

WHAT MAKES A VILLAGE?

THIS YEAR'S EARLY CHILDHOOD CONFERENCE CELEBRATED PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS.

SOME 1,200 EC PROFESSIONALS + 10,000 FAMILIES AND CHILDREN Attended the ECC 2016



Minister Tan Chuan Jin with ECDA's CEO Mr Eugene Leong checking out an exhibition booth

On Day Two, Professor Saravanan Gopinathan, Academic Director of The HEAD Foundation, Singapore gave his take on 'values education' in children's formative years. The three keynote speakers, together with two educators and a parent, then shared their views on the conference theme at a Panel Session. Minister for Social and Family Development, Mr Tan Chuan-Jin, also announced the new Early Childhood Manpower Plan and presented the ECDA Awards 2016 to outstanding EC professionals and pre-school centres.

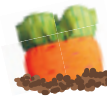
More than 30 concurrent workshops were held over the two conference days. These covered a wide range of topics and issues in EC care and education. Prior to the conference, some EC professionals also signed up for their choice of Learning Journey from the eight offered.

The ECC 2016 also featured a fun-filled exhibition, comprising over 50 booths that offered a wide range of fringe activities, educational resources and performances. Some 10,000 visitors had the opportunity to tinker with tech toys at the PlayMaker Interactive Workshop organised by the Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore, test their agility at the Friendship Olympiad obstacle course put up by the Singapore Kindness Movement, and more!

The ECDA Early Childhood Conference (ECC) 2016, held at the SUNTEC Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre on 30 September and 1 October, attracted a record-high crowd since its inception in 2013. Themed 'Enriching Childhood: It Takes A Village', the Conference celebrated the importance of strong collaborative partnerships between EC professionals, families and community partners. Day One featured two insightful keynote presentations from Professor Marilyn Fleeer from Monash University, Australia, and Associate Professor Sandra Tsang Kit Man from the University of Hong Kong. Parliamentary Secretary for Education and Trade and Industry, Ms Low Yen Ling, also presented the Singapore Pre-school Accreditation Framework (SPARK) certificates to over 200 pre-school centres.



Photos by Mark Lee & Leo Shee igwei



STRONGER TOGETHER

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS AT THE ECC 2016 GAVE THEIR PERSPECTIVES ON BUILDING HOME-PRE-SCHOOL RELATIONSHIPS AND INSTILLING VALUES.

The focus of Prof Fleeer's presentation was on the Relational Agency Framework, which she defined as "a tool that enables multi-disciplinary professionals, including educators and parents, to come together". Within a network, educators and parents feel a mutual sense of belonging as they work together to support the learning and development of young children.

What is the Relational Agency Framework?

It describes how educators and parents' engagement in networks progresses through eight phases, from building a foundational sense of belonging to enhancing professional practice by harnessing shared resources. The more each member of the network contributes to the dialogue, the quicker they can develop common knowledge, move up the levels and establish trust.

What steps can be taken to inject more openness or agency into the process?

Implementing a professional inquiry-based project helps, as the answers are naturally opened. Having a facilitator to guide the conversation ensures that each person has a safe space to contribute his or her ideas. And things can be made fun or enjoyable by talking over coffee, or bringing food to meetings.



Professor Marilyn Fleeer

Foundation Chair of Early Childhood Education, Faculty of Education, Monash University, Australia



Fun-filled exhibition with over 50 exciting fringe activities



Dr Sandra Tsang

Associate Professor, Department of Social Work and Social Administration, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong

Dr Tsang imparted "KASH tips", explaining that mastery of important knowledge (K), attitude (A) and skills (S) leads to healthy harmony (H) among stakeholders.

Why is home-school cooperation so important?

Families and pre-schools are the first and second cradles of child development, respectively. Through parent-teacher collaboration, we can deepen educational advancement. We need to think of both educators and parents as partners in the education system.

How can educators set in motion the "KASH tips"?

Educators can encourage greater family involvement in pre-schools by setting realistic expectations for parent volunteers and being open to their views. They can also better equip themselves to engage parents by attending pre- and in-service training courses, as well as addressing deficits in interpersonal skills. This will help set the foundation for a healthy, happy environment for children to grow up in.



Professor Saravanan Gopinathan

Academic Director, The HEAD Foundation, Singapore and Adjunct Professor at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore

Prof Gopinathan noted that children are growing up in an increasingly stressful environment. With rising expectations for academic excellence and external influences from social media, it has become more critical for children to receive 'values education'. This needs to play a central role in early childhood education.

Why is values education so important?

In this fast changing world, values are our anchors. They are a part of one's personality and foundation to a resilient life. As a society, we need people who are empathetic, civic-minded, and service-oriented. This is a no-brainer and that is why we have to inculcate values from young, especially in Singapore where competition is so keen and the push for academic achievement is so strong.

How can we promote the "catching on" of values in children?

