

10-1/82/11/15

**SPEECH BY MR HOWE YOON CHONG, MINISTER FOR HEALTH,  
AT THE PAP POTONG PASIR KINDERGARTEN GRADUATION  
CEREMONY AT THE MACRITCHIE PRIMARY SCHOOL  
ON MONDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 1982 AT 6.30 PM**

Kindergartens are very popular today because parents are anxious that their little children should have a head-start in education. Parents want to make sure that their children can enjoy all the advantages that they themselves have missed in their own childhood. Some even send their little children to kindergartens that charge the highest fees in the belief that they must be better. While these intentions are laudable, the results may not be as good as expected. Very much depends on what the parents want the kindergarten to do for their children.

The kindergarten is of German origin. It bears the influence of child psychologists and experts in pre-school education. In concept it is a place where little children five years and below come together to spend a few enjoyable hours each day learning about many things while playing in garden surroundings under the watchful eye of teachers who influence them through kindness, understanding, and compassion. Formal classroom instruction is to be reduced to the minimum. The purpose of the kindergarten is to further the physical, mental, and social development of the children by means of games, creative activities, nature study, excursions, and the like.

The days when the kindergarten was looked upon as a preparatory school for children from poorer homes with less educated parents to get themselves ready for admission to primary school should now be over. Those parents who expect kindergartens to teach their children to read or write or do arithmetic within a few weeks or months will be disappointed. Instruction in such classroom subjects is not the aim of the kindergarten.

The better .....2/-

The better educated parents however will understand the modern concept of pre-school education. They will appreciate that their little children are in fact learning proper discipline, building up social responsibility, and forming good habits and character while they play with others in the kindergarten. The other important point is that they are encouraged to be bilingual, to speak English and Mandarin, to be good neighbours, and to respect the wishes of others. All of them will learn to play and have fun together in friendship and harmony.

Today our little children come from better homes with parents who are themselves better educated. These children now start on an equal footing with other children when they enter primary school. Today's little children should have all the opportunities to enjoy their childhood and at the same time learn the art of living. In the kindergarten they can be taught to cope with personal hygiene and cleanliness, to take responsibility towards others, and to distinguish right from wrong. These are much more important than elementary book knowledge which can come later.

Our kindergarten teachers have been trained to limit classroom instruction to the minimum. Their supervision over the children will be more outdoor and less in the classrooms. The children will spend more time at play. Lessons include drawing, games, nature studies, excursions, and outings where children are encouraged to be creative to exercise their natural curiosity. Parents should welcome the plans for our kindergarten to develop along these lines.

Another year has come and gone. Another group of little children - who are our most important and valuable assets - will proceed from here to primary schools. The modest contribution of our kindergarten towards their education in their early formative years will make them better able to cope with future problems. We hope that all these little children will grow up to be good, filial, responsible, and hardworking citizens in the years ahead.

I wish everyone of you, parent and children alike, good health and success.

---