

Nature vs. Nurture: My Parenting Story By T. W. Lee

Parenting experts have long been debating nature vs. nurture and the various sides of the issue.

Personally, I see no issue and no side at all. Nature and nurture are apples and oranges. Nature, or genetic contribution, is like a piece of cloth or material. It can be cotton, cashmere, wool, silk, linen, Polyester, Nylon, or Rayon... etc. The materials are all good in their own right. Parents, grandparents, teachers, mentors or care-takers are the tailors. The tailors should first understand the material they are holding in their hands, instead of cutting it to their design and desire. First and foremost is to know the special quality. The cutting, the sewing and the design should be a fit to the kind of material. A piece of silk can be ruined by a poor cut or a misfit in style. A Polyester cloth can be cut and styled for the most special occasion.

I started motherhood at a relatively mature age of 35. Guided by my reading and research on parenting, I consciously divided the task into different stages.

From 0-3 years old is the period of exploration. The curious mind is always searching and learning. With all my three sons, I avoided using the word "no" unless they were in unsafe situations. Onlookers might think I was being too permissive and that I was spoiling them.

By four years of age, after the language acquisition is almost completed, the reasoning stage is instilled. By then, when children start to distinguish right from wrong, my parenting took on a more structured and consistent direction.

By the third stage (K-1), the "one time rule" was applied: "I know you are not deaf, and that you can hear me well, I will say everything one time only". I did this at home with my sons and at school with my students. Once children get the habit of responding to the rule, parents no longer need to raise their voices or repeat themselves. Parents no longer need to say, "I am counting to three, and you will... one, one and a half... Two, two and a half..." We need to let our children know that there's no negotiation. Parents need to empower themselves and make it clear to their children that they can not be manipulated.

Preparing for school

Printed symbols (letters, numbers and words) were introduced to my children as early as a few months. Just as languages were taught to them.

With the child in arm, I would point them to everything we saw and say the label. Seeing a car, I would first point to the car, and say "car". Then I would point to the brands and say "Honda" etc. The car license "C S 1 2 3 4" etc. were read to the child out loud. And of course, there were lots of toys, picture books, songs and movements.

School age

Homework, classroom assignments, following school rules, becoming good citizens were their responsibilities. I seldom helped with homework or checked their works, assuming they did their best. However, starting from kindergarten to third grade, they had "Mom's assignments" at home.

Fortunately, I had easy access to academic materials that were above their grade levels. By fourth grade, they were two or more grades above their school grade.

Character development

Personally, I am certain that modeling is the first front line. It has the greatest impact on character development. What children observe at home is what they will become. Positive attitude, pleasant disposition, courtesy at home and in public, and a general kindness to all living beings are things children can sense and feel. The love of reading and writing, the joy of cooking and gardening, consistent exercise and healthy food choices are all absorbed by the process of "immersion".

For behavior that needed reinforcement or reminding, there were two proactive interactions. One is "catch them being good". For the child that cannot sit still for long, once he sat down to color, say, "Gosh! I like the way you are sitting still." When two children are together, one is ready for bed (brushing teeth etc). The other is still playing a video game, say, "I like the way Lok is ready for bed, how about Hong?"

Two is: catch the teachable moments. If the child skips and jumps down the steps that could be unsafe, make the child walk back and take the step all over. If the child slams the door in anger, make him/her come back and redo the action. Again, if the "one time rule" is imprinted, they will listen automatically.

Siblings

When Yee was 4 years old, I was pregnant with twin boys. He liked me to dry his wet hands. To prepare him for the change, I said, "When the twins are born, I will be busy wiping their hands." He responded, "Then you will wipe one baby and I will dry the other." A four year old taught me to involve him as a partner rather than rival with his new siblings.

It is always difficult for the firstborn to suddenly lose his/her parents' undivided attention. Yee's kindergarten teacher remarked, "It seems a hole was poked in his head after the twins' arrival". I wish I could go back in time and do more for him. Very soon he adjusted and accepted them. Yee had been his little brothers' "little Daddy" growing up. Hong and Lok played with each other and fought often. When they came to me to complain each other, I would tell them I am not a police woman. They need to resolve their problems on their own since they were together much more than I was with them.

(I thought my boys did not fight. Not true. They just did not fight in front of me! Haha!) My three sons are now grown adults. they are each others' best buddies.

Nature

My sons have a grandmother who is still very sharp at age 97. All my sons seem to have their grandmother's smart genes. However, there is also a complex genetic code that is very different for each sibling except for identical twins.

As a mother of fraternal twins, I observed closely their differences and similarities. The first time I put on some music, Lok seemed startled. He listened with great focus and attention at only 1 month old.

Hong did not seem to have that kind of connection. They both learned to crawl at the same time. However, when I put Hong on the stairs, he just crawled up. With Lok, he seemed uncertain. I touched his left hand, then right hand. He moved his hands. Then I touched his left and right legs. He got it and started crawling up. (The twins are lefties like me. Yee uses his right hand like his dad.)

By high school, Lok learned to play the guitar by himself, and made several guitars from scratch. As an adult, his guitar collection is growing by the day. (His dad learned to play guitar by ears in his youth.)

Hong learned breakdancing by watching YouTube and showed off his one handed-stand in his prom and dislocated his left shoulder. (I am still an active dancer even at age 72). They both tried and declined taking piano lessons.

Yee always pretended to be playing piano on the table before we had one (at six). His piano teacher thought that he had the potential to be a concert pianist. He is still playing the keyboard for enjoyment as an adult..

Nature gives our children all kinds of gifts and talents. We just need to recognize those talents and appreciate the gifts.

Our goal is to have our family full of

Yee = 怡 , harmony

Hong = 康 , health

Lok = 樂 , happiness

To me, harmony, health, happiness is all that matters in our family.

Wish everyone and every family hold onto their harmony, health and happiness.