**Before there were telephones, humans devised clever ways to communicate. Africans used drums and American Indians used smoke signals. In the 15th century Indians sent this message: “He says his name is Christopher Columbus and he’s looking for China! What do we tell him?” Chris never made it. If he had, the Chinese would have announced Columbus’ arrival by their unique communication system that Chinese Americans still celebrate -- the fortune cookie. Cookies warned in the 19th century that the British were funneling opium to China with shipments through Hong Kong. In 1972, cookies blared: “We interrupt this fortune cookie for an important message. President Nixon is coming to Beijing!” In 2008, cookies extolled the Beijing Olympics. Today, they say to you, “Gung Hay Fat Choy! For very good fortune, hear Yee.”**

**Drawing on my knowledge and experience as an educator, psychologist, and parent, I published a book titled *Raising and Teaching Children for Their Tomorrows*. Addressed to teachers and caregivers, that is, birth and foster parents, kin, and orphanages, the book is about the urgency of improving how we raise and teach children.**

**Parents with their first child who think they know everything about**

**raising him or her are fools. Michael Levine observed: "Having children makes you no more a parent than having a piano makes you a pianist.”**. **Caring for their children for about 7,000 days before they go on their own, parents lead in determining what kind of people they will be as adults. If they succeed and are good people, take credit. Who do you blame if they don’t do well? Children need more than affection. It’s not simple and easy, people realize that getting married, earning a degree and a living demand effort and patience, yet of all their endeavors they usually shortchange their young.**

**Let’s suppose we had two scales ranging from miserable to ideal -- one that assessed parents’ upbringing of children and a similar scale on how well educators teach students. The two measures would have to cover the many differences and complexities involved. If such scales existed, they would reveal what I fear -- the average scores would be miserable. I say that because while there are decent, child-centered households as well as excellent teachers, the reality is that many children have poor, even abusive care, and the vast majority are raised and taught with no consistency and merit. The great range of differences from good to poor childcare and teaching represents a tragic waste of human potential. Too many parents are inconsistent, permissive or mean. When teaching at the CUHK, for example, I was told by a student that exams terrified her. She explained that as a girl her father would beat her whenever she did not get top grades. Counseling helped her pass my course.**

**Let’s focus on the crucial early years of children. As soon as they are born,**

**babies’ awareness of caregivers, surroundings, and self quickly develops. As**

**their senses progress, they learn to discriminate close ones and objects, and**

**their brains struggle to comprehend. By their 6th month, normal babies learn to discriminate about 50 phonemes. Phonemes are the smallest language sounds that carry meaning, such as discriminating between the sounds of *lip* and *rip* and *milk* and *mama*. They also discriminate phonemes by facial expressions. For example, saying *yes* or *hai* and mama and papa move one’s mouth and face upward. Saying *no* or *bu* lowers the mouth and face. The familiar expression, *gaochai*, says it all.**

**Children’s first three years are crucial for language acquisition. Babies**

**pick up basics of any language spoken around them. By two or so, many can speak short sentences. A gift of human evolution, infants are born with a magnet-like, mental facility that struggles to understand and use their caretakers’ language. It’s called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Language acquisition distinguishes humans from other animals, as seen with the deer, squirrels, and birds on my property. Although babies are helpless and highly dependent, their brains are constantly trying to learn and understand. If a child is isolated and not spoken with by the age of six, he or she will never learn to speak. That phenomenon was discovered centuries ago**

**when children were found living with wolves. They could bark like wolves,**

**but after their rescue they never learned to speak as humans.**

**The importance of good care-giving is that children’s early life experiences**

**begin to shape their ability to learn, think, and conduct their adult lives.** **Awareness and learning begin at birth, not when children enter school. Babies’ first three years are most important for cognitive development, that is, thinking, reasoning, and remembering. I found all of that to be true through my study of famous people’s lives.**

