Early Childhood Education Concerns Our Society
What Starting Well Means to Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO of the Lien Foundation

A teacher interacting with her students during lesson time. 教师和学生在上课时互动。
The Starting Well Index commissioned by the Lien Foundation was published in June 2012. Produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit, the Index ranked the performance of the early childhood sector in 45 countries. Singapore was ranked 29th. In July, Vital Voices for Vital Years was published. The report brought together 27 leaders in the Singapore early childhood sector, and provided insights into how the country can improve the industry. The Lien Foundation also conducted a parents’ survey on early childhood education in Singapore in August, because Mr Lee Poh Wah, Chief Executive Officer of the Lien Foundation, felt it necessary to hear from parents.

“If you want to seek reformation you need to help people see reality. That’s one reason why we embark on independent research. It’s a mirror, so you can have some honest self-reflection,” said Mr Lee.

The independent research has indeed awakened us from our slumber, and caused us to face reality. In this interview, Mr Lee shared his views and analysed the problems that the early childhood sector faces.

When Discussing Early Childhood Education, One Must Remember Social Inequality Too

Against the backdrop of the formation of the Early Childhood Development Agency and the government’s investment of $3 billion over the next five years in early childhood, Mr Lee had this to say, “This is a catch-up for us, because we have a lost decade of under-investment if you think about it. President Barack Obama, in his 2013 State of the Union Address, talked about having universal access to pre-school at the age of four in ten years’ time. Similarly, China is targeting to have 70 per cent of their children having at least three years of pre-school education by 2020.

“Neuroscience research shows that it’s important to emphasise pre-school education. I like to tell pre-school teachers that they are in the human semi-conductor industry. They help to build the brain circuitry so the kid can be ready for life, not just Primary 1. Ninety per cent of the brain is formed by the age of five. This is when a lot of the social competencies are hardwired. The debate about nature versus nurture is incorrect. It should be about the nexus and interplay between them. Different environments can switch on or switch off different kinds of genes.”

Levelling the Playing Field

Giving children a leg up is especially needed if they come from disadvantaged environments, such as those from low-income or dysfunctional families.

“Poverty is like a disease that can impoverish the soul and damage the child’s disposition. The debate about pre-school is also a debate about inequality. The reality: intergenerational transmission of privilege and power at the top; intergenerational transmission of poverty and problems at the bottom. You can’t stop rich families from giving the best for their children, but what we can do is to help level up,” Mr Lee said.

In early 2013, the Lien Foundation partnered Care Corner to introduce the Circle of Care to the latter’s Leng Kee and Admiralty childcare centres. Circle of Care is a pilot model of childcare where educators, social workers and educational therapists look after children’s development in an integrated way.
The four-year multi-pronged $1.8 million programme seeks to improve outcomes for all pre-school students and their families, including those at-risk, so that they can integrate confidently into school and community systems. Half of the funding will go towards hiring more teachers and providing teacher training, while the other half will be used to establish a comprehensive care team and to improve facilities at the centres. Well-respected early childhood expert Dr Khoo Kim Choo is the consultant for this project.

The Care Corner centre in Leng Kee is an example of how poverty can set pre-school students way behind the starting line. 40 per cent of the children there come from families with a total monthly household income of less than $1,000. They often have troubled backgrounds and display disruptive behaviour, like pretending to smoke and bullying other kids as they mimic what’s happening at home.

“The childcare centre where these children spend 10 to 12 hours of their time can be a safe sanctuary for them to learn and form some good habits. Hopefully, their parents will see what an enriched environment can do,” Mr Lee said.

The Circle of Care programme not only helps the child, it also encourages positive and involved parenting through consultations with a social worker. “Parents are brought into the circle of care, as their role is integral to the child’s development and improvement,” Mr Lee added.

On what the Circle of Care hopes to achieve, Mr Lee said, “We are not setting ambitious goals. Rather, we’ll focus on the three Es. First, make sure it’s efficacious. Once it is efficacious, make sure it’s efficient. Once
Learning support educators to provide guidance for children with learning difficulties. It showed positive results and underscored the need for an accessible and affordable nationwide programme to help pre-school students with developmental needs catch up. In 2012, the government scaled it to about a hundred more centres in Singapore.

