

MORE THAN FUN & GAMES

GRACE CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTRE IS SERIOUS ABOUT DEVELOPING TEACHERS TO ENHANCE LEARNING THROUGH PLAY.



To incorporate play in a music and movement activity, Ms Low Shi Hui gets her K1 class to dress up as cats



Storytelling sessions help build up language skills



Teachers benefit from feedback at monthly peer sharing sessions

Learning through planned play experiences is the main teaching and learning focus at Grace Child Development Centre.

"When children play, they explore concepts freely at their own pace, enabling them to discover and make connections to construct knowledge in the process," says Centre Principal Mdm Norwaty Mamsie. Hence, the centre's play experiences are planned for meaningful learning, with intentional learning objectives.

For instance, introducing the concept of lines is turned into a fun activity where the children 'walk' their pet balloons along straight and zigzag lines pasted on the floor. In the process, they also learn to balance and coordinate their movements, and pick up social skills as they take turns to tread the lines.

PURPOSEFUL PLAY

"We incorporate play in every activity here," says K1 teacher Ms Low Shi Hui. "The children's

interests and prior learning are taken into consideration to ensure that they are engaged meaningfully."

For the centre, it is also important for every activity to integrate two or three learning domains, since children's learning is not 'compartmentalised'. For instance, after a field trip to the River Safari to observe pandas in their habitat, the children put on panda onesies and reenacted what they had seen in a storytelling session. Apart from learning about pandas, the activity was structured to give them an opportunity to learn how to cooperate with others, practise their language skills and build their confidence in public speaking.

BUILDING COMPETENCIES

To strengthen the teachers' competencies in implementing the centre's play-based curriculum, they need to undergo a yearly refresher orientation and training throughout the year, based on their individual needs.

"The centre places emphasis on building teachers' competencies in areas such as planning play activities and effective facilitation skills, including techniques on open-ended questioning, sustaining meaningful conversation and managing group engagement," says Mdm Norwaty.

"In addition to learning from the sector experts, teachers also benefit from regular feedback on their classroom practices. We have peer-sharing at our monthly curriculum sessions. Here, teachers reflect and discuss the effectiveness of their teaching and learning practices," she elaborates.

"We also arrange for our teachers to observe a more senior teacher in action and pair them with buddies for specific areas of improvement. They consult their more experienced colleagues and tap on the centre's resources and the internet for teaching and learning ideas," adds Ms Low. In the near future, the centre has plans to establish a mentoring programme for the systematic mentoring of teachers for specific competencies.



Voluntary Welfare Organisation Grace Child Development Centre is a SPARK (Commendation) certified centre. See <https://www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo> for more information on SPARK-certified preschools.



Through a purposeful play activity using pebbles, Eunice guides children to use observation and critical thinking skills to predict how objects balance or fall

OBSERVE & LEARN

AWARD-WINNING TEACHER EUNICE TAY RELIES ON OBSERVATION AND REFLECTION TO DESIGN EFFECTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS FOR CHILDREN UNDER HER CARE.

"Being open and innovative is important when it comes to designing a learning-through-play environment for a classroom of children with diverse learning styles," says Ms Eunice Tay. The Deputy Centre Lead at NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at Blk 803 Tampines is the winner of the 2018 ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher award.

TUNING IN TO DIFFERENT LEARNING STYLES

To cater to different types of learners, Eunice comes up with a multi-tiered lesson plan. For instance, when she teaches the children about plants, she starts by introducing a song about planting. "The children are given time to come up with actions to accompany the song. This gives the auditory and kinaesthetic learners a better understanding of the topic," she says.

After the song, she reads them a book on planting. "The pictures on the pages help the visual learners anticipate what will happen in the garden later," she explains. By approaching the topic in different

Teacher Eunice has taught me that the best way to get a child to learn is to focus on teachable moments, which can happen at any time and place. Depending on the child's interest at a particular moment, parents can impart as much knowledge as possible before the child loses interest."

MS SRI RAHAYU BINTE RAHMAT, parent of K2 student Nuryn Eiliyah Binte Mohammad Firdhaus

ways, she ensures that all the children are fully engaged by the time they are ready to do the actual planting.

