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PG 92



# Young parents

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PG 38

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Jan 11, 2011


Dear diary,

This year, I am in **K2**! I am a little bit  and a little bit  about that. I am happy because I have wanted to grow  up forever, and I am finally the **biggest** at school.

I am sad because I didn't know **K2** = .


At **SCHOOL**, I always get homework from

Mrs **李**. Always on  !!! Mummy is

even more  hardworking. She gives me

a worksheet **every day!** When I asked her

why **K2** is so hard, she says it is for my

own  (that's mummy's word for

 super duper boring ).

 Sally

BY HO YUN KUAN



**I**f every Singaporean preschooler kept a diary, the bulk of it might read like the preceding paragraph. These kids appear to be a pressured bunch. A search on popular forums like Singapore Motherhood and Kiasu Parents finds parents discussing homework for kids as young as three years old – that’s when they are in nursery.

And they are not just talking about homework handed out by schools. Some anxious parents are giving extra work at home, too.

A check on six preschools – Etonhouse, Carpe Diem, PCF, Character Montessori, NTUC First Campus and Newton Kindergarten – that run a total of 188 centres locally reveals that written worksheets for nursery students are rare. In fact, none of these centres expect kids younger than K1 to tackle “serious” worksheets. Instead, what they get are fun assignments that involve the parents.

Francis Ng, founder director of Carpe Diem Holdings, describes one such assignment: “We have a family theme for February and March, so I asked the children to take photos of all their family members to make a family tree. It’s not an academic project.”

In all the six schools interviewed, interesting assignments like the one Francis described are a staple for all levels. Only the K1 and K2 kids at PCF and Newton Kindergarten have regular homework once a week. But for some parents, this just isn’t enough.

### CIASU OR PRUDENT?

Grace Yong, executive director of Character Montessori, has seen her fair share of worried parents in her eight-year career in early childhood education: “These parents come from a different regime. Most of them had a lot of written work at school. The ones that did not do so well under this type of system think that it was because they didn’t do enough. The ones that thrived in this system

think that if it worked for them, it should work for their kids. Either way, they want more work.”

Some parents take it upon themselves to tutor their kids. When Ashrel Tan started K2 last year, his mum, Cynthia Tan, 37, was worried about how he would cope with Primary 1 this year. She started giving her son daily assignments.

“I started to make homework a little more serious. I had to let him know what it would be like in Primary 1, so I told him that he must sit down and spend some time doing worksheets every day,” says the stay-at-home mum.

Cynthia’s comment sums up the way most parents feel: They want their kids to be academically prepared for Primary 1, and to get used to doing work at the table.

This concern is common and probably not surprising if the child is in K2.

However, some parents, like Shirley Tan, believe in starting even earlier.

When her Primary 1 son, Marcus Quek, was in K2, he had three pages of homework from school every Friday – one each for English, maths and Chinese.

But that’s not all. She gave him hanyu pinyin exercises three times a week in addition to the monthly project that she had been doing with him since he was four.

“Parents can give them the environment to pick up more.

If you wait till K2 or the last three months before Primary 1 to teach them all these things, the child will feel more stressed than if you lay the foundation right from the start,” explains the 36-year-old director of From Tiny Acorns learning centre.

That’s why she started giving Marcus projects to do when he was only four. These monthly activities involve lapbooks, which resemble posters that are folded in half like a book. Every lapbook is based on a children’s book, and filled with artwork and short paragraphs related to the literature that inspired it.






Her method seems effective. Her son never had problems sitting down straight after school for 15 minutes to complete his homework every Friday.





Jan 31, 2011

Dear diary,

Mummy says we can go to the  on Saturday, but I must finish my homework first. Nate (my brother) is being . He **laughed** at me for having homework, and then he went to watch . I think he turned up the volume  **louder** than usual, too. I complained to Mummy. He was so , he switched off the TV and kept very quiet. **AHAHA!!!!!!**

 Sally

He is now such a competent reader that he needs no help understanding the manual that comes with his favourite Lego Mindstorms robot building kit. The toy is designed for kids aged 10 and older, and the manual is about 200 pages thick. "If I didn't spend so much time with Marcus – if I had left him alone – I don't know if he could have reached the standard he is at now," muses Shirley.

learning, is the way to go with preschoolers.

Grace of Character Montessori firmly believes in the importance of play: "Parents need to understand that young children learn differently. For example, they learn language as a whole, not in parts.

"If you start them on phonics younger than five, they will struggle. But they will have no problems learning complete English sentences verbally. So, when you try to teach a child grammar, he wouldn't be able to tell you the rules, or why a sentence is wrong. He'll just say it sounds funny. That's why song, drama and rhymes are so much more effective for children than worksheets."

Lynn Heng, group professional leadership officer of NTUC First Campus, agrees: "We shouldn't subject preschoolers to drilling because it's not meaningful to them. They could do a dozen worksheets copying letters and not really understand what the words mean.

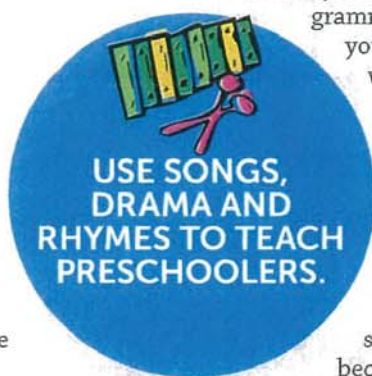
"Assignments should help the child develop lifelong learning skills. It's about teaching them to be curious; to question and to take the initiative to find out more." **VP**


## PLAY IS MORE IMPORTANT

In response to Shirley's comment that weekly homework actually doesn't add much value, Josephine Koh, principal of Newton Kindergarten, admits: "One of the objectives is to reassure parents and let them know what their kids are learning at school."

Educators assure parents that their preschoolers will be ready for formal education, even without the extra work. "Every kindergarten registered with the Ministry of Education is answerable to MOE, and the guidelines will ensure that what is taught at preschool is enough to prepare them for primary school," explains Josephine.

Lapbooking worked so well for Marcus partly because it engaged him. And most educators recognise that fun, more than rote



 DO YOU THINK PRESCHOOLERS SHOULD HAVE HOMEWORK? Share your views with us at [magyoungparents@sph.com.sg](mailto:magyoungparents@sph.com.sg).

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