

THRIVE



Learning Zones

How to make the most of our library and science resources



Red And White Pride

Say cheers to National Day with a delicious drink



Game Plan

Make your own Tic-Tac-Toe gift box



SHARPEN YOUR SENSES
for the ultimate nature experience

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JUL-SEP
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TAILORED TO EACH CHILD'S NEEDS

Unlock children's full potential through developmentally appropriate practices

5 TIPS
for meaningful conversations with little ones



PLAY TO THEIR STRENGTHS



engage children, to enable them to learn and progress at their own pace. As the educator John Holt reminds us, we need "to make it easier for them to get where they want to go (not where we think they ought to go), and to find out what they want to find out". Understanding how children learn can also help educators refine their classroom practices to enable age-appropriate and effective learning for children.

It is thus timely that this year's Early Childhood Celebrations & Conference (ECCC) is themed "Learning How Children Learn, Transforming Practices Together". EC educators can engage in professional discourse with local and international speakers, and network with fellow educators to share expertise and experiences.

The ECCC is also our annual celebration of achievements by our educators and preschools via the ECDA Awards, the SPARK Certification Presentation Ceremony and the 'Start Small Dream Big' Finale.

Indeed, our educators play influential roles in the lives of young children, and we value their contributions and well-being. Improving the working conditions of our educators remains a priority for ECDA, and we will share more developments on this front soon.

On behalf of my ECDA colleagues, I hope parents of preschoolers can join me in wishing our EC educators a Happy Teachers' Day!

MR TAN CHEE WEE
Chief Executive Officer
Early Childhood Development Agency (ECDA)

Early childhood (EC) education is in an exciting phase in Singapore, with an increasing recognition that it is vital to our children's holistic development and lays the foundation for their future success.

Findings from neuroscience and child development research show that the 'one-size-fits-all' approach to educating young children is no longer adequate. To optimise their full potential, we should adopt developmentally appropriate practices (DAP), which call for respecting and embracing the diverse profiles of our children in accordance with their developmental stages.

By considering individual needs, strengths and interests, EC educators can adopt the most suitable way to motivate and



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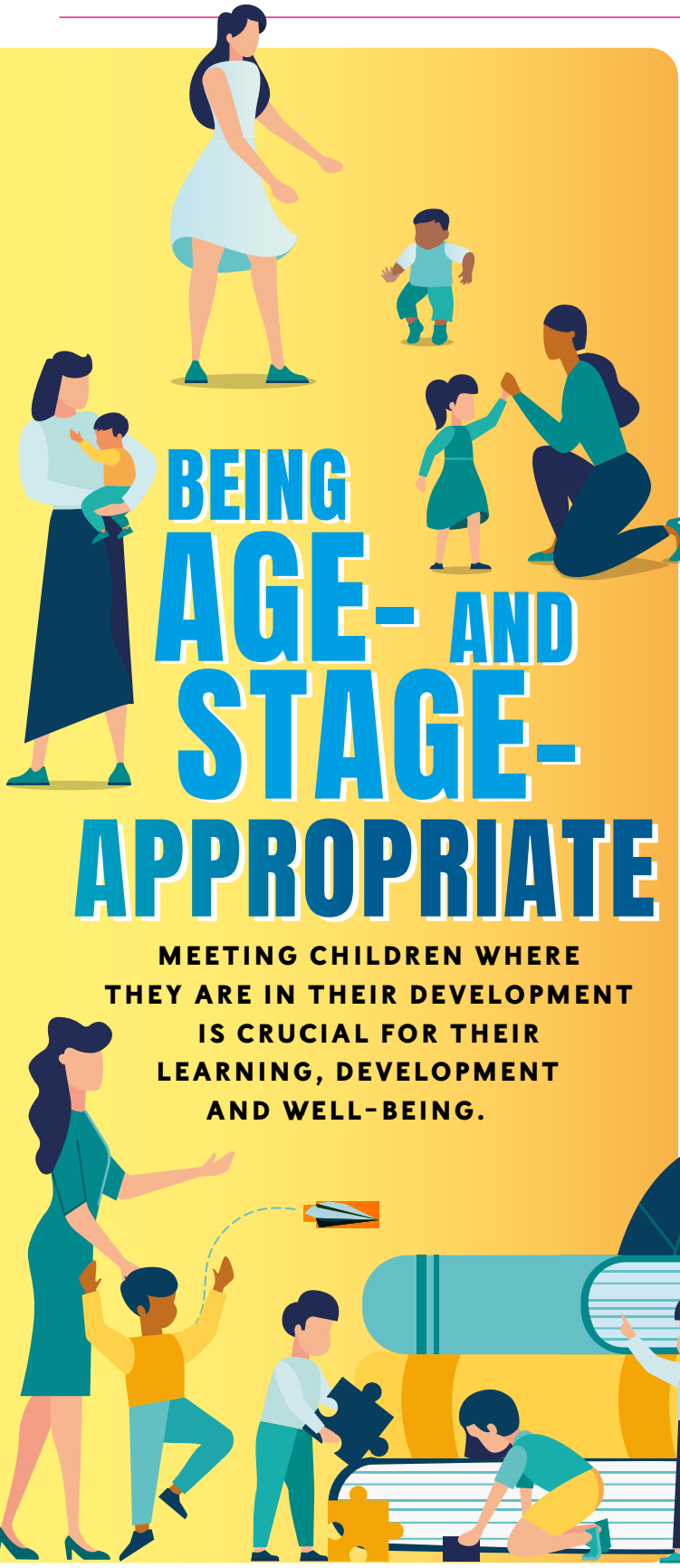


