

Interviewer: The interview will be basically about bilingualism or like curriculum in general. So what actually is bilingualism to you?

Principal: Able to use two languages in the environment. As in there is no restrictions, nothing. So it's not just the form teacher being the English teacher and only being able to use English. The Chinese and English teacher are both equal in class and they are both able to use their languages to communicate and interact with the children also.

Interviewer: So does it necessarily have to have like separate lesson? Or all mixed together into one lesson?

Principal: I think it is always good to have a time slot for each language because it would be easy for the children to absorb and focus properly. Because in K2 for example, they might get confused in terms of hanyu pinyin and phonics. So it will be good to have separate lessons.

Interviewer: So like for the centre right, most of the classes, what is the race demographics like? Is there more Chinese or...

Principal: Definitely more Chinese, like 90% Chinese and 10% probably mixed race. Indian, Malay and Eurasian.

Interviewer: So does your centre offer bilingualism for the children?

Principal: Only Mandarin and English. Yeah these two languages.

Interviewer: So for the children who are not Chinese, do they have to also take the Mandarin language classes or is it like optional for them to pick up?

Principal: Usually during the centre tour, when we bring the parents around, they already know that Mandarin is the second language in the school. So they can choose to not join the school if they do not want to expose their children to Mandarin. So it is up to them, yeah. But if they were to come in and say that, "I just want my child to know how to listen and to speak but not necessarily write" then we will not give the work to the champs to do. It is really up to the parents.

Interviewer: Would your centre actually consider like offering other languages in the future? Would that be a possibility?

Principal: I don't think I can answer this question because mindchamps as a whole we will still have to follow what the HQ is doing. But in the meantime and in the near future, I still think that it will only be Mandarin. Because to set up a curriculum department for Malay language and Tamil language department is quite challenging because of the lack of teachers.

Interviewer: So like how many teachers do you have here teaching the mother tongue language?

Principal: I have one for each class. So we have 10. I have 10 classes, so we have 10 teachers.

Interviewer: Do you think that Bilingualism is important for pre-schoolers, or do you think that it doesn't matter so much?

Principal: I feel that it is important because language is very important to children at this young age. So to expose them is very important.

Interviewer: Because it is not compulsory to actually pick up a second language in preschool. So do you think that the Government should actually make it compulsory. In a sense to have a mother tongue teacher in the class?

Principal: Compulsory?

Interviewer: Because in the primary school setting students who are entering primary school have to take up their mother tongue languages. Whereas for preschool it is not compulsory. So do you think that the Government should make it compulsory in the same standards in primary school or is preschool too early to make such decisions?

Principal: I am not in the favour of compulsory but probably highly encourage to have it. Because in the first place Early Childhood in Singapore is really not a formal education yet, only K1 and K2. I think a lot of parents right now, they have mixed race marriages. So to really have a compulsory mother tongue in Early Childhood can be a little challenging because you would have to provide a variety of languages and resources and training for teachers. Which at the moment, we are really not there yet.

Interviewer: Do you think the parents in your centre, are they very supportive of their children learning Chinese? Or are they not super supportive of that?

Principal: Only the Singaporean parents are very supportive. I mean the China parents are already very strong in their mother tongue so they are very supportive in the English language. But for Singaporean parents, they are very enthused about these two languages. No doubt about it. If they were to enrol their children into Mind champs, they are very enthused about curriculum. I'm speaking in terms of Mindchamps parents. Because for other preschools, they still come to Mindchamps for the reading and writing enrichment lesson that we provide during the weekends.

Interviewer: Are the children in your centre mostly locals? Because you mentioned that some of your students are from China.

Principal: They are all PRs here. All PRs. The China parents are all PRs. They actually schooled here since their JC years. [interviewer nods]. Ya, secondary, JC years. So they are actually quite long in Singapore already yeah.

Interviewer: So actually you have mentioned about like Chinese and like Singaporeans right, then what about the Malays and all those, like, do they encourage their children to learn Chinese also instead of their own mother tongue?

Principal: They are... they are supportive but they sometimes don't really know how to teach in terms of Mandarin. Because when you bring home Chinese storybooks, I would only encourage

picture talk in their own mother tongue. So the Chinese language would still be taught in school by the teachers because I do not want the parents to go online and find and speak the wrong... you know Chinese have different (ying) for different word. I do not want them to teach the wrong sound for the word. So it would be best to teach their child in their own mother tongue so when they bring home a Chinese book, they will be doing picture talk.

Interviewer: So like how is your mother tongue curriculum like? So like is there like... erm... like you mentioned like one teacher is in one class right, so do they have like separate lesson or throughout the children would communicate to the teachers at like different languages at the same time?

