A local flavour for pre-school Chinese lessons

Resources designed by NTU's Confucius Institute feature content like HDB life, MRT travel

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Illustrations of HDB living and MRT travel, as well as desktop games created by local students, are part of new materials developed to teach pre-schoolers Chinese.

The materials, designed by the Confucius Institute at the Nanyang Technological University (CI-NTU) for children from ages three to six, feature content and illustrations that are locally relevant.

They are also in line with the Ministry of Education's Nurturing Early Learners framework, which spells out the learning outcomes of pre-school education.

The resources, titled Chinese for Early Learners, were launched yesterday by Minister for Education (Higher Education and Skills) Ong Ye Kung. He commended the institute's effort, telling reporters that learning any language has to be a ground-up initiative.

The package is available for sale at $1,800 for interested pre-school operators. It comprises 68 books, 544 lesson plans, 2,800 flashcards and 16 student activity books.

Since 2016, CI-NTU's teaching resource team has worked with academics and pre-school educators to develop lesson plans, book content and nursery rhymes. It also conducted pilot tests of the materials in a few pre-schools.

The project received $300,000 in seed funding from NTU in 2016, and was completed in October last year.

The resource package also includes five online language games designed by 12 Institute of Technical Education students during their internship with the Confucius Institute, the first Chinese language and culture school in Singapore co-sponsored by China's central government. The institute, established jointly in 2005 by NTU and China's Office of Chinese Language Council International, offers Chinese language and culture courses to children and adults.

At the launch event held at a PCF Sparkletots pre-school in Yishun Avenue 6, Dr Neo Peng Fu, director of CI-NTU, said there could be vast differences in learning experiences across pre-schools, especially for mother tongue classes.

"We set out to develop a localised Chinese curriculum for pre-schoolers, as materials used by some pre-schools are sourced from other countries, or may not be of high quality. Our newly developed curriculum would also be helpful to pre-school operators that may not have the resources to design their own curriculum," he said.

The materials were developed with the main objective of laying a solid foundation in the skills of listening to and speaking Mandarin, he said, adding that it is not children's dominant language these days.

"You must learn how to speak and listen before proceeding to learning how to read and write (in primary school)," said Dr Neo.

The books, which revolve around 17 themes such as colours and numbers, are illustrated by local comic artist Wee Tian Beng.

They are also compatible with pen devices that can read the text aloud when pressed against the words on a page. Five Singaporean children had their voices recorded in a studio at NTU last year for this feature.

The team from CI-NTU plans to meet anchor operators and private pre-schools to share the resources.

Madam Ng Lay Tin, executive principal of PCF headquarters, said that the school is in discussions to use the new materials.

She added that they could supplement PCF's current Chinese syllabus - which is developed together with the English curriculum - but would not replace it entirely.

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