

Parents' Views on the Essential Life Skills of
Junior Secondary School Students

- Executive Summary-

Commissioned by: Committee on Home-school Cooperation

Conducted by: Consumer Search

Date: 25 July 2006

1. Survey objectives

- 1.1 The Committee on Home-School Co-operation (CHSC) of the Education and Manpower Bureau of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region Government commissioned Consumer Search to conduct a survey on “Parents’ Views on the Essential Life Skills of Junior Secondary School Students” in April 2006.
- 1.2 The objectives of the survey were to understand the views of parents on nine essential life skills to be acquired by junior secondary school students and to explore the approaches using by parents at home to nurture and train their children to master four basic life skills, including “time management”, “handling household chores”, “managing personal finance” and “self-learning”.
- 1.3 The survey was conducted from April 27 to May 17, 2006 through telephone and covered residential households that had children aged 12 to 15.
- 1.4 535 questionnaires were completed with an overall response rate of 50.0%. At 95% confidence level, the maximum sampling error was +/- 4.4%.

2. Respondents’ background

- 2.1 Among the respondents, 70.8% were females in which half of them were working mothers. The rest (29.2%) were males and most of them were working fathers. Of those working parents, majority of them were blue-collar workers, professionals or managers, while the rest were white collar workers.
- 2.2 Most respondents (64.7%) were aged 40 to 49, and around one-fifth of the respondents (19.1%) were aged over 50. Those who aged under 39 were of 16.3%.
- 2.3 In terms of educational background, over 70% of the respondents were of secondary education or above. Among them, one in seven especially amongst fathers had attained university education or above.
- 2.4 In regard to total monthly income of the family, half of the respondents were below \$15,000 while another half of the respondents’ income ranged from \$15,000 to \$24,999 and some of them were above \$25,000. Forty-three percent of the respondents were living in private housing, and one third of them were living in public housing.
- 2.5 Regarding to the number of children of age ranging from 12 years to 15 years, around 80% of the interviewed families had one child and 18.5% of the interviewed families had two children. Only 2.2% of the interviewed families had three children aged 12 to 15. During the interview, parents were asked to answer the questions based on one of their child/children who was randomly selected by them. Amongst these selected children, 53% were sons and 47% were daughters. In terms of parenting style, 70% of the interviewed parents adopted “Authoritative” style and they would discuss with their children in the buying process and bought clothes based on children’s needs, style and prices. These parents would allow the children to buy clothes by their own. Thirteen point three percent of the interviewed parents adopted “Indulgent” style, and they would only give money to their children and let them buy clothes on their own. The other thirteen percent of the interviewed parents adopted “Authoritarian” style of parenting, and they would know the needs of their children and bought clothes for the children themselves. Only a few interviewed parents adopted “Neglectful” style, and

they did not care anything. These four types of parenting styles were adopted from the research titled “The Relationship between Parenting Styles and Adolescents’ Behavior” conducted by the Boys’ and Girls’ Clubs Association of Hong Kong in 1994.

3. Survey Findings

Views on Essential Life-skills

- 3.1 Interviewed parents were asked to rank the importance on the following nine life-skills acquired by children aged 12-15, viz. “Know how to take care of one’s appearance”, “Able to manage one’s time effectively”, “Able to manage one’s finances”, “Able to assist with household chores”, “Able to manage one’s emotion”, “Know how to get on well with other people”, “Take initiative in learning”, “Know how to make use of information technology” and “Able to develop one’s potential”.
- 3.2 According to the ranking on importance, over nine in ten of the interviewed parents regarded “Know how to get on well with other people”, “Able to manage one’s emotion”, “Know how to take care of one’s appearance”, “Able to manage one’s time effectively”, “Take initiative in learning”, “Know how to make use of information technology” “Able to develop one’s potential” and “Able to manage one’s finances” as important life skills. Just over seven in ten parents regarded “Able to assist with household chores” as an important life skill.
- 3.3 About four in ten of the interviewed parents considered “Take initiative in learning”, “Know how to get on well with other people” and “Able to control one’s emotion” as extremely important life skills to students of junior secondary.
- 3.4 Amongst those four in ten parents, mothers were more concerned about the importance of “Take initiative in learning” and “Able to manage one’s emotion”, while fathers considered “Know how to make use of information technology” as more important.
- 3.5 In regard to the gender of the children, parents considered that it was more important for girls than boys to acquire two life skills namely :“Know how to take care of one’s appearance” and “Take initiative in learning”.