Principal: Ya, so for the children over here, they would talk to the Chinese teachers in Mandarin and the English teachers in English. But it really depends on who they are communicating to. So the children themselves, they automatically know that they have to switch language to both the teachers and during different lessons. But during play time, they are free to use whatever language they are comfortable in.

Interviewer: So do you have any troubles finding mother tongue teachers? To teach mandarin?

Principal: No

Interviewer: Is there like a higher percentage of foreign mother tongue teachers or...

Principal: definitely yes. All are from China or Taiwan. All. Because a lot of local Singaporeans are only to MOE schools so they only teach primary school, secondary school. For early childhood, a lot of them are not locals. A lot of them are from China or Taiwan.

Interviewer: Do you prefer like having... I don't know if you can relate because you stated all your mother tongue teachers are foreigners. But do you feel like you have a preference of having local Chinese teacher or...

Principal: definitely I would want but there is none. Not enough out there

Interviewer: what would be like the benefits of having local Chinese teachers instead of foreign though? Because, foreign are better at the language but if its local, what else can they provide?

Principal: For the locals, they would know more local flavours of Singapore, you know. They would know different... the Chinese words that we would normally use like err.. "*ma ling su*" and "*tu dou*" (different words for potato). The Taiwanese teacher would use "*tu dou*" instead of "*ma ling su*", "*fan qie*" instead of "*xi hong shi*" "*xi hong shi*" is mostly use in China and in Taiwan but we really we would use "*fan qie*" (tomato) so the local teachers would use more local context languages compared to those who come from China or Taiwan. But of course, when they come in, they teach us different things as well. They teach us a lot of more authentic Chinese culture. Ya... so it's actually more flavourful and actually a lot of my Chinese teachers here are PR as well. So they actually stay in Singapore for many many years.

Interviewer: What is your school minimum requirements to become a language teacher?

Principal: For PG, at least a certificate. N1 onwards, at least a diploma. So even my assistant teachers have to go through the ACEY cert. Yup.

Interviewer: So if like, there is like a very passionate teacher but she don't have the certification right, would your centre actually consider hiring them or like provide them training before hiring them or anything

Principal: We will let the teacher work first and see how it goes. If she's really passionate, she will survive. She will survive then we will send her for course.

Interviewer: So... erm... the courses, are they like compulsory for all teachers here?

Principal: For full time, full fledge teachers, yes. The Mindchamps would provide training for them.

Interviewer: It's fully funded?

Principal: Mmm.

Interviewer: So like, it's a standardize... err...

Principal: training provided by HQ. So they have to go through a series of training before they get accreditation by the trainers. Then when they come back to the centre, I would have to do an observation and submit to HQ before they get certification. During the staff development day.

Interviewer: so like, for the workshops right, like what kind of workshops or trainings do you provide?

Principal: trainings would be based on the mindchamps way curriculum. How we carry out our curriculum. So you guys would be taught how to carry out the numeracy lesson, language lesson, enquiry lesson and why we do this way, what's the correct way, what are the very normal mistakes that teachers would make. So they would discuss during this 200 hour intensive training.

Interviewer: Would you like encourage parents to help out during mother tongue lessons?

Principal: Yea, definitely, yes.

Interviewer: Do parents actually come in and volunteer often or?

Principal: over here, they volunteer more for excursion, ya. And sometimes storytelling. Yea, sometimes they come in to do gourmet on certain occasions like Chinese New Year, National Day.

Interviewer: So is it like useful, in a way, to teach children about language as well, with the parents coming in?

Principal: ya ya ya. Because sometimes they bring in calligraphy. They will come in to do “*jiao xi*” (dumplings), mooncake, snowskin mooncake.

Interviewer: do you think then.. like , there’s this while bilingualism thing, then like in order to have trained teachers, there should be enough budget so like do you feel like there is enough budget put into training of teachers or can be more?

Principal : I think besides training, there’s a lot of times where teachers would have to work in the centre first before they go for training. So what we do over here is.. erm... the teachers would usually start work first, then sent for trainings, then they would come back to apply the theory to practice. Then subsequently, the teachers can actually say ‘oh, I’m actually interested in arts and craft’ or ‘I’m very interested in music and movement’. Then the teachers would actually go and take initiative to go and find courses or workshops that they want to learn or train then they will inform the school then we will send you there. Or the centre has observed that “oh probably you need some help in classroom management.”, then I will send you there. Yea, so it is actually vice versa.

Interviewer: What are other.. other than like the budget what other support do you think is needed to make it a better curriculum for bilingualism in general?

Principal: I think resources. For example, if you really want to have this bilingual erm bilingual thing inside the centre, you would really have to buy erm.... Like for example, Chinese culture you have to teach them tea appreciation then you have to buy the tea set. You know? So teachers actually have to go YouTube to train themselves how to do the proper tea ceremony things like that. So you actually have to do a lot of self-teach and have to buy that material. Erm and yeah. So all these thing is..... We have the resources but is whether sometimes the teachers would want to take up the challenge or not to teach a new skills take up a new skill and teach the champs. Yeah...

