

Hands UP

Young minds learn best through their hands, says Ms Tan Lay Hong who advocates a hands-on learning approach.

TO COLLEAGUES, **MS** Tan Lay Hong — the supervisor of PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Limbang Blk 567 — is a nurturing leader who takes the effort to mentor and guide her team. To the children at the preschool, the winner of the ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award 2015, the 50 year-old is a nurturing educator who sparks their desire to learn through fun, hands-on methods.

“Hands-on learning is a great way to teach new skills that build on what children already know,” says Ms Tan, who believes that children are more likely to learn when they are engaged and having fun. “Young children learn and understand best from what they can see, touch, feel, and manipulate. Every experience, every word, every toy deeply impacts the child’s understanding of his or her world and the connections he or she makes.”

An advocate of “child-driven, authentic and active learning”, Ms Tan has adopted innovative teaching methods. It has inspired her to turn a concrete porch at the centre into a lush mini garden where children plant, grow and harvest vegetables. “The ‘Find Out Why’ Mini Garden is a living laboratory where our children explore how organisms live, grow and interact with our world,” says Ms Tan.

Yet the lessons the garden imparts go beyond natural science. “We ignite our children’s sense of wonder and



The ‘Find Out Why’ Mini Garden where children explore how organisms live, grow and interact with our world.

appreciation for plants, while learning perseverance during the process of planting,” she explains. “Gardening provides numerous opportunities for hands-on learning, inquiry, observation, and experimentation. It also helps children cultivate a respect for nature and our environment. When children participate in growing edible plants, they are more motivated to taste, eat, and enjoy fruits and vegetables.”

Another innovative hands-on learning initiative by Ms Tan is the Take Home Bear Care Project, which involves children in Kindergarten 1 taking turns to look after Skippy



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the Teddy Bear — the class mascot — over the weekend. “Skippy has a bag and there are activities that children can do with him. The child returns Skippy on Monday and does a show and tell session to share his or her fun experiences with Skippy. This project instils care and responsibility in the children, and also enhances our partnership with parents. Parents have been supportive, taking photos and engaging in role-play with Skippy and their children,” enthuses Ms Tan of this example of teaching through positive modelling.

The tireless educator is constantly seeking ways to improve the teaching practices at her centre, and recommends PIECE (Practitioner Inquiry in Early Childhood Education) workshop by ECDA. Apart from equipping practitioners with “the necessary knowledge and skills in carrying out classroom inquiry”, Ms Tan also feels that through “observing and reflecting, collaborating and planning, implementing and evaluation, it enhances their teaching & learning practices.” ♥

