

win!
A \$50 UNIQUIGIFT
VOUCHER

THRIVE



Fit As A Fiddle

How sports and exercise can boost a child's self-image



Play It Cool

Dress up your drinks with fruity ice cubes



Here Comes The Sun

Catch the light with this colourful craft



**2021,
HERE WE
COME!**

Turn your dreams
into goals
this new year

Beanstalk

JAN-MAR
2021

HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR CHILD?

Recognising children's
competencies to bring
out their potential

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5
WAYS TO USE
FINGER PUPPETS
to build
social-emotional
skills



CELEBRATING TEACHERS AND CHILDREN



When children returned to their preschools in the second half of 2020, they impressed on several counts. First, how much our curious preschoolers learnt and understood about the virus. Second, how capable they were in complying with the safe management measures. Many young children, including my two-year-old, now understand the measures so well that they are the ones reminding the rest of the family to wear their masks! Third, how many of them found creative ways to adhere to the measures to suit their unique personalities.

For me, this has been an important reminder of how our children are truly curious, capable and unique learners. It's important for us to recognise this as we nurture them both in preschool and at home. How we think of our children, in terms of their capabilities, needs and interests, influences our interactions with them and impacts their development and wellbeing.

Our role as adults is to uncover and appreciate the strengths of each child and bring out their potential. As American poet and author Robert John Meehan put it, "Each child has a different learning style and pace. Each child is unique, not only capable of learning but also capable of succeeding."

MS JAMIE ANG
Chief Executive Officer
Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)

Happy New Year, everyone! 2020 was an unprecedented year. I'm heartened that the early childhood fraternity rallied together to help keep our children safe and learning. In 2021, let's continue to work together to support our preschoolers in their development.

In the last quarter of 2020, we celebrated our educators and preschools in three ceremonies. At the ECDA Scholarships and Training Awards Ceremony, we presented over 400 Training Awards, 13 Commendation Awards and nine Scholarships. At the ECDA Awards Ceremony, we honoured 25 award winners and 11 finalists for their professional excellence. At the SPARK Certification Ceremony, 106 preschools received their certification, bringing the total number of SPARK-certified preschools to over half of the preschools in Singapore. Congratulations to all of them!



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Angela Anthony
Jennifer Law

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ON THE COVER

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Beanstalk clinched the APEX 2019 Award of Excellence in the One of a Kind Publication (Education & Training) Category!

Some photos in this issue were taken before the Circuit Breaker period, and feature children/adults without masks on.



IMAGE MATTERS

EXAMINING THE IMAGE WE HOLD OF CHILDREN AND HOW IT INFLUENCES PARENTS' AND EDUCATORS' INTERACTIONS WITH THEM.

What are your views and beliefs about how children learn? Do you see them as blank slates ready to receive information from adults? Or are they capable little dynamos who can take charge of their own learning?

What people assume and understand about children is often referred to by early childhood educators as the image of the child. It highlights how one's assumptions and beliefs about a child's development, learning and motivation can affect day-to-day classroom decisions and teaching practices.

One's image of the child evolves from factors such as culture and past experiences. You may not even be consciously aware of your preconceived notions and ideas, but these deserve close scrutiny. "As young children are very sensitive to the psychological and physical environments they experience, the adults around them play a critical role in creating these environments. We need to be aware that our beliefs guide our practices," says Professor Nirmala Rao, an early childhood expert from The University of Hong Kong. "It is particularly important for educators to reflect on their beliefs of the children in their care, as this will influence the interactions and opportunities they will provide for the children. Evidence tells us that children benefit from caregiving that is sensitive to their individual characteristics and provides opportunities for learning."

Beanstalk finds out how educators and parents perceive the children in their care, and how it shapes the interactions and relationship between adult and child.

TEACHERS, WHAT COMES TO MIND IN RESPONSE TO THE TERM 'IMAGE OF THE CHILD'?

Mabel Eu: Each child is a unique individual. Children can be competent, capable, independent, communicative, fragile, dependent and so on. As educators, we need to be attuned to their different developmental needs and stages of growth.

Siti Farhana Binte Hamid: I believe children are born curious and full of imagination. Imagination

“As educators, we must be flexible and adaptable in guiding and supporting children's interests.”

MDM MABEL EU, 46
Principal, Kanooka School House

stimulates self-expression and creativity. It helps develop higher-order thinking such as problem-solving, visualisation and idea generation.

WHAT IMPACT DOES AN EDUCATOR'S IMAGE OF THE CHILD HAVE ON HIS OR HER INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN, THEIR LEARNING AND WELLBEING?

Mabel: As educators, we scaffold children's learning experiences based on our understanding of the child's interests, abilities, needs and background. For instance, if a child appears shy, we would try to find out the reasons for this shyness and plan experiences to engage the child positively.

Farhana: When a teacher believes there are endless possibilities to a child's potential, and couples it with lessons and activities designed around the child's abilities and interests, it sets the child up for success.

PARENTS, DO YOU SEE CHILDREN AS DEPENDENT ON ADULTS TO LEAD THEM? OR ARE THEY CREATIVE BEINGS WITH UNLIMITED POTENTIAL TO LEARN?

Ahmad Zaki Bin Abdul Rahman: Children are dependent on their immediate caregiver to shield them from the harsh realities which they are not ready to deal with. That said, I think we should give our children a calibrated degree of autonomy so that they can explore and find their feet. In my case, apart from some non-negotiables like limited screen time, we give Ali some autonomy in other areas, such as how to spend his spare time. We give him two options and let him choose what he wants to do.

Sun Jianxia: Children are like seeds striving to grow and blossom. Along the way, they will be exposed to storms and we need to guide them so that they know how to weather the storm of life. At the playground, we let Chloe choose what equipment to play with, while making sure she doesn't get injured. Once we taught her how to grip the ladder on the slide, and hold on to the swing chains, we stepped away and let her try it herself.



WHAT DO YOU SEE AS YOUR CHILD'S QUALITIES, ABILITIES AND POTENTIAL? HOW DO THESE OPINIONS AFFECT THE WAY YOU INTERACT WITH HIM OR HER?

Ahmad: I see Ali as our hope for a better future. He displays confidence and can articulate ideas well. I hope that one day, Ali will be an independent and responsible individual. My role is to help him get there, one small step at a time. Involving him in the decision-making process in the early years, even for little things like what to wear or what to eat when dining out, will help develop his sense of self, enhancing his self-image and his unique identity as a person.

Jianxia: All children have the potential to learn new things. Parents should nurture their children's unique abilities, help them with emotion regulation and guide them through frustration. As for Chloe, my husband and I are particular about her emotional development. We always ask her for her opinions. We teach her to accept setbacks and to learn from them. Chloe likes dancing, but gets frustrated sometimes when she has trouble picking up a new dance move. We motivate her by saying things like "I can see you're getting better!" so that she will keep trying until she gets the hang of it.

TEACHERS, HOW IMPORTANT IS IT TO OBSERVE AND ASSESS CHILDREN IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS, SUCH AS ENGAGING IN CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES, PLAYING WITH FRIENDS, OR EVEN IN THE COMPANY OF THEIR PARENTS?

Mabel: Children have different learning styles and react differently when they are with their peers, teachers and parents. Through observation, we can fine-tune the way we respond to their behaviours. If there are concerns with a behaviour, it would be good to identify the child's intent, the triggers and what could be

“ I believe children are born curious and full of imagination.

MS SITI FARHANA BINTE HAMID, 37
Teacher, AL-Mukminin Mosque Kindergarten



KIDS HAVE RIGHTS TOO

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has set out the standards which include safeguarding of the image of the child and their right to a childhood. For example, Article 12 states that the child who is capable of forming his or her own views has the right to express those views freely. Article 29 reiterates that the education of the child should be directed to the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

done to alleviate the behaviour. Observations can also inform our teaching strategies and materials used to provide children with appropriate learning contexts. Some children may benefit from hands-on experiences such as playing with toys, while others may prefer visual learning aids such as posters and picture cards, or listening to music.

Farhana: It is important to observe children in different environments to assess how they communicate and relate to others. This helps us understand a child's learning, as well as social and emotional development. Observing and assessing provide us with valuable information on a child's abilities, which can inform curriculum planning and activities. More importantly, it informs our communication with parents. These can help maximise the child's potential.

HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR CENTRE'S TEACHING PRACTICES? ARE THEY TEACHER-DIRECTED, CHILD-INITIATED, CHILD-ORIENTED, OR A MIX OF THE DIFFERENT APPROACHES?

Mabel: Our centre adopts a combination of approaches. There is a teacher-directed plan where the class follows a fixed activity schedule. However, we also support child-initiated learning. For instance, when reading a story, the teacher may ask children what they think will happen next. In so doing, the children are given space to invent their own stories and draw pictures of these unique stories. There's no limit to children's imagination! As educators, we must be flexible and adaptable in guiding and supporting their interests.

Farhana: Our centre combines teacher-directed and child-initiated approaches, too. Part of the daily programme, planned by the teacher, involves direct instruction of concepts and skills. Other parts of the day are set aside for free play and discovery time. In our Discovery of the World lesson on leaves, the children noticed the veins of the leaves and asked, "Don't humans have veins too?" This led to a broader discussion on veins. Children are indeed capable of making connections in their learning.

AN EDUCATOR'S IMAGE OF THE CHILD MAY DIFFER FROM THAT HELD BY A PARENT. SHOULD BOTH ALIGN THEIR IMAGE OF THE CHILD?

Mabel: Certainly. If the educator and parent hold differing images of the child, it may affect the child's self-esteem, cognitive development and behaviour. The same child may react differently to different settings or adults. Parents and teachers need to communicate and work together to align their observations of the child in order to derive effective strategies. For example, a new child exhibiting shy behaviour in preschool might not reflect such a behaviour at home. Teachers can find out from parents how she behaves at home, and what can soothe or allay her anxieties.

Farhana: Parents have their own child-raising beliefs and expectations of their children. Educators need to be respectful and sensitive to these differences, and explore ways to work together with parents for the children's benefit. Taking time to build a trusting and engaging partnership can help align differences and bring about a shared understanding. For instance, we involved parents in a recent gardening project by inviting them to help their children create flower pots using recycled and natural materials. As the children used

“ I am good at singing and dancing. My favourite activity is art — I love painting and colouring.

CHLOE LEE, 4
Kanooka School House



“ All children have the potential to learn new things. Parents should nurture their children's unique abilities, help them with emotion regulation and guide them through frustration.

MS SUN JIANXIA, 34
Preschool Teacher, mother of Chloe Lee

LOOK AND LISTEN

ECDA Fellow Dr Geraldine Teo-Zuzarte on what educators can do to view children as capable and curious learners.



There has been much research on the development of the brain and, in particular, how a baby is born with billions of neurons that need to be activated through experience. Neuroscience findings suggest strongly that very young children are capable of higher-order thinking and learning. Hence, the old model of viewing children as 'vessels to be filled' may no longer be relevant.

• **DEEPEN OBSERVATION SKILLS TO DEEPEN REFLECTIONS**
For educators to see children as active constructors of learning, observation is critical. Observations of young children need to be done in natural or authentic settings, for example, how children engage in different activities such as play, during meals and even interactions with others and materials in the environment.
Look at the child's motivation and intention behind an action or behaviour. This is core to planning, evaluating and modifying teaching practices, beyond just seeing it for documenting children's development.

• **ADOPT A BALANCED APPROACH**
To construct a holistic image of children, educators should adopt a balanced approach between teacher-facilitated activities and child-led experiences.
Educators must make informed decisions about when to teach (skills and concepts) and when to facilitate and reinforce learning. For example, while providing choices within a set of developmentally-appropriate boundaries, children can also be invited to co-construct or work together with the teacher to decide on activities at the learning centres, and select what activities they may like to do for the day.

The goal of ensuring a holistic and realistic view of any child is for educators to 'see' and make visible his strengths and abilities, as well as areas that may need strengthening. One way is through Learning Stories, which educators can use as a pedagogical tool to document what a child does throughout the day. It is important to embrace the image that each child comes to us competent, ready to learn and understand the world around them. Educators who understand and reflect this in their practice are able to work more effectively with the families for each child's optimal learning and development.

different objects such as plastic bottles, onion nets and seashells to make flower pots, the parents came to realise that the little ones can actually think through the process, make decisions and be creative.

WHAT STRATEGIES CAN EDUCATORS USE TO PARTNER PARENTS IN NURTURING THE CHILD'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT IN SPITE OF THEIR DIFFERENT IMAGES OF THE CHILD?

Mabel: It is important to establish communication and trust between educators and parents. Educators can discuss the intent and strategies with parents, and ways in which they can consider adopting similar strategies at home. These may include praising the child or offering a small reward when he or she displays good behaviour, or talking to children instead of scolding them to find out the reasons for their misbehaviour. Do check in with parents for their feedback — what went well and what could be improved. This will help parents guide their children's learning and development better.

Farhana: Regular updates to parents on how their child is faring in preschool greatly benefit parents and children. This can be done through written communication or phone calls. Our centre also uses an online portal where teachers post photos of preschool activities for parents to find out more about their child's learning. Teachers can also involve parents in activities and projects to foster parent-child bonding and develop positive parent-teacher communication.

“ I see Ali as our hope for a better future. He displays confidence and can articulate ideas well.

MR AHMAD ZAKI BIN ABDUL RAHMAN, 34
Lecturer, father of Ali Bin Ahmad Zaki



700

new synapses or connections between brain cells are formed every second in the first three years of life. This discovery supports the image of the child as highly capable, and highlights the pivotal role of early childhood experiences in the development of brain architecture.

PARENTS, DO YOU SHARE THE SAME VIEWS ABOUT YOUR CHILD AS HIS OR HER TEACHERS?

Ahmad: We mostly share similar views with his teachers. We also try and reinforce strategies used by the teachers so that there is continuity in Ali's development at home.

Jianxia: As parents, it is important to reflect on the teacher's views of how to improve our child's behaviour. If we adopt similar strategies, it provides consistency for the child. On our part, we also update Chloe's teachers about her progress at home. When we observe that she became interested in colouring, we shared this with her teachers so that they could bring out her creative and aesthetic side.

HOW IS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PARENTS AND TEACHERS IMPORTANT IN SUPPORTING A CHILD'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

Ahmad: Effective parent-teacher partnership definitely works to the child's advantage. I remember Ali's teacher made a constructive remark regarding Ali's penmanship. We took it seriously and made it a point to make Ali practise writing more at home so that his penmanship gets even better. The outcome is encouraging.

Jianxia: Chloe's teachers regularly share with us her progress in preschool. Besides parent-teacher conferences twice a year, they also give us daily feedback. We are also proactive in asking them about her behaviour in class and what is being taught. We do our part by following up at home. For instance, when Chloe's teacher started toilet training in preschool, we aligned our efforts at home to encourage and motivate her.

“ I enjoy free play at the blocks corner in preschool because I can build things that I imagine.

ALI BIN AHMAD ZAKI, 4
Al-Mukminin Mosque Kindergarten

THROUGH OUR LENS

EDUCATORS MUST RECOGNISE THAT THEIR BELIEFS AND BACKGROUNDS INFLUENCE THEIR IMAGE OF THE CHILD AND NOT LET IT LIMIT OR DERAIL THE CHILD'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT, SAYS PROFESSOR NIRMALA RAO.

Children's experiences are largely shaped by the views that adults have on what influences their development.

> Nature vs Nurture

Adults differ in the importance they ascribe to the role of nature (genes) or nurture (the environment) in influencing a child's development, behaviour and learning. Today, experts concur that both genes and environment interact and affect behaviour.

> Passive vs Active Child

Do you think children are empty vessels to be filled with knowledge, or are they 'little scientists' who discover and make sense of the world? Modern educational theories assume



that children actively process information they receive and are not sponges that merely soak up information.

> Culturally-Based Beliefs

Many of our beliefs about early development are acquired from our parents and reflect traditional cultural values. For example, in explaining individual differences in human development, nature is given more importance than nurture in some cultures.