Interviewer: So it would just be the budget and resources?

Principal: Budget is we have. Is also whether the teacher want to take up the challenge or not. So it’s actually vice versa, it's not just the centre keep on giving but also teachers have to give in give and take as well. Hmmm

Interviewer: So like not all erm preschool actually have the bilingualism thing like some preschool just have the Mother tongue teacher as an assistant teacher in a way so like how long do you think would it take Singapore to kind of like have a fully a well-integrated lesson like that?

Principal: Hard to say. (laughter) Because to... Because EDCA ratio is like that you know. So the schools will make use of EDCA ratio to hire teachers. So they will take in the probably the maximum number of students in the children. I mean business lah. You still have to earn money profit in order to give the teacher’s salary right. So I think the government the stack board will have to change first before we can change. Yeah.

Interviewer: But do you think like Singapore is moving towards like bilingualism? Like..

Principal: We are moving towards but if you really want to have what mindchamps are doing like two teachers in a class at all times is going to take a long time. Because like what you said you are

right. A lot of teachers are taking like A and the other teacher is taking B. Then, in the afternoon they switch. So they are actually taking two classes at the same time. Yeah... So, it's hard for them to get out from that system because it has already worked for them so many years.

Interviewer: Do you think it is also because like erm... There isn't erm... Much teachers that are interested in teaching the languages. So like resources in terms of erm manpower yeah?

Principal: Mandarin teachers not a problem leh. Is the English teachers that have the problem.

Interviewer: How come? Yeah

Principal: No English teachers would want to come into this field. Very very few. Yeah. They probably stay for a year and go.

Interviewer: Is it because of the like passion? Pay or stress?

Principal: It may be the passion. It may be the salary. Hmmmm...

Interviewer: Also for other than other than the manpower issue, is there any other issues you feel like erm contributes to the lack of interest in bilingualism in like preschools currently?

Principal: Can you elaborate?

Interviewer: So like, er... You were saying that... Wait, I lost my train of thoughts. So like other than other than the resources, the teachers, is there like factors that contributes to not effectively having bilingualism? So like... I also not very sure though... Like is there any other issues?

Principal: I think I think I get what you mean lah. I think er... That will boils down to the management having to manage yeah yeah.... Manage their I mean is the vision and mission for the centre. So if they really support this bilingual curriculum in the centre, they will make it work. Yeah. And at the end of the day the management will still look at the Money... Yeah. If this Chinese teacher is able to float three classes, why not take this teacher and why she would want to take three local Chinese teachers to teach three classes. True? If this foreign teacher is willing to take up three levels.

Interviewer: So in a way like business is also a contributor?

Principal: It also a factor. It is definitely affected since we are private. Yeah. We are not a government sector.

Interviewer: Is there any other issues like erm.. That your centre face that is like.. It doesn't have to be like bilingualism. So is it like manpower issues or like any other issues like having a holistic curriculum or anything?

Principal: Holistic curriculum? I think would be parents' expectations would be an issue because if they will expect too much from the child, it is not realistic. And erm.... It can put stress on the children as well as on the teacher and this can make the teacher leave as well.

Principal: Because sometimes the teacher will feel demoralized as they feel that they can't satisfy the parents' needs. This will result them to leave.

Interviewer: So is there a high turnover rate in your centre?

Principal: For my centre so far so good. I mean I cannot deny that some will leave because of the workload but most of them leave because they need to further study or have family commitments. But different people would have different threshold of workload, how they manage their workload.

Interviewer: So where do the children go for outdoor play?

Principal: Actually we have an outdoor playground. We also have an indoor gym for their indoor play.

Interviewer: I have noticed that the Mindchamps at Paragon does not have an outdoor play area.

Principal: Ya. They do not have one because it is in the shopping centre. It actually depends on where the centre is located. Then they would have to cater different activities for the children.

Interviewer: Do you think the government is providing enough trainings for the Mother Tongue teachers? For example, there is a new national training institute, NIEC for the early childhood educators.

Principal: For Chinese, I think they have lesser workshop as compared to the English teacher actually but they are starting to come out with more. I can see that. But because Mindchamps itself have trainings so I don't see it as an issue yet.

Interviewer: Oh I see. I am aware that you send your teachers for internal trainings. May I ask if you send your teachers for external trainings too? Like the government.

Principal: For English teachers yes. Not for the Chinese teachers. Ya. Because sometimes some of them are not PRs, they are holding work permit. It can be difficult to send. Because of the cost issues and stuff like that.

Interviewer: you said that the English Teachers have a higher likelihood of leaving. So what are the possible solutions that you think can counter that?

