience of guilt and anxiety. Forays in to new social situations with peers and adults provide opportunities for self-consciousness, shame and doubt which from Erickson's standpoint permit the integration of identity or conversely identity confusion or diffusion as maladaptive outcomes.²⁵

Larger stronger bodies increase the probability of negative consequences from aggressive encounters and mastery over angry impulses, hopefully a product of earlier learning, is tested.

Ability to cope with boredom and frustration in a constructive way is also tested as one queues up for participation in desirable activities or tolerates a lack of means to achieve desired aspirations.

Workers with youth will often attest to the difficulty of working with the mood swings of 12-13 year old girls and 14-15 year old boys.

Individual temperamental differences which are quite apparent at birth begin to have much more obvious consequences as independence approaches. The individual is in a position in adolescence to capitalise on emotional strengths and usually, as a consequence of responses from peers or significant others, to modify or learn to live with negative emotions and the intra-psychic defence mechanisms which have grown up around them.

Emotional strengths and weaknesses often form the basis on which individuals are judged suitable or otherwise to perform certain roles. Considerable experimentation takes place in respect to attachment, bonding and the cathecting of people and objects. Similarly grief, depression and despair are often encountered as a consequence of breaking bonds.

Social workers trained to establish appropriate relationships, to use empathy and the controlled expression of emotion as a helping tool find in work with young

people great challenges, great frustration and great rewards. The adolescent period presents a crucial stage in the pathway to emotional maturity. A state which is generally seen as an ability to acknowledge the emotion present in self and others, to empathise and to constructively deal with these feeling states either alone or in concert with others.

THE SOCIAL ASPECT

The social aspect of the personal sphere concerns those features of the person specifically relevant to his or her place in relation to other persons. It concerns the social skills of communicating and relating according to a variety of modes of interaction. It concerns those aspects of the person which affect membership of a couple (dyad), triad, tetrad, small group, collective, crowd, organisations, community, neighbourhood, social network, sub-culture, culture, ethnic group, nation, race, or society as a whole. Angyal (1941,⁵¹) posited dual developmental streams in each person. One stream of developing autonomy and another stream of developing homonomy. (Man as an individual, man as a social being)²⁶

The human child's long period of dependency makes social behaviour mandatory as does the sexual basis of human procreation. The speed and complexity of many aspects of modern living both arise from and make participation in large organisations an imperative. Another consequence of the modern industrial and post-industrial society appears to be the stretching of the period of adolescence, the age of entry to puberty has been slowly falling over the last century and the age at which education and training is seen as complete has in many situations been extending. In spite of the formal adoption of the age of 18 as the age of majority, market pressures and other realities result in youth status sanctions and adults rights, responsibilities and benefits being variously withheld or applied up to the early twenties, some-times twenty-five, e.g. legal penalties, insurance premiums, family allowances.

One approach to viewing social emotional maturity has been in use in Victoria for some time. It is referred to as the I level classification system and drawn initially from the work of Warren, Grant, Sullivan and Grant, 1966 in California with the Youth Authority. It seeks to classify individuals according to a concept of inter-personal maturity.²⁷

Based on a conception of normal development where the person moves from simple and egocentric views of themselves and others, through various levels, toward a much greater empathetic and intellectual awareness of the world and capacity for independent action based on a greater understanding of self and others. It suggests that many of the young people who get into trouble do so because of a failure to advance up the levels or because of neurotic forms of adjustment to inter-

personal relations at higher levels. At lower levels it is suggested that a tendency to see life simplistically and excessive conformity to peer group or other sources of power causes trouble. At higher levels neurotic conflicts lead to excessive avoidance or acting out behaviour. It accommodates situational emotional reactions and that small group who are psychologically well adjusted but to a set of standards which are at odds with society. In Victoria over the past two decades, considerable effort has gone into minimising the penetration of young people into the criminal justice system. Where entry becomes inevitable due to behaviour exceeding the threshold or community tolerance effort is directed to restoring personal responsibility and community re-entry as soon as possible in a graduated way. Warren's scheme is not dissimilar to Kohlberg's approach to moral development where he argues for a 6-staged approach in the development of individual's morality through three general levels. The writer believes that the study of morals belongs in the social dimension.

