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The Cultural Context of Early Home Education: A Case Study of Familial Impact on Child Development

by  
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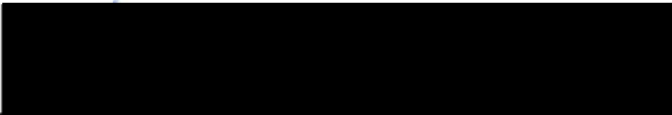
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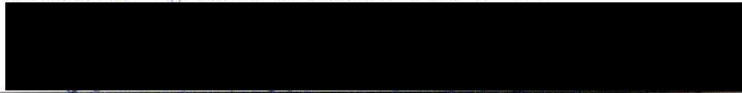
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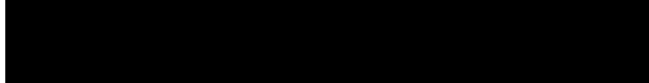
in the Department of Communications and Social Foundations

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the difference between two sets of families, one recently arrived Chinese family, and one long-time resident Canadian family, in raising their children and preparing them for school. By using a descriptive case study, the researcher explored the differences of parental involvement in children's homework, home education, and the cultural impact of parents' beliefs, philosophies, attitudes and educational style on their children's beliefs and attitudes towards learning.

Interviews were conducted separately with parents of both families and their seven-year-old boys. Interview questions were designed to concentrate on the children's daily life after school, parents' beliefs about efforts and personal abilities, parents' rearing and training practices in their children's early age, children's attitudes and interests in learning, and children's performance at school. Interview transcripts were made and the observer's comments and recollections of researcher's childhood were also included.

This study showed that the parents of the two families were very supportive and concerned about their children's education. This was revealed in several aspects: reading stories from an early age, helping children with school work when necessary, and frequently communicating with their children.

However, differences were also very obvious in their daily practices. For example, the Chinese parents were more active in the involvement of their child's homework than the Canadian family; the Canadian mother

had a more broad sense of communication with school than the Chinese mother did; both parents held very different opinions about disciplining their children and the methods of raising their children. It was also discovered that the Chinese parents and the Canadian parents had very different beliefs about personal abilities and objective efforts. As a result, parents' differences in their beliefs, attitudes and practices exerted a strong impact on their children's behaviors, beliefs and attitudes towards learning.


Examiner:



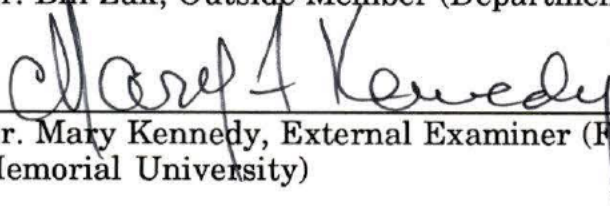
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And my friends Theona and Hua.

**Dedication**

With deep affection to my parents  
and my devoted husband, James

## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 My background**

I was living in China for twenty-five years until I came to Victoria to pursue further education in graduate studies . As I am the only daughter at home, my parents have exerted a great deal of their strength in educating me. Their efforts in the past twenty-five years have made it possible for me to get into one of the top five middle schools in Shanghai, finish four years of university and come to Canada to get my Master of Arts degree. Graduate courses with Mr. Lon MacIlroy and Dr. Antoinette Oberg initiated a reflection back upon myself as the product of my culture and my parents.

### **1.2 Personal interest and beliefs**

In the past two years, I have been able to acquire an increasing amount of information about the North American Educational systems, educational reform and the school status quo. I was astounded by the reports of poor school achievement of American children in some jurisdictions, which have been released in various research reports and comparative studies. Similarly, I have also heard Chinese immigrant parents complain about the school system in Canada. The controversy of an inadequate education system is also reflected on the Year 2000 plan that focused on a reform of the education system in British Columbia. It seems to me that in addition to teaching traditional academic subjects, teachers here perform a myriad of tasks which include keeping children off the streets, keeping them away from drugs, dealing with teenage pregnancy and teenage parents, preventing violence in school and other

responsibilities. This is very different from my vision of education and my vision of the role of the school. Given the diverse problems in the present North American school system, I cannot refrain from asking: Where are the parents? As far as I can discern, children from different homes are brought up in different environments. They mature physically, emotionally and intellectually at different rates and develop different interests. School teachers are often unable to deal with a class of children with so many differences. In fact, education and schooling is not the same thing. Parents are the child's first teachers, and home is the first school. The way in which the child is educated by the parents and affected by the home environment will be very influential in the long term development of the child.

Recollecting pieces of my childhood experiences, I more and more realized that my parents' beliefs have greatly influenced me. My husband has noticed that I like to quote my parents in our daily experience. I started to ask myself: How did I become the way I am now? How can I relate my experiences to my parents and the education I received from them? What have they done in helping me to become educated? Why was it important for them to exert their energy and spare time on my education? What is the attitudes of Canadian parents towards their children's education? How different is the home education between the Chinese family and the Canadian family? To what degree could parents' belief, attitudes and behavior affect their children?

### **1.3 Purpose of study**

Compelled by these questions, I decided to do a comparative descriptive study on two families from different cultures: One newly-arrived Chinese family and one Canadian family. I intended to find out the differences between two sets of parents in raising their children and preparing them for school, whether their philosophies, their beliefs, and their educational styles had influenced the younger generation and how. I hoped that this study could help me to observe and investigate what occurs within the family unit, which is the fundamental framework of a child's education.

I decided to focus my study on two sets of families with three members each as my study subject. By using a descriptive case study of two seven-year-old boys, one from a recently immigrated family and one from a longtime resident Canadian family, I tried to explore the differences of both families and parental involvement in homework, home education and pre-school preparation through individual interviews of the respective parents and children. I also hoped that I would be able to discover the parental influence that was consistent in each culture , and something that we could learn from both cultures.

#### **1.4 Research questions and assumptions**

I decided to focus my study on research questions that reflect my own interests and that have been raised previously by other researchers. These questions are as follows:

1. Is there any school work for the children to bring home every day? Do parents give children homework to do after school? What kind of involvement have their parents played in their children's homework?

Would the involvement make the learning environment easier? And how?

2. What are the parents' views on subjective efforts and objective abilities? Stigler et al. (1990) have found that American parents and Asian parents are very different in beliefs of effort and ability. I wanted to see whether differences existed between the Canadian parents and the Chinese parents. And how different are they ?

3. What have these parents done in preparing their children for school from an early age? What are the differences in parents' child rearing and training practices in these two families?

4. What is the impact of parents' behaviors, beliefs, ways of child-rearing and training on children's attitudes and interests in learning, and their performance at school?

5. What is the attitude of parents from different cultures towards physical punishment? In traditional China, children are used to being trained to control emotions that are considered adverse and disruptive to harmonious social interaction. Punishment of aggressive behavior among children is a characteristic Chinese child-rearing technique that may account for the learning of self-control and emotional restraint at an early age.

### **1.5 Definition of terms**

Case Study: A study based on an thorough compilation of actual cases. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or the case, it aims to uncover or interpret the interaction of significant factors and the characteristics of the phenomenon.(Merriam, 1988, Shorter Oxford Dictionary)

**Descriptive Study:** A study with objective descriptions which are based upon observed or empirical facts exclusive of historical, theoretical, cultural or other considerations. (Merriam, 1988, Short Oxford Dictionary)

**Qualitative Case Study:** An intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit.(Merriam, 1988)

**Semi-structured Interview:** An interview guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, but neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging world view of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic.(Merriam, 1988)

**Home Education:** The development of knowledge, skill, ability, moral sense, or character by experiencing and training through the family members.

## **CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Introduction**

In Chinese culture, the sense of family plays an important role in parental support and the social and economical success of the children. The family, to most Chinese, is still the basic unit of society in which the child receives great care and socialization. "Family relationships are, to this day, perceived as essential in mainland China, despite the extreme changes that have taken place in the sociopolitical structures beyond family." (Wu and Tseng, 1985, p.7) The family is still the principle source of support, and motivation. The solid sense of the family, the firm foundation and root of being, and the value of learning and achievement which are rooted in Confucian principles, deeply influence Chinese parents' attitude and commitment toward the child's education. Through the different aspects reflected in a review of the literature, I hope that a more clear and profound picture of family can be obtained.

### **2.2 Chinese value of education and achievement**

"In China, the value of learning and achievement prevails in every society." (Wu and Tseng, 1985 p.11) Education ties in with one's career, future success and the enhancement of personal welfare. As Lee points out: "East Asians have traditionally placed a high value on education as a means for achieving upward mobility, social respect and self-improvement." (Lee, 1987) In the family, Chinese parents pay special attention to training children to adhere to socially desirable and culturally approved behavior. One way to measure the success of parental intervention is the ability of children to perform well in school.

### **2.3 Wholeness , the Chinese sense of family**

One of the characteristics of traditional Chinese culture is the strong emphasis on the family system. In traditional China" it was the family, not the individual that was the important unit in social transactions." (King and Bond, 1985, p.36) "Family socialization practices were marked by a particular stress on the cultivation of collective consciousness and responsibilities of the members." (King and Bond, 1985, p.37) In Confucian social theory, "the family occupies a central position; it is not only the primary social group, but it is the prototype of all social organizations." (Mei, 1967, p.331)

This especially demonstrates the Chinese sense of "face". In contrast to the West, the Chinese concept of "face" concerns not only the individuals directly involved, but the family as well. Such sayings as "The children's misbehavior is the fault of the father," or "the ugly things (of the family) should not go out of the house gate," underscore the sense of joint responsibility and shared fate involved in family membership. "One's face is a collective property." (King and Bond, 1985, p.37) The children were taught that "A man needs face like a tree needs bark." In view of this, children are compelled to be cautious in their daily behaviors and try their best at school or in other social activities so that they can, whenever possible, win the face for the family and avoid blemishing it.

