Parental Attitudes and Behaviors and Children's Creativity

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Abstract

Parental reactions are related to children creativity. To examine the relationship, two steps of research were constructed in the present study. One was a quantitative, journal-article search, another was a qualitative, book search. The first study was to develop scenarios as indicators for the second study to interview parents. Results showed that parents were keen on using children's correct scenarios as indicators of creativity. They were also high on including children's wide indicators. Findings from other social scenarios lent further support to the relationship. The present study provided new evidence in the creativity of parent-children search as well as for parents to watch out for new ways to develop children' creativity development.

Keywords: Parenting, childhood, creativity development, social scenarios, Chinese parents and children

1. Introduction

Through social learning theory (Bandura, 1997), it is understood that children tend to repeat behaviors that result in positive reinforcement and cease to engage in those that lead to negative reinforcement. They also learn through observation. If their creative expression and observation of others' creative expression are reinforced, they are likely to develop into creative adults. If they are punished for creative expression, their motivation to express their creativity will be diminished. They may have certain traits that lead to certain behaviors that parents find difficult to handle (Pugsley & Asar, 2018). How parents deal with these behaviors may affect children's creativity development.

The present research aimed to address the following research questions:

1. How parents react to children's creative behaviors?

2. How would parents' responses to children's behaviors affect creativity?

3. What are the areas of parenting that may need education concerning children's creativity development?

Two parts were conducted to address the above questions. The first part was an introduction of literature on parental reactions that facilitate or hinder children's creativity. It aimed to provide a platform to develop themes in the building of scenarios for use in the parent-interview. The interviews included parents' responses to children's behaviors that were uncommon. This was a unique construction of interview scenarios that provided what responses parents should do and avoid doing were discussed. The problems encountered by parents in raising creative behaviors in children were examined. This approach was taken as it had been emphasized by researchers not to rely solely on creativity tests in conducting

creativity research. This qualitative approach provided a different perspective in the understanding of parental reactions to children's behaviors. In most parenting research, most includes the comparisons of creativity effects on parents and children. Results tended to show that the differences might be significant but not strong or stable (Fearon et al, 2013). This is specifically so to the frontline practitioners. Relatively less research on parent interview of child creativity has been done. Torrance (1962) had advocated the need of non-test interviews of identifying the creatively gifted. This study used a two-step approach to obtain questions for parenting interview.

2. Literature Review

In literature, it has been shown that creative children have certain positive personality traits such as autonomy (Wang & Dong, 2019), openness to new experiences (Tan et al., 2016), willingness to take risks (Zhang & Sternberg, 2011), being un-conformative (Kim & Park, 2020). These traits fall in line with the general emphasis of good parenting (Sternberg, 2004). However, not all children with these traits will grow up to be creative adults as personality traits are not stagnant and may change over time and social contexts. Runco et al. (2017) evidenced that students in school are less creative than those outside of school as the two groups might encounter different influences. If parents act as a role model in exercising creativity for their children to imitate by showing encouragement and provide a psychologically safe environment to feel confident to exercise their creativity, the possibility for them to behave creatively will increase (Pugsley & Acar, 2018). The positive traits may make children get into problem and create conflicts with their parents. Present research examined the child-rearing practices and strategies that parents encourage or discourage children's creativity by the strategies implemented by parents in response to children's creative behaviors.

Selection of journal articles and books was about child-rearing practices that were related to children's creative behaviors. The aim was to provide a platform for the construction of interview questions for parents. Journal articles accessible from the University Library and other links were examined. Twenty-nine Chinese and thirty-three English books that could be borrowed from public libraries and other university libraries included in the Hong Kong Academic Library Link program were also solicited for examination. The checking was conducted to identify the practices that affect children's creativity development. Complete lists of articles and books were reported in Au et al. (2013).

In the parenting literature on child creativity, much less research by parent interview could be found. This might be due to the difficulty of parent recruitment. The inclusion of parent interview would broaden the way to understand parent and child creativity development (Pugsley & Acar, 2018). The following introduction of research evidence showed the need of reaching out for parent-interview in the understanding of children creativity development besides the reliance on survey-types of research.

2.1 Journal Articles

An examination of empirical studies concerning the parenting style employed by creative

children's parents yielded inconsistent findings. Concerning overall support, Koestner et al. (1999) reported that these parents did not show more warmth to their children than other parents. Domino (1969) concluded that these parents were less likely to be nurturing and obliging. Aldous (1975) found that mothers gave less positive affect to their children in the tasks. They did not differ from others in the amount of negative and total affect given. The fathers of creative children did not differ from other fathers in amount of affects given. Contrarily, creative children were found by Sharma (2011) to be more likely to have a home environment richer in cognitive, emotional, and social support. Pugsley and Acar (2018) posted a question of whether supporting creativity or conformity by parents would affect children's creativity. Because of their unusual behaviors, creative children may cause parents to require them to follow certain socially acceptable rules. This contrast might lead to certain conflict. Based on a large sample of parents, it was found that those with positive attitudes and values towards creativity and creative home environment were supportive of creativity characteristics. Parents were more supportive creative traits than socially acceptable characteristics. It was also that mindful parenting was negatively related to support for the socially acceptable characteristics in children.

