



3 STAR SPOTTING

Hong Kong takes shine to Fab Four

6 TOP 10

The best treats for dad on Father's Day

10 THE BRAIN GAME

What kind of champion would you like to be

Friday, June 15, 2012

youngmost

'Learning is about being innovative'

Ahead of Father's Day on Sunday, **Wong Yat-hei** talks to a special dad-son duo, who embrace a dynamic way of learning through problem solving



ERIC CHAN (TOP) WITH HIS FATHER RICKY CHAN.
PHOTO: THOMAS YAU

Veteran Hong Kong educator Ricky Chan Wai-leung is not worried his son, Eric Chan Lap-yan, 19, is not a straight-A student.

He believes it is more important to encourage Eric - indeed all students - to develop critical-thinking skills: to question things, yet work out solutions themselves, rather than simply giving them the answers.

"I try hard *not* to tell my son what to do," he says. "I always reply to my son's question with another question. As a dad, it is easy to tell my son what I think."

"The hard part is to come up with a question to drive him to look for solutions on his own: I convince myself that this is for the sake of my son's future."

Chan is chairman of Hong Kong's privately-funded Association of Brain-based Learning in Education. He and partner Anson Chen - both former local secondary school

teachers - are internationally certified brain-based trainers. They focus on how human brains learn naturally, and react to physical, social and emotional learning environments.

"As a parent, don't be afraid to see children make mistakes, or take longer routes to their goals," Chan says. "The process of getting to a goal with one's own power is precious. Parents can raise questions to inspire kids to make better decisions, but should never force their ideas on them, even if they think they're best."

Chan uses advances in neuroscience as a basis for training teachers and parents to improve their abilities. Scientists have found, for example, that complex learning is enhanced by challenge and inhibited by stress. The association, set up in 2005, has trained more than 8,000 teachers and 20,000 parents and introduced brain-based learning to more than 150 local schools.

"A common mistake by parents, especially well-educated ones, is to flood children with knowledge," Chan says. "If a child asks a question, the parent is keen to tell them all he or she knows. It seems reasonable, but the brain doesn't learn by listening to what others say. The right way to inspire children is encourage them to discover knowledge on their own."

"So my advice to parents is to do *less* interfering and *more* discussing when your child is trying to make a decision."

Chan has always encouraged Eric to follow a wide range of interests, and respect other people's opinions. Today his son, who has just taken his A-levels at Tsung Tsin Christian Academy, in Sham Shui Po, has a clear goal.

"I want to be an environmental scientist, focusing on producing renewable 'green' energy," Eric says. "To achieve that, I plan to study electrical engineering at Hong Kong Polytechnic University."

"I made my Jupas [Joint University Programmes Admissions System] choice myself. My father didn't help. Of course, I *do* ask his advice and we express our views ... But I've learned in life there is no *definite* solution. Such thinking has maintained a harmonious father-son relationship."

Since Eric's birth, Chan has encouraged his son to develop his problem-solving skills by tackling difficulties from different angles - even if this has gone against typical local teaching methods.

"I think Eric is only an average performer in exams," Chan says. "He's not accustomed to reciting

The brain doesn't learn listening to what others say. The right way is to help people find out by themselves

model answers from marking schemes, which is probably how most students learn now."

At primary school, some of Eric's teachers suggested he was a "dreamer" when he said he wanted to be a scientist creating green energy. Yet he was never discouraged, thanks to his father's guidance.

"Honestly, I don't think the science teachers in schools aim to train students to be scientists," Chan says. "Yet Eric's 'think-from-various-angles' approach is exactly what a scientist needs."

"I expect him to achieve a lot more at university than he did at school, now the learning is more about being innovative - and not reciting model answers."

If you want a good relationship with your father, try asking him to think from various angles and engage in more discussion before coming to a conclusion. That is the key to harmony - not only in family relations but also human interaction in general.