

iPads, learning corners & no heavy make-up, preschoolers have no clue how lucky they are

Early childhood education has come a long way.



Image courtesy of Learning Vision

I have two distinct memories from when I was in preschool.

The first that comes to mind is being slathered with makeup – foundation, blush, and lipstick – before being ushered onto stage in a counterfeit Manchester United jersey for my graduation concert to sing and dance to Ricky Martin’s FIFA anthem, “The Cup of Life”.

Another involves nap time in the afternoon. I remember lying on a thin mattress in the middle of the classroom, surrounded by other mattresses with children slowly drifting off to sleep.

Meanwhile, preschooler-me struggled to hit the hay; the room was humid and hot, and for some reason, my mattress felt extra thin that day.

Feeling restless, I crawled over to the supervising teacher, explained my predicament, and asked her if I could have a cup of water.

"If you drink water that will give you more saliva and that will make you want to talk more," she said.

"And if you want to talk you'll find it even harder to fall asleep."

Even as a five-year-old, I remember thinking that the logic didn't really add up.

Yet, according to Joanna Toh, the principal of preschool Learning Vision @ Raffles Place, such patronising approaches are a thing of the past.

A new principle guiding educators

"We truly believe that every child is competent and capable," she said.

"It's just a matter of time and facilitation, but eventually everyone will reach where they need to reach."

This principle, the 31-year-old educator told me, underpins much of the change that has occurred in preschooling over the last two decades.

Classes back then often saw the children almost as passive learners; "We learned what the teacher wanted us to say, we learned what the teacher wanted us to read," Toh described.

"But in comparison, these days education doesn't work this way. You have to consider the children's perspective as well."

It means that at a preschool like Learning Vision, teachers have to learn to ask questions and incorporate the children's interests into lesson plans.

Children are further encouraged to pursue these interests with speciality programmes such as Junior Reporter – where the preschooler takes on the role of a community journalist coming up with and presenting news stories – and Junior Athlete, which allows them to develop their sports skills.



Image courtesy of Learning Vision

In a sense, this makes children far more active participants in their own learning journey, even driving the direction of a class to a certain extent.

The goal is to eventually develop each child's confidence and critical thinking skills, hopefully setting them up for success further down the road.

Play as part of learning

However, if a teacher asked the preschool version of me what I was interested in doing, the first thing on my mind would be “play”.

Fortunately, for the modern early childhood educator, play is a large part of the curriculum, or more accurately learning through playing.

Diving into her own memories of preschool, Toh recalled one of her favourite experiences: playing with yellow strings and styrofoam balls while pretending to be a fishball noodle hawker.

“When it is fun, you remember it – it becomes a memory for you,” she said.

With this in mind, Learning Vision sets aside time every day for the children to engage with its “learning corners”. These are different stations around the classroom where playing and learning are perfectly blended together; preschoolers can engage with whichever corner takes their fancy for the day.

One of the corners set up at the moment sees children donning the uniform of delivery riders and delivering various objects while riding a tricycle.

Another activity saw the school's Chinese teacher and her students making noodles with real ingredients, enhancing a lesson on the Chinese words of each component and tool with a hands-on approach.

“We make learning very meaningful to the children,” said Toh.



Image courtesy of Learning Vision

High-tech learning

Another way that preschool has changed since I was making life hard for my teachers is the incorporation of technology.

It shouldn't surprise anyone that the days of a teacher with nothing but a whiteboard are long gone.

Computers, iPads, and projectors are now commonplace classroom tools.

But what did surprise me was the way that technology is being used by teachers to enrich the learning experience.

On the day that Toh and I spoke, her students had just finished a day of cultural exchange with a preschool in Australia as part of a programme called Global Friendships.

Through the magic of Zoom, the children gave each other a tour of their respective preschools and shared different aspects of life in their countries – for the Singaporean kids it was about a strange hairy fruit known as the rambutan.

"Aside from being just a Zoom session, they are actually learning about public speaking," Toh explained.



Image courtesy of Learning Vision

“Because they’re taking turns to introduce themselves, ask questions, and share about things from school.”

Beyond just using gadgets and apps in classes, children are also being taught how to use technology for real-world purposes.

For example, preschoolers at Learning Vision have classes on how to write an email, or how to find information using Google.

Keeping with the times

So with all these changes, how are preschool teachers coping?

After all, while Toh herself has been an early childhood educator for 11 years, some of her colleagues have been in the business for far longer – some have careers spanning over 20 years.

"We value teacher development a lot," said Toh.

"We make sure that teachers get to attend at least 20 hours of training each year."

This training, according to Toh, helps them to keep up to date with the latest methods while also providing opportunities for educators to get together and brainstorm new ideas to make classes even more engaging.

Still, with all this evolution and improvement in preschool education, one thing has managed to stand the test of time and make itself into an institution – the graduation concert.

"It's a significant milestone for them to graduate, so they definitely still have to have their concert!" Toh said while giggling.

Thankfully for the children of today, society seems to have progressed past the need for copious amounts of blush and lipstick on the faces of poor unsuspecting preschoolers.

"No, nowadays it's not so heavy," said Toh.

"Parents don't really like that heavy make-up look."

Me neither.

Learning Vision considers itself a leading provider of high quality preschool education. Its curriculum is designed to empower children to become critical thinkers and creative learners.

To date, there are 16 Learning Vision preschools throughout Singapore, catering to more than 2,500 children

Parents who enrol their children by Dec. 1, 2021 will receive:

S\$500 off school fees for three months (S\$1,500)

Registration fees waiver (S\$535)

Two sets of free uniform (\$66)

Valid at the following centres:

Learning Vision @ CET Campus East (Paya Lebar)

Learning Vision @ Changi Business Park

Learning Vision @ Biopolis

Learning Vision @ Raffles Place

For more information, visit [here](#), follow Learning Vision's Facebook and Instagram, or call 6781 0888 to schedule a visit.

Images courtesy of Learning Vision; some images were taken before the Covid-19 pandemic.

This Busy Bees-Sponsored article made the writer feel embarrassed again for how badly he forgot the dance moves during his K2 graduation concert.