ON THE COVER

From left Asmaa Sofiyyah Binte Muhammad Nazmi, Uwais Muazzam Bin Muhammad Nazmi, Mithran s/o Dinesh Kumar, Nirmla Sumathy, Chloe Lee, Alan Lai, Uwais Muazzam, Anne Lai

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FRONT COVER On Chloe: Outfit Mango Kids. On Alan: Outfit Mango. On Uwais: Outfit Mango Kids. On Anne: Dress Mango Kids, shoes model's own. **BACK COVER** On Asmaa: Blouse & trousers Mango Kids, headscarf & shoes model's own. On Uwais: Polo tee & trousers Mango Kids, shoes model's own. On Mithran: Outfit Mango Kids. On Nirmla: T-shirt, cardigan & trousers Mango, shoes model's own.



Children learn in different ways. Today, the focus is on differentiated learning and catering to the diverse profiles of children. When teaching practices are developmentally appropriate and based on a child's strengths and interests, teachers can create meaningful learning opportunities to optimise his or her learning and development in all domains — physical, cognitive, social and emotional.

This approach stems from the understanding that children are unique and access learning in various ways. "Children develop at different paces. Developmental milestones serve as a reference for us to understand the strengths and needs of a developing child," says Ms Rathi Devi d/o Balachandran, Lead Curriculum Specialist (Curriculum & Programmes), National Institute of Early Childhood Development.

Ms Rathi also highlights the significance of culture in shaping developmentally appropriate practices (DAP). "Cultural background comprises one's values, beliefs and traditions. These affect a family's priorities and expectations on parenting practices, as well as how and what their children should be learning," she says. "DAP accommodates differences in parenting practices and allows for understanding and respect."

Beanstalk speaks to Ms Rathi, educators and parents to find out more about DAP in action in the preschool classroom and at home.

WHAT IS YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF DAP?

Nirmala Sumathy: DAP is about using developmentally- and age-appropriate teaching strategies to leverage children's strengths and create an environment that is intentionally designed to support their learning and development. For instance, a three-year-old cannot be expected to learn the same way a six-year-old does! In DAP, educators see children as individuals. They consider each child's interests, age group and developmental stage, as well as individual

differences, when planning learning experiences. DAP also helps educators think about the support needed for either a child or a group of children.

Masyitah Binte Abdul Latif: The DAP approach avoids a 'one-size-fits-all' mentality. Instead, we adjust our teaching practices, materials and resources accordingly. It helps us focus on how we can make learning more meaningful, engaging and joyful for children.

HOW DO YOU ADOPT DAP WHEN THERE IS A STANDARDISED CURRICULUM?

Nirmala: The standardised curriculum in our preschool serves as a guide for teachers. It is important that they have the flexibility to modify the curriculum as well as their teaching practices and activities, based on children's individual needs and interests. My teachers and I observe how each child is learning and developing. Through a combination of structure and flexibility, we guide the children towards learning goals in ways relevant to them. We also conduct a termly review of the curriculum and propose recommendations bearing DAP in mind.

Masyitah: Our standard curriculum helps frame lesson planning and practices for most of the children in our preschool. However, we also adjust it according to DAP guidelines to better support children's diverse learning needs. This enables us to



DID YOU KNOW?

The concept of DAP was introduced in the mid-1980s by the United States-based National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). Since then, NAEYC has revised its Position Statement on DAP (including guidelines and recommendations) several times. The fourth and latest version, updated in 2020, recognises the growing racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity of the national and global populations. For more on DAP, go to www.naeyc.org/resources/developmentally-appropriate-practice.

tailor effective and meaningful learning experiences to meet both individual and group needs. To ensure the curriculum is relevant, we review it regularly based on DAP as well as the children's levels of engagement and progress. These observations are also shared with the whole team and the children's parents. Collectively, we can better understand and support the children.

HOW DO YOU PUT DAP INTO ACTION AT YOUR CENTRE?

Nirmala: We do this by bringing together the different learning areas into the curriculum across all age groups. This integrated curriculum builds connections between concepts and learning areas, which supports children's holistic development. It is implemented through an experiential, hands-on approach, as we know the brain learns best this way.