**Neurons and their interconnections are the brain’s workhorses, of which humans have many billions. As the brain produces neurons on a need basis, youths who have loving, interactive, and thoughtful caregivers and teachers develop brains richly interwoven with neurons. Children raised and taught in bland, negligent conditions have fewer neurons and weak cognitive development. Studies have found that the brains of highly intelligent children develop differently from children with average intelligence. Although children with average IQ (scores of 83-108) reached peak cortex growth at age 7-8, very bright youths (IQ scores of 121-149) reached their peak cortex thickness about age 13 with greater dynamic pruning of redundant neuron connections to make way for new neurons. The brains of high IQ youths are more plastic and changeable. This has been verified by comparing orphanage**

**children, who lack attachment and social interaction, with children raised by**

**regular families.**

**Since humans are social creatures, interpersonal relations are crucial**

**for children. Nurturance of children stimulates attachment with parents and relatives. Attachment is close, warm, trusting relations between people. We all have attachments with friends and relatives – some that endure and others that fade and end. Normal caregivers’ attachment with children, who are usually their own flesh and blood, is expressed in devotion and commitment. This is most notable between mothers and their babies and children, a natural bond worldwide. People cherish their mothers, but there are big differences in how mothers raise their offspring. Love alone is not enough.**

**Research has found big differences in how mothers handle attachments and social interaction. Comparison of good and poor quality mother-child relations has found that “mothers who scored high on sensitivity (show) more acceptance, cooperation, and accessibility in their interactions with their infants.” The good mothers with high sensitivity get to understand their babies so well that they are able to anticipate and promptly respond to their wants and needs. Besides handling their babies’ physical needs, such as feeding and changing diapers, high-sensitivity mothers treat babies as thinking beings. A crucial point, they treat babies as thinkers. As high sensitivity mothers interact with their infants, they constantly pour out abundant baby talk and seek responses from their babies. The best mothers use attachment to fully interact with their babies and understand them. Poor mothers with low sensitivity express love and care in their attachment with babies, but they seldom go beyond the level of feeding and cleansing. They don’t treat their babies as thinking beings that can learn. For example, mothers that shortchange their children might say “Goochigoo. I love you! So you’re wet again. I’ll change you before we have our milk.” Good mothers might say to their babies, “Oh, I hear my darling crying. Is that because you’re wet and uncomfortable? Your crying seems to tell me that, right? Would you like me to change you before you get your milk? Can you say yes? Oh my, what a big smile. Do you see my happy smile?” Note the frequent use of questions.**

**As children grow, parents’ social interaction with them can expand**

**through many activities, such as going shopping, taking walks, and visiting others. An example is what I once witnessed at the CU train station. A mother with a young child in a forward carry sling talked with the child and stopped before a big electrical cabinet. She chatted away about the cabinet and what it might be for, pointing to this and that circuit for the child to see. His mind must have registered that the cabinet was mechanical, complex, and**

**something mom was interested in.**

**All caregivers and teachers should view the “Miracle Worker,” a movie**

**about Helen Keller’s youth. Keller could not see or hear after she suffered**

**scarlet fever in her second year. Hired as Helen’s teacher after other teachers had failed, Anne Sullivan opened Helen’s mind to language through her fingers. The most dramatic moment was when the girl realized what she pumped out of a well had a name, which Anne repeatedly fingered to her in Braille – “W A T E R.” Finally making the connection between Braille and objects, Helen rushed to learn the names of everything. The film demonstrates that the symbolic nature of language, which the mind uses to communicate and learn, and the dedicated skill and persistence of Anne Sullivan sparked an animal-like creature to flourish into a functioning human being. Though unable to see and hear, Helen grew to become an acclaimed humanitarian author and speaker. She was fortunate on two counts – first, her first 19 months of life were normal when she and her parents became positively attached, and second, after becoming blind and deaf she developed and used a crude hand language with the daughter of the family cook until Anne arrived to teach her. Another film I’d recommend is “Sunrise Over Campobello.” See how Eleanor Roosevelt played perfectly by Greer Garson interacts with her children to teach and supervise them, ranging from very**

