

# A Study on the Problems of Trans-Generational Rearing and Its Improving Strategies

Based on the Interviews and Observations Conducted in Qingyuan City of China\*

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**Abstract**—Family education is critically important for the healthy growth of young children. Realizing the importance of family education, the Ministry of Education of China has proposed a new policy in 2015, urging the regional education departments, schools and communities to provide solid guidance and support for family education. However, with the acceleration of China's modernization and urbanization, more and more young couples have given up their primary family education responsibilities while searching their fortunes in big cities. Therefore, their parents, the older generation, have shouldered the responsibilities in rearing and educating the young children, which we call it "trans-generational rearing". In this case, how can regional governments, schools and communities help them to rear and educate their grandchildren better? This paper takes Qingyuan City as an example, and analyzes the current strategies for supporting family education conducted by the government, schools and communities in the city, so as to find out the needs to improve those strategies. This paper also tries to explore the elderly' characteristics and needs based the investigation and interviews of 20 samples, so as to provide strategies and suggestions for improve the quality of "trans-generational rearing" in Qingyuan City.

**Keywords:** *trans-generational rearing, family education, Qingyuan City, problems, strategies*

## I. INTRODUCTION

As the saying goes, a hundred years of life stands on the foundation of early childhood. Therefore, family education for the early childhood is critically important for the healthy growth of young children and helps to lay the foundation for children's lifelong learning and all-round development. The period before the age of 6 is crucial for young children to form his/her behavior habits and emotional stability.

The state is aware of the importance of family education for early childhood. Many educators in China believe that family is the first school for children and family education is as important as school education, which directly affects the

development of children physically and emotionally. In order to strengthen the guidance of family education in China, the Ministry of Education of China has issued a new policy in October 2015. According to the policy, local Bureau of Education, local Women's Federation and communities should speed up the formation of social supporting network for family education and establish family education guidance institutions in each communities or villages. [1] However, with the acceleration of China's modernization and urbanization, more and more young parents have left their hometown to work in big cities, leaving their children's under the custody of their grandparents, which we call it "trans-generational rearing". The practice of "trans-generational rearing" is so common in both Chinese cities and countries that it leads many other problems. So the local governments in different regions need to take action to solve these problems in order to make sure the quality of family education for young children.

## II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is obvious that the elderly grandparents are less educated and less energetic than their children in fulfilling the children rearing responsibilities, thought they have richer experience in life.

- How can local governments implement national policies to continue to promote the improvement of family education quality in the context of "young parents leaving their family education responsibilities to the older generation"?
- What kind of growth do the elderly grandparents need in raising and education young children?
- How can local governments, schools and communities meet the elderly's needs and achieve the goal of "providing for the aged and educating the young"?

All these questions are worthy for further research and discussion. Taking Qingyuan City as an example, this paper analyzes the existing measures that have taken by the local government, schools and communities in helping the promotion of better family education and tries to find out the

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existing problems. We have also interviewed 20 elderly people who mainly participate in their grandchildren's early childhood education in order to understand their needs and difficulties in rearing and educating young children. On this basis, we have summarized and proposed a few strategies and suggestions for improve early childhood trans-generational education in Qingyuan City, China.

### III. THE CURRENT MEASURES TAKEN FOR BETTER FAMILY EDUCATION IN QINGYUAN

Qingyuan City is located in the northern part of Guangdong Province, which has the largest land area in Guangdong Province, with a registered population of 4.429 million. Among them are about 2.8 million women and children, and about 240 thousand kindergarten children. [2] Therefore, there are many families in Qingyuan City who need family education guidance and support. Qingyuan government, schools and communities are all committed to the improvement of local family education. By interviewing the staffs who are in charge of the related work, we find out the following measurements they have taken.

First, the local government is responsible for providing funds for the improvement of local family education. The Women's Federation and the Education Bureau of the city are two major institutes for providing guidance and support for families. The Women's Federation is mainly responsible for the community part, and the education bureau for the school part.

Therefore, the Women's Federation of Qingyuan has established the so-called parenting schools in various communities, which are hosted by the local neighborhood committee or village committee. They have also built up community organizations for serving local parents in rearing and raising children. Those organizations, unlike other non-official ones, are funded by the government, owning a certain number of offices and having a team of official staffs. Their major role in helping parents is to carry out parenting lectures, to organize parents-children outdoor activities, parenting counseling in the community, in order to help parents build up scientific parenting philosophy and master some basic parenting skills.