For example, in our Outdoor Learning curriculum, children observe the life cycle of a banana plant as it flowers and bears fruit. The learning process integrates various domains such as language, numeracy, discovery of the world and motor skills development. While younger children observe and learn that the fruit changes colour as it ripens, older ones count the bananas, weigh them, and explore the uses of the banana leaf. When the bananas are ripe, the older children make banana cake and have it for tea.

Masyitah: At our centre, DAP informs all aspects of teaching and learning processes — from the content we design, to the types of play provisions, to teacher-child and child-child interactions. By recognising that children have their own unique strengths, interests, learning styles and challenges, we deliver the learning experience in appropriate ways.

For example, having observed that younger children like music and make-believe, teachers make stories come alive with puppets, role play and songs. Older children may appreciate experimenting with plot twists, creating their own story endings, or imagining the emotions of a storybook character.

“In DAP, educators see children as individuals. They consider each child's interests, age group and developmental stage, as well as individual differences, when planning learning experiences.”

On Nirmala: Outfit model's own.

MRS NIRMALA SUMATHY, 59
Principal, Marymount Preschool



Rathi Devi d/o Balachandran: When deciding which techniques and strategies are developmentally appropriate, we need to bear in mind every single learner's unique strengths, interests and needs. Educators and parents can ask themselves, "Is it meaningful and engaging to my child? Does it allow my child to participate in an enjoyable way? How else could I have planned this activity?"

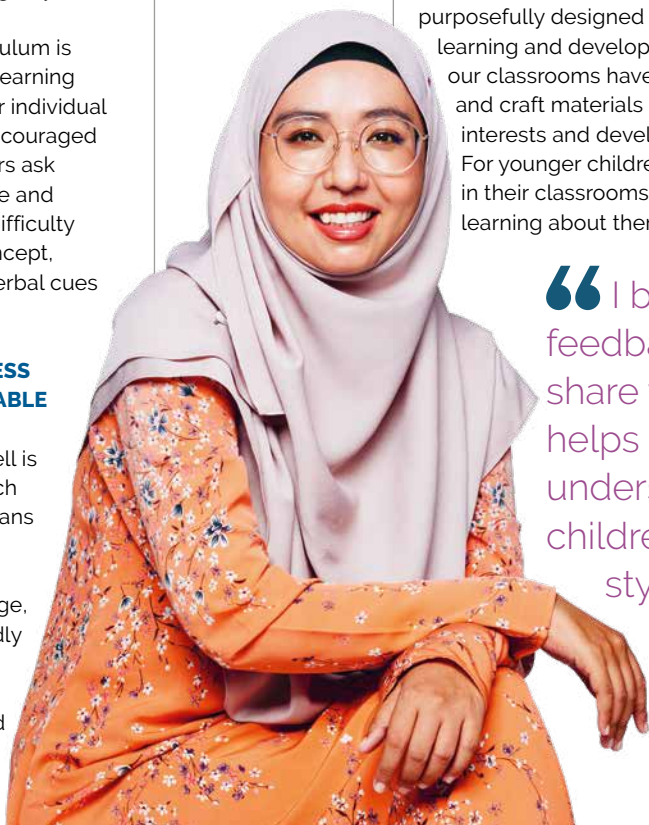
HOW DOES DAP BENEFIT CHILDREN'S LEARNING?

Masyitah: DAP takes into account the ages and stages of child development as well as individual differences. When learning about a topic like change, younger children usually understand the concept better by observing it in a physical object close at hand, such as a plant's growth from seed to sprout over time. Older children, who are better able to grasp more complex concepts, may be interested to find out about cloud changes through books and the Internet. Each age group experiences the concept in line with their development. With DAP, teachers are continually reflecting on their teaching practices and how best to ensure that children are engaged and learning meaningfully.

Nirmala: Our integrated curriculum is designed to promote optimal learning and help children achieve their individual learning goals. Children are encouraged to ask questions, while teachers ask questions that provoke creative and critical thinking. If a child has difficulty understanding a particular concept, teachers use visual aids and verbal cues to assist learning.

PARENTS, HOW DO YOU ASSESS WHICH ACTIVITIES ARE SUITABLE FOR YOUR CHILD AT HOME?

Alan Lai: Knowing my child well is fundamental to assessing which activities are suitable. That means spending time with her, being present, and putting away mobile devices to better engage, observe and listen to her. Blindly trying out recommended activities based on age may not always work, as every child is unique and develops in his or her own way. For instance,



“I believe the feedback we share with parents helps them understand their children's learning styles and strengths.

MS MASYITAH BINTE ABDUL LATIF, 30
Teacher, Cavenur Kindergarten

many parental guides suggest learning the piano is good for children's development. But our daughter Anne was more into drawing at first, so we gave her space to express herself with a pencil and paper. When she started to show interest in music, we gave her a few musical instruments to choose from. She eventually decided on the piano, and it was then we felt she was ready to give music a shot.