Kohlberg's three general levels are the pre-conventional level, through the conventional level, to the post-conventional, autonomous or principled level, each with two stages. Stage 1 is the punishment and obedience orientation. In the child's perception, the goodness or badness of an action relates simply to the physical consequences and not some underlying meaning. Stage 2 is the instrumental relativist orientation. Rightness of action is that which satisfies the child's own needs and sometimes the needs of others. Some reciprocity of relationships and sense of fairness may be present but in a simple and instrumental way. At the conventional level, Stage 3 is the interpersonal concordance or "good boy - nice girl" orientation. Good behaviour is that which pleases, helps and receives approval from others. Maintaining relationships through conformity to stereotypical images is perceived and valued. Stage 4 is the law and order orientation. Authority, rules and social order are recognised in their own right and respected to the degree that doing one's duty is the right thing. The post-conventional level introduces a degree of moral principle which extends beyond the presence of power and the person's identification with reference groups. Stage 5 is the social contract legalistic orientation. It is suggested that this is the official morality in American culture. Right actions may be defined in terms of general individual rights and agreed standards. A clear awareness exists of the relativity of values and opinions and procedures for obtaining consensus or solidarity. Outside these agreed realms, personal opinion can exist and be subject to contract and agreement but the resulting emphasis is on a "legal point of view". Stage 6 is the universal ethical principle orientation. Right is defined according to abstract and ethical principles which are self chosen and be-

come matters of conscience. Rather than concrete rules they are more in the nature of a feeling for justice, reciprocity, and equality in human rights and relationships and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons. (Kohlberg 1970). Kohlberg obtained some cross-cultural evidence which was indicative of the universality of these levels and his data indicates the presence of all stages among adolescent populations but with significant shifts in the number of individuals moving to Stages 4, 5 and 6 between the ages of 10 and 16. This was true of all the cultures studied although differences in the proportion of youth at each stage were apparent. Clearly, stages 5 and 6 are not reached for many until late adolescence or adulthood and movement seems to be related to interaction with others who have attained high levels.²⁸

The process of socialisation is concerned with preparation for a variety of social roles and sufficient in the way of social skills and guiding philosophies to manage risks and opportunities. Knowles 1972 made the following contribution to the search for a taxonomy of social roles and related personal competencies. The way in which these roles are performed will change as the individual develops and as demands and expectations alter during the different stages of life. The seven roles and their related competencies are listed below.

The role of *learner* is enhanced by competence in reading, writing, computing, perceiving, conceptualising, evaluating, imagining and inquiring. *Becoming a self* (with unique self identity) is enhanced by competence in self analysing, sensing, goal-building, objectivising, value clarifying, expressing. The role of *friend* is enhanced by competence in loving, empathising, listening, collaborating, sharing, buying, saving, loving, taking responsibility. The role of *worker* involves career planning, delegating and managing. The role of *leisure time user* involves knowing resources, appreciating, performing, playing, relaxing, planning, risking and reflecting.²⁹

As late adolescence merges with early adulthood, the young person is likely to be confronted with developmental tasks such as, selecting a mate; learning to live with a marriage partner; starting a family; rearing children; managing a home; getting started in an occupation; taking on civic responsibility; finding a congenial social group. (Havighurst 1962).³⁰

Attention to the social aspect of development includes physical, intellectual and emotional aspects of the person but emphasises their interpersonal application. Communication and interaction with others as a partner, subordinate or superior in the work place, at play, in the community and in the household brings in the need to consider the full range of human rights and responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Although some attention has been

given to the detail of personal factors affecting personal development in youth, it has by no means been an exhaustive treatment of those factors. The intention has been to provide a relatively simple frame of reference around which the worker with youth can accumulate further knowledge and experience. It can be seen that these basic dimensions related to personal development, three core need areas of identity, stimulation and security and the four aspects of the person, physical, intellectual, emotional and social do draw attention to a great deal of change and potential for change during the years from age 12 to 25.