Principal: To provide probably more leadership roles for them. Cause sometimes they will feel like eh I have been a teacher for many years already so what can I do more. Ya. So you can give them more responsibility to build up their leadership skills. Eventually they will still have to venture out.

Interviewer: Do the teachers here rotate centres or are they permanently here?

Principal: Permanently here.

Interviewer: So is there any event where they can explore different centres?

Principal: No.

Interviewer: Do you think bilingualism is important?

Principal: Of course it is. But sometimes it also depends on how supportive the parents are.

Interviewer: Do you have parents that are not supportive of bilingualism?

Principal: No really not supportive but they will say they support but they will not do any reinforcement at home. They will not come for any parental involvement activities. They will not do any home partnership projects. Ya. The homework that was brought home would be empty not done but they will say I support. Ah... So we have this kind of silent parents where you just have to keep on nagging and nagging and nagging until K1 K2 when they oh suddenly oh no cannot make it then they stress, the child stress then the teacher also stress.

Interviewer: So bilingualism is like a partnership?

Principal: Yes it is a partnership. Both home and school. So far in Mindchamps we do have the environment because both teachers are inside.

Interviewer: So for example discovery of the world. Is the lesson conducted in both languages?

Principal: Ya. It is conducted in both languages. The Chinese and English Teachers have the same theme. For example animals, the English teacher will explore the children's interest in this area. The Chinese teacher will explore in animals as well but probably in different area and probably touch and go of what the English teacher has taught. Ya because if you would to say the same thing all over again the children will get bored you see but they are learning about animals concurrently. But sometimes they will still overlap each other lessons as well because the topic might overlap. So they will know what is herbivore, omnivore in Chinese as well. Ya. So when it comes to learning journey or excursions the English and Chinese Teachers will do it together.

Interviewer: So in terms of learning languages what are the possible excursions that the school has been doing?

Principal: Ermmm... So far they have been doing together. So the Chinese teacher they are exploring on marine animals then the English are doing on farm. So they actually go to SEA Aquarium and Zoo. Ya so I do not restrict them to say that you know in 1 term you can only go for 1 learning trip. You can actually go for more learning trip if you want. Up to you.

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Principal: If parents are supportive to pay, then go ahead. But of course the experience will be

different if you were to go with a family as compared to school you see. So for K1s they are going to 4 excursions in term 2 - a play (Pinocchio play), it can be not related to any theme, just go for fun. They also go to the post office to post their Mother's' Day gift. And SEA aquarium, zoo and they are going to invite the shark savers to come in and talk about marine animals, the pollution, water pollution. So it is actually a very impromptu kind of curriculum where they can just invite and go wherever they need to.

Interviewer: So it is like an inquiry right?

Principal: Yes, so the K1 (and) K2s will keep on going for learning journeys to support what they are doing in class because you cannot just depend on books and internet and youtube, you still have to go out and see.

Interviewer: Like for example like not only like in Chinese, do you invite the parents to come in and talk about their occupation and all?

Principal: Yes, so it depends on their theme as well. So the K1s did the occupation - communities. So they visit their parent's factory, office.

Interviewer: So it is mostly in English?

Principal: Chinese as well, but of course main language is in English as the people giving the talk will be in English. So the Chinese teacher, when they come back still have to do a recap with videos, photos and ask the Champs to do journal. For younger ones, lesser but the Chinese teacher also plans fieldtrip.

Interviewer: So actually parents have to be involved in both languages. Do you find that parents are more involved in English than Chinese?

Principal: Of course because they are more comfortable. And sometimes they don't really dare to teach mother tongue because they are scared to teach the wrong words as well.

Interviewer: Does your bilingualism extends to the PG (play group) class as well?

Principal: Yes.

Principal: They have equal number of hours in terms of teaching. So Chinese and English. For example if Chinese have 1 and a half hour, the English will also be the same. And my AT (assistant teacher) for PG also teachers Chinese. So small group activities they will be singing songs, reading in Chinese.

Interviewer: So like there is private preschool and government run, is there a difference in terms of curriculum for their MT lessons/ bilingualism?

Principal: Yes, yes. I believe so but there are quite a number of changes as well, they focus more on play.

Interviewer: So do you feel like private will focus more on Chinese and English (bilingualism)?

Principal: It depends on the vision and mission of the school. I mean MindChamps is rather academic, so there is still fun. They don't just work and work but they also do play. Just that the K2s have lesser of those times.

Interviewer: So the children are able to pick up the languages well or are they actually quite stress with the languages?

Principal: Well if the child has been with us since PG, I am confident to say that there is no problem.

Interviewer: Because they are exposed to?

Principal: Yes, exposed to both languages early all day every day. And my Chinese teacher is actually quite strong.