> Play and Learning

All national curricula for the early years emphasise the importance



of play in learning and support play-based learning or free play. However, some parents feel kindergartens should prepare children for primary school and that play is idleness. Hence, they believe play should not be given too much emphasis in preschools.

Educators tend to believe that environmental factors play an important role in children's development. At the same time, they need to be aware of the limits set by genetic factors.

Early childhood educators must continuously reflect on their pedagogical practices and examine what has worked and what has not worked in promoting children's learning. In the same vein, they should regularly reflect on their beliefs about the children in their care. They should observe and assess the child in different contexts, such as in the classroom with friends or at the park with unfamiliar peers. For example, a teacher can help a shy child learn how to initiate and maintain play with peers. If the child is no longer shy, the teacher should be willing to change his or her image of the child to reflect a shift in the child's behaviour.



PROFESSOR NIRMALA RAO

Serena H C Yang Professor in Early Childhood Development and Education & Chair Professor of Child Development and Education, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong

Professor Rao has been recognised internationally for her research on EC development and education in Asian cultural contexts. She is also actively involved in professional organisations that aim to promote the wellbeing of children through research and advocacy efforts.



ALL ABROAD VIRTUALLY!



A VIRTUAL STUDY TRIP TO THREE COUNTRIES GAVE EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERS MUCH TO REFLECT ON IN THEIR PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL GROWTH.

COVID-19 may have put a halt to physical travel last year, but educators were still able to network and learn from their overseas counterparts via a virtual study trip. Early childhood (EC) leaders on the Professional Development Programme for Leaders, or PDP(L), spent a week last November and December making virtual visits to three preschools: Little Sprouts in the US, Double Love Preschool in Taiwan, and Bambi Step by Step Kindergarten in Romania.

ECDA, together with the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) (AECES), conducted the entire one-week trip online. President of AECES, Dr Christine Chen, was gratified by the scope of the programme: "In a day, we were able to visit two countries in the West, which could never be done physically. Our partners were so accommodating that time differences did not pose a barrier."

INSPIRATIONS AND INSIGHTS

Ms Koh Hui Siu, Cluster Principal at Star Learners Group, was pleased with how the virtual trip facilitated 'visits' to different preschools abroad. The PDP(L) participants had the opportunity to observe children in various activities via videos. They also got to interact with the teachers and engage in in-depth discussions with centre leaders of the preschools they 'visited'. "Listening to their experiences and perspectives opened up a world of new ideas and possibilities as I reflected upon our own local teaching practices."

She was especially struck by the child-centred approach in Bambi Step by Step Kindergarten. "Teachers allow children to establish the day's programme by arranging activity cards in time order on a board. Children feel empowered as they take ownership of their learning and learn to be responsible for their choices," says Ms Koh. Besides taking a virtual 'walk' through the centre via an immersive video experience, the participants had dialogues with the centre leader about

the learning corners, practices and their leadership philosophy.

Another participant, Ms Arin Choo, Principal of Cherie Hearts DiscoveryLand, noted that the teachers at Little Sprouts make available their lesson plans to parents to help them extend their children's learning at home. Parents are also invited to contribute towards what they would like their children to learn, with the centres providing guidance. "It is important for the home and preschool to build a trusting relationship and have strong connections in the interest of the child," adds Ms Choo.

The 'trip' also emphasised the need to balance personal and professional development. "We realised that we tend to prioritise our team's needs before our own, which may lead to burnout. I want to encourage centre leaders to be mindful and intentional in carving out time for themselves to recharge. Something as simple as having an hour of undisturbed lunch can do wonders for our sense of wellbeing," says Ms Koh.

KNOW THIS

Dr Christine Chen identified three key learnings from the virtual study trip.

> **Inclusive education does not only mean including children with additional needs. It means creating a culture of inclusiveness where similarities and differences are embraced and celebrated in both the centre's programme and curriculum.**

> **Family involvement and engagement is a strength. It is important in developing children's abilities and aptitudes, and supporting them to reach their maximum potential.**

> **To be effective leaders, centre leaders should attend to self-care and their own professional growth, as well as their teachers' development.**



LEARNING MTL IS FUN



ECDA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT MS LI YUNDI PURSUES HER PASSION IN CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION TO DEVELOP CHILDREN'S LOVE FOR THE LANGUAGE.



Ms Li wants to make Chinese language learning fun and exciting for children

Teaching children to speak and write in Mandarin is one thing, getting them to appreciate and love the language is quite another. This is what Ms Li Yundi, Principal of Kids & Kins Child Care Centre, is passionate about.

To support this goal, Ms Li, 31, embarked on a part-time Bachelor of Early Childhood and Chinese Language Education programme at the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) at the beginning of 2020. She was awarded the ECDA Scholarship to support her pursuit. "With the new knowledge and skills, I hope to make learning the Chinese language more fun and exciting for

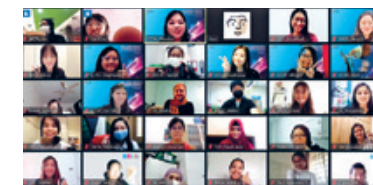
children," says the bilingual educator. "The better they are in their mother tongue language (MTL), the more connected they are to their heritage and culture."

LEARN AND PASS IT ON

Pursuing this degree has improved her own proficiency in the language and could potentially benefit the teachers at her centre. "Collectively, we can create a deeper understanding and appreciation of the Chinese language and culture among preschoolers," says Ms Li. Recently, she revised the centre's curriculum to balance writing with oral communication. "Getting children to speak Mandarin outside of lessons — say, during mealtimes

STEP UP

The ECDA Scholarships are offered to outstanding in-service EC educators who wish to further their studies in EC education and take on larger roles in the sector. The ECDA Training Awards are offered to students to support their aspirations to join the EC sector. For more information, visit www.ecda.gov.sg/Pages/ecda-scholarships-and-training-awards.aspx. Catch the ECDA Scholarships and Training Awards Presentation Ceremony held on 28 October 2020 at go.gov.sg/ceremony2020.



HONOUR ROLL

More than 400 aspiring EC educators received the ECDA Training Award (TA) in 2020. Thirteen TA recipients were presented the ECDA TA Commendation Award for exemplary performance in their studies. Nine outstanding in-service EC educators, including Ms Li, received the ECDA Scholarship to further their studies in EC education.

and outdoor play — will make language learning more fun than if they were to just write Chinese characters in class, and help them grow to love using it," she adds.

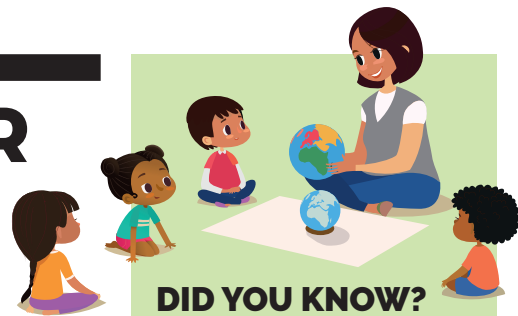
Having worked at the same centre throughout her eight years in the early childhood (EC) sector, Ms Li welcomed the opportunity to widen her network through her course. "It was enlightening to exchange ideas and practices on effective learning strategies with other educators who share a similar interest in the Chinese language."

GET AN EARLY START

The course has motivated her to explore innovative teaching approaches, such as combining catchy melodies and movements with Tang poetry, and focusing on Chinese idioms that children can relate to in their daily lives. For example, children learn to say "福如东海, 寿比南山" (translated as "May your fortune be as boundless as the Eastern Sea and your life as long as the Southern Mountain"), a proverb commonly used to wish older relatives a happy birthday. "Learning a language introduces children to customs and positive values. It is never too early to set the groundwork for language learning," highlights Ms Li.

RAISING THE BAR

THE GROWING NUMBER OF PRESCHOOLS WHICH ACHIEVED SPARK CERTIFICATION SIGNALS A CONTINUED COMMITMENT TO QUALITY.



DID YOU KNOW?

There are now 985 SPARK-certified preschools, or more than half the sector. To see the list of SPARK recipients, go to www.ecda.gov.sg/sparkinfo/Pages/Home.aspx.