**young to teenage.**

**Children love to be read to. Toddlers like books with pictures and repeated readings of their favorite books. Readings should be frequent and done with social interaction. Instead of just rote recitation, caregivers should involve young listeners by asking them what is transpiring and what might happen next, what pictures show, and stressing certain words and phrases for meaning and use; i.e., use of social interaction. My children’s mother read frequently each day and did so with dramatic feeling and suspense. I can still hear her clamorous readings of *Chicken Little’s* warning cry, “The Sky is falling!” At times, I would join them flapping my arms like a terrified bird and shouting the warning cry. As I flew around the room, the children vigorously applauded and laughed. Children’s attitudes, values of what is good and bad, and their self-image, develop from meaningful times. I highly recommend making use of museums and libraries. Whenever an incident occurs, such as going to the dentist or there being a house fire nearby, instead of always giving answers, parents should say let’s study and get books on the subject and see what we can learn. Interact with children at their level of understanding.**

**The more parents talk with, not only to, their children, the faster their**

**vocabulary grows. At three, children born into child-proficient families had**

**heard and exchanged millions of more words than those from negligent backgrounds. Sending children to “pre-school” at the age of four comes too late to compensate for shortcomings at home. Words spoken directly and meaningfully to and with a child, rather than those simply heard around them, are what builds vocabulary. Listening to televisions does not work. Neither does being near grown-ups while they converse. As I’ve said, children’s language development comes from giving and getting communications from caregivers to and with children in social interaction.**

**The Language Environment Analysis (LENA) Foundation has a clever device that records everything in a child’s audio environment up to 16 hours. The DLP can play back recordings by sound, but its visual data processing works only with the English version of Windows. If anyone is interested in contacting** **LENA, see me later**.

**Teachers should not be hampered by strict, inflexible rules and syllabuses that prevent rapport with youngsters. Lacking caregivers’ bosom affection and home activities, teacher-student relations, however, can foster rapport that is oriented to learning and school activities. The best teachers infuse knowledge and inspiration through their rapport and social interaction with students, sometimes more influential than caregivers. Superior teachers** **portray a wholesome sense of openness and willingness to serve. They don’t act like robots programmed by a rigid master plan and treat students as non-thinking robots. In control but not autocratic, they stay ahead of what they are doing and are quick to spot student problems. While poor teachers stand on cold, impersonal authority, outstanding teachers radiate a composite of animated confidence, eagerness, and knowledge. When a classroom teacher, I quickly learned each student’s names and worked hard to understand each one and the class as a whole.**

**Education should be more than memorization and facts. Children’s**

**brain development is promoted by quality, interactive teaching. Research of 2,400 four-year-olds in 671 pre-K classrooms in the U.S. found that children’s academic and language skills flourished when they received “greater instructional support, such as feedback on their ideas and encouragement to think in more complex ways . . . when teachers showed more positive emotions.” Strict, inflexible syllabuses restrict teachers. When I was a classroom teacher in California, broad behavioral objectives were set as curricular goals for all subjects, such as the children achieving grade-level ability to read comprehensively with examples. Factors used to evaluate teaching quality, such as class size and teachers’ years of education, have been found to make no real difference on children’s learning progress. Requiring teachers to have many hours of in-service training are wasted if the training is**

**not focused on developing and maintaining social interaction with students.**

**Those training to teach should be provided video examples of excellent teaching that they can model and generalize further. Also, Hong Kong should have demonstration schools with superb teachers, especially at the primary level. Elevated to the famous Frederic Burk School at San Francisco State, I joined a faculty of outstanding teachers who provided real-life teaching demonstrations for groups of student teachers and educators.**

**To summarize, now you should be able to answer these questions: (1) At what age do children begin to think and learn? (2) What period of life is most critical to a person’s future? (3) Who are most important in children’s language development: parents or teachers? (4) What are the most crucial factors in parenting and teaching?**