Most educators and parents recognise that values are crucial, but are not giving enough attention to putting these values in practice. Inculcating values is a shared responsibility, and no educator should do this alone. One way of imparting values is to support your child, listen to what he/she has to say and show empathy. This strengthens the relationship with your child. Adopt the same approach when you are communicating and sharing with your child's educators or parents. Strong relationships which involve sharing and looking out for one another are key to "catching on" of good values.



A plenary session at the ECC 2016

A LIVELY DISCUSSION

Everyone plays a part in raising a child. Dr Jacqueline Chung (Senior Principal and Academic Director of St James' Church Kindergarten and ECDA Fellow) moderated an engaging and meaningful panel discussion on how parents and educators can strengthen their partnership for the benefit of the child. The plenary speakers comprised the keynote speakers, Mr James Chong who is a father, and 2015 ECDA Awards winners, Ms Siti Nurrafidah Binte Samat and Ms Uma Mageswari.

Some highlights of the discussion were:

- The importance of two-way communication.
- The challenges educators face in dealing with diverse parenting practices.
- The need to align different perspectives towards a common goal of supporting children's holistic development.
- The building of robust relationships among parents, educators and community partners is a continual work-in-progress.

A good partnership between pre-school and parents has to be based on agreed expectations, open and respectful communication, as well as trust. There should be a two-way feedback on the child's progress — both positive and negative — between educators and parents. Parents should also empower educators by trusting that they have the child's best interest at heart.

Mr James Chong, 41, Father of two girls aged 7 and 4



COVER: On Karina: Uniform Mothercare, Leggings & socks Stylist's own, Boots Dr Martens On Magiswari: Blazer, Blouse, Pants & Necklace Mark's and Spencer, Flats Melissa On Shao Wen: Shirt Mark's and Spencer, Pants Mothercare, Hat Stylist's own, Shoes KidSports On Kelvin: Sweater & Pants UNIQLO, Shirt & Sneakers, Mark's and Spencer On Yasias: Top Petit Bateau, Pants Mothercare, Beret Stylist's own, Shoes Dr Martens On Domayrin: Blouse & Dungaree KidStyle, Jeans Mothercare, Hat Stylist's own, Spate Daboo, Boots Melissa

ENRICHING EXPERIENCES

WORKSHOPS AND LEARNING JOURNEYS WERE AN EXPERIENTIAL PART OF ECC 2016. BEANSTALK HIGHLIGHTS TWO OF THEM.

Educators worked through a range of theoretical and practical early childhood issues at the workshops. In one workshop, "Interdisciplinary Arts in the EC Classroom", educators learnt how children's literature can be used to seamlessly fuse multiple art forms — music & movement, visual arts and drama — and achieve curriculum goals. It was conducted by Ms Wong Seet Fun, Ms Lavina Chong and Ms Elaine Ng, all artists-cum-EC practitioners.



A workshop in session



A special performance at the ECC 2016

The three presenters recounted their successful efforts to design and deliver a 12-week interdisciplinary arts programme for K2 children in a pre-school centre in 2015, under the Artist-in-School Scheme for Pre-Schools (a joint initiative by the National Arts Council and ECDA). Such aesthetic expression, said Ms Chong, allows children to pick up "21st-century competency skills" or the "5Cs" which are creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, communication and confidence-building.

One of the educators who benefitted from the session was Ms Lim Qian Hao, a K1 educator at Soka Kindergarten. "Children at our centre explore with different visual art materials, but it was useful to have practical tips on how to integrate

visual art with the other two art forms," she said.

Another workshop, "Time's Up for Time-out: How Can Educators Cultivate Desirable Behaviours in Children?" was led by Ms Chong Hwee Min, a psychologist at the KK Women's and Children's Hospital. She focused on how educators can cultivate desirable behaviours with alternatives to time-out. She also recommended adopting "time-in" strategies to manage children's challenging behaviours:

- **Set the right climate.** Phrase classroom rules positively and enforce these regularly.
- **Communicate the desired behaviour.** Tell children precisely what you want to see in them and model that behaviour so they can emulate you.
- **Advise and remind.** Inform children on the consequences of inappropriate behaviour.

The workshop prompted participants like Mrs Careen Lee, a N1 teacher at Green Pastures Child Centre, to review their own classroom management practices. The proposed alternatives to time-out, she said, would complement her centre's emphasis on positive reinforcement. ♥

A JOURNEY TO REMEMBER

One of the Learning Journeys, offered as part of the ECC 2016, took educators to KidZania Singapore. This is an interactive indoor theme park for children aged four and above to role-play a range of occupations. Mr Leong Yue Weng, General Manager of KidZania Singapore, highlighted the importance of hands-on experience in the early years. "Role-playing offers children amazing opportunities to develop important life skills such as decision-making, problem-solving and even financial literacy through experiential learning," said Mr Leong.

This was something that Ms Kylie Ng from The Singapore Teachers Co-Op Child Care Centre agreed with. "With the first-hand knowledge and interactive experience, children are able to get a better idea of how things work and think through situations," said Ms Ng. "As the saying goes, 'tell me and I'll forget, show me and I can't remember, get me involved and I'll learn'."



Photos courtesy of KidZania Singapore



Educators on their learning journey