Siti Nurliyana Binte Smaat: I refer to books and the Internet to get ideas for suitable activities. When my children were younger, we focused on strengthening their core muscles, so we did a lot of outdoor activities. They also enjoy Lego bricks; drawing, cutting and pasting; and pretend play, such as imagining themselves as chefs in a restaurant using kitchen utensils like wooden spoons and pans. These activities build their creativity and confidence. Now that Uwais is turning six, we see he can take on some responsibilities. We have started giving him simple household chores, such as arranging shoes and keeping his room tidy.

EDUCATORS, WHAT DOES A DAP-FOCUSED CLASSROOM LOOK LIKE?

Masyitah: Every part of the classroom is purposefully designed to support children's learning and development. For instance, our classrooms have a variety of art and craft materials to cater to different interests and developmental stages. For younger children, we have mirrors in their classrooms as they are still learning about themselves. Mirrors

make them realise, "Oh, this is what I look like" or "This is what I look like when I'm happy". It develops their self-awareness and helps them regulate emotions. As for older children, their classrooms have dedicated spaces for small-group discussions and different materials to support collaborative play.

Nirmala: Our open-space classrooms and learning centres — such as the dramatic play corner and the science corner — allow for a mix of self-directed play, guided play and small-group learning. Child-height shelves and storage containers enable children to access and explore materials independently. Classroom activities are followed by outdoor play, where gross motor activities like running and skipping allow teachers to observe and assess children's motor skills development in an authentic setting.

Rathi: A DAP-focused classroom considers the children's family and cultural backgrounds. For instance, some toddlers may not know how to use a spoon, as they may use their hands to eat or are spoon-fed at home. Encouraging parents to share their home practices and routines will help educators better understand and support the children in acquiring new skills and adjusting to the centre's routines. There should also be opportunities for peer interaction and group projects to build language, communication and critical thinking skills, as well as facilitate social development.

WHAT ARE SOME CHALLENGES FACED WHEN IMPLEMENTING DAP?

Masyitah: Though DAP can make a big difference to a child's learning, the planning takes time. Challenges arise when teachers are overwhelmed with tasks and responsibilities. They may not have enough time to pause and reflect on their

SETTING PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS

Ms Charmaine Teo, Vice President of the Association for Early Childhood Educators (Singapore) or AECES for short, shares how its Code of Ethics guides teaching practices and strengthens professionalism.



The AECES Code of Ethics, published in 2004 and updated in 2015, serves as a reference for preschool educators to clarify their thinking and prioritise their responsibilities for children. It guides ethical and professional behaviour; ensures high quality care and education for children; builds a strong early childhood fraternity; and marks respect for children, families, the community, and the profession.

EC professionals can encounter challenging situations or conflicting responsibilities during a typical preschool day. For instance, a parent prefers her child to not take afternoon naps as he has difficulty going to bed early at night. However, the teacher observes the child getting tired by the afternoon. Bearing in mind the need to balance responsibilities and obligations towards the parent and the child, the teacher can work out an arrangement with the parent to ease the child into a shortened naptime, such as letting him do quiet activities (e.g., drawing, reading) before taking a nap. Working together with the parent supports both the parent's and the child's needs.

Here is a four-step approach that EC professionals can adopt when practising the Code of Ethics:

1. What is the challenging situation or issue?
2. Reflect on your professional values, responsibilities and obligations.
3. What might an early childhood professional do in this situation? Discuss with colleagues if necessary.
4. What might be the implications and how can you address these?

For more information and examples of case studies, refer to www.aeces.org/membership/code-of-ethics.

“Blindly trying out recommended activities based on age may not always work, as every child is unique and develops in his or her own way.

MR ALAN LAI, 45
CEO of a tech company, father of Anne Lai, 5



THIS SPREAD On Masyitah: Outfit model's own. On Alan: Outfit Mango. On Anne: Outfit Mango Kids

teaching practices and interactions with children. Our centre encourages a culture of reflection. We have dedicated time for teachers to come together to discuss and brainstorm ways to tweak teaching practices, ask questions, clarify doubts, and modify activities to better suit the children's needs.

Rathi: It is important for educators to have a good grounding in child development and be open to learning. In this regard, embrace DAP and the merits they bring. Apart from training, it is also important to set aside time for discussions with peers or mentors on actual classroom situations and challenges. DAP should be a key part of teacher professionalism as this supports a teacher's understanding of different learner profiles, equips them with the knowledge and skills to engage all children, and enhances learning outcomes.

PARENTS, HOW HAS YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER HELPED YOU SUPPORT HIS OR HER LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

Siti: When Uwais was adjusting to the preschool environment, he had difficulty managing his emotions and had frequent meltdowns in class. During my discussions with his teacher, she suggested breathing techniques and counting backwards to help him calm down. These strategies really worked! Uwais has since settled down and now enjoys learning.

Alan: We once received feedback from Anne's teacher that she needed more practice writing Chinese characters. This

“ Now that Uwais is turning six, we see he can take on some responsibilities. We have started giving him simple household chores.