Blair et al. (2014) estimated the longitudinal effect of parenting on the creative leadership development with a large sample of children. Results were introduced to be robust. With a large sample of high-ability young adults, Miller et al. (2012) found positive relationships between permissive parenting and creativity, and authoritarian parenting style and socially prescribed perfectionism. Results were not strong or uncommon.

Using a small Jamaican sample of parents and children, Fearon et al. (2013) showed that in comparison to authoritative and permissive parenting, the negative influence of authoritarian parenting was more predictive of children's creativity. With parents' creativity level being greater than that of their children, it was found to be more predictive of children's creativity level than those who were not. This was to argue that mothers were an important source of influence. The findings were weak. In another small sample of mothers and children in Indonesia, Setivowati et al. (2019) found a weak relationship between permissive parenting and child creativity. Kim and Park (2020) examined how cultural parenting would impact children's creativity in China. It was observed Chinese parents trained children to learn for academic achievement, while American parents encouraged children to pursue their own interests. When Americans lived in China, their children followed some family rules: i.e., one hour of TV watching if they finished eating after dinner. No such rules existed in Chinese families. The cultural findings were weak.

Mueller et al. (2012) explored why people desired but rejected creative ideas. People could hold a bias against creativity that was not necessarily overt and that was activated when people experienced a motivation to reduce uncertainty. The experimental results showed the existence of a negative bias against creativity when participants experienced uncertainty. It was taken to reveal a concealed barrier that creative actors might face as they attempted to gain acceptance for their novel ideas. The findings were not strong and clear.

In general, journal literature showed that creative children have positive personality traits and

were likely to be raised in a favourable environment by open-minded parents who used supportive parenting styles. These parents reinforced their children's sense of safety to act creatively. The findings were not consistent and strong. In here, no extensive journal search was included, with more focus put on the construction of interview questions from books instead.

2.2 Books

Present research also included an examination of books on child-rearing practices related to children's creative behaviors (Au et al., 2013; Torrance, 1965). The examination generated nine key parental practices that were crucial to children's creativity development. They were in line with Erikson's (1968) stages of healthy development (e.g., trust, autonomy). They were also in line with the positive personality traits shown above (autonomy, openness to new experiences).

In the present study, from the journal articles and book**s** attended, nine key parental practices were extracted (cf. Appendix 1). As a platform, 28 questions helped to generate the practices for Study 1(Pilot Study; cf. Appendix 2). They were for the interview of parents in Study 2 (Main Study; cf. Appendix 3). Twelve scenarios were selected for interview of parents by two researchers. Parents' responses were coded with a scheme generated from the introduction part of the present study. The coding scheme aimed to investigate which parental practices were commonly adopted in each scenario. This could be seen below (a report on the reliability was available upon request.)

Accepting imaginative acts. Parents should understand that pretend play and imaginary friendships are normal behaviors in children and should be encouraged. These activities help to lay the foundation for later creativity. Parents learn to focus on the process and not on the end product. The acquiring of new knowledge, learning about decision- making, and coming to view themselves positively are important as well. These activities also provide an opportunity for parents to learn that children's mistake-making is not harmful, because it is a concept that children will need in other situations.

Tolerating messy disruption. During the process of creative activities, children may cause negative results in the environment. Their destructive behaviors may be their expression of curiosity. Rather than demanding a tidy environment, parents should tolerate the messiness children cause, and tell them to deal with it after the process ends. This would make them feel freer to exercise their creativity.

Appreciating creative expression. Parents should appreciate children's ideas, uniqueness, and less on perfect products because doing so help to preserve children's imagination, and make them feel respected. When children give an unconventional answer, they should be given an opportunity to explain their response because there is often more than one answer to a question. Not afraid of making mistakes is important because it is part of the creative process. Praising may lead children to work on getting more praise and take their focus off the creative process, thus parents need to give their praise carefully. Instead of responses such as "good" or "well done", feedback should be genuine.

Offering guidance and help but not imposition. To facilitate children's creativity, parents can join their journey. However, they should let the children take the lead and offer guidance only when they need help. Doing so helps children develop a sense of agency. When children are taking the lead and making decisions, they get into a state of concentration. Offering guidance is not the same as imposing ideas or taking over. The latter two hinder children's creativity because they are only following parents' agenda.

