

NEWSLETTER

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GIVE LESS STUFF, EXPECT MORE SUCCESS

I was blown away by a recent New York Times column written by Nicholas Kristof (Friday, November 22, 2002).

Writing from Shanghai, Kristof describes kindergarten children instantaneously calculating the answer to something like $6+8-7+6+5$ in their second or third language--they speak Mandarin, Shangainese, and English. !I have met the future and it is these kids.

Yes, the moppets described above are in a private school; yes, education in rural China can be pretty terrible; yes, there is less diversity in China than in the US. !But China!s great strength is that in the cities it is not a Communist country, not a socialist country but simply an education country.

Sadly, we are NOT an education country. We were once. Our Founding Fathers realized that the privilege of voting carries with it the responsibility of every citizen being informed so they stressed free public education and a free press. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century our schools taught generations of immigrant kids who learned English and acquired the tools of success so they could partake of the American dream. Public colleges were free in many places like New York City.

Now, despite the fact that the world is more complex and competitive than ever, our kids are falling behind. I!m not going to discuss our schools and education system although in many neighborhoods they sure need improvement. I want to write about today!s parents.

We give out kids TOO MUCH STUFF and we don!t EXPECT ENOUGH from them.

Kristof cites surveys that show American parents think kids who achieve at school do so because they are smarter. Chinese parents say children who get high marks do so because they work harder. Chinese parents set very high standards and demand much from their children. American parents demand less. !--and in each case the students meet expectations.

I think too much stuff and not high enough expectations are related. It!s a lot easier to go to a toy store or even a computer store than it is to show and tell your children EVERY DAY how important education is, how exciting learning is, and how important knowledge is. After the trip

to the store the parent can think, I got my child an educational toy or educational software for the PC--well that task is finished.

Wrong! There's a lot more to do. You have to MODEL how important education is to you in your work. You have to VALUE intellectual pursuits like reading and thinking. You have to INVOLVE YOUR CHILDREN in these pursuits. And you have to tell them over and over again that you expect them to be not just good, but excellent, students.

Yes, it will take time. But look at the time you'll save buying less stuff!