**Parallels between Starting Well and Ending Well**

Mr Lee is of the opinion that the problems the early childhood sector faces must be viewed from all aspects of society. He shared how he has in his work found similarities between end-of-life care and early childhood education. “Pre-school children and the terminally ill are very similar. These are people we love — vulnerable, voiceless, and dependent on family members to decide for them. And the services they need straddle different parties. There’s presently a lot of bureaucracy and issues in these sectors. The real diseases in Singapore are apathy, complacency and mediocrity that come with wealth and success.”

Combating the inertia also means addressing the efficiency level of pre-schools. “Pre-schools are like enterprises, and right now, not all of them are efficient, and this is not just a matter of having enough student numbers. Many operators are struggling to meet all the functions of a pre-school and keep it afloat. If expertise like those from SPRING Singapore could be sent to pre-schools to reconfigure the workflow, streamline processes and improve productivity using technology, teachers can better focus on teaching. These small things can be transformative,” Mr Lee said.

**Successful Pilot Programme Scaled Up Nationally**

In 2009, the Lien Foundation started a pilot project called Mission: I’mPossible with KK Women’s and Children’s Hospital and PAP Community Foundation (PCF) to help children with mild developmental needs in 22 PCF centres.

“In Singapore, children with severe developmental problems are well taken care of in special schools. However, about five to six per cent of children in each cohort have some form of learning difficulty and they’re not getting the help they need. To me, Mission: I’mPossible is also about how we can prevent unnecessary suffering. Think about the loss of self-esteem and confidence in the child, and parents’ and teachers’ frustration in not knowing what to do,” Mr Lee elaborated.

The early intervention programme brought professional help into the classrooms and created a new breed of learning support educators to provide guidance for children with learning difficulties. It showed positive results and underscored the need for an accessible and affordable nationwide programme to help pre-school students with developmental needs catch up. In 2012, the government scaled it to about a hundred more centres in Singapore.

**Four Lows and Five Highs**

Mr Lee thinks that the most crucial and complex problem facing the early childhood sector today is the quality of teachers.

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**PPIS students playing at the new playground at PPIS Bukit Batok Centre, which was recently refurbished at a cost of more than $300,000.**
The sector presently suffers from four lows resulting in five highs. The four lows are: quality, status, pay and prestige — resulting in the five highs of turnover rate, attrition rate, shortages of teachers, frustration on the part of operators and anxiety in children. These issues not only affect the quality of early childhood education, they also become obstacles to efforts for improvement. For example, high attrition stalls capacity and fritters away the money spent in training, and breeds an unstable teaching environment for the children.

In addition, the dismal status of pre-school teachers and their systemic under-qualification prevents the sector from attracting good talent. I don’t think we are getting enough of the right kind of people to be pre-school teachers. There should be an obsession about recruiting, developing and retaining teachers, rather than lowering the entry level of early childhood educators.

Mr Lee also revealed that because so many of them never cross the five-year hurdle, there is a missing layer of experienced, long-serving teachers. “There is high frustration on the part of pre-school operators because of HR (human resource) issues. If you have HR issues, you are very vulnerable — you cannot respond to challenges or opportunities, or even scale up,” Mr Lee said.

He shared his personal experience of the impact of high teacher attrition and turnover. “I placed my daughter in a private playgroup for a couple of hours every day when she was two years old. For the one year that she was there, there was more than a 100 per cent teacher turnover rate. And I could see the separation anxiety and frustration in the children. At the end of the day, a child needs stable and secure relationships with caring adults as teachers are like surrogate parents.”

In an opinion piece he wrote for TODAY in 2012, Mr Lee highlighted the problems teachers faced: “The employer of primary and secondary school teachers, the Ministry of Education (MOE), recruits from the top 30 per cent of each cohort and selects so stringently that only 14 per cent of some 18,000 applicants are successful every year.”

During the interview, Mr Lee suggested that the MOE could consider recruiting an additional six per cent of potential pre-school teachers. “Why can’t we change it to 20 per cent? Take in another six per cent and that translates to about 1,000 more teachers. The graduate trainees could be from any discipline, it doesn’t matter. Put them on a course, and when they graduate, they can teach in either pre-schools or primary schools. I think it is better to find high quality people than to set the bar too low.
“We need buy-in from the MOE and the NIE (National Institute of Education) to create a career pathway that intersects primary schools and pre-schools. The MOE’s investment in high quality graduates for the early childhood sector can enhance the quality of teaching.”