Encouraging exploration. Parents need to encourage children to explore, and provide information for them to think. Ideally, only open-ended questions with indefinite answers that lead to further thinking should be given. When confronted with a difficult question, parents should admit that they do not have an answer. If parents fake an answer, children will end the discussion.

Promoting independence. Children need to be given experience to work independently, and their actions of independence should be appreciated. If they are overly reliant on parents' instructions, their creative response is less likely to blossom.

Allowing risk-risking. Encouraging children's spirit of adventure and help them understand more about themselves with respect to their abilities. Being able to trust oneself and taking risks also foster spontaneity, which often provides inspiration.

Exercising rules with explanation. Parents who always try to maintain discipline and make many rules for children to follow are hindering creativity as they are conveying their lack of respect for children's thinking. Parents should emphasize values and teach their children what is right and wrong based on those values.

Involving decision-making. Having opportunities to make decision is important because children get to exercise their thinking skills to solve problems and to make judgment. By giving the responsibility to make decisions, parents are implying that they trust them, and children in turn learn to trust themselves.

In sum, promoting independence, allowing risk-taking, involvement in making decisions and explaining rules to children imply that parents cater to children's need for autonomy. Creative children possess a desire to engage themselves as independent individuals. Once they think they are able to make choice and come up with alternatives based on their own preference and thought process. They are more likely to feel confident and safe to display creative behaviors in an environment where discussion with parents that takes place and where non-constructive criticism and judgment are absent. The current study is to help building more on the distinction between parental reaction and children creativity.

It is argued why the current study needs to be done and published. This is to place more influence in the distinction. The results would help to highlight the separation, where is small in current research.

2.3 Interviews of Parents

The following study furthered the subject of children creative response through the interviews of parents.

3. Methods

The parent-interview study included a Pilot and a Main study. In the Pilot study, a focus group interview was conducted to develop scenarios for use in the Main study. The goal was to examine how parents would respond to children's creative behaviors.

3.1 Participants

The sample included 48 parents (8 in the Pilot study, 40 in the Main study). All participations were voluntary and were informed of the research purpose on the education of children creativity development. The project was carried out before the COVID-19 epidemic.

3.2 Procedure

Participants in the Pilot study were recruited from a kindergarten program organized by the child center of the University. It was to finalize the interviewing procedures for the Main study. Twenty-eight behaviors of creative children were extracted from child-rearing books. Twelve final scenarios were selected for the Main study. Parents were recruited from five kindergartens. Principals were contacted by mail and phone. Individual interviews were conducted at the kindergartens and each interview lasted about 30 minutes. Parents were asked how they would react if the scenarios involved their children. All interviews were transcribed to construct a brief coding frame. Each response corresponding to the themes included in the coding scheme was identified and assigned into different categories, which were then trying to find the emerging themes. The qualitative study of Glenn et al. (2012) on the interview of children's perception of play provided brief coding reference for present interview of parents' view of children's response. (The questions are provided in Appendix 3.)

4. Results and Discussion

Discussions were conducted to each scenario to examine how parents respond to their children's expression and whether these strategies encourage or discourage the creativity. A brief explanation for each scenario was provided, with detailed elaboration of the scenarios and responses reported in Au et al. (2013). (For simplicity, only four scenarios and parents' responses were reported in the following. A full list of scenarios and parents' response was available upon request.)

Scenario 1. In this scenario children were creating something in an unusual way such as drawing apples in purple. Most parents responded they would appreciate the behavior, reasoning that since it was just an art work, it was fine to let the children make the decision of which color to use. Some parents would ask questions so as to learn why the children were using purple to draw apples and to understand their inner world and thought process.

Parent 17: "I will ask him why he draws the apple in purple. It is strange because apples are obviously red and green, and there are no purple ones. I want to know how he would answer me."

It seemed that most parents appreciated their children's creative choice. This encouraged

creative expression in children. Many parents were still concerned about instilling the correct knowledge in children.

Scenario 2. This scenario described a child who shared with the parent his creative work, which was an unrecognizable fish with only two lines. About a third of the parents said they nonetheless would show appreciation.

The parents who were intolerant and critical of their children's drawing stated that they thought their children would draw that way because they did not know how a fish looked. They were concerned that their children were not having the correct knowledge.

Parent 35: "I suppose I will tell him that is not a fish, just two line, as a fish does not have that shape. I will ask him how the two lines would look like a fish."

In all, some parents would react in ways that facilitated their children's creativity development by showing their appreciation for their children's creation, while others would do harm to their children's creativity with criticism and intolerance. It seemed many viewed that having the right knowledge was more important than expressing in imaginative and creative ways. Interestingly, this view was stronger in this scenario than in Scenario 2 even both involved a child drawing a non-conforming picture.

