

WORD GETS AROUND

WITH PARENTS AS PARTNERS, PAT'S SCHOOLHOUSE @ SEMBAWANG HAS SEEN IMPROVEMENTS IN THE READING AND WRITING ABILITIES OF THEIR K1 CLASSES.



Group reading and writing sessions help develop children's language and literacy skills in a fun way



Parents supported the school's literacy initiative by bringing their children to the library

HOW TO DEVELOP A LOVE FOR READING



Practical tips for parents.

- **Read to your child daily.** It establishes a routine for reading and gives him a sense of continuity of his experiences at preschool.
- **Visit the library together.** Expose your child to a variety of books, both fiction and non-fiction. This will generate different types of conversations.
- **Get books related to your child's interest.** This nurtures his love for reading. At the same time, he can relate to the content and express his ideas easily.
- **Ask open-ended questions.** "Why do you think?" or "What makes you say that?" are some ways you can stimulate your child's curiosity, imaginative and critical thinking skills.

Parent engagement has a positive impact on children's literacy skills.

This was the finding from a Practitioner Inquiry (PI) project carried out by Pat's Schoolhouse @ Sembawang.

The centre conducted workshops for parents to build their awareness of the importance of home support, and provided them with practical strategies to further strengthen their children's language and literacy skills [see box].

Teachers saw an increase in the number of library card applications as the children were bringing their library books to preschool. They also showed more interest in the wide genre of books found in the class library.

READING WIDELY, WRITING BETTER

"We found that children who receive strong learning support at home developed quickly in their word recognition skills," observes teacher Ms Kristina Cassandra Felix. "The difference was also evident in their reading and writing skills. They

learnt to apply inventive spelling (spelling words by sounding them). The children also demonstrated a wider vocabulary and this may also be attributed to their exposure to a range of books," she says.

SUPPORT ON THE HOME FRONT

Mdm Tan Hui Sze found the workshop useful in taking the reading with her daughter Micaela Soh to another level. She says, "Techniques such as asking open-ended questions helped enhance her word-recognition skills and story comprehension. It has also made our reading time together fun and enjoyable!"

Mdm Tan believes that aligning the strategies used in preschool and at home strengthened her child's ability to learn. At preschool, Micaela and classmates participated in small group readings and writing exercises. At home, Mdm Tan ensured that she reinforced what was carried out in preschool. "If Micaela read an interesting story at school, she would tell the family about it. We encouraged her to share what the

story was about or to even act it out. We hoped that this would help increase her confidence in speaking and her love for books," adds Mdm Tan.

Ms Felix notes that many parents have similar experiences with their children. "After starting this programme, parents shared that their children looked forward to reading stories with them. Better yet, we heard that the children were motivated to read independently at home." ●

FROM “ME” TO “WE”

DEVELOPING QUALITY INTERACTIONS AND FORGING STRONGER PARTNERSHIPS AMONG CENTRE LEADERS, TEACHERS AND PARENTS.



ECDA Fellows from left: Ms Chua Lay Mui, Ms Zaiton Mohd Ali, Ms Seri Rahayu Binte Ariff and Ms Ong Siew Teng

Increasingly, the spotlight has been on the quality of relationships between educators and parents because research suggests that it is linked to educational outcomes for children.

It starts with good leadership practices, where centre leaders nurture high-quality interactions with their team of teachers, and encourage teachers to do the same with parents.

What do such quality relationships look like? How can centre leaders implement these in their own centres? *Beanstalk* spoke to ECDA Fellows Ms Chua Lay Mui and Ms Zaiton Mohd Ali, who shared some approaches from their respective Inquiry-Based Action Plan (IBAP) projects, the evidence-based practices to improve the quality of the sector.

LEADING THROUGH TRUST

Centre leaders sometimes face challenges from their teachers as well as parents when there are changes or concerns in the centre. According to Ms Chua Lay Mui, Executive Principal of PCF

understanding,” explains Ms Chua.

She offers these strategies to gain trust and support from teachers and parents, and resolve conflicts:

- **Be a good listener.** Ms Chua says, “Most of us listen not with the intent to understand, but with the intent to reply. We focus on getting our points across, and ignore what the other person is telling us. Be empathetic and ‘listen’ to see, hear and understand the other person’s perspectives.”
- **Be sincere and humble.** Put aside your pride or belief that you are right. Show a willingness to listen, continue to communicate, and respect differences in views.
- **Make deposits into “emotional bank accounts”.** Be genuine. Keep commitments. Show integrity and maintain confidentiality. Remember little things such as birthdays. Such acts build goodwill, trust and respect in the long run.