The Chinese concept of face sees the individual's behavior as presenting the collective qualities of the family, including the faults or virtues of the ancestors. If one family member accomplishes some extraordinary achievement or demonstrates virtuous behavior, then the

whole family gains face. If one member fails or show unacceptable, deviant behavior, the whole family loses face. Thus the consequence of individual family member's behavior are shared by the whole family. (Jing Hsu, 1985)

All the family members are supposed to support and maintain the family harmony by sharing love and intimacy among members. Children are taught to be obedient to the parents. Parent, which means the head of a family in Chinese, becomes the source of mental consolation, support and motivation. "Family members depend on each other for support, both emotional and carrying out daily tasks" (Jing Hsu, 1985). This prevailing strong sense of obligation and responsibility among family members is still cherished as Chinese virtue. The family closeness and loyalty have not been weakened in spite of the extreme social and political changes that have taken place in mainland China. "The essence of traditional Chinese culture has been well preserved and carried forward." (Lee, 1985)

## **2.4 Development of Canadian Family Structure**

In Canada, the family has been and will continue to be accepted as the cornerstone of the society. (Chant and Doxey, 1990) It has been described as "the bastion and support of personal life and individuality." (Hayford, 1988, p.6) However, family structures and family life are changing dramatically. Accompanying with this, the lives of young children within Canadian families have great diversity. (Chant and Doxey, 1990, p.43) Chant and Doxey (1990) also stated:

Historically, the family has been seen as a self-contained, self-sufficient unit that provides for the economic, educational, recreational, physical, and emotional needs of its members. Many of these functions are now served by other societal

institutions. Schools, for instance, have supplemented, extended and replaced or compensated for the family. (p.44)

Even the interpretations of the word "family" have been dramatically altered over the years in Canada. Eichler (1988) addresses the definition of the family as follows:

A family is a social group which may or may not include adults of both sexes, (e.g. lone parent families), may or may not include one or more children,(e.g. childless couples), who may or may not have been born in their wedlock (e.g. adopted children or children by one adult partner of a previous union). The relationship of the adults may or may not have its origin in marriage (e.g. common-law couples) they may or may not share a common residence (e.g. commuting couples). The adults may or may not co-habit sexually and the relationship may or may not involve such socially patterned feelings as love, attraction, piety, and awe. (p.4)

This definition captures the rapid changes that have been taking place in family values and organization, and highlights the potential variety in family conditions for young Canadian children today. (Chant and Doxey, 1990, p.45)

## **2.5 Chinese literature on effort**

Confucian thought, which has dominated the Chinese code of conduct for three thousand years, has never ceased in its influence on Chinese society. The societal emphasis on education and the attitude of working hard all stem from Confucian beliefs about learning, ability, and effort in achievement. In his writing, individual differences in potential are de-emphasized. Great importance is placed on the role of effort and diligence in modifying the course of human development. Such statements as:"Being diligent in study means devoting one's effort to it for a long time," and "One who will inevitably succeed in one's study is the one who is

diligent and takes delight in study" have long been used as a doctrine on the children.

Similarly, there are a number of old short sayings that encourage the child to work hard. They include "If you are not diligent in study when your hair is black, it will be too late to sigh about learning when your hair turns grey," and "The rock can be transformed into a gem only through daily polishing." In the studies conducted by Stigler and Perry (1990), they have found out that Japanese and Chinese educators are more comfortable in the belief that all children, with proper effort, can take advantage of a uniform education experience. By attributing relative failure to lack of effort, individuals may expect that they can do better in subsequent tasks by working hard. Stevenson et al. have also noted that parents who believe that all children have equal amounts of natural ability more likely to believe that success can be obtained through diligent study. (Stevenson, Lee, Chen, Stigler, and Hsu, 1990, p.60)

## **2.6 American beliefs on innate ability**

### **2.6.1 Historical reason**

The American interest in innate ability has been evident for many decades. Early in this century, Americans greeted the intelligence-testing movement with great enthusiasm. Alfred Binet, the French psychologist who created the first intelligence test, intended it to be a simple, reliable means of identifying children who would not benefit from traditional schooling. American psychologists, such as Lewis Terman, who popularized the test in the United States, placed far greater importance on it as a measure of innate abilities than Binet had intended.(Harold and

Stigler, 1992, p.96) From then on, American people "gradually came to emphasize the limits on what can be accomplished imposed by innate differences among individuals." (Harold and Stigler, 1992, p.221)

### **2.6.2 Problems affected by beliefs on innate ability**

Here, the argument is not on whether the innate abilities exist or not, the point is that an overemphasis on innate abilities could have negative implications for children's development and education. In the comparative studies among American, Chinese, and Japanese families, Stevenson et al.(1990) concluded:

"when parents believe that success in school depends on ability in contrast to effort, they are less likely to foster participation in activities related to academic achievement that would elicit strong effort toward learning on the part of their children."  
(p.66)

Children who believe that their high ability is sufficient to ensure success find little reason to work hard. Alternatively, children who perceive themselves as having low ability and doubt that they can master their lessons through continued effort also have little reason to work hard.(Harold and Stigler, 1992, p.94)

## **2.7 Parental involvement**

### **2.7.1 Parent involvement in Canada**

Parent involvement in the education of children is not new in Canada. In the relatively recent past in Canadian history, many children were educated solely in the home by the family. (Mayfield, 1990, p.240) In

the past two decades, parent participation in early childhood programs has been increasingly growing in North America. (Berger, 1981, p.4)

Early childhood educators have been recommending parent involvement in their children's early development and education for hundreds of years. It is only in recent years that parent involvement has received significant and increasing attention from educators, professionals, and policy-makers in Canada. (Mayfield, 1990, p.240)

Parent involvement in children's program is based on parent participation and shared learning. " It is possible through the efforts of the parents themselves, with the help of experienced and committed people who believe in cooperation as a democratic and fulfilling way of achieving their goals."(Stevenson, 1990, p.221)

A recent review of Canadian early childhood programs identified three trends in this area:

(1) the notion that early childhood education must consider family and parent as well as child needs; (2) the idea that parents are really partners in , not clients of, early childhood programs and services; and (3) the acceptance of the school as a partner in developing programs and services for preschool-age children and their families. (Biemiiler, Regan and Lero, 1987, p.45)

By comparison, Chinese parent involvement is still limited in the scope of a family. This could due to the strong influence of Confucianism. According to Confucianism, formal schooling is only a small part of education. Home is the more important source of education. When an infant is born, his or her innate ability and knowledge should be nourished and should be trained by his or her parents as a filial child and as a social being.

### **2.7.2 Positive impact of proper parental guidance**

The importance of involving parents in the early education of their child has been described by several researchers. (Cook, 1986) Children are naturally conservative: they need security, stability, direction.(Van Manen, 1991,p.54) For a child to grow up and explore the world in the context of security means that the child feels protected by the love and care of some adults. It is significant that the term security is associated with caring. Children who feel that somebody worries about them do not have to worry unduly themselves.... To provide support to a child means that the adult is reliable and can be counted on to be there dependably and in a continuing way.... All children should be able to expect from their teachers and parents a sense of involvement in life because all children need direction--- if only the direction that confirms that the choices they have made are good choices. (Van Manen, 1991, p.56, p.59, p.61) Parent involvement in an early childhood program can foster continuity for the child, parent, and teacher between home and school. (Mayfield, 1990, p.242)

Numerous reviews of the literature and research on parent involvement have reported that parents' involvement in education programs for their young children can have long-term positive effects on children and parents. (Berrueta-Clement, 1984) For example, parents became more aware of their role in teaching their children, became more confident in their parenting skill, and became more concerned with educational and life goals for their children; (Slaughter, 1983) The parents and children developed more positive attitudes towards education; (Berger,

1981) The parents became more responsive to and with their children, less authoritarian and more confident. (Love, 1976)

In one word, parents can play a central role in fostering children's learning and development. (Harold and Stigler, 1992) Good parent involvement requires much thought and effort to best meet the needs and goals of the children. (Mayfield, 1990, p.245) Other researchers have also found that the parents' expressions of warmth, support, interest, affection, and encouragement have a great impact on a child's achievement. (Dolan, 1983; Scheinfeld, 1983) Like Van Manen stated, "The adult can only have pedagogical influence over a child when the authority is based, not on power, but on love, affection, and internalized sanction on the part of the child. (1990, p.70)

## **CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Research Subjects**

This study focuses on a recently immigrated Chinese family and a Canadian family. Interviews were conducted with the father, mother and children of both families. The Chinese family who very recently arrived in Canada was considered to be influenced very little by the new Western culture and was, thus, regarded as an accurate representative of Chinese culture. The Canadian family interviewed was third generation Canadian. As it has been mentioned in the last chapter, the family structures in Canada have dramatically changed in modern times, thus I had difficulty in finding an intact family with a similar background to the Chinese family.

Two boys from both families were seven years old at the time of the study. The Chinese boy is the only child of the family. The Canadian boy is the first of two children. They were both in grade two and were quite able to express themselves clearly and logically during the interview.

The two families in my study had similar backgrounds. Both parents had similar educational levels. In the Canadian family, the father, an instructor at Camosun College in Victoria, British Columbia, was doing his Master's degree in administration. The mother, who has a degree in Theatre, was working part-time as a manager in a science store. In the Chinese family, the father, an English major graduate, was an editor and translator before he left China; the mother, who was a teacher at a Chinese university, was doing her Ph. D. at the University of Victoria. The mother had been in Canada for two and half years, while her husband

and son had just arrived in Victoria four months previous to the time I interviewed them.

### **3.2 Research Method**

The qualitative study, which has only gained recognition in the field of education recently, harbours a long and rich tradition. (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982, p.xiii and p.3) It "seeks to expose the roots of the human experience, making it truly a method for all the humanities, as well as for all human beings" (Kidd and Kidd, 1990, p.ix) In Thomas Langan words:(Kidd and Kidd, 1990)

It is an ontological neutral method designed to illumine the interaction of subject and object.... It is about real subjects knowing real objects in real situations, reflected upon in such a way that it is difficult to ignore or down play any dimension of subject, object or setting.(p.ix)

As Merriam (1988) pointed out, the qualitative study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit." It is "particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and relies heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources."(Merriam, 1988) Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities, the world is not an objective thing out there but a polymerization of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. During the qualitative study, "one does not manipulate variables or administer a treatment. What one does do is observe, intuit, sense what is occurring in a natural setting."(Merriam, 1988) The qualitative approach to the research enables one to examine and

to try to understand the way a particular collection of people thinks and feels about a particular set of topics so that one can find more delicate, specific data that is beyond the reach of quantitative research.

The dominant strategy for data collection in qualitative research is interview (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982), for the interview helps us to "observe behavior, feeling, or how people interpret the world around them." (Merriam, 1988) Interviewing, through its open-ended and loosely structured nature, "provides a vehicle to help the researcher understand, in considerable detail, how the interviewees think and how they come to develop the perspective they have." (Merriam, 1988) A good interview could produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives. (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982) Patton (1980) explains further: "We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe." Rather than aiming to prove a specific hypothesis, the objective of the study is to, through the freely expressed points of view revealed in the interview, let the picture emerge from the collected information.

Questions were designed to guide the interviews so that the interview could be focused around particular topics and may be guided by some general questions. (Merton and Kendall, 1946) While conducting the interview, several strategies were used to enhance the participant's level of comfort. At the beginning of each interview, a free chatting session was conducted between the interviewer and the interviewee. The participants were also encouraged to unconditionally express their opinions. There were no right or wrong answers. Except for a few interruptions, generally the interviewees were allowed to express themselves in an unhindered way. There seemed to be a genuine effort on the part of the participants to be open

in sharing their thoughts because they expressed a strong interest in this research.