Scenario 3. Participants were asked to imagine coming home to find their children making a mess while playing. Most said they would allow their children to continue playing, but would also require them to pick up the toys themselves afterwards. Among them, many would also explain why it was important to pick up their toys.

Parent 42: "I will say, 'You can build your village and play the dwarfs. But when the dwarfs are gone, remember to pick up the things in the village.' At least, I think I need to let him know that he can play, but he also has the responsibility to clean up afterwards."

Parents who tolerated the messiness and allowed their children to continue playing were asked to explain their decision; many said they understood their children were exercising their imagination. Recognizing this, some said they would discuss with their children or even participate in the imaginary world in order to understand their children's inner world.

Several parents would not tolerate the messiness. Some said they had been training their children to keep things tidy when their children were younger. Instead, they thought their children were looking for the toys they wanted to play with, and once they succeeded, they should put the other toys back to where they belonged right away.

Findings from this scenario revealed that most parents would approve their children's imaginary expression and tolerate the mess resulting from such expression, which could promote further creative expression in their children. Those who would not tolerate the messiness could be hindering their children's creativity, and they usually did so because of a failure to recognize their children's engagement in the imaginary world.

Scenario 4. In here, children voiced their opinion regarding where they wanted to visit on Sunday. Only one parent said she would listen to the child's opinions, involve him in the

family decision-making process, and try to fulfil his wish whenever possible. Parents gave various reasons for this decision. Some said that since they had little time to spend with their children on weekdays and that Sunday was all about spending time together as a family happily.

Parent 22: "Sunday is a day for families to have fun together. As long as the children like it and enjoy it, it doesn't matter where we go." Other parents explained that they would consider their children's opinions because they wanted their children to expand on their interests, learn more, and explore more.

Some parents stated that as their children were part of the family, it was only natural that they had the right to participate in making family decisions. Most parents mentioned that there could be circumstances (e.g., time constraint) where they could not fulfil their children's wish; they would explain the reasons because they respect them and did not want to upset them. Most parents would involve their children in making family decisions and provide an explanation when the children's request could not be met. These responses were favourable to their children's creativity development.

From all twelve scenarios, most strategies parents would use in response to their children's creative expression were beneficial to children's creativity development. Most would allow their children to take risks, provide enough but not too much guidance, approve of and appreciate their behaviors, tolerate their messiness and disruptive behaviors during the creative process, accept their acts of imagination, and encourage them to explore.

There are areas where parents might need improvement. One of the problems was that parents, at times, were unable to recognize children's messiness and disruptive behaviors as imaginary expression. If parents were told that these behaviors were related to their children's creativity, they might be more likely to tolerate them. Many parents were also concerned with their children learning the wrong knowledge, so they might criticize or disapprove their children's expression. Parents need to know that while acquiring the right knowledge is important, emphasizing on what is real may squash their children's creativity. While parents would usually provide an explanation for disallowing their children from doing certain things and not being able to meet their children's requests, when it came to breaking family rules, only half of the parents would give an explanation. Parents need to understand that it is favorable to explain the family rules to them.

5. Conclusion

The qualitative inclusion of Study 1 and 2 had helped to broaden our understanding of the issue of parental influence on children's creativity development from different perspectives. The examination of books in Study 1 was helpful in generating relevant scenarios that covered a wide range of real-life situations meaningful for the parent interviews in Study 2. Responses from parents who were presented with scenarios of creative children's behaviors in the interview contributed further our understanding of the strategies used by parents and the problems they encountered.

The journal articles showed that parents held high expectations for their children without

requiring them to act in socially desirable ways, foster independence in their children, and reinforce their children's creative expression through encouragement. Examination of books revealed nine key parental practices crucial to children's creativity development: Independence, risk taking, rule exercising, decision making, imagination, exploration, making mess, guidance, and appreciation. Study 2 showed parents did well in most areas except for tolerating children's messiness and disruptive behaviors, and exercising rules with explanation and flexibility. Parents' over-concern about children in learning the right knowledge might create hurdles to creativity development.

It is worthy of note that the parental interviews could be clouded by the possible irrelevance of a couple of scenarios felt by some parents. The relationship between child-rearing practices of father and mother and child gender could be examined. It will be meaningful to observe how parents actually react to their children's behaviors. It would be helpful if practical strategies could be extended like the following. In one action study (Tong, 2007), Chinese and Japanese children were grouped to play. They were required to come up with one creative product in 3 hours. They could do so under smooth interactions. It seemed when it came to play, children were able to overcome the language and cultural barriers. Another Hong Kong Chinese project was on the effect of story-telling training of parents on children (Au et al., 2013). Children were found to show a growth in self-concept, and parents were very willing to spend time to pick up the skills to tell stories to their children. When it came to learning new ways to help children's development, parents were willing to put forth the effort required.