SHOW & TELL

Ms Chua and Ms Zaiton were among the 22 ECDA Fellows who presented their respective IBAP projects at the Project Showcase for EC Leaders on 19 February 2019. Twelve IBAP projects were presented at the event, including these four new ones:

- **Building Leadership Capacity: Coffee, Tea or Conflicts**
By Ms Chua Lay Mui, Ms Seri Rahayu Binte Ariff and Ms Ong Siew Teng
- **From What’s Wrong to What’s Strong: A Strength-based Approach towards Quality Relationships with Staff**
By Ms Zaiton Mohd Ali and Ms Ong Siew Teng
- **Building Powerful Learning Communities within the Centre**
By Ms Hephzi Tee, Ms Suhana Bte Salleh and Ms Sylvia Yeo
- **Quality Interactions: Guiding Educators to Connect with Children beyond Instruction**
By Ms Melissa Goh-Karssen

Scan this QR code for quick access to the *Keep Calm and Lead On* e-newsletter series, which features past eight IBAP projects.



Ms Zaiton Mohd Ali stressed the importance of recognising teachers’ strengths at the Project Showcase event

“Centre leaders need to understand the dynamic personalities of their staff. Staff, too, need to understand how a leader works and his perspectives. When we align our visions and create a shared understanding, we can work together as a team.”

MS ASLIZAWATI BINTE AMAN, Principal of Redpony Centre Cashew, on her main takeaway from the Project Showcase event

TAP ON STRENGTHS

It is human nature to focus on one’s weaknesses or shortcomings, and it is no different in the early childhood sector. For example, centre leaders typically focus on identifying teachers’ competency gaps during Learning Needs Analysis to determine their professional development needs. “We tend to overlook the teachers’ strengths, when in fact we should be celebrating them,” observes Ms Zaiton, Executive Principal of Iyad Perdaus Child Development.

A shift from deficit-based to strength-based thinking is necessary. “When centre leaders highlight the strengths of individual staff members and acknowledge what they are doing right, it increases motivation and strengthens their relationships. It can lead to better performance, higher job satisfaction and higher staff retention rates,” says Ms Zaiton.

She shares tips for creating this “enabling environment”:

- **Believe in yourself.** We come with different life experiences, traits, strengths and gifts. Believe that you can make a positive difference to the people and environment around you.
- **Remember that each individual is unique.** He or she could be creative, willing to take risks, helpful to colleagues, be goal-oriented, etc. Focus on what is working well and invest in creating a growth mindset.
- **Celebrate small successes.** Acknowledge and affirm strengths and contributions. Remember that a strength-based mindset and culture is built over time. ●



WATCH IT!

Get inspiration and ideas from the second batch of ECDA Fellows in the latest *ECDA Fellows Talk Series*. Scan this QR code to watch the eight YouTube clips.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION 101

Teacher-parent clashes can happen due to differences in personality, temperament, culture or lifestyle experiences. Parents and teachers have suggested a few tips to tackle difficult situations:

Scenario 1: The teacher who gives negative feedback about your child
Start by saying, “I know you mean well and want the best for my child.” Ask questions to clarify. Focus on coming up with solutions on how your child can be supported both at home and preschool. Check in periodically with the teacher to exchange updates on child’s progress.

Scenario 2: The teacher who is too rough or shouts at your child
Schedule a session with the teacher. Calmly describe what you have observed or heard, and share how it makes your child feel. Hear the teacher out. Explain that you are sharing the information to help meet your child’s needs. Continue to build rapport with regular chats.

Scenario 3: The parent who tells you how to teach her child
Explain that the curriculum is designed based on how children grow and develop. Provide examples to show how it gives the child a firm foundation while allowing her to enjoy the learning process. Share her little successes. Work with the parent on how he can reinforce what is being carried out in preschool. Ask for input.

Scenario 4: The parent who disagrees with how you discipline her child
Calmly clarify why and how specific behavioural management strategies are used. Explain that it is important for a child to receive consistent feedback and responses to his behaviour at home and in preschool. Share how the strategies have resulted in positive behavioural adjustments for the child. Involve the parents and ask them for suggestions.