Views on Nurturing “Time-Management” Skills at Home

- 3.6 Nearly half of the interviewed parents considered that their children in junior secondary school were able to accomplish the following tasks on regular basis: “Finish homework on time”, “Sleep at regular time and get up for school by their own”, “Manage to participate in extra-curricular activities, training in music and physical education”. More than one-tenth of the parents considered that their children were never able to “Know how to use their time wisely on using computer or talking on phone” and “Revision for examinations without being told”.
- 3.7 The interviewed parents considered that girls in junior secondary schools tended to be more able to “Finish homework on time”, “Sleep at regular time and get up for school by their own” and “Manage to participate in extra-curricular activities, training in music and physical education”. On the other hand, boys tended to be less able to “Know how to use time wisely on using computer or talking on phone” and “Revision for examinations without being told”.
- 3.8 “Reminding them on a regular basis” (64.3%) was the most popular method adopted by

parents especially amongst mothers to help their children in managing their time. Over a quarter of interviewed parents adopted “Training them at an early age with the help of timetable”, especially amongst those with higher education attainment and those who had adopted authoritative style of parenting.

- 3.9 Despite less than one-tenth of interviewed parents mentioned that they would adopt “Setting a good example and good role model” as a method in training their children, this method tended to be mentioned by parents with higher education attainment (19.7%). About two in ten of interviewed parents, who were of lower level of education attainment and had adopted indulgent style or neglectful style of parenting, did not do anything to nurture the time-management skill of their children.

Views on Nurturing Skills on “Handling Household Chores” at Home

- 3.10 Nearly seven in ten of the interviewed families especially amongst those who lived in public housing claimed their children in junior secondary school were able to help out occasionally or regularly with the household chores such as “Tiding up one’s room”, “Shopping for groceries” and “Tiding up the house”,. More than half of the interviewed households especially fathers mentioned their children never performed household sores such as “Washing & Ironing” and “Cooking”.
- 3.11 Comparing the gender of children, more girls were able to “Tidy up one’s room”. On the contrary, more boys were never able to “Tidy up the house” and “Washing & Ironing”.
- 3.12 “Reminding them on a regular basis” (49.5%) was the method adopted by about half of the interviewed parents especially amongst working parents in nurturing their children on handling household chores. “Training them at an early age” (21.9%) and “Setting a good example and good role model” (15.7%) were the next two common methods adopted by parents. Among these parents, more mothers and non-working parents had used handling household chores as a relationship-building activity with their children. Parents adopting “Authoritative Style” of parenting tended to use “Training their children at an early age” more whereas parents using “Authoritarian Style” of parenting had higher preference on using “Setting a good example and good role model”.
- 3.13 Nearly a quarter of interviewed parents had done nothing to nurture their children in handling household chores, especially amongst those who had adopted “Indulgent Style” and “Neglectful Style” of parenting.

Views on Nurturing Skills on “Managing Personal Finance” at Home

- 3.14 More than seven in ten interviewed parents perceived their children were able to “Spend within one’s budget”, “Keeping one’s personal possessions such as purse and portable phone”, “Draw up a plan on spending” and “Have good saving habit”. Parents who had attained higher level of education, higher total family income considered that their children were able to “Keeping one’s personal possessions” and “Have good saving habit”.
- 3.15 Overall speaking, the interviewed parents considered that their girls were more able to “Spend within one’s budget” than boys.
- 3.16 Nearly half of the interviewed parents especially amongst those parents with lower

education attainment adopted “Reminding them on a regular basis” in enhancing their children’s capability in managing their personal finance. About a quarter of the parents adopted “Training them at an early age” and “Fixing a monthly plan on expenses as to inform their children the importance of balancing the incomes and expenditures”. Barely over one-tenth of the parents adopted “Setting a good example and not spending excessively”. There was a higher tendency amongst mothers than fathers in adopting “Fixing a monthly plan on expenses as to inform their children the importance of balancing the incomes and expenditures” and “Setting a good example and not spending excessively” in enhancing their children’s ability in managing their personal finance.

