

RAISING A GLOBALLY-MINDED CHILD

PARENTS AND EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS DISCUSS HOW TO NURTURE A GENERATION OF CHILDREN WHO ARE GLOBALLY, SOCIALLY AND ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS, AS WELL AS RICH IN VALUES.



MAIN PHOTO: On Anurandha; Shirt: Dress CRAYON, Ribbon: Pumps, Melissa. On Austen; Shirt & Shorts: Cotton On Kids, Slogan Tee, Snap-back & Slippers, Seed Heritage. On Lucas: Full outfit: Seed Heritage. On Noah: Dinosaur Printed Tee, Seed Heritage, Fedora & Jogger, Pants: Kookies + Milk, Sneakers: Stylist's own. On Louise: Full outfit: Seed Heritage, Unicorn Printed Pumps, Melissa. On Nur Syarah: Full outfit: Seed Heritage. On Ahmad Lufti: Full outfit: Marks and Spencer. Denim Sneakers: SPINGLE, Star 360. PAGE 3 On Edna: Full outfit: Model's own. Photo: Kelvin Chia Styling. Sharon Tan assisted by: Kiana Tan Grooming, Manisa Tan & Felicia Ng

Focus

WHAT DOES BEING "GLOBALLY CONSCIOUS" MEAN TO YOU PERSONALLY? AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO NURTURE CHILDREN WHO ARE GLOBALLY-MINDED?

Anurandha d/o Subramaniam: Globally-conscious individuals are aware of their environments, issues and the people around them. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected and interdependent, we come in contact with people from all over the world. It is critical for children to respect this diversity and embrace the concepts of equality and fairness. Nurturing this mindset begins in the early years and continues as part of our children's lifelong journey.

Toh Ai Lin: Being globally conscious is to go beyond our immediate four walls or our shores. It is about understanding what other cultures entail. A globally-minded child is one who is able to appreciate and empathise with others, opens up to the diversity and richness of each culture, and understand that every culture is beautiful in its own way. With increased globalisation made possible by technological advancements, it is crucial to nurture my daughter's global awareness so that she can thrive in this rapidly changing world.

Edna Ng: To be globally conscious, one needs to start with oneself — knowing who you are, appreciating the community you belong to and being culturally rich. Young children are eager to learn new things, and their early years are prime for exposure to different cultures. As adults, we can help them understand and respect different cultures, their traditions and customs. These will give them the skills to appreciate cultural diversity when interacting with others now, and later in life.

Ahmad Lufti Bin Abdul Rashid: A globally-minded child learns to confidently and sensitively communicate with different people. He becomes aware of their differences, and is open and respectful of them. Inculcating values is important as everyone has a part to play in ensuring racial harmony, especially in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society like Singapore. Our children have to learn to appreciate the diversified world that we live in. They can only do this by observing what we say and do. We have to be their role models.

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Ms Edna Ng



EC PROFESSIONALS, HOW DO YOUR CENTRES AIM TO INCULCATE THIS SENSE OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL AWARENESS?

Edna: We have in place a Friendship Programme at our Kindergarten. The intention is to provide our children with opportunities to interact and learn from other children of different backgrounds, including those from Malaysia, Taiwan and the French preschool in Singapore. As part of the programme, children and teachers take turns to visit one another's centre, with the host putting up cultural performances, organising traditional games and serving local food. We introduced this programme some years back as we realised that our children would benefit from being exposed to cultures and traditions beyond their own. We want them to experience diversity and develop appropriate social skills in their early years, so that they grow up to become respectful and confident adults.

Anu: At our preschool, teachers make current affairs an integral part of our curriculum. For example, in the week that the Jurong Region Line was announced, the children learnt about public spaces and transportation. The teachers also discussed with the children why a new MRT line is needed, and how increased connectivity makes travelling more convenient. Moving beyond our shores, we also expose the children to what is happening regionally. For example, we gathered newspaper articles on the haze situation, its impact on the environment and brainstormed possible solutions. This helps the children make meaning of the news instead of merely being fed with the information.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS WE NEED TO TAKE NOTE OF WHEN EXPOSING CHILDREN TO CURRENT AFFAIRS OR ROLLING OUT FRIENDSHIP PROGRAMMES?

Anu: We need to ensure that the news is developmentally appropriate and relevant. How we unpack the news is also important to make it engaging and meaningful for the children. News on road accidents or natural disasters may negatively affect children so it's important to tune into the children's emotional state. Keep parents updated on topics and issues discussed. Encourage them to continue the discussions at home to further strengthen their children's understanding. For the young ones in the playgroups, you can expose them to simple and appropriate images, as most content may be too complex and abstract for their understanding. Draw links between the news and the children's daily lives and routines. Making such connections will help them understand and appreciate the issues at hand.

Edna: Plan ahead if your centre is interested in putting together a friendship programme. It is important to rally the teachers and be specific about

the learning objectives and the key insights that you would like the children to take away. Also draw up a plan on how you want to achieve the objectives. Involve children in researching the culture of the children they will be visiting. You can also get parents to contribute as well by involving them in activities, such as teaching traditional games or chaperoning visits to the international preschool.

WHAT ARE SOME BENEFITS TO THE CHILDREN AS A RESULT OF THESE EXPERIENCES?

Anu: We have observed that the children are more aware and curious about what is happening around them. They have a deeper understanding of issues and

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Ms Anurandha d/o Subramaniam



Ms Anurandha d/o Subramaniam
36, Educator at Mindchamps Preschool @ Changi Business Park

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Mr Ahmad Lufti Bin Abdul Rashid

are more confident in sharing their experiences with their peers. Their command of language has also improved.