MDM SITI NURLIYANA BINTE SAMAAT, 35
Housewife, mother of Uwais Muazzam Bin Muhammad Nazmi, 5, and Asmaa Sofiyah Binte Muhammad Nazmi, 2



surprised me as she has good pen grip and can draw well. I realised that because we had been letting her draw freely, Anne was less skilled in writing Chinese characters, which are more structured. I started creating dotted lines of Chinese characters for her to follow, while still giving her space to draw creatively. Within half a year, her Chinese character-writing skills improved vastly.

EDUCATORS, HOW DO YOU SUPPORT AND WORK WITH PARENTS TO ENSURE DAP IS SUPPORTED AT HOME?

Nirmala: Our centre has sharing sessions every term with parents on their children's learning and development. We also send out home-learning kits with activities listed by age group. For instance, together with their parents, K2 children had to adopt a tree in their neighbourhood, learn its name, and observe its growth. They were encouraged to journal their observations and share these during 'Show & Tell' sessions. We also encourage parents to provide feedback, so that we can improve the children's learning.

Masyitah: I believe the feedback we share with parents helps them understand their children's learning styles and strengths. Practical examples we provide also help parents better support their children. I make it a point to make myself available, especially during dismissal time, so that parents and I can share and exchange any information or anecdotes about their children.

Rathi: Educators should respect that parents know their children best in terms of the latter's preferences, interests and needs. It is hence important for educators to seek parents' inputs about their children. Both parties will then have a more comprehensive and mutual understanding of the child's developmental goals, as well as suitable strategies in preschool and at home.

On Asmaa: Outfit model's own. On Siti: Outfit model's own. On Uwais: Outfit Mango Kids.

AT THE CHILD'S LEVEL

PROFESSOR IRAM SIRAJ EXPLAINS HOW EARLY CHILDHOOD PRACTITIONERS CAN IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF THEIR INTERACTIONS WITH CHILDREN, WHICH IS KEY TO GOOD TEACHING PRACTICE.

Effective early learning combines positive adult-child relationships with meaningful activities. Educators provide intentional engagement and warm, responsive interactions, while maintaining a setting that is orderly and predictable yet not overly structured or formal.

Alongside research showing the importance of such intentional and relational pedagogy in early childhood education, the concept of Sustained Shared Thinking (SST) has become an important practice. SST occurs in high-quality interactions where practitioners are actively engaged in children's learning and extend their thinking through communication. Characteristics of SST include tuning in, showing genuine interest, respecting the children's decisions and choices, inviting children to elaborate, offering an alternative viewpoint and asking open-ended questions.

SST can only be achieved when children's emotional well-being is also supported. This in turn requires the development of positive relationships — between educators and parents, between adults and children, as well as between children themselves. Such relationships provide a safe base for young children to explore the interpersonal and intellectual aspects of early learning, while promoting early self-regulation.

TOOLKIT FOR TEACHERS

Practitioners can improve their skills in SST and support the emotional well-being of children aged two to six years by using the Sustained Shared Thinking and Emotional Well-being (SSTEWS) Scale. This tool supports the development of strong relationships, effective communication, aspects of self-regulation and concept development.

In particular, the SSTEWS Scale looks at the quality of interactions between adults and children, and between the children themselves. It considers the responsiveness of adults to children — and how they intentionally support children's learning and development — through descriptors of inadequate, good and excellent practice. Fundamental to the SSTEWS Scale is the understanding that to successfully engage in SST, adults need

MEASURING SSTEWS

The SSTEWS Scale consists of five main categories (each with sub-categories):

1. Building trust, confidence and independence
2. Social and emotional well-being
3. Supporting and extending language and communication
4. Supporting learning and critical thinking
5. Assessing learning and language

Including sub-categories, there are 15 items to be assessed on a scale ranging from 1 (Inadequate) to 7 (Excellent).

to know children well and develop positive relationships with them. Adults require a good understanding of the children's current development, their cultural heritage and achievements, as well as their feelings, behaviours and responses to learning. An effective early childhood educator should be able to recognise when children are thinking, sensitively extend their language and periods of concentration, and encourage their perseverance.

Educators can use the SSTEWS Scale as part of their self-assessment, to support staff training, or to improve their own early years practice. For optimal impact, professional development should be incorporated into the process as well.



PROFESSOR IRAM SIRAJ
Professor of Child Development and Education, University of Oxford, England
Professor Siraj has an international reputation for her longitudinal research and policy expertise. She has co-directed influential studies such as the United Kingdom-based *Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years* (dera.ioe.ac.uk/id/eprint/4650/1/RR356.pdf), which first developed the concept of SST. She is the co-author of several complementary scales that measure quality in settings with young children, including the SSTEWS Scale.



STARTING AFRESH

THE UPDATED NURTURING EARLY LEARNERS FRAMEWORK'S IMPACT ON TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICES.