**Yes, the most important years of learning begin at birth and continue through Primary Six. Love is essential but alone does not raise a child properly. Parents, relatives, and teachers should develop positive attachment and rapport with children that promotes social interaction. Make a habit of speaking abundantly and meaningfully not just to but with children with frequent use of questions to elicit responses, as in reading sessions. Treat children and youths as thinkers, not robots. Expose them to a variety of experiences and ideas and engage their minds about them. When the children you have raised and taught have had a full, good life, in old age they can look back with much satisfaction and warm remembrance of you. My workshop will elaborate on what I have said with a report on my biographical studies and perhaps discuss discipline.**

**You may not know how it came to be that I am here speaking to you today.**

**What happened is when Cam Cheung, EDiversity’s creative and hardworking chief executive, and her associates were planning this conference, they discovered my writings on the problems of Hong Kong’s educational system in the South China Morning Post and Asian Wall Street Journal that were published almost 30 years ago. Seeing that much of what I had published remains true today, they kindly invited me to this conference.**

**I am happy and grateful to be back in Hong Kong. The first time was 67 years ago when my family sent me to study at Lingnan in Guangzhou. Hong Kong in 1947-48 had not recovered from the war with Japan and the place was a colonial backwater. Many streets were unpaved like the dirt floors of restaurants. Buses on Nathan Road were open-air trucks. Escaping the civil war chaos of Guangzhou, I visited Hong Kong often and enjoyed milk shakes at the Mandarin Hotel. By 1948 Mao Zedong’s armies were rushing south. The American President liners were overbooked by people fleeing China, but after a month in Hong Kong I gained a berth on a freighter. I next saw Hong Kong in 1972 after touring China for about a month. Premier Zhou Enlai had awarded me a rare visa for helping the White House make plan for President Nixon’s visit to China earlier that year. I had proposed that America and China should develop an agreement for educational, cultural, and scientific exchanges of students, scholars, artists, businessmen, scientists, etc. That idea turned out to be the most tangible achievement of the Nixon-Zhou negotiations. Pursuing a great variety of interests, many thousands of Americans and Chinese crossed the Pacific for years because of that agreement. Sad to say, my tour of China in 1972 exposed China’s miserable condition wrought by the Cultural Revolution. Streets were bare and everything was in decay. Exiting China through Hong Kong, the ugly shacks of refugees piled up high also shocked me. Yet I could see that the city was developing and that the British were not as oppressive as in 1947-48. No longer were there police with long poles and whites in Central screaming at and chasing the people. That stay in 1972 was short. In the 1980’s, I came to Hong Kong to work and became a professor at Chinese University teaching psychology and education. Gaining permanent residency, I am a Hong Konger.**

**Here is some of what I published in the 1980’s: “In all the talk about the political and economic arrangements in post-1997 Hong Kong, other areas such as education have been overshadowed. Education, for one, should not be taken for granted. Now that the communist takeover is coming, the question is, what’s wrong with the present system and what can be done to improve it.**

**As in England, Hong Kong’s system of public education developed at first mainly through voluntarism by religious societies and minor state aid. Public education began in Hong Kong as early as 1812 when the Morrison Education Society, headed by an American missionary named Elijah Bridgman, opened up a one-room school on land donated by then Governor Sir Henry Pottinger. For a long time after that, Hong Kong’s most influential leaders in education were missionaries, such as James Legge.**

**In 1873, the grant-in-aid scheme was introduced to support private schools. Many Hong Kong governors supported public education. As government’s funding of education grew, it imposed more and more regulations. This gradual, steady bureaucratization of education relieved the financial burden of schools and greatly increased enrollment. It did so, however, by stressing the power of the government over those of the schools. Students and teachers became pawns of officialdom.**

