

CREATIVELY SPEAKING

AT PCF SPARKLETOTS PRESCHOOL @ NANYANG BLK 922, SPEECH AND DRAMA LESSONS HAVE TAKEN ON AN INNOVATIVE TWIST.



Speech choir participants having fun

In the pre-school curriculum, speech and drama lessons usually involve singing, storytelling and role-playing. But from last year, PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Nanyang Blk 922 has conducted such activities with a twist — the children recite poems and rhymes in unison (minus the music), which are accompanied with choreographed movements. This creative way of teaching the arts and language — known as speech choir — won the centre the ECDA Early Childhood Innovation Award 2017 (Distinction).

“My educators and I constantly look for ways to provide children with quality learning experiences,” says the centre’s principal, Ms Noorhayati Binte Zahari. “We like the idea of a speech choir because it is holistic and can be integrated into the six learning areas in the Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) curriculum framework. The speech choir strengthens children’s language skills and helps them synchronise speech patterns with physical movements. The children learn to express themselves creatively and also engage in counting and patterning.”

The centre applied for the ECDA Innovation Grant, which supported Ms Noorhayati and her team’s participation in a workshop conducted by a local music training company. There, the educators picked up techniques and learnt how to tailor

the speech choir experience to meet the developmental needs of pre-schoolers. The educators chose content that triggered conversations about values and dispositions (such as Robert Frost’s *The Road Not Taken*). Books such as *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* by Michael Rosen had educators exploring different sensorial textures through speech. To bring these descriptions to life, educators brought in real mud, grass and water for the children to feel the different textures and discuss appropriate speech sounds.

The speech choir was initially conducted only during the school holidays. But after seeing its benefits on the children, Ms Noorhayati and her team decided to introduce a 45-minute session once a week during the curriculum hours. “Children have gained confidence in expressing themselves verbally and communicating with each other,” says Ms Noorhayati.

Ms Poh Soh Hoon, mother to K1 pre-schooler Renee Yeo, believes that speech choir has taught her daughter the importance of teamwork. “It makes her more aware of how to cooperate and work together in groups,” says Ms Poh.

For Renee, five, the element of teamwork stands out the most. “Reciting the rhymes or poems is interesting. It is fun as I get to perform with my friends too.” ♥

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Ms Noorhayati Binte Zahari,
Principal, PCF Sparkletots Preschool @
Nanyang Blk 922



Reciting rhymes with movement

NOTES TO GET STARTED ON SPEECH CHOIR

Hone your own public speaking skills so that you can guide children more confidently and effectively:

- ▶ Learn when to pause for breath as you read. This allows you to read aloud long sentences without interrupting the flow.
- ▶ Practise proper articulation and diction. This ensures that performed words are clear and audible.
- ▶ Project your voice correctly so that you have a strong stage presence.



INQUIRING MINDS



AN AWARD-WINNING PROJECT BY THE CATERPILLAR’S COVE CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND STUDY CENTRE @ JURONG EAST SHEDS LIGHT ON HOW TODDLERS THINK AND LEARN.



Children at The Caterpillar’s Cove inventing and constructing with materials



Experimenting with clay



Learning concepts through the use of aluminium foil

Young children are naturally curious and they learn through watching, touching, smelling, tasting and, sometimes, by taking things apart. “Toddlers are no exception. They have specific characteristics that require an observant, intentional and responsive educator to extend their thinking,” says Ms Cynthia Tan, the principal of The Caterpillar’s Cove Child Development and Study Centre @ Jurong East.

To gain an understanding into how these young minds make sense of the world around them, the centre embarked on a study, “Strategies for Thinking: Fostering Toddler Inquiry Through Provocations” under the ECDA-funded Innovation Grant. The project won the centre the 2017 ECDA Early Childhood Innovation Award (Distinction).



Making sense of how ramps work

Getting Hands On

Some 20 toddlers, aged two to three years old participated in the project. Over four months, educators observed the children’s behaviours as they interacted with materials such as aluminium sheets and clay, as well as pieces of cardboard constructed into ramps. Through their observations, Ms Tan and her team identified four broad indicators of how toddlers think as they learn.

1 Toddlers manipulate resources to investigate, invent and construct. “Toddlers often use both big and small motor movements to help them make sense of the materials they are working with,” says Ms Tan. In this project, they used various parts of their bodies to poke, flatten and make marks on the clay. This helped them to discover the material’s properties.

We hope that the project and its findings can highlight the capabilities of toddlers and communicate the need for more support to strengthen the infant-toddler curriculum in Singapore.

Ms Cynthia Tan, Principal,
The Caterpillar’s Cove Child Development
and Study Centre @ Jurong East

2 Toddlers problem-solve using different methods, including by trial and error, reason and logic. For example, when a cardboard ramp tore, one toddler asked for tape to mend the tear. “The use of tape reflected his thinking about cause and effect. He seemed to have an understanding of the materials he was working with,” explains Ms Tan.

3 Toddlers understand mathematical ideas and concepts. The toddlers noticed the varying sizes of the materials. “One toddler asked for a bigger piece of aluminium, demonstrating his concept of size,” she says.

4 Toddlers explore ideas and theories using imagination, creativity and play. Ms Tan recalls one toddler rolling a self-assembled toy car down the ramp. After each try, he would extend the length of the car by adding extra parts. “When asked why, he told us he wanted it to be a fast car. Play was a way of exploring his theory that the larger the car, the faster it goes.”

Based on these observations, the centre further strengthened its curriculum to better facilitate the thinking processes of their toddlers. A toolkit has also been created to guide other educators to better facilitate inquiry in toddlers. ♥