"I knew we needed a mindset change if we were to implement respectful, responsive and reciprocal interactions with our infants and toddlers," she explained. Educarers at the centre were initially apprehensive about letting children play with art materials, with many remarking that it would get too "messy". However, they warmed up to the idea after Ms Neo explained the benefits of art, such as allowing children to explore their senses and make creative decisions.

As children spent more time on art, Ms Neo noticed that the relationship between educator and child grew closer. "Educarers talked to the children about what they were doing, looked for non-verbal responses, waited [for children to speak] and praised the children. The child was the focus," she said. Such efforts helped the centre clinch its second consecutive SPARK Certification (Commendation), this time, using the QRS (0-6).

Besides growing quality centres, ECDA is also committed to developing the expertise and careers of EC professionals, shared Ms Jamie Ang, the agency's Chief Executive. Staff can look forward to a refreshed Skills Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education, as well as a Continuing Professional Development Roadmap, to better support their training and career progression. "We look forward to better supporting you in your growth and development, so that we can give every child a good start in life," assured Ms Ang.



COVID-19 has not stopped the early childhood (EC) sector's quest for Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) certification, which recognises the quality of a preschool and its programmes.

"In the months of April to August in 2020, assessments were suspended to allow preschools to focus on implementing safe management measures to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of children and staff," observed Ms Sun Xueling, Minister of State for Social and Family Development and Education. "I am glad that when SPARK assessments

resumed from September, centres were ready to get back on their quality improvement journey."

Ms Sun was speaking at the first-ever virtual SPARK Certificate Presentation Ceremony on 18 November 2020. The ceremony celebrated the achievements of 106 preschools as they received or renewed their SPARK certification.

DRIVING QUALITY

The latest Ceremony was the first to honour awardees who had used the new Quality Rating Scale (QRS) for ages 0-6. It provides a more comprehensive assessment of preschools by encouraging them to enhance quality at all levels.

The benefits of the QRS (0-6) were shared by Ms Pauline Neo, Principal of PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Eunos Blk 134. The centre had previously attained SPARK Certification (Commendation) using the QRS for ages 4-6. Guided by the newly-enhanced QRS, Ms Neo encouraged her centre's educarers to reflect on and rethink their roles and responsibilities.



Ms Sun Xueling, Minister of State for Social and Family Development and Education



PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

THE FIRST-EVER VIRTUAL ECDA AWARDS 2020 WAS NO LESS JUBILANT THAN PAST EDITIONS.

The ECDA Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Development 2020, a key event for the early childhood (EC) fraternity, went virtual on 28 November 2020. Themed 'Unity in Purpose: Celebrating Our Early Childhood Professionals', the ceremony honoured a total of 25 exemplary preschool educators and centres for their professional excellence in EC care and education.

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development and Second Minister for Health, congratulated the Awards recipients at the start of the ceremony. "Winning the Awards is the beginning and not the end of your early childhood professional journey. I hope you will continue to deepen your expertise and find innovative ways to enrich our children's learning experiences," he said.

Those who tuned in to the ceremony also heard from two ECDA Awards judges: Dr Dora Chen, Associate Professor and Head, Early Childhood Education Programme, Singapore University of Social Sciences; and Ms Tham Foong Chue, Campus Head, School of Humanities & Social Sciences, National Institute

of Early Childhood Development (Ngee Ann Polytechnic). Both judges have served on the judging panel in the last couple of years.

Dr Chen noted that EC professionals now place greater emphasis on delivering a child-centric curriculum in their centres. She also found that teachers are more critically reflective of their teaching practices. Likewise, Ms Tham observed that teachers these days are more confident, which has a positive impact on children's achievements, attitudes and social-emotional growth. Most of all, she was heartened by their passion and collective aspiration to further uplift the EC fraternity.



Janice Ong, the 2019 ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Educator, in conversation with Minister Masagos Zulkifli during the ECDA Awards 2020 virtual ceremony.



Visit www.ECDAawards2020.com for the full list of ECDA Awards 2020 winners.

THE JUDGES WEIGH IN

WHAT QUALITIES DEFINE AN ECDA AWARD WINNER?

Ms Tham Foong Chue:

I once came across a meaningful quote: "A teacher who loves teaching teaches children to love learning." Children can sense a teacher's enthusiasm. They will be motivated to learn when they see that their teachers are happy interacting with them.



Dr Dora Chen: Intrinsic motivation is important.

Teachers should think critically about their practices and seek out professional development opportunities, so that they can give their best to children. Once they see children engaging with them on a deeper level, it will fuel their energy and passion to go on.



WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR THE EC FRATERNITY?

Dr Chen: Be open and flexible to new ideas. And be intentional in all this — do not lose sight of the children.

Ms Tham: The ECDA Awards is not the be-all and end-all, but rather a key milestone for you to develop and expand your competencies. Think about how you can contribute to your centre and the wider EC fraternity.



Children in Ms Chia's class are encouraged to ask questions

EMPOWERING CHILDREN

FOR OUTSTANDING EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EILEEN CHIA, A GOOD EDUCATOR IS ONE WHO LISTENS TO CHILDREN AND BECOMES A PARTNER IN THEIR LEARNING EXPERIENCE.

Ms Eileen Chia sees her role as a guide rather than a teacher in the child's learning journey. "I believe that when educators continue to find enjoyment in learning and value the learning process that children undergo, they are better able to guide young learners to seek answers, try out solutions and take ownership of their learning," says the Little Skool-House By-The-Vista teacher.

may not be in the standard lexicon of a kindergartener, but Ms Chia was surprised with the way the children drew connections between 'natural' and nature, as well as nature and 'environment', during the preschool's Earth Day celebrations. "When we see children as competent learners, it becomes a part of our daily conversations to explore a larger vocabulary," she notes.

LET THE CHILD LEAD

The preschool's teaching culture of facilitating rather than providing answers empowers children to take charge of their learning. Ms Chia explains, "Supporting a child's inquiry involves creating the drive in children to ask questions, take risks in learning and engage in self-reflection." For instance, when children were learning about water resources, they drew a class mural to propose solutions that could help keep the waters clean, and came up with short messages on what could be done to conserve water. ●

PERCEPTIONS SHAPE CONVERSATIONS

Adults' perception of children's abilities affects their interactions with them, she observes. "If we view children as competent learners, we will intentionally create opportunities for them to engage in meaningful conversations. Prompts such as 'Tell us more about what you noticed' or questions like 'Why do you think this happens?' help children articulate their perspectives. This reinforces the message that their opinions matter."

It also means that one should not assume what is too complex for a child to understand. For example, the phrase "natural environment"



Watch Ms Chia's winner showcase video at youtu.be/EwPnWnFJuA4 or visit www.ECDAawards2020.com.



Let children figure out simple calculations like how much change is due

TAKE IT AWAY, KIDS!

Ms Chia's three tips to develop children's sense of agency and autonomy.

- **Offer Choices**
Invite children to take part in decision-making. It sends the message that they are capable of making choices. Involve children in planning for the family weekend. Have a "dress yourself" day where children can pick out an outfit of their choice.
- **Respect the Process and Struggle**
Take a step back, and allow children the time and space to problem-solve on their own. Help them by redefining the problem (e.g. "You've spilled the milk but it's all right, it was an accident") and acknowledge their frustrations. Then allow them to work through the process of finding a solution and fixing it.
- **Give Responsibility**
Let children care for their belongings and take on simple chores at home. A good place to start is to involve them in packing their school bags. Older children can create a checklist of items they need for the next day. Younger children can take charge of a specific item like water bottles or diapers.

DRIVING FORCE

OUTSTANDING EDUCARER FARHANA BINTE MOHAMED HASSAN CONSTANTLY STRIVES TO BETTER THE ENVIRONMENT FOR INFANTS' HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT.



Ms Farhana took the initiative to create an outdoor sensory path that includes elements such as this Water Wall

As a senior infant educarer at PCF Sparkletots @ Pioneer Blk 987D, Ms Farhana Binte Mohamed Hassan's interactions with children are guided by her belief that children are curious and capable. "We need to believe in them and create a safe environment where they can explore their interests and strengths. This will increase their confidence and stimulate the development of self-help skills," she explains.