In one field training study, it was found that a three-hour SCAMPER workshop was able to enhance the self-confidence in creativity in Chinese students (Poon et al., 2014). Another Hong Kong field experimental study was done to examine the dilemma creative children faced in their social status (Lau & Li, 1996). Their peer acceptance could be due to their broad creative ideas, but their rejection could also be due to their dominance. With some social skills training, they could relate themselves better to their peers. Findings from the aforementioned studies suggested that training in social skills, story-telling and cross-cultural enrichment, could serve as different channels to stimulate children's creativity and psychological growth.

It is worthy to take a cross-cultural examination of parents in the use of strategies in nurturing their children's creativity development. Lau et al. (2013) provided an in-depth examination of the bi-cultural effect on creativity development of Chinese and French children in Hong Kong and Paris. If more cross-cultural studies are to be performed, it should be noted that the research should not rely on one stereotyped concept such as collectivism-individualism to explain any cross-cultural difference (Lau, 1992).

Apart from the fact that parents favor the creativity development of their children, there are factors that would hinder their free hand on aspects like independence and risk-taking. Frequent curriculum and education policy change had also created constant instabilities and anxiety to parents in preparing plans for their children to get into primary schools (Cheung & Lau, 2013). We do need a reasonably stable and challenging environment for parents to work

with teachers to create strategies to nurture children's creativity. From an ecological perspective, children are malleable to challenges. Findings like the present are useful to educational and frontline practitioners who are often looking for ready-to-use references in parenting and child-rearing education. As a part, it is important to take note of the limitations of policy and practice in the use of findings. Future research is needed to extend the study such as gender, age so as to modify the findings. Ethical implications are to be concerned.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix 1. Parental practices

Promoting children's independence

Parents who wish to promote their children's creative growth should encourage independence and autonomy in their children. Children need to be given experience to work independently, and their actions of independence should be appreciated. Being independent positively reinforces children's desire to move forward. If children are overly dependent on their parents and reliant on their parents' constant instructions, their creativity is less likely to blossom.

Examples of what parents should do:

- *Help their children understand that they need to take the responsibility themselves if they cannot solve their problems.*

- *Allow their children to do things by themselves.*

- *Let their children think of ways to solve problems first.*

Examples of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Help their children to make up excuses to their schools when their children fail to complete their school assignments.*

- *Do everything for their children.*

- *Assign no house chores to their children so they can focus on more important things.*

Allowing children to take risks

Parents need to be less over-protective of their children and allow their children to take risks as long as no one's life and body is in danger. Allowing children to be risky encourage their spirit of adventure and helps children understand more about themselves as well as their abilities. Being able to trust oneself and taking risks also foster spontaneity, which often provide the children with inspiration.

Parents who are overly protective of their children will find their children lacking in motivation to go on new adventures, dependent upon them, having no ambition, and being less creative.

Example of what parents should do:

- *Teach their children how to use scissors*

Examples of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Prohibit their children from doing things on a commanding way, such as, "That place is dangerous. You cannot play there." "This game is dangerous. You cannot play."*

- *Apply harsh discipline on their children and often tell them, "You will fall down if you climb up the tree. It's dangerous!" or "The broken glass in the sand pool will cut your hands. It's dangerous!"*

Exercising rules on children with explanation

Parents who always try to maintain discipline and make many specific rules for their children to follow are hindering their children's creative development because they are conveying to their children that their lack of respect for the children's thinking and their lack of belief in the children. They also fail to give the children an opportunity to make decisions. To enhance children's creativity, rather than having specific rules, parents should emphasize values and teach their children what is right and what is wrong based on those values. Few rules should be made, and when there is a need to make rules, parents should explain the rules and make sure their children know that the rules can be bent depending on the situation. This way, children get to make decisions based on the values they learned instead of relying on the rules made by their parents every time they decide what is right and what is wrong. Thus, their decision-making skills are exercised, and their independence is fostered. Having few rules and constraints placed upon them during creative activities also make children feel freer to use their imagination and creativity.

Parents must exercise caution when presenting rules. Giving rules in a way which makes children feel restricted undermines their creativity as the placement of constraints can lower the children's intrinsic motivation and interest in what the activity they are engaging in, which, in turn, harms their creativity. Thus, parents should present rules in an informative way and make children feel they have choices and are choosing to be well-behaved so that children's interests and creativity are not harmed.

