Discovering and Inspiring
The Leader in Your Child

I had an interesting conversation over lunch with a western mother of 2 teenagers from Los Angeles. She said that “helicopter parenting”, prevalent in Hong Kong, is not uncommon to them even halfway across the globe. To prevent her children from growing up in such a high pressure environment, this well-educated and affluent mother is sending her children to more remote schools and colleges instead of the elite institutions in Beverly Hills where they live. Reason for the move? It is her simple belief that education or any effort you make in life is the “footwork”, but the results or return depends a lot on timing, character and principles. She is now a film maker in Hollywood, but it all began on her 21st birthday when she happened to sit next to another film maker on the plane. She said, “Sometimes, by clinging onto your model too tightly, opportunities cannot come through.”

Why are we so tempted “helicoptering” our children nowadays? Who is, or should be determining the pace and learning curve of our children? As a busy working mother of two, I dare to represent most working parents to admit that spending long nights on homework, or driving the children around town for classes isn’t exactly the best way to relax after a long day or week at work. “There is no choice...!” is the excuse for most parents to keep the treadmill spinning for their children or themselves.

There really isn’t a choice if you think you should raise a child the “market” or “others” ask for. Every child is unique, so is every parent and every family. There is no single winning formula. Before you map out a flowchart or launch on a journey which you believe will catapult your child to success, please pause and define a “smart” and “successful” child or person. Do you think spoon-feeding or even force-feeding a child with knowledge and information will create a successful person? The greatest people in history or in our times are mostly thinkers, pioneers, inspirational leaders, inventors, adventurists, or even dreamers! Their achievement did not spring from textbooks or worksheets, but rather stem from their ability to inquire, imagine, take risk, push the boundaries, and challenge the norm. It is important, especially in the early days of education, to instill in children yearning and curiosity to know more beyond textbooks. While teaching them fundamental skills and knowledge, try to encourage them to question, and perhaps answer their questions with a question. Keep the momentum of conversation and enquiry. The most
common scenario we observe in classes and at home nowadays is a teacher or parent unilaterally transmitting information or instruction to the children. As for the children, they are so overwhelmed by the spoon-fed data, there is no desire or time to explore beyond.

Parents need to convince themselves that playing is learning. Play allows a young child to be "the boss" and for a moment dominate his territory and thinking, thus building self-esteem. Play helps children learn about the world around them. Play also helps to build social skills and elicit emotions and feelings from the child. And with no doubt, play fosters language command. (Referenced from “Importance of Play in Child Development” by Ellie Dixon)

Travel is another powerful way to inspire our children. -“The world is a book and those who do not travel read only one page.” – St. Augustine. How much can you read, talk or google about a place or culture? Our children are truly blessed and privileged today when travelling is affordable for many families. Take a topic your children learn from school and bring it to life through travels. Integrate learning and real life experiences. In this way, your children can think in a complete sphere, making inferences and lasting memories of what they learn from school or books.

My son has developed an ardent love for prehistoric animals ever since we gave him a dinosaur toy 3 years ago. From then, he has learnt all the classifications of the animals and built a collection of over 100 fact books and encyclopedias on dinosaurs and reptiles. His interest has extended onto other animals and he goes on to learn about marine life and insects. We take him to zoos and aquariums whenever we travel, and last summer, we finally fulfilled his dream by taking him to the dinosaur town of Drumheller in Alberta, Canada, where he got to see paleontologists at work and dig his own fossil sample. He was absolutely in awe and inspired. He has set his goal to become either a paleontologist or marine biologist to be closer to the animals he loves.

We were fascinated during the trip too. We were touched to see his eyes shine with eagerness to learn more and to pursue his dream and ambition at the young age of 6. The market may tell you, we do not need more paleontologists, how many more fossils are there?! But we see something more precious than bread and butter. We want to nurture this flame and passion in the little boy who so innocently follows his heart and
desire to learn. Without passion, one can only be a follower. We aspire to be parents who can create a leader in our children. More so, we hope that one day, our children can lead us into the future.

“Do not quench your inspiration and your imagination; do not become the slave of your model.” - Vincent van Gogh

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