Both educators and parents need to uphold this view of children as capable individuals with the potential to learn and develop. Ms Farhana gives the example of continuing to hold the bottle or a sippy cup for a child during milk feeds, instead of giving him the opportunity to try it for himself.

"When an infant reaches 5 or 6 months old, or when he shows an interest in wanting to hold his own milk bottle, let him. Guide him when he needs assistance. This is a basic self-help skill that an infant can learn to master, if given the opportunity," says the mother of three.

RESOURCEFUL THINKING

Not wanting the children to miss out on learning opportunities at the height of COVID-19, Ms Farhana used easily-sourced materials to create an outdoor sensory path within the centre's grounds. At the percussion area, for instance, children can bang on empty tins. They can doodle with water and a paintbrush on the water board. Elsewhere along the path, they can walk on carpet grass and touch natural items such as rocks and wood.



Watch Ms Farhana's winner showcase video at www.ECDAawards2020.com. Look out for the opening of nominations for the 2021 ECDA Awards. Find out more at bit.ly/ECDAawards.

TIPS FOR PARENTS



How to engage your infant at home.

- **Read or explore** a book with your baby every day. Be animated while talking and use descriptive language such as "look at this blue bus".
- Organise **hands-on activities** such as playing with playdough, building blocks or engaging in water play.
- Encourage **independence** when opportunities arise, such as letting your child hold a sippy cup or a spoon so he can learn how to feed himself.

This way, infants can experience sensory play and still remain safe. "At this young age, they are exploring and discovering through their five senses," says Ms Farhana on the importance of sensory play for early brain development. "We want our children to continue to have a variety of play experiences. This stimulates curiosity and sparks the confidence to explore."

IT STARTS WITH RESPECT

Ms Farhana believes that every child is unique and special as they come from different backgrounds and environments. Hence, educators should make an effort to understand each child. Caregiving or routine tasks such as diapering present opportunities to get to know the child, read his behavioural cues and respond accordingly.

"Show respect to the infant by choosing a time for the diaper change when he is not focused on exploration. Wait for him to acknowledge your presence, then say, 'It's time for a diaper change,'" she suggests. "Talk to the child and describe what you are going to do. Pause to wait for his responses or gestures. This is a form of respectful and reciprocal interaction. It creates trust and rapport between you and the child, while developing his language and thinking skills." ●



Children hone their motor skills as they prepare their own meals and clean up afterwards



Involving children in cooking empowers them to be more independent

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

CHILDREN DEVELOP AN APPETITE FOR LEARNING THROUGH MEALTIMES AND CULINARY EXPERIENCES.

At Chatsworth Preschool (Piccadilly Campus), mealtimes are woven into the curriculum. By teacher Ms Farah Aziz's estimation, children possibly spend more than two hours a day on mealtimes. She points out, "This exceeds the time they spend on each curricular area. With all this time spent on meals, should this simply be a routine?"

By involving them in preparing, serving and cleaning up, mealtimes become a pedagogical channel for children to "acquire language, develop numeracy skills, heighten social competence and hone eye-hand coordination", says Ms Farah. She spearheaded the 'Language of Food' project that won the centre an ECDA Early Childhood Innovation Award (Distinction) in 2020.

MAKING MEALTIMES MEANINGFUL

A food pantry was set up in the classroom, with tabletop space for food preparation, a storage system for kitchen utensils and a cleaning station with a mobile sink, all designed to be easily accessible for toddlers. Teachers attended training courses to learn about food content, nutritional value and the

art of plating, in order to involve and engage children.

Lunch became a time for socialisation and conversation. Children were encouraged to converse with one another while waiting to be served. Menu options allowed them to make independent choices. Food leaders were appointed to take note of their classmates' menu preferences and relay the information to the teachers.

Outside mealtimes, children were encouraged to express their ideas about food through discussions and writing. They voted on the food they liked, made recipe cards, reviewed the menus and shared experiences through show-and-tell sessions.

Meal preparation and after-meal clean-up offered opportunities for them to practise their motor skills. They were exposed to kitchen tools

“ In class, I learnt to be responsible for cooking and cleaning on my own. I like to make things for myself. My favourite is pancakes. It is fun to help in the kitchen.

ADAM LIM, 4

like the pestle and mortar. After meals, they washed their own plates and utensils.

"As active participants in their mealtime experience, children were able to create, express themselves, and make connections from the farm to table," observes Ms Farah. "This experience is empowering and it translates into children developing a sense of agency, confidence and responsibility."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

This project affirmed the educators' image of toddlers as capable learners. "It made us think about the curriculum opportunities in routine care. For a start, we want to have a version of a kitchen in every class for every child so that explorations and learning about food are embedded in their daily lives," adds Ms Farah.

On that note, the centre intends to establish 'Language of Food' as a progressive curriculum as children advance through the levels. It will start with the playgroups exploring the taste, shapes and colours of fruits from the preschool garden; pre-nursery learning to prepare their own snacks; nursery growing herbs and vegetables; K1 creating recipes; and K2 making snacks to feed other levels. ●



HARVESTING THE BENEFITS

WORKING IN THE PRESCHOOL GARDEN HELPED CHILDREN GAIN CONFIDENCE IN THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY WHILE LEARNING TO CARE FOR THE ENVIRONMENT.



Children measuring the papayas they grew in their preschool garden

It was the children who planted the idea of creating a garden for NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at Blk 203D Compassvale Road. While on their regular outdoor walks, the teachers observed how much children enjoyed interacting with the gardeners and exploring the green plot at the nearby Compassvale Southgate Community Garden.

The centre tapped on the ECDA Innovation Projects Grant for funding support to set up its own garden. Together with the children, the teachers researched into sustainable gardening and purchased a simple irrigation system powered by solar energy to water the garden. Plants were marked with labels printed with QR codes, which children could scan to get more information about the



Scanning a QR code to find out more about pumpkins

species and origin of each plant variety. The flexibility of QR codes allowed teachers to curate and update the content regularly. This project earned the centre an ECDA Early Childhood Innovation Award (Distinction) in 2020.

COMMUNITY SPIRIT

The centre sought advice from NParks and the gardeners who tend the Compassvale Southgate Community Garden. Parents were also roped in as volunteers.

Ms Inggawati, the centre's English Lead Teacher, says, "Together with the community gardeners, parents helped us by contributing recycled materials like vehicle tyres and plastic bottles, scrapped toilet doors for garden panels and fences, and physical labour to dig the ground and install the fences. It was a community effort!"

FRUITS OF THEIR LABOUR

Ms Inggawati shares the manifold ways in which children blossomed. They practised their motor and body coordination skills as they raked the soil, picked up seeds and plucked the leaves. Their literacy and numeracy skills also improved

“ My favourite activity in the garden is learning about the plants. When Mummy and Daddy ask me the names, I can answer because I know which is pumpkin and kangkong.

JONAS TAN, 5

as they discussed the gardening experiences. The children had opportunities to think critically and problem-solve through questions about the vegetables planted, and the mechanics of the irrigation system and solar panels.

As the children weeded, watered and nurtured the garden, the teachers could see that they were learning to show a greater appreciation for nature and awareness of the environment. They also brought home the fruits of their labour. "Parents told us that their children enjoyed eating kangkong harvested from the garden, compared to the ones from the supermarket," adds Ms Inggawati.

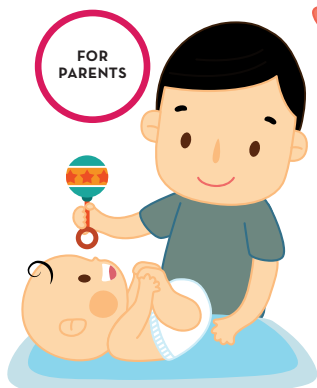
Working on this project has also shaped her perception of children as active, confident learners who are born curious. "They are always interested to learn new concepts, and they adapt easily to innovative approaches and the use of technology. Teachers play an important role as facilitators," she observes. ●

TAKE ROOT AND GROW

The centre plans to scale up the garden and plant more crop varieties. It has also purchased a composter and fertiliser machine to promote sustainability. Children will learn how food waste is turned into organic fertiliser and share this resource with the community gardeners who inspired their project.