Example of what parents should do:

- *Explain to the child every rule and restriction.*

Examples of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Limit their children's behaviors with family rules or parental authority without giving explanation.*

- *Force their children to obey blindly.*

Involving children in making decisions

Parents should give their children responsibility to make decisions early on. Ways to do so include allowing children to make decisions for themselves, allowing them to express their opinions when making family decisions, and providing them with choices for them to choose from. If parents make all the decisions and prohibit their children from questioning their decisions, children's creativity will be harmed. Having opportunities to make decisions is important because children get to exercise their thinking skills to solve problems and learn to make judgement. By giving children the responsibility to make decisions, parents are implying that they trust their children, and this helps the children learn to trust themselves. If parents are the ones who make decisions, children will learn not to trust their instincts.

Examples of what parents should do:

- *Allow their children to make decisions and believe in his or her ability to do so.*

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- *Ask their children to decide what the family will eat that day.*

- *Allow their children to choose which toys to play with, what to wear, where to go on picnics etc.*

Example of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Be afraid that their children will fail or get hurt if they make their own decisions and thus often make decisions for them.*

Accepting children's acts of imagination

To nurture creativity in children, parents should understand that imaginative thinking, pretend play, fantasy play, and imaginary friendships are normal behaviors in children and should be encouraged. These activities help to lay the foundation for later creativity. Engaging in these acts of the imagination stimulates children's creativity. Through these activities, children's imagination deepened. They come to see the use of the imagination as normal and approved, learn to love and enjoy the creative process instead of focusing on the end product, acquire new knowledge, learn about decision making, discover what their interests are, have the questions they have been curious about answered, and come to view themselves more positively. These activities also provide a great opportunity for parents to teach children that making mistakes is not bad, which is a concept that children will need in other creative situations. Thus, parents who discourage their children's imaginative thinking and activities will hinder their children's creative development.

Aggressive and emotional themes in pretend play and fantasy play should not be forbidden. Instead, they should be accepted because young children tend to be interested in these themes but are usually prohibited to explore them in other situations; play is the only time children get to explore and try to understand these themes.

Examples of what parents should do:

- *Join their children's pretend play when asked by the children.*

- *Show interest in their children's imaginative play process.*

- *Encourage their children to play games that require the use of the imagination.*

Example of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Find their children's imaginative behaviors strange and thus stop them from engaging in such activities.*

Encouraging children to explore

It is important to allow children to be curious and explore things since it leads to self-motivated learning and deep thinking. Questioning, exploring, and testing ideas are essentially what scientists do before they make a discovery! Hence, to promote creativity, parents need to encourage and challenge their children to explore, question, experiment, view things differently, and systematically test their ideas by providing information for them to

think about and asking them questions that prompt thinking. Caution must be used in choosing what and how to ask children. Ideally, only open- ended questions with indefinite answers which lead to further thinking should be asked. Questions asking for factual answers, "yes/no" questions, and those with only one answer do not lead to further learning. With no further learning, children stop thinking and looking further for deeper meaning.

Parents should permit and encourage the questioning behaviors in children in order to protect children's desire to explore and enhance their motivation to innovate. When confronted with a difficult question, parents should admit that they do not have an answer. Parents should not be afraid that they will lose face when they do this because they will not; instead, they will win their children's respect. If parents fake an answer, children will end the discussion, thinking they have been given a right answer. Their exploration in this particular unknown subject will be hindered.

Similarly, children's other exploratory behaviors should not be stopped. Parents should only stop behaviors that are impolite, dangerous, or destructive. If the children's behaviors are not rude and cause no harm, danger, and destruction, parents should not stop their children. Stopping children from doing what they are interested in simply because the parents are busy or feel annoyed does not help the children's creativity in any way. When it is necessary to stop children from doing something, parents should not say "no" or "don't" because this would squash the children's creativity; parents should redirect the children's attention to something else.

Examples of what parents should do:

- *When the parents do not know the answer to the question asked by their children, tell the children, "I don't know the answer."*

- *When their children propose to do something crazy (e.g., playing baseball in the living room), ask the child "Why do you want to do so?" or "What problems will be encountered while doing so?"*

- *Ask their children "What if…" and other imaginative questions.*

Examples of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Prohibit their children from touching things to keep the children's clothes clean (e.g., tell the child, "Get up quickly. Your clothes will get dirty.")*

- *Ask their children mainly yes/no questions or questions that elicit an automatic response from children.*

- *Ignore their children's questions or just reply, "I don't know" without thinking.*

- *Ask their children to shut up, behave, and ask less questions.*

- *Pretend to know everything and come up with fake answers.*

- *Tell their children, "There is no answer for this question." "Why do you ask so much?" or "You'll understand when you grow up."*

Tolerating children's messiness and disruptive behaviors during creative process

During the process of creative activities, children may cause destruction and messiness in the environment. However, their destructive behaviors and messiness are just their expression of curiosity. If they do not make a mess or cause destruction, their creativity cannot be enhanced. Hence, rather than constantly demanding for a clean and tidy environment, parents should relax and tolerate this messiness their children cause in the creative process because doing so makes children feel freer to continue to exercise their creativity.