- 3.17 Nearly two in ten of the interviewed parents especially amongst parents using indulgent style and neglectful style of parenting did nothing in this area.

Views on Nurturing Skills on “Self-learning” at Home

- 3.18 Over nine in ten of the interviewed families mentioned that their children usually or occasionally “Reading books other than text books”, “Seeking/ accepting opinions from others”, “Paying attention to current affairs” and “Visit to libraries, museums, space museum, and country parks etc” in their learning. Amongst those parents with higher education attainment and higher family income, their children would always “Reading books other than text books”. Close to two percent of the interviewed parents who were of lower education qualification reflected that their children had never visited libraries, museums, space museum and country parks in their learning.
- 3.19 In the opinions of interviewed parents, more girls than boys tended to use “Reading books other than text books” and “Visiting to libraries, museums, space museum and country parks etc” to nurture their own self-learning skills.
- 3.20 Although over a quarter of the interviewed parents mentioned that their children would be regularly “Taught by a tutor”, the same proportion of interviewed parents mentioned that their children did not have such learning experience, especially amongst parents with lower education attainment and lower family income.
- 3.21 “Reminding them on a regular basis” (40.0%) was also the most common method used by parents in helping children to enhance their self-learning skills, especially amongst parents using authoritarian of parenting. Besides, about a quarter of the interviewed parents adopted “Training them at early age” and nearly two in ten adopted “Visiting libraries, museums, space museum and country parks etc” to cultivate their children’s self-learning skills, especially amongst parents using authoritative of parenting. Also more than ten percent of the parents mentioned “Creating reading atmosphere at home” to help their children
- 3.22 Seventeen point six percent of the interviewed parents did nothing to help their children enhance their self-learning skills, particularly amongst those who were of lower education attainment.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4.1 The objectives of the survey were to understand the view of the Parents on nine essential life skills to be acquired by Junior Secondary School Students and to obtain information on whether appropriate training had been provided at home on four

essential life skills.

- 4.2 The results indicated that the interviewed parents generally regarded the nine life-skills to be acquired by children aged 12-15 as important. More parents ranked “Take initiative in learning”, “Know how to get on well with other people” and “Able to manage one’s emotion” as some very important life skills to be acquired. On the contrary, “Able to assist with households chores” was considered as relatively less important.
- 4.3 Parents at large did not rely much on schools for the training of their children on the selected life-skills that include “Self-learning”, “Managing time”, “Handling household chores” and “Managing personal finance”. Parents of “Indulgent Style” of parenting considered that the schools should play a more significant role in enhancing children’s ability in “Self-learning”.
- 4.4 Although the tendency to rely on schools was not obvious amongst the parents, the survey findings indicated that only some parents would take it serious in training their children at early age and setting a good example to nurture their children, reviewing teaching methods across the four surveyed life-skills at home. Not too many parents would use positive reinforcement to encourage their children to learn. Most parents would only remind their children on a regular basis.
- 4.5 Some of the interviewed parents had double standards on the expected life skills acquired by boys and girls. Overall, parents considered some life skills such as “Know how to take care of one’s appearance” and “Take initiative in learning” more important to girls than boys in junior secondary school.
- 4.6 The survey findings also indicated that parents generally perceived girls performed more satisfactorily than boys in self-discipline, doing household chores and self-learning. In general, parents considered more girls had acquired the abilities of “Time management”, “Handling household chores” and “Managing one’s personal finance” at an early age.
- 4.7 General speaking, parents should choose suitable nurturing method according to the individual development needs of their children. Thus, providing all around training to their children in school and also at home.