Q&A HOW PARENTS AND EDUCATORS CAN SUPPORT CHILDREN TO BECOME ACTIVE, SELF-DIRECTED LEARNERS.



FOR PARENTS

Q How can I support my three-month-old baby beyond her physical needs like feeding, bathing and diapering?

It is important to meet your baby's emotional needs to form a warm, secure attachment with your little one. Infants need to feel that they are understood and their parents or caregivers are available for them. This trusting relationship creates a safe haven for infants to explore, learn and thrive.

To support your baby's learning and development:

- > **Be respectful.** Keep babies informed and engage them during routines and activities. Address your baby by name as it gives her a sense of identity, e.g. "Charmaine, may I carry you?"
- > **Be responsive.** Observe and know your baby. Be sensitive to both verbal and non-verbal cues. Spend time to understand her temperament traits so that you can respond appropriately. Depending on the tone of your baby's cries, she may either be hungry, need a diaper change or just want a hug.
- > **Be reciprocal.** Allow for back-and-forth interactions. Repeat the sounds and words your child uses. Speak to your baby, maintain eye contact and give her time to respond with sounds and gestures. Be guided by your baby's non-verbal cues and follow her lead.
- > **Be communicative.** Introduce new words through stories and songs when you spend time together. Children acquire language by listening, so use the right vocabulary. Be descriptive and verbalise your actions.
- > **Be creative.** Create play opportunities for your baby. For instance, during tummy time, let her reach out for a rattle or other play materials, play peek-a-boo, or even respond to sounds or simply look at a mirror and describe what you see.

Last but not least, it is important to regulate our own behaviour and feelings before responding.

Q How can educators help build an image of the child as a self-directed learner?

Forming close bonds and connections with children from their infancy will help them feel secure and confident to explore, discover and learn.

1. **Observe.** Pick up on children's responses to things around them. If they crawl towards a toy that interests them, give them time and space to play spontaneously. Encourage them to take the lead in directing their own play, and guide them only when necessary (e.g. introducing new materials).
2. **Let go.** Trust that children can work their way through challenges, like figuring out how to retrieve an object such as a ball that has rolled under a chair. As long as these challenges are developmentally appropriate and safe, let them experiment and even struggle to learn perseverance and resilience.
3. **Communicate.** Children may not necessarily understand what we are saying. However, by thoughtfully choosing our words, we can introduce them to the power of language. Narrate their actions or describe the object or toy they are interested in. For a child who is beginning to crawl and pushing a ball around, you can say, "Wow, you've pushed the big, red ball and it's rolling! Do you want to crawl to the ball and push it again?" When you verbalise and use language purposefully, it not only affirms the children's actions but motivates them to ask their own questions and seek out the answers. This helps them develop a positive and confident image of themselves.



FOR EDUCATORS



N THAMARAI is an ECDA Fellow and the Senior Cluster Quality Manager of My First Skool. She believes that the years between 0 and 3 are the most critical developmental stage of a child's life. She has been in the EC sector for more than 30 years.



DK GOWRI is a lecturer at the National Institute of Early Childhood Development. She has more than 30 years of field experience as a classroom teacher, principal, curriculum writer, preschool director and trainer.

THRIVE

TIPS AND IDEAS FOR THE PHYSICAL, LANGUAGE, COGNITIVE AND SOCIO-EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF YOUR CHILD



Ice cubes look cloudy or white because of air bubbles and tiny impurities that are trapped within as water freezes.



learn



18 | How sports and exercise promote a positive self-image

grow



21 | A fresh and fruity idea for a sweet Valentine

play



22 | Make a suncatcher of many colours



Mastering fundamental movement skills such as jumping will help children grow in confidence

Learn

GET PHYSICAL

Children who are active from an early age are more likely to develop a healthy body image and self-esteem.

Getting involved in physical activity from a young age allows children to learn what their bodies are capable of. Active play helps a child develop fundamental movement skills that enable agility, balance and coordination. These competencies underpin the learning of more complicated sports and movement skills as they grow older.

"The early years is the ideal time for children to acquire and master their fundamental movement skills," says Dr Miriam Lee, Senior Manager at Sport Singapore. "This

"I like running, jumping and bouncing a ball. Doing these makes me feel strong.

TANG ONN CHI, 6
NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at Blk 997 Buangkok Crescent

helps them to start right physically, social-emotionally and cognitively, benefitting the holistic healthy development of the whole individual."

HEALTHY, HAPPY AND CONFIDENT KIDS

Children who are active are less likely to fall ill or become obese. They also develop sharper cognitive abilities that help them think creatively, make decisions and solve problems. They are happier as endorphins, mood-lifting hormones, are released during exercise. They get to meet new people and build friendships through shared sporting experiences. Physical play, whether indoors or outdoors, also gives children valuable bonding time with their parents.

Regular and varied physical activity also enables children to gain a positive sense of self, notes Dr Lee. "Having a positive image of themselves makes them more comfortable about themselves, confident to try new things, and improves their social skills to make new friends."

FIRST OFF THE STARTING BLOCK

The development of these skills does not happen by chance. Parents and educators need to find or create relevant play opportunities and experiences. Dr Lee suggests, "Encourage children to be active in a way that suits them, be it cycling, hiking or a team sport. Provide them with various opportunities to participate in and learn different sports. Ask them what they enjoy most. List down different activities to try together as a family."

Pay attention to what your children enjoy and excel in, she advises. Praise their accomplishments, big or small, so that they feel affirmed and proud of themselves. Dr Lee also stresses the importance of modelling the right attitude. "Be active every day, adopt a healthy diet, talk about your own body in positive ways and take good care of it. Your child will learn from you and do the same for themselves."

"I like to scoot and cycle. Even though I feel tired sometimes, it makes me happy because I can go out and breathe fresh air.

RENEE TAN, 6
MY World @ Ang Mo Kio



So Much to Do, So Little Time

Young children aged below 7 who are capable of walking unaided should be physically active for at least **180 minutes** spread throughout the day, in safe environments, according to the Health Promotion Board.

"I am good at walking on the balancing beam. I want to do it well because it helps me when I dance ballet.

CADENA POH, 5
PCF Sparkletots @ Woodlands Blk 801



ACTION PLAN

Get your children to be physically active with these five tips from Family Life Educator Mrs Charis Patrick.

1. Keep it fun and free. Let children discover the types of movement and play they prefer, while keeping it safe. Inject fun and excitement into the activities.

2. Use the '3Es' to connect with children. Be enthusiastic, encouraging and empowering. Bear in mind that non-verbal cues such as facial expressions and tone of voice may have more impact than the words you use.

3. Create a routine to cultivate a habit. Routines are key to establishing habits and helping preschoolers compartmentalise their day into smaller, meaningful segments. Set aside dedicated pockets of time for play so that children look forward to quality time with you.

4. Introduce different types of active time. Provide different play formats to keep children interested and engaged:

- Personal active time for them to explore their surroundings by themselves
- Buddy active time with a sibling or grandparent for them to pick up social skills
- Family active time for bonding moments with the whole family

5. Be a role model. Walk the talk, because most attitudes and values are caught and not taught. If you want your children to be active, you too must be active. More importantly, have fun!

Watch Mrs Patrick explain the tips in this video series: tinyurl.com/yju978bm



ACTIVE KIDS, ACTIVE PARENTS

- > For ideas on fun and simple activities to do with your children, download resource kits from activeparents.myactivesg.com.
- > For sport programmes suitable for children aged 3 and above, check out the variety of options at www.myactivesg.com/Programmes/Academy.

Active Parents is a social movement by Sport Singapore to enable and empower parents to play an active role in their child's life and sporting journey.



Developing physical literacy and positive dispositions through the obstacle course

AGAINST ALL OBSTACLES

For nine weeks from 7 July 2020, more than 45,000 children from over 400 preschools participated in the Nurture Kids @ GetActive! Singapore programme, which is designed to develop physical literacy in preschoolers and give them an active and healthy start in life, at their respective preschools.

The third edition, co-organised by Sport Singapore and Obstacle Course Racing Singapore, involved preschools setting up a series of activity stations for the children, while observing safe distancing during the COVID-19 period. The activities, such as tossing a beanbag into a hoop, throwing a ball into a basket and crab walk, helped children pick up important skills, including balance and hand-eye coordination.