Example of what parents should do:

- *Ask their children to deal with the mess after the creative process has ended.*

Example of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Blame their children for messing up things.*

Offering guidance and help but not imposition during children's creative process

To facilitate children's creative development, parents can join their children's creative journey. However, they should let the children take the lead and offer guidance and aid only when the children need help. Doing so helps children develop a sense of agency and independence. Also, when children are taking the lead and making decisions, they get into a state of deep concentration that is required in creativity. Offering guidance is not the same as imposing ideas on children or taking over. The latter two behaviors hinder children's creative development because children are only following their parents' agenda when the parents are in charge; they do not get to practice their creativity. Parents simply cannot impose creativity in their children; children's creativity needs to come from within.

Example of what parents should do:

- *When their children say, "I don't know how to draw," guide them through the creative process to create something of their own.*

Examples of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Give their children the answer right away when their children get stuck.*

- *Impose ideas while their children are drawing (e.g. "Red can be used here, and yellow can be used there," "There should be a tree here, and there should be a house there," etc.).*

Appreciating children's creative expression

Parents should tolerate and appreciate children's ideas, uniqueness, and less than perfect products because doing so helps preserve young children's imagination, boost their self-esteem and makes them feel respected, which encourages them to explore their creativity even further. When children give an unconventional answer, they should be given an opportunity to explain their response because there is often more than one answer to a question and the children's thinking process may actually provide new insight. Parents should

also allow and encourage their children to make mistakes. Not being afraid of making mistakes is important because making mistakes is part of the creative process. Parents may even use the mistakes as opportunities for their children to learn.

Parents need to be careful when showing appreciation. Any feedback given to the children should be genuine because if the parents' response is fake or if the response does not really say anything (such as "good," "well done"), the children will know that it is fake. Therefore, parents are advised to give constructive feedback. Additionally, because praising children may lead them to work to get more praise and take their focus off the creative process, parents need to phrase their praise carefully. Praising the children's effort, however, is favorable because this can help build the children's self-trust and sense of self-pride.

The following parental behaviors can destroy children's creativity: being critical of or making fun of children's ideas, expecting a perfect product from their children, requiring their children to fit in, prohibiting children from voicing their opinions, dismissing children's accomplishments, considering children as abnormal, and disapproving children's non-confirming behaviors. Because these actions imply that innovation is wrong, children will feel rejected by their parents, and their self-confidence and self-esteem will be negatively affected. They will focus on creating something that satisfies their parent expectations, leading to distrust of their intuition and suppression of unconventional ideas.

Examples of what parents should do:

- *Be pleased to see that their children are drawing apples, for examples, with unusual colors.*

- *Tolerate the silly ways their children use to do things.*

- *Give recognition and show appreciation to their children's self-composed stories, self-created toys, and self-choreographed dance pieces etc.*

- *Show interest when their children share what they did that day.*

Examples of what parents should avoid doing:

- *Tell their boys that being emotional are for girls only.*

- *Reject their children's ideas quickly (e.g., "Stupid kid, you should aim much higher," "Your idea is unrealistic. Let me tell you why.").*

- *Give no response or a simple reply that gives no information (e.g., "Okay") when their children share what they did that day.*

- *Tell their children that their paintings are bad.*

- *Ignore the children's creation, or even laugh at, intervene or inhibit the child to create.*

Appendix 2. Scenarios asked in pilot focus group interview

1. Your child stands on the dining chair. You asked him/her to sit down. He/she asked you, "Why do I need to sit down?" or "Can I stand or squat?"

2. Your family goes to visit your parents during Chinese New Year. You asked your child to greet his/her grandparents. He/she asked, "Why do I need to do so?", "Can I just kiss them and not greet them?"

3. Your child usually goes to bed at 9 o'clock. Tonight, he/she asked "Can I go to sleep later?" and give you a lot of reasons.

4. Your child would like to open a packet of snack and asked for a pair of scissors.

5. Your child wants to climb up the tree in the playground.

6. Your child wants to jump into a sand pond.

7. Your child receives a fountain pen from your pen which has a projector function. He/she asked "Can I open it?"

8. Your child finds a strange insect in the garden and asked "Can I bring it home and take care of it?"

9. Your family is making dumplings. Your child asked "Can I make one that looks like a sausage-shaped or star-shaped dumpling?"

10. Your child is doing homework and asked "Can I draw a purple apple?"

11. Your child is playing and pretending to be the teacher by himself/herself for an hour and asks you to correct the homework of the invisible Amy.

12. Your child creates a new song and asks if it is good.

13. Your child draws two lines on the paper and asks if it is good.

14. Your child makes a doll out of boxes and gives it to you as a present. He/she asks if you like it.

15. Your child asks you to go and see his/her big discovery. When you arrive, you find that he/she discovered a beetle. He/she asks if you are excited.