Edna: The Friendship Programme has opened up opportunities for the children to make new friends and learn new things. For example, from their friends at the French preschool, the children in my kindergarten now have a better understanding of the French lifestyle, food, culture and language; everything from the food they eat to the songs they sing and the games they play. They have also learnt simple French greeting phrases. The experience has piqued their curiosity and opened their minds to beyond what they are accustomed to.

PARENTS, WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THESE PROGRAMMES CONDUCTED AT YOUR CHILD'S CENTRE?

Lufti: The current affairs programme has been enlightening for my daughter. It is good that she is exposed to a wide range of topics and issues — from science, health and the environment to sports, music and even politics. The class discussions have also helped to broaden her mind and deepen the way she thinks. I am pleased as this has sparked her curiosity to know and learn more.

Ai Lin: The cross-culture sharing experiences from the Friendship Programme have given my daughter an opportunity to interact with children whose first language isn't English. It has been an enriching experience for her. I find that she now is more appreciative of another person's culture. Not to mention that she has had a fun time, too!

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO HAVE AN OPEN MIND AND THINKING THAT GOES BEYOND THE 'SELF'?

Lufti: My wife and I make it a point to expose our daughter to different art forms. We take her to the museums and Esplanade Theatres on the Bay, especially if there's a children-focused programme going on. The latter often holds free cultural performances, like the Malay *dikir barat* and Korean folk dance. After each outing, we



Mr Ahmad Lufti Bin Abdul Rashid
35, Civil Servant, Father of a 3-year-old girl

WINDOWS TO THE WORLD

TEACHERS SHARE TIPS ON WHAT ELSE PARENTS CAN DO TO FOSTER A GLOBAL MINDSET IN THEIR CHILDREN.

- ✓ Create a cosy current affairs corner at home with your child. Select interesting newspaper articles together with your child to put up in the corner.
- ✓ Watch the local and international news together. Engage your child in conversations.
- ✓ Visit museums and put together a 'cultural' scrapbook. Revisit the contents periodically.
- ✓ Borrow books from the library to find out more about different cultures.
- ✓ Look for ways to reach out to the community. Discuss with your preschool how you and your child can be involved. For instance, you could take part in fund-raising events for social causes.

THIS SPREAD On Anurandha: Cardigan: Stylist's own, Stripe Shift Dress: Yacht 21, On Nur Syaurah: Full outfit: Seed Heritage, On Ahmad Lufti: Full outfit: Marks and Spencer, PAGE 6 On Ai Lin: Belted Blouse: CRAYON, Jeans: Model's Own, On Louise: Full outfit: Cookies + Milk.

COVER On Nur Syaurah: Full outfit: Seed Heritage, Windbreaker: Seed Heritage, Emotion Printed Tee & Beige Shorts: Cotton On Kids, Socks & Sneakers: Stylist's Own, On Anurandha: Blouse: Seed Heritage, Jeans & Flats: Stylist's own.

Ms Toh Ai Lin
50, Secretary,
Mother of a
6-year-old girl



have conversations to help her better understand the whole experience.

Ai Lin: As parents, we play an important role in moulding our children's understanding and appreciation of different cultures. My husband and I talk to our daughter about the festivals celebrated in Singapore and their significance. We also bring her to gatherings and weddings when we are invited by friends of other races. These are good opportunities for her to understand different cultures.



NATURE AS A LEARNING TOOL

OUTDOOR EDUCATOR MS JANET ROBERTSON SHARES HOW SHE USES NATURAL MATERIALS TO DEVELOP ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS IN CHILDREN.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF TAPPING ON NATURE AND NATURAL MATERIALS TO CREATE TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES FOR YOUNG CHILDREN?

All materials have their own 'voice' — a language of possibilities. Some materials are intentionally 'close ended' (such as insert puzzles), while others (such as blocks) offer more possibilities. These manufactured resources, though useful and necessary, may not have the inherent complexity of natural materials. For example, no two leaves are the same, and each pebble or stone is unique. This complexity enables for more interpretation and encourages imagination and creativity.

HOW CAN A SUSTAINABILITY MINDSET BE NURTURED IN THE EARLY YEARS?

Sustainability is a complex issue and is more than just about the 3Rs (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle). Simply taking natural materials without regard for their provenance, so children can play with them, is in itself an unsustainable act. Many of the materials commercially available are also not harvested or transported in a sustainable manner.



Currently, teaching young children about sustainability tends to focus on the negative aspects of issues like climate change. We can actually shift our focus away from the negative and towards the positive. For instance, we can teach our children to appreciate nature so that they will fall in love with the earth and what it has to offer (this is known as biophilia). This will help create individuals who care enough to be custodians of the planet and its resources.

CAN YOU OFFER SOME TIPS TO OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS WHEN USING NATURAL MATERIALS AS A TEACHING TOOL?

- ✦ Trust that children will be imaginative and find ideas with the natural materials you have at hand.
- ✦ Speak to the relevant authorities about your desire to use natural materials from the preschool's surroundings, and together explore how this can be done.
- ✦ Learn to appreciate the local natural materials like leaves, twigs, pebbles, and bark that are found in Singapore.
- ✦ Add natural materials to existing play spaces, instead of creating an exclusive space for natural material play.
- ✦ Always check the safety of new items. Create a checklist so you can assess the potential problems (if any), such as if they might be a choking hazard, a skin irritant or poisonous if ingested. ❤️



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