The interviews were done separately among family members. The child's interview questions were identical to the parents' interview except for minor changes required to make the questions relevant to the child's own performance. Because the Chinese family was just recently arrived, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin. This made it easier for them to express their opinions clearly and thoroughly. English was used with the Canadian family. The interview conducted in the home setting made the interviewees feel uninhibited and enabled them to freely express their thoughts and feelings.

### **3.3 Research Process**

After the interview transcripts were translated and written, a copy including observer's reflective memos was sent to each family to avoid the distortion or exaggeration of their interview and to ensure the accuracy of interpretation. Both families read it carefully and responded with suggestions in a few areas that they thought needed to be improved or clarified. Changes were made and the use of the transcript in this paper was also approved.

While preparing the transcripts of the interview, I became more and more uncertain about the structure and patterns of the findings. I seemed to have entered a blind alley. After all the transcripts were done, I examined them, read them over and over again, thought about them, and at last found some common points, some related qualities and characteristics. Relationship and patterns started to emerge at that time.

It seems that this experience could be explained as "reflexive" and "reflective" defined in Kidds'(1990) book, *Experiential Method*. They describe it as follows:

The primordial function of consciousness is the reflexive rather than the reflective. The reflexive is immediate, an intensification of consciousness. The reflective is mediate, a recuperating consciousness. The reflexive is a centripetal movement, a constituting power more original than intentionality. The reflective is a centrifugal movement.(p.9)

The interview transcribing seemed like a reflexive period. My self-consciousness, my own experience and the recollection of my past, tangled with the information I collected from the two families, threw me into uncertainty. I was unable to tell which was which. The reading of transcripts allowed me to intensify, and expand that which is expressed through focused attention. "This is just like time-lapsed photography which allow you to slow down time and reveal which cannot be seen in a single grasp. (Kidd and Kidd, 1990, p.27) Thevanaz describes this effort of concentrated attention as an act of will. It is a way of becoming conscious of that which is present in action and bringing that action into clearer and sharper focus. (Thevenaz, 1962, p.128) "Reflection is the re-living of an already existing understand of self and world." (Kidd and Kidd, 1990, p.10) In Chinese, *xin* means either heart and mind. they are integral. "Heart is the reflexive, mind is the reflective. Neither exists without the others and although not the same are inextricably one." (Kidd and Kidd, 1990, p.11)

After some consideration, I decided to add the recollection of my family, my parents, and myself as part of the interview, thus developed a framework to organize and structure the data that had been gathered. The

findings and interpretation were later presented according to that framework and the structure.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: INTERVIEWS WITH TWO FAMILIES\***

### **4.1 Interview with the Chinese family**

#### **4.1.1 Interview with J, the husband**

This interview occurred at 3:15 p.m., April 16, 1993, on a sunny Friday afternoon. J, Hua's husband was waiting for me at home. Hua hadn't returned from school yet. J and his son S had just arrived in Victoria December 28th, 1992 for a visit to Hua who is now studying for her Ph.D. at University of Victoria.

I was very interested in their feelings about their new life in Victoria, so I asked J how he felt about their visit. He said that it is a wonderful opportunity to broaden the view of their son S to a new world. He added that it is also a good time for their son to learn English. Although he and his wife are both English major graduates from Henan Normal University, he still has little confidence in his English. He told me that he tries to avoid helping S with the ESL course in case his accent and other weak points would have a poor influence on S. But he said that both he and his wife spend at least three or four hours each week helping S with his Chinese.

Just then, the school bus arrived back home. It was 3:40. After we greeted each other, S asked Daddy for a cup of water. After he finished the water, he ate the orange which was supposed to be eaten with lunch. Then he sat at the table, doing his homework.

J told me that every time S comes home, he will sit at the table doing Chinese and Mathematics which are assigned by mum and dad. They had brought all the grade two to grade six textbooks from China. Mum and daddy determined the homework the day before, after they had checked

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\* The interviews are presented in the order that I spoke to them

their son's assignments. Hua is quite busy with her school work and J has to work almost full time in a restaurant at night. They both agree that life here is much harder than in China. They always come home exhausted, but they feel able to deal with S's school work.

Every time S has problems with his homework, he asks his daddy for assistance. As J didn't want S to interrupt us too often, after several interruptions, J suggested S do Chinese instead of Mathematics so that he can help S afterwards. S still has questions to ask. Sometimes, J explains very carefully to him. Other times J tells him to use the dictionary. J explains to me later that Hua knows S's school work better than he does. Before Hua left China for Victoria, she was the one spending much of the time with S's school work and daily life. After she left China, J took on all the tasks. At present, both are taking almost the same amount of time with their son. However, J still thinks that his wife spends more time with the boy than he.

When I asked J what determines school achievement, he said that it is quite a complicated question to answer. After a while, he said that he thinks a good family environment is very important even though it is not an absolute answer. Second, he believes that a competitive atmosphere in class is better than a class without competition. He feels that the competition between students is also a competition between parents.

[O.C. (observer's comment) The sense of competition between parents probably pushes them to spend more time helping their children with school work.]

As to what determines school achievement, personal ability or effort, J's answer is that both are important. He said that it is hard to separate

them. He also pointed out that except for a few mentally disabled youngsters, most children have no difference in their talents and ability.

Considering that physical punishment was a traditional way in educating children, I was very interested to learn J's view on this topic. He said that he never gives S physical punishment. If S did something wrong, he would reason with him so that S would know why his parents were unhappy with him. He seemed very sure that disciplining children should start from a very early age. The earlier the discipline at home, the easier to educate the child later. He said that parents' example is another important aspect in influencing the child's character.

J emphasized that everything they are doing now is for the son. Both he and his wife are ready to sacrifice everything for S. J said that S still misses life in China. He said that in the residential area of his institute, S had a lot of friends with whom he could play. All the colleges nearby were at a similar educational level, and their children were the same age too. Outside their apartment building, was a very big courtyard where S could play with other children. Their concern was not that the child spent too much time playing but not enough. Chinese teachers gave pupils a lot of assignments to do at home. He said: "That is why, in China, I encouraged S to play, while here, I push him to spend more time studying".

#### **4.1.2 Interview with S, the son**

S is now studying at Gordon Head Elementary School. He doesn't feel it is hard to get used to the new life. He still misses his Chinese friends with whom he played everyday at school and at home.

He told me there is no homework at his school. He doesn't find mathematic papers difficult at school but he said that he is still making one or two mistakes. When I asked him how he felt about his mistakes, he answered that he should learn what he doesn't know. When I asked how, he said that Mom would help him and the teacher too. When I asked: "Are you sure?" His answer was very definite. He said that he only wanted to learn more things. It doesn't matter whether he will be the top student or not. [O.C. S feels very confident in his school work because he is very sure that he can get support from both parents and teachers.]

S said that most Canadian pupils don't work hard like Chinese pupils, who have a lot homework to do, but here, many teachers do not assign homework. He doesn't believe that Chinese are more clever than Caucasians. He thinks that he is a good student in China and here too. He doesn't think he is brighter than others. The reason why he does homework or schoolwork quicker and better than others is just because he doesn't talk while working. He says that if you talk, you cannot concentrate and that's why you cannot finish in time. [O.C. Maybe, this is what Hua told him to do and it became engraved deeply on his mind.]

Then I asked him whether it meant that effort is more important in school achievement. He said more effort should be spent on reviewing old things and learning new things.

He said: "I don't like a lot of homework. If it is not too much, that's O.K. If it is really too little, I will do more by myself until I find it is enough for me.

S said when he was in China he liked to go to school because he could play with classmates. Here, he has no children with whom he could play .

He likes to go to school because he can take the school bus. He likes riding on the school bus, and enjoys watching the bus driver.

When I asked S if a wizard could give him anything he wishes, what would he like? Without hesitation, he said: "Car." He told me that he liked cars from a very early age. His parents always bought him toy cars. I noticed that there were several toy cars and toy trucks scattered on the floor. I asked him which he prefers, toy cars or real cars? He said: "Doesn't matter." I asked him if he liked racing cars, and his answer was "no", but he said he likes street cars. Then he started telling me what you should do when driving a car. I asked him where he learned all these techniques. He said that he watched the bus driver on the school bus. [O.C. Is it part of S's philosophy about learning what he doesn't know? He is curious about "the magic cars" running on the street, so he wants to know everything about them and find out what makes cars so magical.]

#### **4.1.3 Interview with Hua, the wife**

It was 5:00 p.m., April 24th, another Saturday afternoon. After a few minutes' chatting, I started to interview Hua. The first question I asked her is how long does it take S to do his homework. Hua told me that if he works quickly, it is 30 minutes every day including weekends. When S was in China, all the homework was assigned by the school teacher. Now Hua herself decides the amount of homework according to content and his usual speed. Hua said that S would not like to do it if she gives him too much. She said that the homework assigned by her was very different from the assignment given by the school teacher. If the assignments were from the school, the child would finish it no matter how much they were. If too

much homework was given by the parents, S would bargain with the parent so that he could do less than expected.

She told me that she doesn't approve the methods the Chinese teachers are using. She said that they ask children to write each new word 10 to 20 times which is really too much. But she still believes that repetition is necessary. As S has no strong Chinese-speaking environment as in China, repetition, practising is especially important for him at present. She said that S has no Mandarin-speaking friends at school now. The only place he can use Chinese is at home. He cannot improve his Chinese as quickly as he did in China, because he cannot practise with other classmates. He has no chance to use new words and expressions outside home. In this case, Hua asks him to write new words five times, also to create sentences and phrases. In China, the teacher tries to let students master Chinese by frequent application. After new words are taught, students will be asked to practice with each other in different ways. "Practising helps memorizing" Hua said, " But here, he is, actually studying by himself."

Hua thinks that S has quite strong self-study abilities. Every morning, she leaves a note on his table, telling him what he should learn that day. After he comes back from school, he will always sit at the table, doing his homework. Hua thought that it appeared to be very unusual for the boy of his age to possess this ability.

So I asked her how it was formed. Hua said it is related to the habits that were formed since an early age. When he was four years old, Hua started to set a time for him, to sit and "study" for a while. The "study" then only meant drawing, playing or doing whatever piqued his interest.

He had to sit there, but later he was accustomed to sitting at the table for this time.

Hua said that this child has a very strong tendency to seek knowledge. When he was between 1 to 2 years old, he learned 78 Chinese words from picture cards. Hua was afraid that learning too much would dampen the development of the brain, so she hid those cards away from him. One night around 11 to 12 o'clock, he urged his mum to teach him new words, however his mum refused. After almost six months, he could still remember these words.

Hua thinks that S first learned words from TV when he was six months old. He likes music. The background music used by the CCTV weather report had a special effect on him. Every time, the weather report was on, he would stop and turn his head toward the television.

One day, when he was one and half years old, Hua was playing chalk with him on the floor. She, from the habit of being a teacher, wrote some Chinese words on the ground. S suddenly read out some of them which happened to be the name of the cities appeared on the CCTV weather report.

