

To sustain bilingualism, three changes are needed at the pre-school level

Letter from Kwan Jin Yao

MR LEE Kuan Yew's remarks that bilingualism remains pertinent, in the report "Bilingualism is possible, says Lee Kuan Yew" (Sept 17), are timely.

Mastering two languages would bring many benefits, such as heightened communication levels and interaction abilities; it would aid in school and at work.

Pre-school and kindergarten teaching-learning is especially crucial and must be fine-tuned in three ways to render bilingualism a reality.

Firstly, to be fluent or proficient in a language, one must actively put its components — conversation or writing — into practice. Therefore, home-based education with parents must be strengthened.

The challenge comes when families can manage only one language. To get around this,

households within a neighbourhood can band together to provide cross-assistance and interaction.

Online resources, with interactive lesson plans and topical revisions, can also be shared.

Secondly, exposure to dual languages is one thing, developing an interest is another. The Education Ministry should review current curricula and teaching-learning methods at the pre-school level to decide if improvements are needed.

Recommendations should factor in feedback from stakeholders who are aware of present shortcomings. More importantly, sturdier partnerships must be speedily forged between schools, teachers and parents.

Finally, we must recognise that a language goes beyond the written component. In Singapore, more often than not, rote memorisation,

written examinations and assessments are emphasised over other aspects, and pupils and parents are too hung up over performance in this department.

To make learning interesting, children need to be exposed to reading, speaking and listening.

The National Library Board could contribute with reading lists and summary highlights. Pupils could be encouraged to make public presentations or speeches, and multimedia technology could be adopted, besides using music, radio and television.

For bilingualism to remain sustainable, administrators must introduce changes that will affect foundation learning.

If pupils do not develop these abilities and interests during this time, it would be difficult to stir their passions later.

Teachers, native English speakers should team up

Letter from Kim Scarabello

I AM a University of Cambridge certified English teacher from Canada who has been volunteering at both my sons' local schools since we moved to Singapore in 2009.

The kindergarten and primary school pupils are adorable even though I can rarely understand what they are saying.

With large numbers of pupils in each class, I like the idea of employing assistant teachers to help with the workload, and it would be excellent if the Education Ministry would consider what Japan has been doing for the last 24 years.

With the inception of the Japan Exchange and Teaching

programme, the Japanese government employs native English speakers from around the world to "team teach" in classrooms from Hokkaido to Okinawa.

I participated in the programme, and as a team, the Japanese teacher and I encouraged the pupils to study the grammar and then verbally practise the points in useful and interesting ways.

If native speakers of English could work on phonics and pronunciation in the classrooms, it would help the Singaporean teacher, who is under a lot of pressure already, as well as encourage the pupils to move away from Singlish and towards standard English.

Dengue bill based on private hospital charges

Letter from Lee How Teck
Senior Vice President & General Manager, Group & Health Insurance Division, NTUC Income

I REFER to Mr Denis Distant's letter "The high cost of dengue fever?" (Sept 17), and would like to explain the basis of our statements, which can be read in detail at http://www.have-a-plan.com.sg/dreaddisease_dengue.php.

On this webpage, we explained that the bill of \$5,502 was premised on a patient being hospitalised in a one-bed ward at a private hospital.

The amount was based on a 90th-percentile bill size, that is, 90 per cent of patients in this instance are expected to pay this bill size or less. These figures were computed from

publicly available data.

Mr Distant correctly pointed out that an Enhanced IncomeShield plan with Assist Rider will pick up a substantial portion (\$4,952) of the expected bill, while the insured will pay \$550. More details of this plan are available at the website.

More importantly, NTUC Income would like to emphasise a key point: Singaporeans should look closely at their medical insurance needs and make adequate preparations as early as possible to meet them over the long term. This is imperative, with rising healthcare costs.

We thank Mr Distant for the opportunity to clarify our position.

Why is it a private road?

Letter from David Kwok Ng Kan

MANY motorists and pedestrians use Tras Link (off Tanjong Pagar Road) daily, and traffic is increasing with the addition of residents from The Pinnacle@Duxton.

The road was built three years ago and open to the public for the last two years. Of late, light and heavy vehicles have been parking along its short stretch.

According to the Land

Transport Authority, they cannot do anything about this because Tras Link is a private road under the management of the developer. No fines can be issued either.

What would happen if there is an accident on this road? Legally, would pedestrians and motorists be able to seek compensation from the LTA or the private developer?

In any case, why is Tras Link still a private road after two years of operation?



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