Early childhood educators working with children aged four to six can now use the updated Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework launched by the Ministry of Education (MOE) in November 2022. It enables educators to better understand how to put principles into practice and design quality learning experiences, while continuing to cultivate the joy of learning, character-building and a growth mindset in young children.

WHAT'S NEW

The updated NEL Framework places an increased emphasis on nurturing values, social and emotional competencies, and learning dispositions. These aspects are important as they help children develop and grow as individuals of good character, build positive relationships with others, and embrace lifelong learning. Having this strong foundation will enable them to make appropriate decisions, work well with others and persevere in trying different ways to overcome challenges.

HOW CHILDREN BENEFIT

'Over-teaching' — where educators deliver a content-heavy curriculum at the expense of nurturing values, social and emotional competencies, and learning dispositions — is discouraged at the preschool level.

Dr Tan Ching Ting, Master Specialist in Pre-school Education at MOE, explains, "Accelerating the preschool curriculum and drilling in the preschool years to over-prepare children academically for Primary 1 may lead to short-term gains that

are not sustained, and also erode children's joy of learning."

Studies however show a link between the development of social and emotional competencies during the early childhood years and positive social and behavioural outcomes, as well as academic success. Dr Tan contends that some of the essential skills for children at this stage are the ability to focus, remember and follow instructions; self-control; flexible thinking; and a positive attitude towards learning. These will enable them to manage everyday activities as well as excel academically. Educators are thus encouraged to give children space to explore and grow, and to nurture their curiosity.

HOW IT INFLUENCES TEACHING

Already, the merits of the updated NEL Framework have emerged in the classroom. "Its emphasis on values, social-emotional competencies and learning dispositions affirms the approaches we are taking in our preschool," says Ms Lorraine Serquina, a senior teacher at Far Eastern Kindergarten. The centre's curriculum is rooted in character education, with teachers focusing on a specific character trait every term. For instance, to instil gratefulness in children, they write short daily notes about something or someone they are thankful for.

DEVELOPING MINDS

Ms Serquina offers tips for parents to support their children at home.

- **Play games** such as Math or Language Bingo. This promotes quality family time and allows you to observe children's attitudes and behaviours when they win or lose, presenting opportunities for character-building.
- **Let children organise and plan their own learning activities.** This empowers them and helps develop their executive functioning skills (e.g., focus, self-awareness, flexible thinking).

To foster generosity, they create artworks to raise funds for the less fortunate.

Ms Serquina adds, "We are more intentional in our curriculum, which incorporates the development of values and social-emotional competencies alongside foundational academic skills. The updated NEL Framework has more clearly defined *iTeach* principles, which guide us in fine-tuning our facilitation skills to better support children's authentic learning experiences through purposeful play and quality interactions." ●



Visit go.gov.sg/nel-2022 or scan here to see the updated NEL Framework.



ENRICHING EXPOSURE

A CAPACITY-BUILDING VOLUNTEER PROJECT IN INDONESIA HELPED EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERS APPROACH THEIR WORK WITH RENEWED PASSION AND ENTHUSIASM.



For early childhood educators, overseas capacity-building programmes can create opportunities to expand their professional networks and deepen their sensitivity to cultural diversity. These projects enable our educators and their regional counterparts to share ideas, skills and experiences to uplift EC quality, while effecting positive social change.

This was evinced by those who recently returned from Jakarta, Indonesia, as volunteers for the *Early Childhood Educator Development Project*. Officially started in September 2022, the project is a three-year collaboration between the Singapore International Foundation (SIF), the Central Board of the Indonesian Kindergarten Teachers Association (PP IGTKI) and Singapore's Presbyterian Preschool Services (PPS). It aims to expand the capabilities of preschool educators and boost the quality of EC education in Greater Jakarta.

IMPARTING STRATEGIES

Ms N Kannigadevi, Assistant Director (Development & Care) and a Special Needs Mentor at PPS, is spearheading the project. Over five days in February, Ms Kannigadevi, who is an ECDA Fellow, led a team of volunteers to Jakarta for the first in a series of training modules. The workshops focus on inclusive preschool settings and differentiated instruction to support children with developmental needs.



"I was impressed by the level of engagement among the workshop participants. They proactively presented lesson plans and samples of their children's work to seek feedback from the trainers. The participants' passion for knowledge and openness to learning new things were truly inspiring for me," says Ms Kannigadevi, a long-time volunteer with SIF.

Her sentiments are echoed by another team member, Ms N Pushpavalli. "The participants asked meaningful questions to clarify their understanding of EC concepts and shared how they would transfer the new knowledge into their practices," says Ms Pushpavalli, an ECDA Fellow and Honorary Mentor Principal of Ramakrishna Mission Sarada Kindergarten. "We also highlighted their good practices and helped them see value in their work."