Hua also mentioned that S liked to ask questions, some of which are quite difficult and take time to answer. Then I asked her: "Do you encourage him to ask questions?" She said: "Yes, I encourage him. I very much like him raising questions. I even use a solicitation method to make him ask questions. Sometimes, if he asks me a question, I will ask a question in reply. Then I gradually help him to find the answer. I don't usually tell him the direct answer. Hua said that it can take him several hours or two days to ponder over one question. Sometimes, Hua felt that she had already

given him the answer, but S still seemed not to be satisfied. He kept on thinking.

[O.C. Asking questions is always the result of thinking, and with more meditating, comes deeper questions. When I was young, my father always ask me to "hard work and frequent questioning." He said that a clever student should not only put effort in studying books. A good student should learn to use the brain. Asking questions and learning to ask questions were part of the study. Once you started thinking, questions would gradually come into your mind. Don't be puzzled by those questions. Ask others, discuss with others. The more ideas you got from others, the broader your meditation would become, the deeper question you would ask the next time. Never be afraid of asking questions. That was very encouraging for me. At that time I was not daring enough to ask teachers questions. I liked to keep questions in mind, waiting until I went back home and asking my parents. One thing I am not clear on is whether my father wanted to prepare me with a critical mind or whether he just regarded asking questions as part of the learning method. So, I brought this question to Hua again. Hua explained that she wanted her son to get used to asking questions. She wanted to elicit S to use this method for future learning. She said that she was unable to teach him all kinds of knowledge. However, she wanted S to master this method so that it could be useful in his future learning. ]

Then I asked Hua whether S likes cars very much. Is it because he turned over in his mind a lot of questions about this "magic" car?

Hua said that S still asks her why cars can reverse while bicycles cannot. She told him: "Mom cannot explain this to you. I really don't know

this very well. Maybe you can ask your daddy when he starts learning to drive."

One day he came home telling Hua that he knew the car was reversed in such and such a way. Hua asked him where he learned that. He said that he was watching the school bus driver.

Hua told me that he had a lot of questions about cars from a very early age. He wanted to learn everything about the car. He wanted to know how the car was made, how to drive. Hua says, "He likes drawing cars too." Sometimes he would ask: "Why such a big car can run so quickly on the road? Why the plane can fly on the sky? Why the ships don't sink?" When he was less than one year old, he would ask Hua to carry him out to the street to watch the cars. Hua thought his interest in cars might have changed over the years, but did not. At present, he will beg mum to play toy cars with him on the floor. Hua says that S told him one day that he wanted to learn two things: One is chemistry, the other is car.

"Why chemistry?" I asked.

"Because he found it very interesting. One thing comes out of nothing. The chemical change made him quite fascinated." said Hua. I asked, "How does he know about chemical changes?"

"I don't remember. He told me that I had once said something about chemical reactions to him." Hua said, "When my friend, who is learning chemistry at University of Victoria, came for a visit, I introduced him to S and told him that that uncle is studying chemistry. S later asked me whether I can ask this uncle to teach him chemistry."

When I asked Hua who checks homework at present, she said it is she. She doesn't help him with English, but if he has questions, he can ask

her. At first, she was a little worried about S's English which improved very slowly. He worried too. He asked his mom to borrow some English books so she could read to him. Later, he started to read by himself. Hua says this is just her hypothesis that reading is universal.

"Do you teach him at home?" I asked

"I am teaching him Chinese and Mathematics now so that he won't lag behind the Chinese curricula. I didn't teach him before. I teach him now because I don't want him to be in the same pace as the Canadian School kids. The grade two mathematics is a lot easier than Chinese school. He is very interested in math, so I let him do the math problems from the Chinese text book at home."

"In ESL class, he even helps the Grade Four student do math. He wants to be better than others, he wants to learn more things, and he never regards himself as clever"

[O.C. S's attitude could be instilled by his parents. Chinese educators always advocate being modest. Chinese teachers seldom praise a child in person, neither does the parent. If I got a 100 in an exam, my father would tell me that the teacher happened not to give me the question that I didn't know. What he liked to say was:"You still have a long way to go." If I got 99 out of 100, my father would say that there was still some knowledge that I hadn't mastered. I had to work harder. Good mark doesn't mean that one is cleverer than the other. It only presents that one does put some effort into the study. I was always told that if you wanted to be better than others, you had to work harder.]

"Does he want to compete with others?" I asked.

"He doesn't want to compete, but he wants to do everything well. He wants to learn things. But he likes playing too"

[O.C. J says that children's achievement is also a competition between parents. Chinese value of education, Chinese sense of face, and Chinese sense of family being in the same boat make J and Hua take part in the competition so that they could help S achieve academic success. Interestingly, S, their son, doesn't seem to possess as strong sense of competition as his parents have. When I recall my school age, I can only remember numbers of tests, contests, and exams. My teacher encouraged us to compete with each other. My parents were just like supportive cheer leaders. They backed me up to go for various competitions. If I won, I knew that they would be happy with me. If I lost, I would be very sad, but I would still be very sure that they would not criticize me or blame me. They would help me to stand up and go for the next contest. It seemed to me that competitions between students had already become part of the schooling. However, these competitions were very positive. There was no jealousy among students. In fact, students always helped each other at school. As S has only studied in China for one year, it appears that he has not been very much influenced by the sense of competition at the Chinese school. ]

Hua continued: "If he thinks today's homework is too little, he will do some more by himself." She explained: "His self-discipline was cultivated from a very early age when I asked him to sit for a while to study. I always made him feel it was fun to sit, doing and learning something. He didn't feel bored. He could do anything he liked, but he had to sit at his table. He became used to that and he wouldn't play before he finished homework."

Hua said she started telling him stories almost every night when he was one year old. From that time, he started reading picture word cards too. She stopped reading to him since she has come here. At present, she is not reading any English stories to him. She wants him to pick up English naturally. As all the Chinese books here are not printed in simplified characters, as now used in mainland China, he cannot read by himself. Hua is reading Chinese books to him now.

Hua said when he was little, she always read children's poetry to him. Hua said that she likes poetry which involves a lot of moral lessons, such as teaching children how to behave. Hua stated that S has a very good memory. She also bought some audio books for him. S listened by himself and then repeated the story without losing a single word. Sometimes he asked Hua to retell the story. If Hua missed something, he corrected her by repeating the lines on the audio tape. He likes telling his classmates stories he heard from his Mom, read from a book, or learned through the audio tapes.

Hua said that his language ability was cultivated from a very early age. Now she worries whether it will be lost because of the change of language environment.

When I asked Hua: "What are the factors that influence school achievement?"

She replied that she hadn't thought about it. She is quite sure that one of the factors is motivation. The child's interest is very important. If he loses interest, he loses his desire to learn, no matter how hard you push him.

She continued: "After he gets motivated, he will acquire the desire to learn. This desire kindles his interest, and he will enjoy learning."

"Where does this motivation come from?" I asked.

She answered, "The motivation is formed by both internal and external forces. The external forces play a more important role than internal forces. This only applies to Chinese children. Before the boy realizes what he should do in the future, parents should guide, like making the boy sit studying for a while. Otherwise, if he loses guidance, he has no idea what to do, so he only plays all the time. External forces make him sit and read something for a while. If he can sit and read something for a while, what he is reading will make him feel interested. So he likes sitting and reading this and that. The more he reads, the broader his interest becomes. At last, he is willing to study, and he enjoys studying."

Hua stated that in Canadian schools, math is too easy for him, no novelty, no challenge. He has no motivation to learn Canadian grade two math. ESL here is taught by playing games through which they hope students learn the language. It is not clear what he is learning until he suddenly speaks some words he never knew before.

"Do you ask him about school when he comes home?" I asked.

"Yes. Everyday." Hua answered, "When we were in China, he could tell me what he was learning. Here, because of language, he cannot describe it very clearly. But he will tell me he has read till page so and so. Most of the time, he would tell me everything about school even before I started asking."

Hua said that this started from kindergarten. Every afternoon, when she picked him up at the kindergarten, or preschool, she would ask him "what have you been doing at school?" So he is used to it.

[O.C. This reminds me of my old school days. Every Saturday afternoon when I returned home from school, my mother would take me out for snacks or dimsum. This was also the time for me to tell her everything that happened at school. I still remember that my mother would, now and then, ask me about my teachers and other classmates. My mother explained to me later that she treasured the chance of going out with me after school. She said that it was always a good time for her to know my thoughts, my opinions and my attitude towards others. This was also the time for her to express her ideas like a friend to me. My mother mentioned once that when I went out with her, I liked to talk personal things. If I went out with my father, I liked to discuss political, religious things with him. I never realized that. When I look back, I noticed that the communication channel my parents purposely established between them and me made me feel comfortable being with them. There is no generation gap between us. In fact, I respect them and regard them as my friends, the real friends that I can tell everything from my heart. Communication takes time. I am the one that has benefited from the communicating time my parents had spent on me. It seems that Hua was trying to do the similar thing. She took time knowing her son, knowing what he is doing outside home, at school, with friends. She was trying to understand S so that she could know how to help S in different aspects. ]

"Which one determines the school achievement, ability or effort?" I continued to ask.

Hua responded: "There is a Chinese old saying: 'Success belongs to those hard working people'. Now that you work hard, put efforts in, you will probably succeed." Hua thinks that ability couldn't be ignored. "In general," she said, "if this child has no congenital (inborn) intellectual disability, his ability relies how it is cultivated. S reads earlier than other. It is not because he is brighter than others, but rather that his reading ability was cultivated earlier. I always talked to him, gave him an environment that suited the cultivation of his ability."

Hua continued to explain: "External effort and internal ability interact with each other. Talented people cannot succeed without effort. Non-talented people can reach the same level a talented people can if they work very hard. Effort is very important. Like no temperature, egg cannot hatch into chicken. You cannot say which is the first. They work with each other."

We moved our topic to TV. Hua said that S was only allowed to watch children's programs at home. On weekends he can watch more TV programs, because Hua thinks S has a broader interest and is more mature than kids of the same age.

Then I mentioned letter grade report which is taken very seriously by Chinese parents. Hua said that she doesn't take it very seriously, but S does. She cares whether S has learned something at school. She said that carelessness in an exam is inexcusable. While carelessness is unavoidable for both children and adults, the tendency toward carelessness can be improved over time. If the lower grade is because he doesn't understand, they will sit with him, helping him to learn.

[ O.C. Hua's comment on careless reminds me again of my childhood. My father always said that carelessness was inexcusable. It seems to me that he regarded carelessness as the result of irresponsibility. If the mistake in the test or exam was caused by carelessness, I would be punished, whatever high score I got. If the mistake was made due to the lack of knowledge, he would help me to make it up. I dare not simply conclude that it is a common phenomenon among Chinese parents. At least I might conclude that both Hua and my father regard carelessness as the result of lacking of effort which means that S or I did not take the responsibility to check what we had done on the exam paper. This could be the reason why carelessness was definitely inexcusable.]