The Foundation sees its role as complementing the government’s efforts to improve the early childhood sector.

“I hope the relevant government agencies will have some answers on the problem of teacher quality. I hope they can dream, design and deliver a first class HR system, hopefully over the next ten years, so that pre-school teachers can achieve some sort of parity with teachers from mainstream schools.

Singapore is a city in a garden and we have many parks. I think our green environment and children exist in a natural symbiosis. Think of the word ‘kindergarten’. Why not build kindergartens inside the parks?

“Dr Lien Ying Chow founded the Foundation to focus on education, among other things. I hope to complement the government and sector’s efforts — spot and tackle the gaps that are hard to deal with, or attempt programmes and solutions that the Foundation can nimbly put together.”

The Lien Foundation’s Work in the Early Childhood Sector

In 2005, the Lien Foundation partnered the Young Women’s Christian Association (YWCA) to launch Yes U Can… Be Included! The project aimed to help children with mild developmental needs assimilate in a mainstream pre-school setting. This project was to set the foundation for the highly successful Mission: I’mPossible in 2009.

The Foundation subsequently brought the YWCA together with their Muslim counterparts at Persatuan Pemudi Islam Singapura (PPIS), also known as the Young Women Muslim Association, on a joint training and exchange programme between the two organisations.

“Even though the two organisations share similar missions, they have never talked to one another. We brought them together on joint training programmes, student and teacher exchanges. We also helped to redevelop a PPIS kindergarten at Bukit Batok. These two organisations didn’t get much government funding as they were non-secular. They deserved our support as they serve a niche in the community,” Mr Lee said.

Mr Lee grew more aware of poor families and the kinds of situation the children are faced with. “I would hear stories like that of a mother bottle feeding her young child Coca Cola. I also saw poverty and pockets of social deprivation. To help these families, we put in place a parenting programme scheme at PPIS. The Lien Foundation would pay the needy children’s school fees and their parents were required to attend parenting workshops during the weekends.”

Another key project that the Lien Foundation embarked on in 2010 was aimed at raising capacity and efficiencies in 11 YWCA pre-schools through the use of information technology (IT).

“This was a pretty successful IT project, but we went through a very painful process. We gave each teacher an iPhone with purpose-built apps which they used to create lesson plans and record students’ information, among other things. When teachers had meetings with parents, they were able to access the student’s record and data right away for discussion. The use of IT also enhanced the...
image and professionalism. The students’ learning was enhanced through IT tools like the interactive whiteboard, Wii Games and a dedicated computer lab, “Mr Lee said. Harnessing IT resources for pre-schools also gave Mr Lee valuable insights into HR-related issues in the early childhood sector. “Together with another foundation, we wanted to introduce cloud computing to 60 pre-schools to increase capacity and efficiency. At the end of the day, we managed to deploy it only at eight pre-schools. Why? HR problems such as high turnover, heavy workloads and resistance to change came into play. Some pre-schools had teacher turnover rates of up to 40 per cent. So we were barking up the wrong tree.

“My conclusion is that unless you address the HR issue, the problems will continue to fester. The Foundation can mount many programmes, but if the fundamental problems are not addressed, we would just be assuaging the symptoms.”

**Future Plans of the Lien Foundation**

“If I were to have a dream pre-school — it would be the one I saw on television — a place in Japan called Fuji Kindergarten. The design is fantastic; it looks like a doughnut, and they incorporate the trees they preserve. There is a wooden track on top where children can run about. The whole space — the look and feel — integrates the classroom space, the play area and childcare facilities. How I wish I was a kid so that I could play there.

“Singapore is a city in a garden and we have many parks. I think our green environment and children exist in a natural symbiosis. Think of the word ‘kindergarten’. Why not build kindergartens inside the parks?”

While Mr Lee’s dream pre-school may not be within reach yet, he told us that the Lien Foundation is supporting the development of two model pre-schools with an operator that will be up and running next year. “Their staff have travelled to other countries to see and learn from great pre-schools. In the new pre-schools, there will be dedicated workspaces for the teachers, and a lot of thought has gone into creating an ideal environment for the children, teachers and even parents.”