A DIFFERENT PRISM

The team also visited two preschools in Jakarta, where they gained rich insights observing local teachers

interacting with children and families. For example, Ms Kannigadevi says, "Similar to Singapore, many parents in Indonesia may initially be in denial about their children's special educational needs. Indonesian educators avoid using terms like 'intervention' and 'diagnosis' when communicating with parents. By framing the intervention sessions as 'stimulation sessions' instead, parents tend to be more receptive to the idea."

EC educators in Jakarta have fostered a nurturing environment where children feel secure to explore, learn and flourish. "I saw many heart-warming and bonding moments where educators reached out respectfully to each child," says Ms Pushpavalli. "The trip reignited my passion as an educator. I am rethinking how best to do the same for our EC fraternity here in Singapore." ●

TRAINING THE TRAINERS

The *Early Childhood Educator Development Project* comprises six workshops in Jakarta over the course of three years. It aims to:

- ➔ **Enhance the pedagogy and practice** of local EC educators, especially in employing interactive and participatory teaching methods, play and facilitation, and integrating learning to support children's holistic development.
- ➔ **Train 50 'Master Trainers'** from various kindergartens in Greater Jakarta, who will then cascade the training for greater reach and impact.
- ➔ **Benefit over 5,000 members** of the Indonesian community, including children, teachers, parents and caregivers.

LET'S HEAR IT FOR OUR EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS!

PARENTS SHARE THEIR APPRECIATION FOR THEIR CHILDREN'S TEACHERS.



Kaiser Su, 1, has only just started attending infant care, but the infant educators at Raffles Kidz @ Jurong West are already making a difference to his development. Kaiser's mother, Ms Fitri Ertha, shares more.

● **Separation Without Anxiety** "To ease the transition, the early years educators have established a morning hand-over routine to make Kaiser feel comfortable, such as playing Peekaboo which makes him smile and coo. They have also created a fun, warm and loving environment — so much so that when we celebrated Kaiser's birthday at the centre, he didn't look sad when my husband and I left, much to our surprise."

● **Holistic Development** "The infant educators provide a variety of sensory experiences that spark Kaiser's curiosity. He learns about textures, colours and shapes, and strengthens his cognitive, motor and creative skills through fun art activities such as bubble wrap stamping and crepe paper crafts. They read books, sing songs and play games, in both Chinese and English, which help his language development."

● **Attentive Care** "Being first-time parents, we appreciate the infant educators who have done so much to support us. They provide us with daily updates on how our baby is doing, his habits, likes and dislikes. When Kaiser was ready to start on solids, Teacher Vera (Li *laoshi*) suggested nutritious meal ideas and foods to watch for allergic reactions. Thank you, teachers, for taking such good care of Kaiser!"



Kaiser with his infant educators: (front row from left) Ma *laoshi*, Xie *laoshi*, Teacher Lin, (back row from left) Teacher Kamila, Li *laoshi*, Teacher Zoe and Teacher Linda



Siya with Principal Ms Shelyn Tok

Dear Principal Shelyn,

For a principal to know all the children in the preschool as well and as personally as you do is truly commendable. You also show care in the way you attend to each child's health and dietary requirements, including those of my daughter, who is a vegetarian. Most mornings when I drop Siya off, you are there to greet us and share a little about her, be it something notable that happened in class the day before or a learning area that Siya needs to focus on.

Because Siya is an only child, I am especially concerned about her social skills and peer interactions. I appreciate our many discussions about this, and your advice on how I can reinforce and complement the preschool's efforts.

You and your teachers also supported us through a difficult time last year, when my daughter lost her grandmother who lived overseas. Your video calls while we were overseas cheered Siya up as she got to chat with her friends. It isn't easy for a four-year-old to deal with the concept of death. The tips you shared with Siya's daddy and me on how to manage her emotions were very useful.

As an educator myself, I do understand how challenging the job can be, so it's amazing how your team excels at it. Hats off to you and the team!

Siya said this once and it made me cry: "I hope you are the best teacher for your children, just like Principal Shelyn is for me."

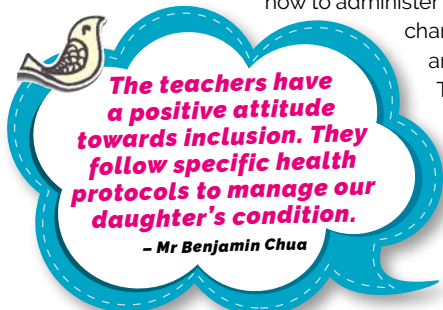
Ms Pooja Trivedi, mother of Siya Chandresh Trivedi, 5, who attends Rainbow Cove @ Sennett



Mr Benjamin Chua opens up about the dedicated team at TOUCH Child Care (Clementi), who go the extra mile to care for his three-year-old daughter.

"Our daughter joined the centre about a year ago, after a long hospital stay. She has end-stage kidney disease, which requires her to be on dialysis. While some preschools may find it challenging to work with children with special health needs, the centre leader and the teachers welcomed us with open minds and willing hearts by taking her in.

As our daughter is tube-fed, the teachers learned how to administer tube-feeding and change the dressing around the tube.