Hua said that she tried to contact S's teacher twice every six months(one term). She wants to know how she can cooperate with the teacher in S's study.

## **4.2. INTERVIEW WITH THE CANADIAN FAMILY**

### **4.2.1 An interview with Elliot Carter, the son**

Elliot, the seven-year-old boy, is a grade two student in Braefoot Elementary school.

Elliot told me that there is no homework from school. Once he took three-pages of mathematics home because the teacher thought he had some trouble in certain math problems. (Elliot's mother recalled that this was the time that the teacher tried to give students some homework. Another occasion was when Elliot missed one class, the next day he was given homework so he could catch up with what he missed).

[O.C. In Elliot's opinion, school seldom gave children homework to do. In contrast, the memory of my school age is full of numbers of homework from the school teachers, mathematics, Chinese, English. Every evening when my father came back home, the first question he would ask me was: "Have you finished your homework?" We were told to complete our homework before we started to play. I could hardly imagine school child's life without homework. S told me that there was no homework in Canadian school. Elliot confirmed me that there was no homework from school. Later I found out that there was actually some homework here in Canadian school. The differences were two: First, the homework here is not assigned as regularly as it is in China; Second, the form of homework has been changed into different varieties like reading contest of the reading program.]

Elliot told me that in the reading program, students who finished reading seven books could get a certificate. He finished ten, so he got a gold medal. [O.C. Elliot was very good at reading.]

When I asked Elliot whether he liked mathematics, he told me that he is not good at some math problems, because his brain lacks something. He said that he "gets angry with his head" if he cannot find out why it is wrong.

When I asked him if there was anyone that was really good at math in his class, he said: "Yah, yah, yah. There is one boy who is very good at math, he always can give answers very quickly." When I asked why, he said that the boy is clever and he does a lot of practice at home. He also told me who is good at this math problem, and who is good at another math

problem. At last he concluded that they have different talents in mathematics so they can give answers quickly to different questions.

[O.C. Were the children influenced by their parents' philosophy, which whether positive or negative, had a great influence on their attitude towards life? Elliot was unsure about his math performance at school. He thought that he lacked certain abilities in math. When I first went to school, I remembered that I was very afraid of math as I had heard from somebody that girls wouldn't do very well in mathematics. One day, I revealed my fear to my father. He told me that it was not true. Every body could do math well. Then he said that he was not a clever person, but he did a lot of math when he was a child. And he became good at math and started teaching others math ( My father was a mathematic teacher before the Cultural Revolution). At last he said that if he could do it, I surely could do it and he would be proud of me. Either because I wanted to make him happy , or because I was indeed encouraged by his teaching, I was no longer so afraid of math as I had been before. In fact, I started enjoying doing math and became very confident in solving math problems. ]

Elliot continued told me that he was in a chemistry group with three students. He said the teacher put them together because they have the same interest. [O.C.Elliot is interested in Chemistry, too.]

When I asked Elliot whether he likes to go to school, his answer was that if there is a field trip or other interesting programs that day, he will look forward to attending. If it is an ordinary school day, and he feels discouraged when he gets up, he will not want to go. When I asked him:"What do you think of school?" His answer was "usually calm" except

some difficult questions makes him "angry with his brain." [O.C. Not a good question]

After school, he is picked up either by his mother or a neighbour who has two children the same age as Elliot and his brother. They play outside or indoors. Sometimes he watches a couple of his favorite programs like Batman. During the weekends, he invites friends over to play. He goes to bed at 8:30 and reads from 8:40 to 9:00. Sometimes his parents read stories to him, but his mother never allows him to read after 9:30. Weekday mornings, he gets up by himself, eats breakfast and watches TV while waiting for Mom. Sometimes he plays a game on the computer. It is a game involving some basic math questions. If the participant of that computer program doesn't answer correctly, he cannot enter another level of the game. Elliot told me that he tried to cheat the program several times, but he never got through to the next stage. So I asked, "You cannot cheat the computer, right?" He said, "No, but trying to cheat the computer is fun."

[O.C. Elliot likes to play with the computer. In order to get to a higher level of the game, he wants to do something different instead of just giving the answer. Is it difficult for him to give the right answer or does he want to use novel, creative ways to challenge the computer?]

Lastly, I asked Elliot if a wizard could give him anything he wanted, what would he like? He immediately related the wizard with magic things. After about three minutes, he jumped from the seat and said: "I know what I want. I want a secret passage in my room that leads to a cave where there is hidden treasure." I asked again: "You don't want the wizard just to put treasures in your hands?" He said: "No." He said that he wants to do adventurous things by himself such as Easter egg hunting.

#### **4.2.2 An interview with Kevin Carter, the husband**

Kevin, an administrator and instructor at Camosun College, is now working on his Master of Administration degree at University of Victoria.

When I mentioned that Elliot is in a four-person-group doing chemistry, Kevin, the father, said he doesn't know the program very well. He thinks that there isn't any specialization in this program. He is not sure how the teacher will manage. Any way, after he learned that his son was interested in chemistry, he bought a chemistry set for Elliot. Also Kevin said that he is unable to compare this with other schools because he knows little about other schools. Kevin thinks however that the leadership in Elliot's school is quite good.

[O.C. I think he probably got this idea from Patrice, his wife, who was involved with the parents' committee. When I checked with Kevin again, he told me that it is only partly true. He also learned this through the meeting with the principal and other personal contacts.]

Kevin told me that he doesn't like letter grade reports which will give a false sense of security. An anecdotal report will help him to have a conversation with the teacher. Kevin would like to look at something she has honestly and seriously written.

[O.C. It seemed to me that Kevin was very interested in knowing the teacher's perspective of the child. He wished that the teacher's objective report could help him to learn about the child, the teacher, and the school.]

Kevin told me that he does participate in Elliot's homework. Kevin will let Elliot work in his presence and Kevin looks at his assignments.

[O.C. Kevin did participate in the supervision of Elliot's homework from the school teachers. Differing from Chinese parents, he did not give Elliot extra work to do after school.]

Kevin told me that the "year 2000 plan", which hopes to change educational philosophy, includes a more heightened conscious deliberate involvement of parents in their children's education. It demands a commitment by the parents. [O.C. This seems to be Kevin's understanding of parental involvement.]

When I asked him what factors influence a child's school achievement, he said that he is unsure about which one is the most important. It is something to do with children themselves. There is something unique about each individual and that will have an effect on children's achievement. If you set a goal, and apply different methods according to individual ability, the individual will achieve in different ways. Those different methods are the external influences on the child. Parents and teachers have a great deal to do with it, as do peers and the school system.

He continued to say that he believes different children have different levels of talent and different levels of ability. He is uncertain where the boundaries lie, to what level it is socializing, and to what level it is inherent.

I asked him which factor was more important in the child's achievement, talent or effort? He said that he didn't know. He believes that effort is necessary and can go a long way. Most people have to work hard, as only a few are phenomenally talented. Whether you have talent or you don't, you have to commit yourself. Perhaps one of the keys in educating children is to bring them from a lack of understanding of commitment to a

sense of understanding of commitment. Then the choice is, to what extent do you want to commit yourself? Effort is also of important, but the results of effort will be different from person to person.

[O.C. It sounds like Kevin attributes a child's school achievement to his or her personal ability. "Individuals of different abilities will achieve in different ways."(p.41) However, it seems that he was not sure to what level would the ability determine the academic achievement. Interestingly, later Kevin mentioned that "one of the keys in educating children is to bring them from a lack of understanding of commitment to a sense of understanding of commitment."(p.41) What is commitment? From the dictionary, commitment means "the action of entrusting, giving in charge, or commending."(Shorter Oxford English Dictionary). So I could regard commitment as a kind of responsibility, a kind of effort. Does it mean that the sense of effort, the sense of responsibility, and the sense of commitment should be taught and advocated at school? Will this be possible without parental involvement?]

Then our topic moved to homework. Kevin told me that in the primary system, Elliot had some work to take home. Once he brought home four pages of arithmetic problems which he thought should be completed for the next day. They sat down and Elliot did them all in one session. It took a long time for a child of his age to finish. But he did it and took it back to the school the next day. The comment from the teacher was:" Wow, you must have worked very hard to get all these done. I didn't expect it to be done". So Elliot got the assignment time wrong. Kevin told me that he had Elliot do it by himself and asked him to check the results with the

calculator. If Elliot still couldn't sort out the problem, then he would show Elliot how to do it.

[O.C. Although homework is a very unusual thing in the primary system, the student did finish it. The teacher was surprised. The parents were involved, leaving a deep impression on all of them. They still remember very clearly the four page math homework. They didn't complain, though they all put time and effort into it. They are all happy they got it completed.]

Kevin thought that everyone got that assignment. [O.C. So did Patrice. Elliot, on the other hand, thought that it was because he had some trouble in doing certain arithmetic problems. He felt the teacher wanted him to do more work at home.]

Kevin told me that there was another occasion when Elliot missed a day of school because he was sick or something, the teacher gave him something that his fellow students had done in class. He brought this home and finished it [O.C. This didn't seem to be remarkable to them.]

Kevin said that Elliot doesn't have to do school work at home although they encourage him to do things he likes to do. [O.C. Kevin and Patrice didn't demand study for Elliot like the Chinese parents did with their children. Elliot got less direction from his parents than S did on how to spend the after school time. As a matter of fact, Elliot almost "experienced no sense of orientation from his parents." (Van Manen, 1992, p.61) Elliot had to make up his own mind. As a result, he ended with playing video games, playing with his brother or friends, or watching TVs.]

Kevin also pointed out that he doesn't like Elliot playing video games because he thinks that the skill base of them is not as intellectual as the

skill base of math games and reading games available. He said that Elliot is much more keen on video games than math games on computer.

Kevin stated that Elliot reads a lot and reads very well. They are very grateful. Reading ten books is fairly easy for Elliot because he reads so many books. He reads every night. Elliot reads to his parents, or he reads by himself. [O.C. Reading started from a very early age and became a part of his daily life. Parents put time and effort into it, the child becomes accustomed to it and gets a lot of useful, enjoyable ideas from what he reads.]

Elliot doesn't go to sleep readily. Even if he finishes reading, he doesn't tend to go to bed. His parents suggest that he stay in bed and read by himself. Elliot sometimes reads during daytime.

Kevin said that they don't control TV as much as they could. Elliot does watch his favorites. "There are some things we don't want him to watch, but we don't limit. And we are not very strict. [O.C. This is unlike Hua and J who are quite strict in regard to content and time involved with TV programs.]

Our topic changed to whether the two brothers are getting along with each other. Kevin said that they fight, but they do things together too. When they get excited about something, they want to share with each other and want to tell each other. They do get into conversation, and listen to each other.