**Today, government plays an overriding role in the school system of Hong Kong. One troubling effect of this bureaucracy is that state examinations have become the criteria for advancement, especially university admission. The great size of the system suggests that decentralization through redistricting is necessary to boost professional accountability and quality in how students are taught and learn. Centralized control promotes inflexibility: it leads to tinkering instead of real fixes and a top-down hierarchy that has forced students to concentrate on memorization and sweat out gateway examinations.**

**Part of the problem is that even the best teachers in Hong Kong, as in China, are not always regarded and respected highly as they should be. This is reinforced by the fact that even teachers do not perceive themselves as the linchpin in the system. They are but the soldiers of the Education Bureau and are expected to obey. Salaries should be raised to attract teachers that can become leaders and model innovators.**

**Hong Kong’s educational system has been fortunate in its financial support by the government and in the number of schools and graduates. However, it is time to go beyond quantity to promote quality. Somehow in all that has been done for Hong Kong’s educational system the individual student has been lost. Not only do students have no influence on how and what they are taught, parents and the community are shut out and ignored. The Education Bureau must open itself to the public and become accountable for what it does. If there is any danger that 1997 will bring further regimentation and**

**doctrinaire thinking into education, the present system of education in Hong**

**Kong is ideally suited to further manipulation.**

**That is what I published in the 1980’s and as I have been told much remains true today, 30 years later. Some good changes have been made by the Education Bureau, particularly teacher certification, school-based management, and fewer examinations. But are schools and teachers making good use of the admirable changes or are they stuck in the old ways of doing things? How well do Hong Kong’s schools and universities actually prepare young people for a democratic society and employment locally and elsewhere in the world?**

**When I taught at the CU, the students were outstanding in taking multiple-choice tests, but they did poorly with open-ended questions related to topics under study. Why was that? Because they concentrated on memorization to pass exams and their thinking and reflection around facts and details had not been developed. Treated as robots through many years of schooling in Hong Kong, the students had not been taught to use their brains to the fullest. There are quantities of facts and details educated people need to know, but remembering them is only the beginning level of thought. Thinking involves comparison, analysis, evaluation, integration, and insight. The problem of memorization as the chief learning-teaching tool is that people forget and lose most or all they have memorized after exams and surely in time. In the 1980’s, a Hong Kong businessman told me that HK employers want to hire good workers, not thinkers. I replied by saying that no matter what workers do at their jobs they have families, children, friends, access to local and world news, avocations they pursue in their leisure time, and possibly the right to vote.**

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**Have educational leaders given serious study to the popular private schools in Hong Kong to see how and what they are teaching children? More than the question of resources, their philosophies, goals, and methods contrast with those of Hong Kong's education system, surely in the ‘80’s when I worked here. For example, two prominent private schools aim at students’ intellectual and social development. Consider the creed of the Hong Kong International School, which began modestly in 1966, has 2,600 students, two campuses, and 500 faculty and staff today: “Our vision is to develop creative, collaborative, resilient, and caring young people who are passionate about meeting the needs of the larger global community.” The English School Foundation, started in 1967 with one school and has 20 today, states its values similarly. The International School and English Foundation Schools express enthusiasm and commitment to education that promote students’ potentials**

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**and values. They commit themselves to empowering students to achieve and succeed in life with others and thereby benefit society.**

**Authorization by the Education Bureau to implement progressive changes in Hong Kong schools is commendable, such as school-based management at primary schools with community participants. The opportunity for schools to innovate and address student and community needs should move apace. If schools and teachers are frozen in the past and unable or slow to implement the Bureau’s changes, teacher exchanges with nations that have outstanding teachers and students, such as Finland and South Korea, could be pursued. Also helpful would be what I have already advised about videos of excellent teaching and the incorporation of demonstration schools. In South Korea, teachers are paid well but not richly. What caught my attention about them is that only the very best pass muster and carefully trained to become primary teachers and they are highly respected by the Korean people. That honor surpasses monetary rewards.**