The Lien Foundation has plans to extend its engagement with a wider community that includes new influencers and opinion makers in the private sector. Mr Lee is excited to explore how the Foundation can harness the strength of corporations to amplify the cause of the early childhood sector.

“I see it as coalition building that strategically taps on the shared values of corporates and the needs of the sector. Corporates may have CSR (corporate social responsibility) interests that are aligned with the cause. My interest is to bring different parties together to tackle the problems for the better good of society, especially our young children. We are still identifying the companies we would like to invite to the coalition.”

In addition to his work in the early childhood sector, Mr Lee is involved with water sanitation and end-of-life projects. Although he is only 43 this year, he has had a personal encounter with death. Six months after joining the Lien Foundation in 2005, Mr Lee was diagnosed with late stage colon cancer. But despite having to undergo a major operation and chemotherapy, his tenacity saw him working throughout his treatment. The experience has given him greater empathy and motivation in his work.

“The whole episode has been a blessing. It has changed my perspective and added value and new insights into my professional work. I shared my story in *The Straits Times* because sometimes we need to remove our armour and show our vulnerabilities to give strength to the work we do.

“A good life, like a good story, should start and end well.”

Teachers at YWCA have an iPhone each to take daily attendance and temperature, record observations and track children’s progress. YWCA幼师用iPhone点名、收集体温、记录对孩子的观察, 跟进他们的成长。
2011年，新加坡连氏基金委托“经济学人信息部”，对45个国家的学前教育作研究和调查，于去年6月发表名为《优良起跑》（Starting Well）的报告。7月，连氏基金接着公布了另一份《给重要幼年的重要意见》（Vital Voices for Vital Years）研究报告，收集了27位学前教育专家的看法及建议，同时开放网上问卷，收集家长对学前教育的意见。8月，家长的网上调查结果出炉。

发起这一系列研究的连氏基金总裁李宝华说：“人们看见实况，感觉不妥，才会发起改革。这是我们委托外国机构独立研究的原因。报告就像一面镜子，让我们诚实地自我反省。”

这一系列研究报告和问卷调查，的确惊醒了梦中人，让新加坡看见现实，看见世界，开始正视学前教育。

《新学》新加坡双语双月刊专访连氏基金总裁李宝华，以他透视真相的眼睛，分析学前教育的种种问题。

### 谈论学前教育要关注社会不平等

对政府痛定思痛，设立法定机构，统一管理和监督托儿所及幼稚园，并承诺在未来五年内拨款30亿元整顿学前教育的举措，李宝华说：“依我看，新加坡有大约10年缺乏在学前教育领域投资。在这个遗失的10年，学前教育停滞不前，现在我们要迎头赶上。

“美国总统奥巴马在今年3月的国情咨文演说中谈到2020年，全美国所有四岁和以上幼儿都有机会接受学前

“幼教帮助孩子衔接脑神经，不只让他们可以为升上小一做好准备，更是为一生打下基础。人的大脑有90%在五岁形成，人的社会竞争力就是在这个时候培养起来的。
在家里就是受到这样的对待。我看着这些孩子，思考他们是否有机会进步，有美好的明天？

“我们固然可以把这个问题归类为家长问题，或推说有其他人在处理这个问题，我们帮不上忙。其实只要真愿意在学前教育努力，托儿所是可以成为这些孩子的避风港。他们每天有10至12小时在托儿所，可以在良好的环境学习、养成好习惯，有机会学好，甚至回家影响父母，让他们的家长看到什么是优良的学习环境。

“关怀圈计划的宗旨很简单，就是为弱势儿童提供良好和丰富的环境。

“新加坡和世界上很多国家都面对了跨代的贫富问题；顶端，是世袭的好处和权力；底部，则是世袭的贫穷和困难。连氏基金从学前教育着手，尝试改善这个问题。”

连氏基金多管齐下，为期四年的关怀圈计划耗资180万元，其中一半用来聘请更多幼师，加强教师训练，其余的则用来建立全方位关怀团队，以及改善教室资源。新加坡知名的学前教育专家邱金珠博士是这项计划的顾问。