OBSERVE TO UNDERSTAND

To make the activities engaging and stimulating, Eunice identifies each child's learning style and interests.

Observation methods include taking videos and photos, checklists and learning stories (a narrative format used to document a child's learning). She regularly chats with parents to further understand their children.

Equipped with a deeper understanding of each child's learning needs, strengths, likes and dislikes, Eunice is able to tailor her lessons to suit different children and checks in with them as to what they think and feel about the learning. The result? Children feel good about themselves, are motivated to complete a task and want to try something more challenging.



Children learning through games with their peers

REFLECT AND UPGRADE

Eunice regularly evaluates her own teaching practices. "I ask myself: How else can I conduct the activities to further extend the children's learning? How did the children respond to my lessons? What was the best part of the lesson for the children? How else can I improve?"

Keeping her skills up to date is also important to Eunice. She looks through the ECDA prospectus every year for courses that will enhance her knowledge and teaching practices. She also attends internal training sessions, reads up on early childhood education online and engages in discussions with her colleagues. Eunice finds it especially important to have regular discussions with her colleagues on professional issues. "It helps me stay relevant and credible in my teaching practices. Supporting each other is also necessary to keep the passion and enthusiasm going," she says.



Eunice shares more in a short video at youtu.be/nCfxUS8KNgw.



Children take ownership of their learning space during outdoor storytelling sessions

OWN THIS SPACE

WINNER OF THE 2018 ECDA OUTSTANDING CENTRE FOR TEACHING & LEARNING AWARD, PCF SPARKLETOTS PRESCHOOL @ PIONEER BLK 661B IS A PLACE WHERE CHILDREN ARE THE ARCHITECTS OF THEIR LEARNING SPACES.

Lead Principal Ms Hamidah Juhan believes that a well-designed learning environment is a powerful curricular tool, as children are more engaged when their needs and interests are reflected in their environment. That is why PCF Sparkletots Preschool at Pioneer Blk 661B provides opportunities for children to create learning spaces and activities with their teachers.

In planning the learning centres for the upcoming term, children start by brainstorming and discussing what activity they want to do, what materials are required, who are involved, as well as when, where and how they need to go about constructing the space. These

ideas are presented visually on a brainstorming web that is displayed on the classroom wall for them to refer to. They then work in small groups with their teachers to design their learning centres with recycled materials they have collected.

CREATING A CONDUCTIVE LEARNING SPACE

Empowering children to take ownership of their learning space benefits them in many ways. Says Ms Hamidah, "It encourages children to think things through, voice their opinions, try out their ideas and work at their own pace. When they play at their own learning space, they feel a sense of accomplishment and are

motivated to learn. They become more adept at critical thinking and more resilient."

The centre also conducts some of the programmes outdoors. Though this is prompted in part by space constraints, bringing the classroom outdoors has also turned out to be an opportunity for children to increase their engagement and concentration. For the teachers, the programmes and activities conducted outdoors become a part of their curriculum planning.

Two programmes which are conducted outdoors are storytelling sessions using various props, as well as art activities which are accompanied by music. Teachers create a conducive environment for children to learn in a relaxing, picnic-style setting and ensure that the space is clean and safe.

ON THE HOME FRONT

To create a similarly positive and enriching space at home, Ms Hamidah offers these tips.

- **Display your child's artwork.** It is a way of recognising and valuing his work, and boosts his self-esteem and confidence.
- **Play with open-ended materials.** These can be blocks, empty shoe and cereal boxes, bottles, toilet rolls, sticks and fabrics. Let your child explore and you will be surprised how creative and imaginative they can be.
- **Bring your child outdoors.** Nature offers plenty to pique a child's curiosity. Bring his favourite storybook to read to your child.

“ I look for a word-rich, colourful, vibrant, clean and neat environment. The **quality of the environment matters** as it needs to be appealing and secure for the child.”

MS SARAH FONG, 42, mother of K1 student, Lukas Fong on choosing a preschool for her child

“ The centre provides a dynamic learning environment as it holds **multiple types of activities** and plans excursions to expose my child to more learning opportunities.”

MS SHARON TAN SHIYUN, mother of N2B student Ashley Kuan, on the importance of a conducive learning environment for her child