As to physical punishment, Kevin said that they try to avoid punishment. Sometimes, even if it seems unavoidable, they don't punish them physically. It is hard not to do things like say: "If you don't eat your dinner, you will have to go to bed earlier." rather than say: "If you eat your

dinner, we will let you play this video game or something." So you reward instead of punishing. Intellectually, it is right. In the heat of the moment, it tends not to be the thing that comes out of your mouth. He admitted that he says a fair amount of "Don't do that."

Kevin felt that it works a lot better to find something that the children really want and what you are willing to give them. Somehow, setting that as a goal to achieve, has greater effect in controlling their behavior.

For example: Elliot likes video games so much that Kevin and Patrice have an arrangement with him that he can rent the machine once a month providing he is cooperative and does certain chores. He is so excited about it that it is very easy to get him to do something.

Kevin doesn't take the credit for a good job. He said that kids today are very smart. Most of the time, Kevin said he shouts at the kids. He thought it is an uncontrolled behavior.

Another example: Last summer, when they were away on vacation, camping for two weeks, Elliot had developed a habit of using language that Kevin and Patrice didn't like. They were tired of hearing him talking in that way because of their close proximity to each other.

[O.C. Camping provides an opportunity for parents and offspring to be together. This bad habit which might be formed at school must have already showed at home. As the parents were not with the children very often at home, they hadn't noticed it. "The children who are not guided by adults may experience the lack of direction also as a tyranny--- the tyranny of being abandoned to the sole influence of their peers and of the culture at large." (Van Manen, 1991, p.61)]

They set up an arrangement whereby for every word they didn't like, he would lose 25 cents. If he did not say any bad words for one hour, he could get 25 cents back. They knew Elliot was very keen about his money. At the end of that day, they would take money away if it was a negative balance and it worked perfectly. In a few hours, Elliot changed his behavior.

[O.C. As Van Manen pointed out, " Pedagogical action and reflection consist in constantly distinguishing between what is good or appropriate and what is not good or less appropriate for a particular child or a group of children. In other words, pedagogical life is the ongoing practice of interpretive thinking and acting--- on the part of adults, ... It means that our living with children is oriented in certain directions and that, as adults, we are accountable with regard to the reasonableness or goodness of our influencing of children." (Van Manen, 1991, p.60) After Patrice and Kevin noticed the bad behavior of Elliot, they chose a method which they thought was appropriate for their son. And it turned out to be a satisfying result.]

#### **4.2.3 An interview with Patrice Palmerino, the wife**

Patrice, the mother of two boys, has obtained a degree in Theatre Arts. She is now working as a part-time manager in a science store.

Patrice told me that when Elliot was younger, he was quite close to her. Now his affection is divided equally between the parents. He is very close to his Dad. They always play baseball together.

Patrice said that it is a hard thing to get Elliot to go to bed and stay there. So they suggested he read in bed. He doesn't have to go to sleep.

When he was a baby, Patrice started reading to Elliot at night. Now he usually reads in bed at night by himself.

Then I asked her about the mathematics homework. Patrice said that three or four sheets of math problems were supposed to be done in class, but the teacher asked them to take it home. Elliot checked his work with the calculator. [O.C. The mathematics homework was an assignment by the school teacher. Every student took it home to complete. However, Elliot regarded it as a punishment. He thought the reason he had to do it was because he was not very good at solving certain math problems.]

Patrice said that Elliot plays the math game on computer once a week, fifteen to twenty minutes each time. Patrice thinks that the program is fun, and that is why Elliot can stay there.

As to punishment, Patrice said that if Elliot did something wrong, they would sit him in the corner as a punishment.

Patrice and Kevin always discussed how to educate the children. Patrice is very involved as a volunteer in Elliot's school, doing fund raising and working in the library. She also sits on a parents' committee with the principal. Patrice thinks that in "the year 2000 plan", parents are considered as teacher's partners.

Patrice said that during her school years, she did some homework, about once or twice each week. She worked hard because she wanted to get praise and approval from her parents and other adults. She thought her good memory helped her to achieve good results in her school work.

Patrice thought that doing well in school and learning well was not the same thing.

Patrice felt that people have different capabilities, and learning abilities too. When the old school system only focused on students' reading, writing and mathematical ability, only some students could gain achievement. With the new system, hopefully every student can acquire some measure of success. Patrice believes that the involvement of parents will make a difference. [O.C. Patrice held the same view as Kevin did. She also agreed that different abilities of each individual would lead to different achievement.]

Patrice told me that because people have different levels of ability and different types of learning ability, teachers are now dividing students into assorted groups. Parents can be more involved in the school by sitting with the group and reading for them. The educational level of the volunteer parents is not important. The difficulty is that it involves a lot of work in coordination with parents.

[O.C. The Chinese parents tend to regard parental involvement as a cooperation with school teachers in helping their own child improve their moral and intellectual abilities. While the Canadian parents believe that they can help improve the whole school system by working voluntarily in the school library or fund raising.]

Patrice thought talent plus success and approval made one want to continue. Practise helps you improve the ability. Patrice still thinks talent is uppermost. Patrice especially emphasized encouragement.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATIONS**

The narrative observations collected in the current study focus on children's homework, differentiating parental philosophies , values , attitudes and styles towards children's education at home and their impact on the children's habits of studying, styles of studying, and finally understanding of learning and performance at school. In the remainder of this chapter, I will present my interpretation of the interviews conducted with the two families.

### **5.1 Parental Involvement**

#### **5.1.1 Parental involvement in the Canadian family**

The Canadian parents that were interviewed stated very clearly that parental involvement can make a difference in children's learning. The father and mother discussed the ways in which to educate their son. The unanimous consensus in various aspects of their son's education at home is reflected throughout the interview . They spend time playing with their child, helping their child do his homework if he brings home any from the school and providing resources, like chemistry sets and the computer, for their child's interest.

The study showed that the Canadian couple understood the role of parental involvement in a broader way than the Chinese parents. They also regarded it as participation in various activities within the school system. This Canadian sense of parental involvement can also be shown in Mayfield's article.(1990) She explains parent involvement as follows:

"Parent involvement is a comprehensive term that can mean different things to different people. To some people, it means

parents receiving newsletters or attending school meetings, while to others it means parents being very actively involved in the program, including the decision-making."(p.240)

Morrison (1988) also described parent involvement as "a process of helping parents use their abilities to benefit themselves, their children, and the early childhood program."(p.322) Both Patrice and Kevin had grave concerns about the school system and reforms within this system. The mother was very active in activities such as: being a volunteer in the school library, assisting teachers with small groups in a reading program, and fund raising for the school.

### **5.1.2 Parental involvement in the Chinese family**

By comparison, Chinese parents' sense of parental involvement is much more limited than the Canadian. It is mainly reflected in the involvement in their child's homework, although the Chinese parents spent time playing with the child, too. From the interview, I noticed that the Chinese parents interviewed were greatly involved in their child's homework. They planned and prepared the homework well ahead for their child to do everyday. They also checked the homework every time their child finished it. Every morning, Hua and J gave S a list of homework for their son to do. After S finished in the afternoon, Hua checked the homework for him and got the new list of homework ready for the next day. The parents also brought textbooks with them when they came from China so that they could have resources for assisting in their child's homework. All this revealed that they had a very strong sense of involvement in their child's

homework. They regarded the homework not only as a part of their child's schooling, but also as a part of their own lives.

I also observed that the Chinese parents were very careful with the way they assisted the child in doing his homework. When he had any questions or needed their help, they always, instead of giving the correct answer, induced the child to reflect or instruct him to find solutions independently. Otherwise, they would suggest that the child use the right tool to help him solve the problem. If the child still could not find a solution after several attempts, his parents would then try to explain as patiently as they could to increase the child's understanding.

What makes Chinese parents so enthusiastically involved in their child's homework? As has been mentioned before, education in China ties in directly with one's career, future success and the enhancement of personal welfare. The only reflection of academic achievement is generated through success in a variety of exams. The supreme exam in China is the Nationwide University Entrance Examination. Scovel(1983) noted:

"Scholastic tests are an important part of the educational system, but because of the strong traditional values placed on education and the long standing importance of tests stemming from the Confucian tradition of civil service examinations, tests are viewed with almost reverential respect by students, teachers and administrators."(p.27)

The external competition, the inner sense of honour and the sense of the family being in the same boat make all family members work together to reach the ultimate goal--- passing the nationwide entrance examination and getting into the university. Thus, it is not hard to explain why Hua and

J brought all their textbooks from grade one to grade six with them to Canada. It is also not hard to understand why Hua and J give more homework for S to do to supplement the lack of homework in the Canadian school system.

## **5.2 Homework**

### **5.2.1 Overburdened homework and no homework**

The Chinese parents were a little different from some other parents in mainland China. As school pupils have a lot of school work to take home every day, parents sometimes unconsciously end up doing homework for their son or daughter so that he or she can finish in time for the subsequent homework assignment the next day. Unlike the pupils in China, S doesn't have any homework from school here. This provides his parents with many more possibilities to find their child's interests or, possibly, for S to reveal his own interest. As a result, S has more time to reflect on the subject areas that interested him. For example: how can the bus move backward and forward? why is chemistry so magic? The more he thinks, the more questions he raises. As Chinese teachers and other foreign educators have pointed out, the Asian students are not as creative as North American peers. "Wherever one goes in Asia, one hears the complaint that although Chinese and Japanese show high levels of academic achievement, they lack creativity."(Harold and Stigler, 1992, p.19) There could be a lot of reasons that explain this phenomenon. But is it because that they are not provided with time and space to practise abstract thinking beyond their textbooks?

Although Chinese parents often complain about too much homework, no homework after school could also have a negative effect . For Elliot, most of his out of school time is spent either on playing with his brother or his friends, or watching TV. He seldom spent much time studying. Learning is a process that involves absorbing, digesting and applying the information. Elliot doesn't like mathematics because he does not excel at it. It is his "headache". He recognized that one of his classmates who is very good at math practises a lot at home. Elliot seldom spends much time practising mathematics after school. He is not required to do homework by the school teachers (except once, although the real reason hasn't been clarified in the interview) and his parents. The less he practices mathematics, the more afraid he becomes. He blames his head for lacking the ability to understand math. By comparison, S enjoys doing mathematics, thirty to forty -five minutes of mathematic homework every day helps him to review and prepare him for the next day's lessons. At this point, I don't think it is relevant to discuss how much homework is best for the child after school. My point is that homework is an important element in the child's school achievement. It would not be surprising if the extra practice resulting from hours of homework and reading would help the child's progress in school. Proper homework and proper instruction from both teachers and parents will help the child to adapt himself more easily to the school environment.