The writer often finds it useful, when thinking about these aspects of a person to use an apple as an aide memoire. At its core are the basic needs related to identity, stimulation and security. The apple itself represents the personal sphere. (Fig. 1)¹³

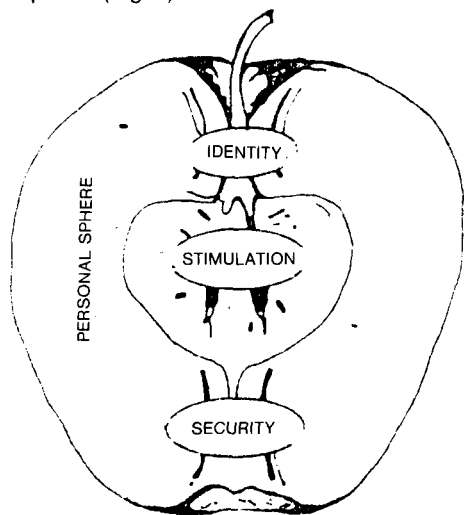


FIGURE 1: Three Core Need Areas of the Personal Sphere Identity, Stimulation and Security (Owen 1982).

The apple representing the whole person, can be cut into quarters conceptually to represent each of the four aspects of personal development, physical, intellectual, emotional and social. The first letter of each aspect provides amnemonic **PIES**. Our aim can be to get the business of development for young people into apple pie order. (Fig.2)³²

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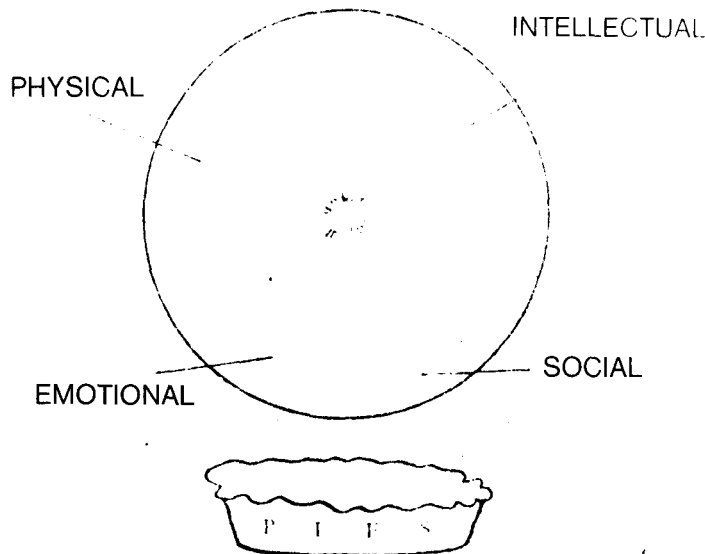


FIGURE 2: Four Aspects of the Personal Sphere: Physical, Intellectual, Emotional and Social (Owen 1982).

The task remains to convince the rest of the world that the business of the personal development of young people is serious business, requiring the exercise of social responsibility on the part of the whole community. That personal development is about helping each other to figure out where each person is "at" and empowering each to get where they need and want to go as contributors and recipients in the life of the community.

Subsequent discussion in two following articles, will focus on basic conceptual areas which may be of use in describing environmental influences on the development of the young person and a group of concepts of value in describing the transactions of the person with the environment. The writer suggests that a great deal of personal development and behaviour results from the interaction of the individual with those parts of the environment which make up the person's lifespaces.

It may help the cause of International Youth Year 85 to see more clearly that part of the world in which young people participate and by considering alternative ways of interacting some progress in the issue of peace might be made.

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