李宝华说：“这项计划也包括一个很重要的环节，就是把家长带进幼儿教育环境中，灌输正面的亲子教育。社工必须让家长放下心防，跟他们建立关系，引导他们参与其中。

“我认为探讨学前教育问题，也是在探讨社会不平等现象。我们不可能阻止富裕家庭尽其所能栽培孩子，但我们可以帮助弱势家庭，尽我们所能为他们提供优良的学习环境。

“我们还有一项计划叫‘我行’计划（Mission: I’mPossible），是尝试全方位照顾幼儿。我们的计划都要经过三至四年的落实再验收，给它足够时间发展。失败了也没关系。

“这种种计划背后的原则很直接，是三个‘E’：确保计划有效（Efficacious）后，要确保它是高效（Efficient）的，最后再扩展（Extend）。当然也要带入相关单位一起合作。我并不想回避政府，毕竟处理这些问题是国家的基本责任。”

李宝华认为学前教育问题必须以社会整体的角度面对，而且不只限于提供足够的学额。

“困扰着新加坡社会的真正顽疾是冷漠、自满和平庸。我们必须找回以前的不满足，精益求精是新加坡不断向前的方程式。我们学前教育中心的问题不只是数量上不足，而且还是个低效率的企业，标新局（SPRING Singapore）应该介入，研究如何重组他们的运作方式，让教师可以更专注在教学上。

“利用科技器材增强生产力、加速工作进度，是可以产生大影响的。托儿所的地点也会影响效率，现在的托儿所和幼稚园都是城市规划后被植入组屋区。”

这几年来李宝华关注学前教育，发现幼儿和末期病患有共同点。

“幼儿和末期病患都需要照顾，都是我们所爱的人，可是都很脆弱。他们没有自己的声音，必须依靠家人为他们做决定。

“他们所需要的服务也是跨越不同单位的，有很多条例。这让我想到，世界卫生组织给国家保健系统的建议，也可以用在学前教育上。当中提到领导、职员训练、主要工具、科技、财力和信息系统等等，两者可以共用。”

学前教育领域的“四低五高”

连氏基金引爆的这份45国学前教育报告，新加坡排在第29名。报告以数字揭露新加坡学前教育的缺陷，但
师资素质不高，也造成学前教育领域的“四低五高”：素质低、地位低、薪金低、声誉低；人员流动率高、人手短缺高、职场摩擦高、业者挫折感高、幼儿焦虑高。

李宝华说：“因为这四低，许多幼师没有办法留在幼教领域超过五年。造成人力资源短缺，业者感到挫败，没有成就感。无法及时应对挑战或机会，即使有人投资，没有人力，也无法扩充。

“这样的现象也会造成孩子焦虑。我把两岁的女儿送到豆豆班，一天几个小时。我记得就在一年里，老师的流动率高达100%。尽管孩子很快适应新教师，但高流动率会造成他们焦虑不安。孩子需要与关心他的大人建立稳固和安全的关系，教师高流动率对孩子身心的成长都不好。

“教师就如父母，因此高素质很重要。希望相关单位可以构想、设计并实行一个顶级的人力资源系统。但愿10年后的学前教育师资培训可以和教育部的平起平坐。”

去年，李宝华曾在《今日报》撰文讨论学前教育师资问题。

他说：“教育学院每年接受最优秀的30%学生申请，有一年，共收到1万8000份入学申请。最终只录取其中的14%。我建议何不增收到20%？再多收6%，大约1000人，然后在课程里加入幼儿教育元素，这1000人毕业后既可以教小学也可以教学前幼儿。

“这1000名教师可以由教育部聘用。物色高品质、有才能的幼师，通过教育学院是方法之一。成功招揽之后，再把其中语言能力强的变成幼师。专业领域不拘，总好过像现在随意招人，修读大专文凭课程后就去教。

“我更认为目前的状况是在浪费时间和金钱。工院耗费金钱训练幼师，最后将近40%因为幼师地位低、薪金低和声誉低而不从事幼儿教育。有的无法久留，也是浪费。

‘高素质’必须有一个统一的定义，幼师训练的水平也必须统一。”

### 四个项目帮助发展学前教育

连氏基金这次引领国人注意学前教育领域，政府也正视他们提出的报告，但李宝华说：

“连瀛洲博士当年创立这个基金，关注教育领域，
并不是要取代政府的工作，而是辅助政府，做政府不能做的。

“连氏基金进行了五个与幼儿教育相关的项目后，我对新加坡幼师的水平之低有很深的感慨，才在2011年委托经济学人信息部对学前教育进行研究。”