"The activity stations created many positive opportunities for children to overcome their fears and build their capabilities and self-confidence," says Mdm Nurdiana Binte Omar, Senior Educator at MY World @ Ang Mo Kio. "One child who was reluctant to crawl under the 'barb wire' at first eventually conquered his fear with the encouragement of his peers and teachers." Overcoming obstacles and challenges will help children boost their self-worth and see themselves as being capable.

NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at Blk 997 Buangkok Crescent participated in the programme to encourage its preschoolers to adopt a more active lifestyle, but noted they also reaped other benefits. "Besides the development of physical skills, we also observed that the children developed positive dispositions through the virtual activity stations. They displayed a sense of perseverance with their persistent efforts to complete the course. And they displayed higher self-esteem and confidence when they finally managed to overcome the challenges independently," says Lead Teacher Ms Tan Kaiyan.

What sets the Nurture Kids programme apart is that it makes physical activity fun. "Because children acquire these skills through play, there is no pressure on them to learn," observes Ms Wong Peng Peng, Centre Supervisor at PCF Sparkletots @ Woodlands Blk 801. "Children wanted to practise again and again until they perfected the skill. It gave them a sense of achievement and pride that 'I can do it'. The Nurture Kids programme helped our children develop a positive self-image."

win

→ One lucky reader will receive a UNIQUIGIFT voucher worth \$50.



Simply answer this question:

Name one strategy that can be used to encourage your child to be physically active and improve his or her self-image.

Send your answer to beanstalk@mediacorp.com.sg with your name and contact details.

Closing date: 19 February 2021

Everybody, Freeze!

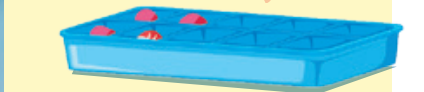
Infused with the colour of love, these red fruit-filled ice cubes add a splash of natural sweetness to any drink.

Fruity ice cubes
SERVES
4

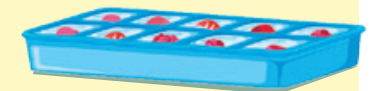


Follow these steps

1. Place fruit into the slots of an ice cube tray. Make sure the fruit does not stick out above the top of the tray and avoid cramming in too much.



2. Pour water over fruit. Place tray in freezer for a few hours until the cubes are frozen.



TIP! It is easier to remove ice cubes from silicone trays, which are more flexible than hard plastic ones.

3. Add fruit cubes to a glass or pitcher of water or other beverage. Cheers!



Satisfy A Sweet Tooth

The ice cubes add **colour** and **natural flavour** to plain water, and are a fun way to encourage children to drink more, while providing a healthier alternative to sugar-sweetened beverages. Let children decide which fruit they want to use.

→ WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 2 cups red fruit, rinsed, sliced, and seeds removed (e.g. strawberries, seedless grapes, cherries with stones removed)



Drops Of Life

➤ **Water is vital** for almost every function in your body. Water is a transport for nutrients and waste, and a solvent for many chemical reactions that happen in our body.

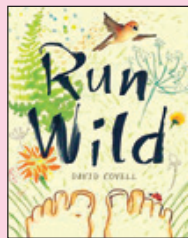
Other than adding fruit to ice cubes, you can also use fresh herbs such as mint and basil.

Find out more at www.healthhub.sg/live-healthy/1358/the-drop-of-life---six-reasons-to-drink-water



Do You See What I See?

Nurture your child's capacity to care about the world and one another.



> Run Wild

By David Covell

Run Wild invites young readers on a whirlwind adventure through the simple joys of nature. In these pages, you'll race a rabbit, talk to worms, and keep going through rain dumps and slippery slumps. With catchy rhymes and gorgeous watercolour illustrations, this is a great book to read aloud together, followed by a nice long walk!

Contributed by *Nathaniel Chew, Associate Librarian, National Library Board*



> Raising Good Humans: A Mindful Guide to Breaking the Cycle of Reactive Parenting and Raising Kind, Confident Kids (ebook)

By Hunter Clarke-Fields

OverDrive link: nlb.overdrive.com/media/4535207

Taking an empathetic approach that understands the challenges of parenting, the author encourages parents to reflect on their communication with their children. Envisioning kind, respectful and compassionate children who emulate their parents, Clarke-Fields shares helpful techniques about reconsidering knee-jerk responses and embracing positive language when speaking to children.

Contributed by *Neo Wan Ting, Associate Librarian, National Library Board*

NLB eReads



Check out these online resources from the comfort of your own home.



Storytime with Our Librarians

Tune in to Facebook storytelling sessions in the four official languages.

www.nlb.gov.sg/discovereads/diy-resources/storytime-with-our-librarians



DIY Resources

A wide range of activity sheets, craft activities and other ideas to engage preschoolers. www.nlb.gov.sg/discovereads/preschool-resources

Live Zoom events are also organised. For more information, visit www.eventbrite.sg/o/golibrary-national-library-board-singapore-26735252849.

FOR YOUR DAILY DOSE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INSPIRATION...

Crow@Beanstalk is your one-stop early childhood (EC) resource portal for inspiring stories, useful tips and activity ideas, as well as the latest happenings from the EC sector.



Visit www.ecda.gov.sg/growatbeanstalk, or scan the QR code



You can also share your passion of "Giving a Good Start to Every Child" by "liking" our Facebook page for daily content, and engaging with other parents and EC educators.



Connect with us at www.facebook.com/beanstalksingapore, or scan the QR code



It's not just work when you work with children. If you aspire to make a lifelong impact, join us as an Early Childhood Professional to shape the next generation.



Find out more about a career in early childhood at www.ecda.gov.sg/ShapeOurTomorrow, or scan the QR code.





→ WHAT YOU'LL NEED



Plastic lid from food container (e.g. ice cream tub)

White glue

Toothpick or wooden skewer

Food colouring or liquid watercolours

Hole punch

String

Photo courtesy of babbledabbledo.com

Here Comes The Sun

Brighten up any room with this brilliant suncatcher.

Follow these steps

1. Pour a thick layer of white glue onto the inner surface of a plastic lid. Swish it around so that the glue covers the entire surface.



2. Put one or two drops of each colour on the glue in different spots.



3. Using a toothpick or wooden skewer, swirl the colours around. Be careful not to mix the colours too much to avoid a muddy-looking finish.



4. Leave to dry for one to three days, or until the edges start to lift away from the lid. Once fully dry, peel it off the lid.



5. Punch a hole through the top of the suncatcher to thread a piece of string through. Hang in a window or other sunny spot.



Repurpose It

HEY PARENTS! Suncatchers can be made from a variety of natural or recycled materials. Try *flower petals, leaves, coloured tissue paper, lace or ribbons*, sandwiched between two sheets of transparent contact paper.



FIVE WAYS TO USE FINGER PUPPETS

PUPPET PLAY LETS CHILDREN EXPLORE DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AND HONE THEIR SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL SKILLS.

Puppets can teach children about emotions and social interactions. A set of five finger puppets, each named after a different disposition or quality — Confi-Dan, Serene-itty, Reese-pectful, Fee-Ling and Razz-possible — was distributed to preschools who signed up for last year's Early Childhood Conference. *Beanstalk* asked some educators to share how they used the puppets in class.



2 EASE ANXIETY ABOUT TRANSITIONS

"Some of my K2 children were anxious about going to primary school. I used the finger puppets, with different voices and personas, as storytelling partners and in conversations with children to address their concerns. They enjoyed this form of communication. Confi-Dan was the most popular character, as he was positive and encouraged children to look forward to the good and fun things in a new school."

MS WONG YEN SHAN
Teacher, My First Skool @ Blk 601 Ang Mo Kio

1 FOSTER EMPATHY AND COMPASSION

"The finger puppets, especially Fee-Ling, were a great resource for our lesson on caring for animals. The children took turns pretending to be Fee-Ling and the animals (such as a parrot puppet and robo-fish). Those role-playing as Fee-Ling had fun feeding and petting the animals. Through this activity, children learned that animals, like humans, have feelings too, and developed a sense of empathy and compassion."