16. Your child asks if he/she can play football in the living room.

17. Your child asks if he/she can use all the things in the cupboard to make a village for his/her imaginary friend.

18. Your child asks if he/she can sleep in a box instead of his/her bed.

19. Your family plans to visit another part of the museum. Your child asks if he/she can stay where he/she is instead of following your plan.

20. You want to order spaghetti for your child, but he/she asks if he/she can have broccoli

instead.

21. Your child has a new mechanical pencil but does not know how to use it. He/she asks for your help.

22. Your child has a stapler and does not know how to use it. He/she asks for your help.

23. Your child is making a birthday card for a friend. He/she asks for your help.

24. Your child is tidying up his/her backpack and seems to be experiencing some difficulties. He/she asks for your help.

25. You find that your child has written a word wrong, but he/she insists and asks if he/she can write like that.

26. Your child sees a line of birds in the sky and asks you if they are afraid of getting lost.

27. Your child asks you why boys stand when they pee but girls sit.

28. Your child wants to fly and ask you how he/she can do it.

Appendix 3

Standardized interview questions

1. You take your child to play in the nearby playground. Once you step inside, your child runs to the highest steel structure, and keeps saying he/she wants to climb up the structure.

    i. Why is your child not afraid of danger and climb up so high?

    ii. How would you usually respond?

    iii. Why would you have this response?

2. Your child is drawing. He/she says the teacher told the class to draw a fruit they like to share the painting with the class next day. You see that your child is drawing a purple apple.

    i. Why is your child drawing an apple with the color purple?

    ii. How would you respond?

    iii. Why would you have this response?

3. Your child shows you a painting that he/she just drew. There are only two lines on the painting, and you don't quite understand the painting. Your child asks you, "Mom, I drew a fish. What do you think of it?"

    i. Why does your child show you his/her painting?

    ii. How would you usually respond?

iii.   Why would you have this response?

4.   You come home from work to find out that your child has taken out all the toys and has spread them all over the house. Your child then tells you he/she is creating a dwarf's village.

i.   Why does your child always create a mess?

ii.   How would you usually respond?

iii.   Why would you have this response?

5.   Father and mother are discussing where to go on Sunday. During this time, your child says, "I want to go to the science museum."

i.   Why does your child say his/her opinion?

ii.   How would you usually respond?

iii.   Why would you have this response?

6.   Your child is trying to open the cap of a new pen, but you know that pen need to be twist-open. Your child can't open it and come over to ask you for help.

i.   Why does your child ask for your help?

ii.   How would you usually respond?

iii.   Why would you have this response?

7.   Boy: Your child is playing by himself. He is playing superman, imagining he is battling a monster. After a while, he gets Thomas and Tank engine, comes over to you, and says, "I defeated the monster and saved Thomas."

Girl: Your child is playing by herself. She is playing the game pretending to be a teacher. She is the teacher and is teaching a few imaginative students spelling. After a while, she got a piece of paper, comes over to you, and says, "Look, my students have finished their homework."

i.   Why does your child play with companions he/she imagined?

ii.   How would you usually respond?

iii.   Why would you have this response?

8.   You and your child are in the living room. Your child keeps asking you questions, "Why do I have to stand when I pee? Why does Michelle sit?", "Why do I have to go to kindergarten?", "Why do I have to eat every day?", "Why do I live with Mom and Dad and not with Alvin and Doris?" …

i.   Why does your child keep asking you questions?

ii.   How would you usually respond?

iii.   Why would you have this response?

9. You just bought a new mechanical pencil. Your child says he/she wants to look at it. A while later, you discover he/she dismantled the pen.

    i.   Why does your child like to dismantle things?

    ii.   How would you usually respond?

    iii.   Why would you have this response?

10. You always tell your child not to leave the table while having meals, but today, your child keeps running around and is not willing to sit down and eat.

    i.   Why does your child run around even though he/she knows the rule?

    ii.   How would you usually respond?

    iii.   Why would you have this response?

11. Your family is getting ready to go to the library. You allow your child to change his/her clothes and put on the shoes by himself/herself, and you go to pack his/her backpack. After a while, you return to find out that your child is still putting on clothes.

    i.   Why is your child so slow?

    ii.   How would you usually respond?

    iii.   Why would you have this response?

12. You and your child are reading a storybook. In the story, there is a frog who wants to go to the moon. You and your child are discussing how to help the frog fly to the moon. After a while, your child shares an idea, "Let's tie many balloons to the frog and let it fly to the sky."

    i.   Why does your child have ideas different from adults?

    ii.   How would you usually respond?

    iii.   Why would you have this response?

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