连氏基金的第一项幼教计划，是2005年与基督教女青年会（YWCA）属下的学前教育中心合作，推行“Yes U Can”计划，帮助有轻微障碍的幼儿更好地学习。这项计划也为2009年的第四项计划，“我行”计划（Mission: I’mPossible）打下基础。

李宝华自嘲是一个“爱管女人闲事的男人”，他发现青年回教妇女协会（PPIS）和YWCA在做着相同的事，却彼此没有来往，于是在2007年把她们召集在一起，进行第二项计划。

“我负责为这两个机构牵线，让她们属下的学前教育中心的教师和学生彼此交流，在开斋节、圣诞节互访。此外，我们也帮助修复PPIS属下位于武吉巴督的一所大型幼稚园。之前那里非常简陋。

“她们是非政府组织、非盈利机构，非常缺乏资源，如果我们不帮助她们怎么办？如果关闭，幼儿、家庭都会受影响。”

从帮助PPIS，李宝华接触到贫困家庭和贫困儿童的问题。

“在PPIS我们推行一项家长教育计划。我们赞助幼儿学费，但要求受到的家长必须在周末出席教育工作坊。计划的反应很不错，我从中看到贫困现象，社会上有许多弱势群体。”

“从这次失败得到的结论是，除非我们直击学前教育系统的根本症结，把它解决掉，否则无论做什么，都只是解决表面症状，根本问题还是会继续恶化。”

“我们的第三项计划是支持YWCA的IngoT Preschool计划，利用高科技产品提升11所学前教育中心的运作效率。我们再次跟YWCA合作，因为已经建立了关系。我们给每一名幼师一支智能手机（iPhone），让他们利用里面的应用程序工作、写教案、点名、记录学生身高体重等。

“把学生的资料存入iPhone后，在家长日可以轻易地拿出来和家长讨论，帮助提升教师的专业形象。学生也可以利用具备互动功能的白板，更好地学习。”

2009年的“我行”计划（Mission: I’mPossible）是连氏基金连同竹脚妇幼医院，和人民行动党社区基金会合力推动的计划，为社区内有轻微发展障碍的孩子接受主流教育做好准备。

“有严重认知障碍的幼儿会在特别学校就读，得到特别的照顾。然而，在一般托儿所里，每个年龄的学生有将近5–6%的幼儿有某方面的学习障碍，却没有得到相关照顾。”

“只要想想家长甚至教师，面对这些孩子时所经历的无力感，我就感觉要做得更多。我们做的是避免让幼儿受不必要的痛苦。”

这项计划很成功，连氏基金于2012年结束资助这项计划后，政府接管。至去年为止，计划已推广到超过100所托儿所。

灾难中的领悟

连氏基金对幼教进行的四个项目都非常成功，然而，第五项计划却是一场“灾难”，让他感慨不已。

“2010年我们和一家基金合作，用60所学前教育中心采用云端科技，提升教学效率。

“我们的目标是60所，但最终只在其中八所实行。因为我看到学前教育资源有更大的问题：教师高流动性造成
师资的办事能力低落。如果不解决师资问题，提供再好的工具或科技器材，也是徒然。他们根本缺乏办事技巧。当时学前教育领域有很多的问题和不稳定，有些中心教职员流动率高达40%。做什么呢？我发现我们错置了焦点。

“从这次失败得到的结论是，除非我们直击学前教育系统的基本症结，把它解决掉，否则无论做什么，都只是解决表面症状，根本问题还是会继续恶化。”

在45国学前教育研究报告之前，连氏基金也曾委托经济学家为世界上40个国家的临终关怀服务进行调查，得出“死亡素质指数”。调查报告于2010年公布时，也引起各界对末期病患医疗服务的关注。

李宝华说：“绝对不要低估独立调查报告的力度，尤其是排名榜的力量。我对经济学人信息部说，我完全不要影响他们，让他们客观分析。

“这次针对世界45国学前教育的调查，调查团队作业非常严谨，2011年底受我们委托，去年6月完成调查报告，只用了六至七个月的时间。调查很公平，很有公信力。国家领导必须要有勇气面对现实，接着动员人民迎向挑战。