Qingyuan Education Bureau is responsible in helping local schools to set up parent committees. The parent committees are the representatives of the parents, very important in forming a mechanism of exchange between schools and families. The parent committees regularly evaluates the education of the school, getting parents more involved in concerning young children's education at school. At the same time, with more exchange and understanding, family education can keep consistent with school education, which will maximize the effects of better education.

Second, schools and teachers are also playing a very crucial role in helping improve trans-generational parenting. All the schools will regularly carry out parent's meeting, and they can make good use of this opportunity to have parenting education on various themes. For example, some of the schools will have lectures and sharing on the topics of

keeping sexual harassment away, traffic safety tips, legal rights for children, etc. They believe these activities can raise the awareness of parents and grandparent in keeping children safe in daily life.

Third, local communities are more active in helping special children in their regions. Particular attention is given to the rural left-behind children and special children with ADHD or depression. Local communities have built up a team of volunteers with local citizens, who will participate in visiting, caring and helping those children in need.

All in all, local government, schools and communities are all taking different roles in helping improving family education qualities, but there are still some problems in those measures and activities, which need to tackle in the near future.

### IV. THE EXISTING PROBLEMS OF CURRENT MEASURES

First of all, no matter at the government level or at the school and community level, the biggest problem of family education service now is non-professional. Although all the concerned departments and agencies all have a strong desire to provide high-quality services for different families, the family education in Qingyuan still lacks professional education talents. According to the statistics provided the Qingyuan Education Bureau, some institutions and organizations related to family education and training have emerged in recent years, but the number is still small, not enough for a large market in family education. Many training institutions are difficult to carry out their work because there is no team of educators with relevant professional backgrounds. The main lecturers involved in parenting training are the members of the so called "family education instructor group", who are amateurs trained by unprofessional government officials. Therefore, professional parenting trainers are greatly needed for improving family education, including trans-generational rearing in the region.

Secondly, the second problem Qingyuan encountered in promoting family education is the serious shortage of funds. It is understood that there are about 2.8 million women and children and about 4 million parents in Qingyuan City, but the government fund for family education in the community is only 100 thousand RMB per year, which is not enough to maintain the most basic parenting training or to supporting the printing and distribution of training materials for family education.

Thirdly, the government personnel in charge of training parents report that the actual effect of parenting training and education is not good because the overall participation of parents or grandparents is low. According to what they say, parents living in cities who generally have higher education level have better awareness in learning better parenting, but they generally think that self-learning is enough, and it is difficult for them to spare time to participate in collective learning. The parents living in rural area have poorer learning awareness and think that children's education is mainly the responsibility of the school, rejecting their own responsibilities for parenting. They are not motivated to learn

or to enhance their parenting skills. In addition, Qingyuan City has a relatively high proportion of trans-generational rearing and parenting, but there is no special training or teachings designed for them.

Last but not the least, Qingyuan City also urgently needs more high-quality electronic resources and network for supporting parenting and trans-generational parenting since most of the parents and grandparents do not have the right awareness in family education. As the number of parents and grandparents in rearing young children is huge, and the proportion of participating in on-site training is still very small, high-quality electronic parenting resource can be a good way to promote healthier and scientific parenting skills since it is easier for users to access. It is especially suitable for the parents who are busy with their work and cannot participate in a live lecture. They can have self-study in their spare time. And through the electronic parenting learning platform, parents can contact, communicate and discuss with other parents in the same city, forming a better learning atmosphere for family education, and promoting parents' self-growth.

#### V. THE CHARACTERISTICS, NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES OF TRANS-GENERATIONAL REARING

This study has randomly selected 20 elderly people who mainly participate in their grandchildren's early childhood education in Qingyuan City for interview and observation, and found the characteristics, needs and difficulties for most of the elderly in rearing and raising young children.

Most of the grandparents who are taking care of their young grandchildren under the age of 6 are over 55 years old. Most of them have retired from work and returned to their families. But the elderly from urban and rural areas may enjoy a very different retired life because of their previous education background and occupations. In urban areas, most retired elderly were engaged in the work of administration, education and other industries, therefore, they usually have a higher degree and knowledge, and may enjoy better retirement welfare. So they are more independent economically. On the contrast, grandparents in rural areas may need to engage in housework, agricultural work while taking care of their grandchildren.

The most common characteristic for grandparents is that they have more free time compared to the young couples. Because they have experienced all sorts of life, they are more patient with kids and with tedious work. Another common characteristic for grandparents in rearing young children is that they are less energetic. However, since children between 3 to 6 are very active and energetic, and they love running and tumble plays, their grandparents sometimes cannot handle with them. And they cannot provide any guidance for children's learning.

