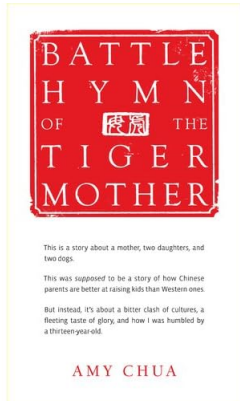


Guest Blogger Jenny: What LA Private School Would A "Tiger Mom" Pick? Progressive? Traditional?

Description



Talk about hype. Honestly, everyone's been abuzzing about Amy Chua's memoir, [*Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother*](#). Her brash, hardcore, take no prisoners approach to parenting is giving more indulgent parents plenty to think about. Because, after all, her parenting somehow must have something to do with your parenting, right?

Well, not really. First off, Chua freely admits that even her parenting might be considered extreme by many Chinese parents. She discusses her style as being more in line with "immigrant style" parenting (even though she's really a second generation Chinese American, and thus not really an immigrant). And, while one of her daughters is a concert level pianist, no doubt due to her obsessive hovering that rivals any Hollywood stage mother, even Chua admits that she might have gone too far. While her first child was a total pleaser, obedient, and a real achiever, her second daughter actively rebelled and actually won the battle. Guess who's singing the victory battle hymn in her household now?

What I have noticed, at least in my Facebook circle, is some discussion regarding Chua in relation to schools and educational approach. The assumption seems to be that Chua, being so rigid and only interested in A's, must only be in favor of a traditional, rote education. Well, I read the book (unlike many of the people commenting on it), and there's hardly anything about the daughter's academic education contained in it. She mentions school as a place for her daughters to spend part of their day, earning top grades, and then coming home and practicing their respective musical instruments. You see, Tiger Mother isn't really about raising academic geniuses, it's about trying, only partially successfully, to raise musical prodigies.

She does write, albeit briefly, about her daughter's private school, complaining about the special events which demand extreme parental participation. You know what I mean: buying particular cultural items, preparing ethnic foods for festivals, doing tons of work while your child just gets to show up. Her complaint was, to my mind, perfectly valid; the kids should have to do all the work, not the parents.

Despite the paucity of school related material in the book, that hasn't kept moms I know from starting to question not just their own mothering, but their children's school's academic approaches. What is better, progressive or traditional?

Perhaps a better question to ask is if truly traditional education exists in Los Angeles private schools at all. Outside of super religious schools, which might be viewed as traditional and rigid, most private schools here seem pretty forward thinking in terms of academic methods. While my daughter's school, Mirman, is known for being more "traditional," I think people are just looking at the uniforms and work load (not as heavy as everyone assumes), not at the teaching methods, which are quite hands on, imaginative, and the opposite of rote learning.

And at more progressive schools, I think the inverse is true. For instance, I went to Crossroads, a progressive school in Santa Monica. We called our teachers by their first names and shoes seemed optional. Yet, the education

was rigorous. Rigorous enough that college seemed a cakewalk in comparison. ***Let's face it: all these private elementary schools feed into the same competitive college preparatory upper schools.*** In order to keep acceptance rates (and their own admission rates) high, even progressive schools have to teach hardcore academics and demand excellence. There has to be a competitive edge, however blunted it's being advertised to leery parents.

The irony of the progressive preference in Los Angeles is that so many of these parents are competitive, highly successful people. They say they want something less rigorous, more individually respectful, and less competitive than what they had academically. Yet, the moment a parent like Chua starts crowing about raising "superior" and competitive children, these same parents panic, thinking: "Her kids have an edge. How do I give my child the same edge?" They are so confused.

You think you want traditional education? Look no further than our lovely LAUSD. When my daughter went to Third St. Elementary, she received a completely rote, traditional education. She was required to memorize what would be on the tests, not look beyond the literal, and most of the subjects seemed mind numbingly dull. She hated science, for instance, because it was "boring." Now, at Mirman, science is her favorite subject, mostly because it's taught in such a concentrated, hands on way.

I know one kid who went to a fairly traditional private school in the Hancock Park area. He's intensely smart, and his parents felt the school was, in its unyielding way, not flexible enough to meet his needs. They moved him to an extremely progressive school. He lasted barely a semester at the new school, switching back to the old one a scant four months later. His mom felt he got lost in the loose academic environment, that perhaps, for her child, the more structured curriculum was better. That seemed like excellent parenting. She looked at her child and decided what would be best for him, not what she necessarily wanted for him (and, by extension, for herself).

Perhaps instead of comparing Chua's parenting approach and preferences to their own, moms should simply look at their children and follow their individual parenting instincts. What is right for their particular child? What teaching method would garner great results? Chua did that, following her instincts, for better or worse. And by the end of her memoir, I'm not sure she's recommending her approach to anyone.

Jenny Heitz has worked as a staff writer for Coast Weekly in Carmel, freelanced in the South Bay, and then switched to advertising copywriting. Her daughter started 4th grade at Mirman School this year. She previously attended 3rd St. Elementary School. Jenny has been published recently in the Daily News. She now writes about gift ideas and products on her blog, [Find A Toad](#).

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1. Guest Blogger Jenny Heitz

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