“《优良起跑》报告是学前教育的宏观景象。之后发布的《给重要幼年的重要意见》报告是由英国东伦敦大学学前教育高级讲师洪琳莹负责完成。接着号召家长上网回答有关学前教育的问卷。有1395名家长参与调查，让我们在很短的时间内，收集到来自各界不同的声音。”

### 连氏基金未来计划

用三份报告让人们看见新加坡学前教育的实况后，连氏基金没有停下来。接下来还有很多计划陆续出台。

李宝华说：“现在的托儿所和幼稚园的名称让人混乱，我觉得当局必须统一。

“对我来说，学前教育只分为‘半天’或‘全天’。现在我们正和一个业者合作，准备支持开办两所新模式学前教育中心。

“这个新模式有全天、半天，也有婴儿托管。中心人员会到澳大利亚学习那里的科技，还有室内设计师和绘测师会帮忙设计整座建筑。

“中心的学生最少有15%来自弱势家庭。我们会赞助这些学生，让中心有个融合的环境，让他们有高质量的学前教育。”

### 新加坡常说要从‘花园城市’变成‘花园里的城市’，

d当我们谈论建设新模式的托儿所或幼稚园时，想到何不把托儿所和幼稚园就建在花园里？而且，绿色的环境对孩子好。我们有这么多的公园，不如把幼儿中心建在公园里吧。
李宝华眼中闪烁着兴奋的神情，讲述着心目中的理想学前教育中心。

“新加坡常说要从‘花园城市’变成‘花园里的城市’，当我们谈论建设新模式的托儿所或幼稚园时，想到何不把托儿所和幼稚园就建在花园里？而且，绿色的环境对孩子好。我们有这么多的公园，不如把幼儿中心建在公园里吧。日本就有这么一个美好的幼稚园，连我都想返老还童，到里面玩。”

连氏基金计划和志同道合的业者合作开设中心，做新的尝试，打造梦幻学前教育中心。除此，李宝华也透露，还会落实提升幼师社会地位运动。

“提升幼师的社会地位，就是提升学前教育的地位。我们的另一个目的是要教育家长，提高他们对幼儿发展方面的知识。和其他计划一样，我们不会独行动，我们会找其他的机构合作，提供一张桌子，让大家坐下来集思广益。不久前我们刚开过会，一问之下，原来与会的业者之前彼此都没有交集，可见这个领域缺乏沟通，更谈不上团结。但他们都看到提升幼师社会地位的重要性。

“我还想联系银行和跨国企业，看看是否有机会合作。光是我们说没有用，还要把可以加大说服力度的单位也一起拉进来。”

李宝华谈着连氏基金种种推动社会发展的项目，如数家珍。他年纪虽轻，却曾和死亡擦肩而过。

2005年加入连氏基金才六个月，李宝华被确诊患上末期大肠癌。患病的他，进行手术切除四分之三的大肠后，八天内出院，两个星期后重回工作岗位。之后的化疗期间也不请假，仍照常工作。是这样的经历，让他把工作做得更好。

“和死神擦肩而过的经历，让我更有创意，更勇敢，因为我不再惧怕。世界上有很多聪明人，但是他们没有勇气做对的事情。

“有了这次的经历，让我在策划安宁疗护（palliative care）的工作时更有体验，更深入了解，更‘专业’。别人都忽悠不了我，我更知道临终关怀背后的心理学理论。

“生病的时候，最重要是保持平常心。总的来说，这对我是一个祝福。有时我们必须卸下武装，暴露弱点，才能重新得到力量。

“一个好的人生，好的故事，要有好的开始，也要有好的结局。”

李宝华2005年加入连氏基金，成为第一名全职职员。在他的领导下，连氏基金积极推动社会发展。基金推动的资讯科技项目，提升乐龄医护和学前教育领域的服务水准。他以创新的项目，带领基金会致力于为末期病患提供更好的服务。2010年的“死亡素质指数”调查报告，为临终关怀服务设下了国际指标。

成立连氏援助组织（Lien Aid），李宝华也扮演了重要角色。连氏援助组织是推动国际发展的非政府组织，通过增加安全饮用水供应和改善卫生系统，为人文发展建构稳固基础。

作为连氏援助组织的首任主席，他已将组织扩展到柬埔寨、中国和越南。