#### VI. THE NEEDS AND DIFFICULTIES FOR TRANS-GENERATIONAL REARING

From interviews and surveys, we have found that many grandparents have expressed some common needs. First, grandparents expressed their hope to have more communication with their children--the parents of their grandchildren, in the desire to work together with them for better childhood family education. They generally believe that parents are the first teachers in the family and their role is indispensable. Even though young couples are under great pressure to make a living in big cities, they can't devote full time to take care of their own children, they still need to interact with their children regularly, which is conducive to children's physical and emotional health.

Second, the grandparents hope to achieve basic respect and gratitude in the process of upbringing their grandchildren. Because of their old age, weak learning ability and energy, grandparents will sometimes make mistakes in dealing with some children's problems. They hope that the younger generation can understand their situation with not blame or complain. Being respected and thanked can make the elderly more motivated to undertake the responsibilities of rearing and educating young children.

Third, most of the grandparents say that when they have retired from work, their willingness and ability to learn is just not as good as before, so if the learning activities organized by the government or other departments were mainly lectures or training, the proportion of ideas they received is generally low. They are in need of more diversified learning experiences in rearing and educating young children.

Last but not the least, many grandparents seem to be quite unprepared in facing some of the problems in helping children to build up good habits. They are hoping to get support and guidance from official educational institutes and other parties. The first problem is the overuse of electronic devices for young children. With the popularity of mobile phones and electronic products, many parents will give children access to mobile phones, TVs, iPad and other electronic devices. Children are generally more obsessed with novelty and colorful and motion pictures, so they love watching TV, playing computer games, etc.. However, that leads to a question: how to cultivate children's self-control in using electronic devices? Basically, most grandparents do not know how to achieve a favorable balance in helping children. Another problem is that grandparents do not know how to keep a healthy diet and sleeping habit for young children. Physically development is critical during the ages of 0-6 years and the diet and sleep quality directly affect their physical and mental health. However, many grandparents lack the knowledge of nutrition and sleep guidance nowadays, and many children are faddy eaters and hard sleepers. Many elderly feel their needs for training in these particular areas.

## VII. ADVICE ON IMPROVING TRANS-GENERATIONAL REARING IN QINGYUAN

In view of the development of family education in Qingyuan, the characteristics and education needs of the grandparents in rearing young children, the following improvement strategies and suggestions are proposed:

First of all, it is suggested that Qingyuan government should cooperate with major domestic family education research institutions to carry out professional training of family education talents. Especially for families with special children, the cultivation of professional psychological counselors and therapists will play an important role in helping these families.

Second, considering the lack of financial support for family education in Qingyuan City, it is suggested that the government should fully consider the number and geographical scope of the population served by the project and try to increase budget input to a reasonable level. In the case of limited government fund, it is a considerably good way to build up special family education funds by calling on all sectors of society to donate money for the good of children.

Thirdly, in terms of the teaching and training mode for the elderly who are mainly responsible in rearing children, Qingyuan City should provide more diversified activities and learning resources with easier access. In order to make suitable changes and improvements, more practical and regional researches are needed. These researches should provide more systemic training programs for the elderly and collect and share high-quality training resources if they are funded. The outcome of these researches will push the development of better family education literacy, and thus lead to the improvement of grandparents' knowledge and skills in rearing and educating young children.

Fourth, it is suggested that the government should work together with the University for the elderly in the community where the elderly have a sense of belonging and find understandings among their peers. As a result, it may lead to a better learning result for the grandparents since bad learning outcome was a problem for the traditional lecturing. In addition, it is better for the schools, particularly the kindergartens, to make full use of the advantages of elderly.

It means that kindergartens can invite suitable persons among the elderly to be their teaching counselors or teaching assistants. In this case, those grandparents who are active and doing well in rearing and teaching their grandchildren can set a good example for those who are less motivated.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

With the increasing participation of grandparents in family education, the impacts of trans-generational rearing on the growth local young children is more and more obvious. But as the grandparents who are taking care of the children have limited energy and physical strength, so we can't put forward too many unreasonable requirements and standards for them. Therefore, the parents who are younger and should shoulder the major responsibilities need to be more actively involved in family education. Only on this basis can the government, schools and communities adjust the corresponding strategies for better family education. In a long run, no matter what we do, we take the interest and the growth of children as one of the most important aspect for social improvement.

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