

First Classroom



Li-Anne Sia, Director of Two by Two Schoolhouse, a Mandarin based kindergarten cum learning centre with an interactive, play based curriculum, answers your questions on preschoolers' learning and development issues.

How can you encourage your little one's interest in picking up the language?

1) Use innovative ways to make reading fun

Use different kinds of media to help your child recognize and read Chinese characters. Encourage your child to read billboards, posters, menus, recipes, road signs, song lyrics as books are not the only source to help instil a love for reading in your child.

With greater exposure, they will realize that they can order food in Chinese, sing along with the lyrics of the latest Mandarin pop song, understand the synopsis of a Chinese movie and appreciate details of the product an advertising billboard is extolling.

The desire to want to read and learn more will then follow naturally.

2) Inquiry based learning

Think of different topics that are of interest to your child and explore them together.

By encouraging him to use Mandarin to ask questions about things that interest him and constantly reaffirming his efforts, it will pave the way to fluency in the language as his competence and confidence grows.

3) Play around with creative activities

Let your child take pictures of people, places, items and animals that fascinate him. Then print out those pictures and weave a story based on them, in Mandarin.

Write short sentences in Mandarin, on various objects or scenarios and get your child to draw pictures that can help illustrate what you have written.

Sing or speak in Mandarin and act out that particular scene together with your child.

4) Choosing the right preschool

Choose a suitable preschool that suits the needs of your child. If they predominantly speak English at home, they will be better able to absorb and learn Mandarin if they spend 70 per cent of their time in kindergarten using the language.

It is crucial for parents to find out more about the curriculum of the school and the background of its teachers. They will then be able to make an informed decision as to whether their child will be happy in school and be inspired to learn.

Parents can suss out schools that adopt an interactive approach in teaching Mandarin, where children will get frequent hands-on sessions and are constantly encouraged to be active contributors.

When it comes to embracing the learning of Mandarin, a curriculum that is fun and engaging will reap the most benefits for a child with very little exposure to the language.