### **5.2.2 Different requirements of homework**

From the interview and my own experience, I realize that the Chinese approach to homework mainly focuses on reviewing what the child

has learned at school. Children are required to practice what they learned at school over and over again. The form of homework is monotonous paperwork. The purpose of homework is reflected in Hua's words: "Practising helps memorizing." In comparison, Elliot's teacher gave different varieties of homework although they rarely gave the child homework to do. The goal of the homework is to enhance the child's interests in learning so that he can willingly and enjoyably do his work. As one can see, Chinese teachers and parents don't really seem to regard the word "enjoy" as an important element of homework. The teacher's job is to instill into the child's "brain" the knowledge required by the curriculum as efficiently as possible. Parents co-operate by helping and supervising their child so that he can finish his homework and master or remember the information given by their "masters".

In order to understand the Chinese method of learning, it is important to reflect upon Confucius philosophy again. In Lun Yu, chapter 1, verse 1, Confucius mentions: "To learn and to practice what is learned again is pleasure, is it not?" Here, it is not hard for one to recognize that Confucius advocates learning new things and practicing what has been learned before. There is another old saying: "Reviewing old helps learning new." To Chinese, learning is composed of two parts: Learn new things at school, and practice what has been learned at home. School teachers are responsible for the former part, while the parents are responsible for the latter part. This constitutes a Chinese system of learning.

The side-effect of this learning system is that it ends up with an overload of homework. Presently, school children in China are burdened with the immense requirements of school curriculum. Can they really enjoy

learning? When I recall my own childhood, I don't remember any enjoyment in the learning process. Learning is replaced by goals of achieving top marks in exams, getting into the university and winning the faces for the family. Hua and J brought all the text books from grade two to grade six with them so that they can help S catch up with his Chinese peers when he goes back to China, and successfully pass all the exams that lead to university entrance. "To learn without losing interest" (Lun Yu, ch.7, vs. 2) already lost its real meaning for the school children in China. To Chinese teachers, parents, and children, it is replaced by the ultimate goal of getting into the high-ranked middle school and passing the national entrance exam of the university.

### **5.2.3 Children's differing attitudes and reactions towards homework**

From the case study, It was also discovered that the two children had very different attitudes and reactions towards their homework.

S is used to immense amounts of homework in China. So when he hasn't got enough homework from his mother, he wants to find more work to do by himself. He also learns to adjust the amount of homework that suits him the best. This is a very interesting phenomenon for a seven-year-old boy. He has not only established the habit of doing homework, but also learned to decide the quantity as well. S has expressed clearly that he doesn't like a lot of homework. He also rejects the idea of not doing homework. Through doing homework, he has realized that more effort should be spent on reviewing old things and learning new things. He is already equipped with the understanding and concept of learning, which is very similar to his parents'.

By comparison, Elliot and his parents are not used to homework although they are not against the idea of homework. All of them have very deep impressions about the four page math homework. Elliot regards it as a "punishment." He thought that he was asked to do it is because he had some trouble in solving certain math problems. Three hours sitting at the table, doing math is unusual for a child who is used to playing after school. He didn't like it although he knew that he had to finish it. In contrast, his attitude towards reading is totally different. He is still excited about winning a medal in the reading program. Elliot's mother started reading stories when he was only a baby. Interesting plots within the stories as well as intimate and comfortable feelings provide a loving environment in which to listen to stories. When he grew up, he began to enjoy reading stories by himself. Now, he has become used to reading and it has become part of his life. His reading skills have also improved rapidly.

#### **5.2.4 Different ways of doing homework**

I also discovered from the interview that the two children from different cultures differed in the ways in which they do their homework. Elliot is very independent. He likes to meditate and solve problems by himself. S knows that he shouldn't talk and should concentrate while doing his homework. However, he likes to ask his parents for help every time he doesn't know the answers or has difficulties. One of the explanations for this divergence in behavior is because S usually has to do a large amount of homework, The easiest way and the most efficient way for him to finish his homework in time is to ask his parents for assistance. Elliot doesn't have much homework to do on an every day basis. He has no

pressure or motivation to complete it. He can have a considerable amount of time to think by himself. However, the situation is not really so simple. When tracing back to the Chinese culture, one notices that there are many old sayings and parables that encourage students to ask those individuals who have great learning in order that the students can fully understand the subjects that they have problems with. Sayings like: "Students have to be diligent and question frequently," a good student should be "quick and devoted to learning, and unashamed to ask of those below him," (Lun Yu, ch.5, vs. 14) "to learn extensively and adhere to aspirations, to question enthusiastically and reflect upon yourself."(Lun Yu, ch.19, vs.6) Hua encourages S to question often which, she thinks, is a way to promote thinking and learning. S's habit of questioning is clearly the result of his mother's pedagogy which is influenced generationally by ancient Chinese educational philosophy.

#### **5.2.5 The results of parental involvement in homework**

I also discovered that the parents' frequent participation in the child's homework provides security and confidence for the child to face the difficulties he will meet in school work. When I asked S how he can learn new things, he immediately tells me that his mother can help him. It seems to me that this quick-minded child has realized that learning new things is not easy, he knows that he will have varieties of problems. However he is quite sure that his mother will stand by him every time he needs help. Hua's proper supervision on S's homework not only improves the child's confidence and enjoyment in study, but also improves the

communication between the parents and the child, and produces a supportive atmosphere at home.

As Elliot's parents have not had many chances in the involvement of his homework, little data is available for making comments.

### **5.3 Communications**

#### **5.3.1 Frequent communications provides a healthy home environment**

Parental involvement in homework provides possibilities for parents to communicate with the child. However, the communication channel is not restricted only to the supervision of homework. It can be established in various ways. The study indicates that both families pay attention to the parental relationship with their respective children. Parents always try to spend some time with their children, whether reading, or playing. During the weekdays, Hua and J, the Chinese parents, always spend time with S, playing and bicycling, after S finishes his homework. Kevin, the Canadian father, plays baseball with the boy for a few hours on some weekends. Patrice sometimes spends time playing with the two boys. Sometimes she just watches Elliot and his brother playing so that she can supervise them in case two boys fight with each other. Both mothers started telling stories when their children were very young. Parents' frequent, friendly interactions with the child establish a close relationship which facilitates positive growth of the child.

#### **5.3.2 Communication between school and the parents**

Researchers in comparative education such as Harold and Stigler have pointed out that "from the first grade on, American children tend to live in two worlds that have little to do with each other. Teachers often feel alienated from parents, and many parents feel unwanted by teachers." (Harold and Stigler, 1992, p.216) This study shows that the fathers of the two families have no direct contact with the school teachers. In contrast, both mothers are very concerned about consistent contact with the school. The two mothers are the key persons in the family in making school contacts, but they are very different in their efforts to be involved with the school. Hua tends to communicate individually with S's teachers. She is interested in knowing how S studies and behaves at school, and how she can co-operate with the teacher in improving her son's moral and intellectual abilities at home. Patrice, the Canadian mother, seems to have a stronger sense of collectiveness in parental involvement. She is enthusiastic about fund raising, working in the library and being an assistant or helper in the classroom, joining the parent committee and assisting the principal with reform in the school system. She is more concerned about the parent's involvement as a supportive role in the whole school system.

To Hua, it could be explained in two respects. Traditionally, school is regarded as a holy place. Parents are not supposed to interfere with school's business. This would be considered to be disrespectful. Politically, Chinese people seldom bother to actively join in the reform of society or societal institutions. "Educational reform" is advocated or initiated only by government authorities. Ordinary people can just follow whatever they are told to do. One learns to survive by taking care of one's own business, one's

own family, one's own child. Individualism is reflected in an old Chinese saying: "Sweeping the snow in front of your own gate."

Political involvement in Canada is very different for people like Patrice. She realizes that she can be an active agent in transforming the world, she takes part in it, hoping that her action can produce change and be beneficial for others.

These two mothers, although from different cultures and different countries, both highly value communication between school and the parents. The fathers, though not directly involved in contacting the school, still showed their knowledge about the child and the child's school which could possibly contribute to the mothers' interest in school activities. In these two families, fathers are not only the bread winners, they are also sharing the responsibility with their wives in educating their children.

#### **5.4. Child rearing and training at an early stage**

##### **5.4.1 Behavior reinforcement**

From the interview, I realized that S has a very specific habit which even his mother considers unusual for a boy of his age. That is: the first thing he usually does when he comes back home is to sit at the table and do his homework. However, if one looks back upon Hua's early home educational methodology, it is easy to realize that this response to homework is actually not very unusual. Starting from the age of four, Hua purposely set a time in the afternoon for S to sit and "study" for a while, although study, at that time, only meant drawing or playing with jigsaw puzzles. The establishment of his sitting habit by his mother makes it easier for S to be able to sit at the table for a few hours doing homework after

school. His mother's homework assignment everyday also strengthened this habit. According to Stevenson(1972), "parents may become strong reinforcing agents for children, not only because they are sources of desired and necessary stimuli; but also because they are present to comfort and aid the child when he is in pain or distress." (Stevenson, 1972, p.146)

Similarly, Elliot's reading habits have also been instilled since his youth when his mom read stories to him at the bedside. Listening to stories every night gradually transferred into the ability of the child to read books by himself. His successful engrained reading habits lead him toward more reading, more interesting findings, more imagination, more enjoyment and quick improvement in reading abilities which enables him to perform very well in the reading program at school. Schermann adds further comment:

"Each child has a personal reinforcement history; what is reinforcing for one child will not necessarily be encouraging for another. The art of providing reinforcement lies in finding responses to reinforce, ... and in noting the effect of the reinforcement on the learner." (Schermann, 1990, p.34)

Harold(1972) also points out:"Reinforcement may be a powerful concept, but it is not a simple one." Although both mothers successfully established their sons' sitting and reading habits, one still can see differences. Seemingly, Hua tended to utilize means that were tough in order to get her child to sit although she tries to make S feel fun in doing interesting projects while sitting. Patrice's way is comparatively much more relaxed. Reading at bed time also creates a receptive environment.

#### **5.4.2 Disciplining the child**

None of the parents interviewed agree with physical punishment, but they expressed very different opinions on disciplining children.

The Chinese parents emphasized that disciplining children from an early age made it easier for later education. They also regarded parents' model as an important element. Hua told me that most children's stories she read to S were about how a good child should behave. She said that this could have left a deep impression on S's mind, and should have made it easier to discipline him in later life. They also set time limits for S to watch TV and had S finish his homework before playing. As a result, S is very obedient to parents. He regards doing homework as the first thing he should do when he comes back home.

Kevin and Patrice were quite relaxed about the discipline and moral education of their son. They advocated natural development. They tended to let their child grow in a self-directed way. They didn't have any restrictions on watching TV. They had no clear requirements on what Elliot should do after school. He could do whatever he liked. Only when they were unable to bear the bad words used by their son during camping, did they start to take emergency disciplinary measures. By comparison, Elliot has less direction than S. Most of the time, his out of school activities were spent playing and watching TV. Self-direction can easily lead to no direction which can be overtaken by one's peer influences. That was clearly reflected in Elliot's habit of swearing.