MS WU SHENG
Teacher, Bridging Stars Childcare

3 CALM DOWN

"After introducing Serene-itty to the children, the teacher got them to try activities that required children to control their emotions and behaviours, like Serene-itty always does. For example, the children had to close their eyes and slowly count to 10, or stay lying down for a few minutes. Those who were able to remain calm and quiet throughout the activity received an origami heart from Serene-itty."

MS WAN HILL KUAN
Centre Leader, YWCA Bedok South Child Development Centre



4 ENABLE CHILDREN TO EXPRESS EMOTIONS SAFELY

"Young children are often shy and struggle to express their feelings. Having imaginary puppet friends allowed children to transform into another 'person' and talk about their feelings openly and without restraint. The finger puppets can be left in the dramatic corner or language corner of your classroom for children to play with. During Show & Tell, let children wear the finger puppets to talk about what they did at home."

DR JANE CHING-KWAN
Curriculum Founder and Director, Skool4Kidz



5 IMPROVE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS THROUGH ROLE PLAY

"We created a mini home out of blocks for the finger puppets, and suggested scenarios for children to engage in role-play. For example, the puppets had common misunderstandings such as wanting the same toy or hurting one another by accident. The children would chime in on what they thought the puppets should do or say in a healthy and pro-social manner, and then use the puppets to act it out."

MS HERMES LU
English Teacher, Little Seeds Preschool @ The Salvation Army (Bukit Batok East)

Snap & Show

Send a picture of your child's DIY suncatcher to beanstalk@mediacorp.com.sg or post it as a public post on your Facebook with the hashtag #BeanstalkCraft. Your child's masterpiece could be featured in the next issue of *Beanstalk!*



This craft is adapted from babbledabbledo.com.

WE'VE GOT MAIL!

Parents share their views on their children's strengths, abilities and potential.

✉ My wife and I strongly believe that play is essential to helping our children discover their interests and strengths, and for us to better understand how to help nurture them. We observe their responses to the various activities that we expose them to, from being outdoors to the arts, to get a sense of what they enjoy. Every time Zoe and Zac go into the water, their expressions are of pure joy and excitement. We can learn to appreciate our children's strengths and interests better by making an effort to get to understand them and see them as unique individuals.



Observing children play offers a window into their interests and strengths

RYAN ONG, father of two, aged 7 and 4



Let children test their limits in a safe setting to build independence

✉ My son Casey surprises me every day with what he can achieve. Since moving to Singapore three months ago, he has adjusted remarkably well to his new home. I make a conscious effort to hang back and let him explore his surroundings on his own, like at the water play area, so as to allow him to test his limits and make mistakes in a safe environment. Hopefully, this will empower him to be an independent and mindful learner.

SARAH CAI, mother of a son, aged 2½

✉ My son is a creative and active boy. His love for climbing, jumping and running shines everywhere he goes, both outdoors and at home. I don't want him to stop being courageous, but I do worry sometimes when he seems to be too adventurous for his age. When I find that his play can be dangerous like climbing a shelf, I'll tell him, "I know you love climbing, but what do you think will happen if this shelf topples? We'll go to the playground soon, OK?" He will understand why this is dangerous, though I may have to repeat myself a few times.

SURAYA MUSTAJAB, mother of a son, aged 3



Find healthy outlets for risk-taking behaviour like climbing

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

Parents, share with us some strategies you have found effective in improving your child's listening, speaking, reading and writing skills, and cultivating your child's love for books. Attach a photo with your anecdote and your submission may appear in the next issue of *Beanstalk!*

Send your story to beanstalk@mediacorp.com.sg with your name and contact details.

DECORATE FOR DEEPAVALI

We showed you how to make a paper plate Rangoli in the Oct-Dec 2020 issue. Here are the festive crafts some of you made!



ALDA CHAI, 4



SANVI SHARATH, 5



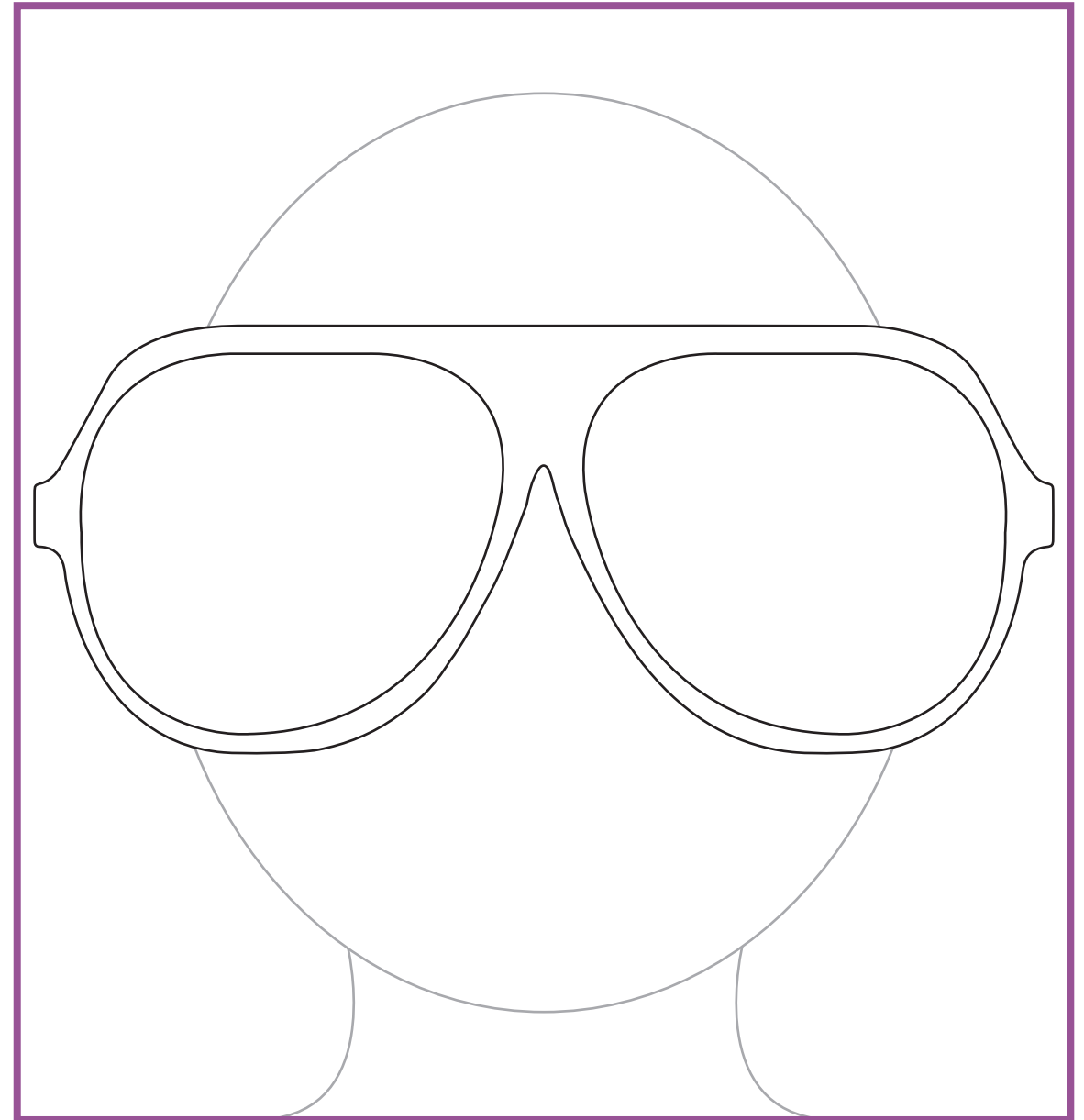
DIYA GOSAI, 5

 We have three **\$30 UNIQUIFT vouchers** to give away to the best letters!



2021, HERE WE COME!

Turn your dreams into goals for the new year! Complete the self-portrait and write down what you want to achieve in the new year within the lenses of the glasses.



Hey Parents!

This project offers both drawing and writing practice and is an exercise in self-reflection. Get children to think about what is important to them, what they have done well in the past year, and what they want to improve on in the new year. Goal-setting helps children take control of their own behaviour and develop focus, accountability and confidence.