## **5.5 Elements that influence child's school achievement**

### **5.5.1 External and internal factors**

As to what determines school achievement, all four parents agreed that it is a complicated question. But the parents from two cultures expressed different opinions in their belief of internal and external factors.

The Chinese parents place much more emphasis on external factors like home environment, motivation, competition between students, and competition among parents, although they agree that personal ability is also indispensable. They think it is the external factors that make their child work harder, and make the parents spend more time involved with the child's homework so that they can help the child adapt to the competition and gain success. Hua's comment on motivation reveals her belief in the relationship between the internal and external factors. She said during the interview: "The motivation is formed by both internal and external factors. The external factor plays a more important role than the internal factor."(p. 33 ) In other words, the external factor prepares something to intrigue the internal interest, internal talents or internal abilities, so that the child can be motivated. And then the interaction between the internal factor and external factor can lead to a stronger motivation in learning.

The external factors show in several aspects in this Chinese family: extra homework, parental supervision, reinforcement of sitting habits. If these external factors can work together with the child's habit of working hard, which is an internal factor, they think that this will result in a successful school achievement which can help S gain success in academic competition, and reach one of the ultimate goals of the family.

While Kevin, the Canadian father, tends to believe that the external factor should only go along with the internal ability, suit the internal ability

and help to develop the unique individual ability. He mentioned in the interview: "If you set a goal (external factor) and apply different methods (external factors) according to individual ability (internal factor), the individual will achieve in different ways." (p.41) Kevin didn't oppose the importance of external factors, but he seemed to be more comfortable in the belief that the external factor should adapt to the internal factor which is comparatively more critical. A specific aspect of external and internal factors, that is, ability and effort, is discussed in the next section.

### **5.5.2 Ability and effort**

I asked which was more important in the determination of school achievement, ability or effort? Both Canadian and Chinese parents agreed that ability and effort cannot be separated. However, these two Chinese parents believe that most children do not differ in their talents and abilities. Hua indicated that "even a non-talented child could reach the same level as that of a talented child as long as he or she works very hard." (p.35) School achievement depended on how his or her abilities were cultivated by teachers and parents and how much effort the child had put into study. It seems that Hua and J's attitudes toward ability and effort is identical to Harold and Stigler's (1992) findings which indicate that the "lack of achievement is attributed to insufficient effort rather than to a lack of ability or to personal or environmental obstacles." (p.97)

By comparison, the Canadian parents think individuals are very different in their talents and abilities. Although they agreed that most people have to work hard except for a few phenomenally talented people, they are very uncertain about the results of the effort. This can be seen

from Kevin's words:" Effort is important, but the result of effort will be different from person to person."(p.42)

### **5.5.3 Influence of parent's beliefs on children's learning attitude**

The child's early years (from birth to age eight) are critically important for shaping values and attitudes. (Doxey, 1990, p.3) The present study discovered that, in these two families in which the parents and the children had very a close relationship, the adults' different beliefs on personal abilities and results of their efforts exerted a great influence on the attitudes of their children towards learning.

S thought that he should put effort in learning what he didn't know so that he could learn more things. He learned from his parents that homework could help him memorize and master what was learned in order to make it easier to learn new things at school. Thus he conscientiously did more homework when the amount required by the teacher or parent was not enough. He didn't regard homework from parents as an unnecessary burden. He did it regularly with enjoyment.

S was not afraid to make mistakes. He was very confident that he could master what he had learned as long as he spent more time on it and worked hard.

As for Elliot, he was very quick to blame his own "brain" every time he could not solve math problems. He thought he lacked ability in math. Even when he was assigned to do some math homework at home, he regarded this as a punishment. He started to be afraid of math, less confident about doing it, and began to hate math class.

## 5.6 Children's learning

In the study, I discovered that S learned new words in two ways. On one hand, Hua and the teacher used repetition method in instructing S's learning. S was asked to practise five to ten times on each new words. This might be related to Gibson's (1969) theory of perceptual learning which proposed that with repeated exposure to material, the individual will increasingly be able to discriminate the distinctive features of the material. "We could expect that repeated exposure to a particular task and one's becoming familiar with the task procedure would lead to increased use of appropriate memory strategies."(Waters and Andreassen, 1983, p.16)

On the other hand, S learned new words occasionally from CCTV weather reports and the picture cards. Much evidence in the research indicates that the use of pictures as stimuli can be a highly effective strategy for learning new vocabulary units and even syntactic structures. (Paivio, 1983, p.197) This also reminds us of a potential application to use viewing production to serve the traditional educational goal.

During the interview, I noticed that both boys were very interested in chemistry. As Schermann stated, "Young children are natural learners, endowed with immense curiosity and a talent for finding out the world."(1990, p.32) It seemed that chemistry has some power to attract these two children. As I read through the interview over and over, I gradually discovered that many of the things that attracted the two boys had some similar characteristics.

S learned the names of Chinese provinces from CCTV weather broadcasts which were produced in beautiful pictures and music; he liked to learn new words from the cards which had colourful pictures. Elliot

wanted to have a hidden passage leading to a cave under his bed so he could search for treasures. S wanted to find out what made the car move on the street. If their early interest in learning words and listening to stories was stimulated by beautiful music, colourful pictures and intriguing plots, then, the secret passage, the chemistry and the cars could have processed some hidden and unrevealed messages that challenged them to discover it. Elliot even wanted to find a way to cheat the computer.

Just as Schermann has stated recently, child learning could "result from the child's own activity, whether it be observation, ...or fine or gross motor movement." (1990, p.34) It seems that these two children don't really like "ready-made" knowledge. "Children prefer what is novel to what is familiar.... Novel stimuli are more effective than familiar stimuli in attracting children's attention." (Harold, 1972, p.232) S and Elliot were excited in learning knowledge through their own exploration. They didn't show much timidity. Their imagination and curiosities drove them to find the truth. As Harold(1972) notes,"novelty may be surprising and may produce an increase level of drive that facilitates the execution of the motor response." (p.232) The question is how can we make the child's perception of the stimuli correspond to the requirement of the learning task.

## **CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATION**

### **6.1 Homework**

The information obtained during the interview suggests that homework may not only provide direction for these children, but can cultivate their sense of commitment and effectively enhance a child's ability and interest in learning as well. School teachers may take the responsibility for giving homework, for the work assigned by the school teacher is more compulsory than the homework from the parents. The four parents I interviewed appear to believe that their involvement in their children's schooling and homework is important to their children. Homework may also provide a communication channel between parents and the children, thereby, making it possible for the parents to build a close relationship with their child and to develop his talents. Little homework or no homework may lead to a lack of direction, laziness, and loss of interest in learning.

The world is changing, and so are the demands of the school system. The form of homework should also be developed beyond its traditional type. The amount of homework should also be very carefully weighed so that the child is not overloaded. Parents and teachers could manage to work together on the supervision of homework and the amount of homework that is the best for each individual child. The varieties of homework should also be advocated so that children's interest in learning can be effectively developed.

### **6.2 Child rearing and training**

Each of the four adults in the study had a high level of education, and were all concerned about the education of their children. Both mothers spent time reading with their children since they were very young; Both families provided affluent resources for the intellectual and physical development of the child. Both parents were very careful in encouraging their child and spending some time together with the child. This suggests that the parents from both families were very careful with their child's education at home which should have an effect on the child's development.

However, two of the parents were very different in their methods of child raising. The Chinese mother tended to use "tough" external forces to cultivate S's sitting behavior so that he would be used to doing homework. By comparison, the Canadian mother was more relaxed. In disciplining their child, the Chinese parents appeared to be more relaxed than the Canadian parents. Hua and J advocated disciplining their child from an early age. Kevin and Patrice used coercive methods only in emergency situations.

Raising and training a child is an art. There is no way one can draw simple conclusions about what is right and what is wrong. It needs to be cautiously developed with love and care.

### **6.3 Ability and effort**

From the study, it appears that the attitudes and beliefs of the parents are very critical to the child's development. I discovered that the Canadian parents appeared to accept the American concept of innate ability, although they did not totally deny the importance of effort. Being influenced directly or indirectly by the parents' belief, Elliot thought that his poor

performance in math was due to the lack of ability. By comparison, the Chinese parents have a stronger belief about effort than the Canadian parents. As a result, S believed that the only way that could lead to success was working hard. I also discovered that not only could the parents' belief have an impact on the children's beliefs, but their methodology and their attitudes could have a great impact on the child's development too. As Minuchin (1974) pointed out, "Humans are not isolated. They are acting and reacting members of a social group and influenced by the social context." The family is the basic unit of the social group. It is the group with which the child has earliest and closest contact. It means that the parents might not be able to avoid leaving marks, leaving influence on their child.

#### **6.4 Closing comment**

In no way do I expect that this study is the final comment on familial impact on a child's development. It is just offered as one possible interpretation of home education in different cultural contexts. Striving for deeper understanding is an ongoing process.

#### **6.5 Recommendations for future study**

This study was based on two families whose parents have fairly high levels of education. As we have noticed, not all the parents, either in China or in Canada, are as well educated as the four adults in this study. In view of this, I would suggest that the future research be done in way that includes a variety of backgrounds.

Considering this study was conducted with a fairly small number of subjects, and the interview questions were designed to the researcher's own interests, varieties of samples and different ways of collecting data might be suggested so that more data could be available for in-depth analysis.

During the study, the researcher found out that both boys were very interested in chemistry. It would be interesting to further explore how and why it could attract and stimulate children's interest in learning and hold their interest. This might also help people better understand children's motivation of learning.

Another thought is that, due to the ten years' Cultural Revolution in China, almost all the young people in the urban areas at that time were not able to receive the formal education at school. They were called by Mao to go to the countryside to be taught by the peasants. As a result, most of them are illiterate or semi-literate. Now, that generation has started to establish their own families and have their own children. To what degree will their beliefs be changed by their specific arduous experience? How will their beliefs and attitudes towards education influence their younger generation? As there is no community support in China, I wish that the further study in this area could lead people to think about these problems and attract society's attention to help these children from above-mentioned families.

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### **Appendix: Interview Questions**

The maternal interview questions I designed is partially based on Robert(1987) and Stevenson's report(1992), A few questions were added in according to my own interest:

#### **I. Questions for the parents:**

1. Do the child have any homework to do after school?
2. Do you help the child with the homework?
3. What are factors that influence the school achievement?
4. Does school success depend on ability or effort?
5. Do you think physical punishment is good for the child's development?

#### **II. Questions for the children:**

1. Do you have any homework to do after school?
2. Does everybody in the class have about the same amount of ability in Mathematics/English?
3. Can any student be good at Mathematics /English if he or she works hard enough?
4. Do you like going to school?
5. Let's say there is a wizard who will let you make a wish about anything you want. What would you wish?

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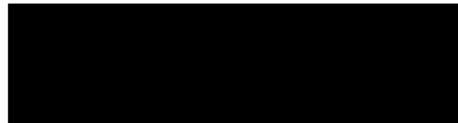
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