The teachers have a positive attitude towards inclusion. They follow specific health protocols to manage our daughter's condition.

— Mr Benjamin Chua

They are mindful that the dressing for her dialysis catheter must be clean and dry, to prevent infection. That means keeping



The team caring for Mr Chua's daughter: (from left) Mrs Teo, Shang *laoshi*, Ms Emily, Zeng *laoshi* and Principal Ms Vanessa Lee

a close eye on her during water play activities, and covering the dressing with waterproof tape when she showers at the centre. We are thankful for their excellent care.

The prolonged hospitalisation affected our daughter's psychomotor development, but she has grown in leaps and bounds at the centre. She has mostly caught up to other children her age and enjoys running around and trying to climb all over the place. Her speech and language skills have also improved. She loves going to preschool and has made many friends.

The teachers often ask how they can support us better, and even shared their personal phone numbers with us in case we need to tell them something urgent. We are very grateful to the entire team."

To the wonderful gem, Teacher Nadiah,

I can't thank you enough for everything you did for me and my son. When Danish first joined the centre, he had trouble expressing himself. I was impressed and touched by how much effort you put in to understand him by doing fun activities together and having one-on-one conversations with him. You showed a great deal of patience in letting him warm up to you.

Moving from preschool to primary school is a big change, but you helped prepare Danish and his classmates for it. You took them to visit a primary school, where they got a taste of student life. You gave each child a diary to jot down information during their visit, to share with their parents. You also taught them how to order food using money.

I will never forget the support and kindness you showed me as a single parent. I didn't feel alone, as you were always there to answer my questions and give useful advice. On days when Danish didn't attend preschool, you would text or call me to check up on him.

Because of your warmth and love, the children feel secure and valued. Although Danish is doing all right in Primary 1, he still misses his old centre and often talks about you, which is why we sometimes come back to say hi. Thanks for the memories!

Ms Zuraidah Abdullah, mother of Md Arian Danish, 7, who graduated from Little Footprints Preschool @ Woodlands 877 in 2022



Ms Zuraidah (left) celebrating Danish's preschool graduation with Teacher Nadiah



Danish sometimes drops by after his primary school day ends to visit Teacher Nadiah

Thank you!



SOMETHING'S BAKING Celebrate Teachers' Day with something extra special! Stay tuned for all the delicious details coming up this August on [@BeanstalkSingapore's Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). 'Like' and 'follow' to get updates on an exciting line-up of activities coming your way.



SUM OF THE PARTS

RICH AND DIVERSE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP COMPETENCIES AND GROW INTO WELL-ROUNDED INDIVIDUALS.

Children's Cove (Jalan Penjara) offers myriad intentional and engaging learning spaces. Senior Principal Ms Yusliza Yusof, who received the 2022 ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award, explains why: "Holistic development is about nurturing every aspect of a child's well-being, including their physical health, mental and emotional states, as well as social connections. These facets are interdependent and neglecting one area may impact the others. To support a child's holistic development, creating intentional spaces is key."

SPACES THAT INSPIRE

Free play and exploration are encouraged throughout the centre. Teachers facilitate children's play to further extend their thinking and deepen learning. The age-appropriate activities integrate different learning areas (e.g., language, numeracy) and developmental domains (e.g., physical, cognitive), and cater to children's interests.

Indoors, the centre has a Maker's Lab and Dark Room. The Maker's Lab

provides loose parts (e.g., pinecones, bottle caps, plastic bottles) that children can explore and create with. The creative process fosters critical thinking and problem-solving skills as they work with tools such as glue guns that hone their motor skills. In the Dark Room, children explore light and shadow using light tables, overhead projectors and other equipment which sharpens spatial awareness and visual perception.

At the outdoor Forest Trail and Edible Garden, children connect with nature and develop a sense of responsibility while caring for plants and harvesting fruit. There is also a sandpit, mud kitchen, water play zone, playground, and a pond with turtles and fish. These offer opportunities for concept learning and the development of competencies.

"We see the interplay between different aspects of children's development," Ms Yusliza observes. "For example, our outdoor classroom is an ideal setting for Show & Tell sessions. Children develop communication skills and social-emotional competencies as they share their experiences and feelings with peers. Organising



Experimenting with light and shadow in the Dark Room

their thoughts and preparing for their presentations help improve executive functioning skills. As physical movement is a big part of outdoor activities, gross motor skill development is a key focus."

BRINGING EVERYONE ON BOARD

Ms Yusliza has created a safe space for open communication and feedback with teachers and looks for ways to build their professional knowledge. "We had frequent conversations to unpack ideas and concepts when we introduced the Maker's Lab and Dark Room. Teachers also underwent training to learn about incorporating loose parts play and light play into the curriculum and teaching practices," she adds.

To maintain regular contact with parents, Ms Yusliza and her team use various channels including weekly overviews, newsletters, parent-teacher meetings and informal conversations. Parents receive updates on their children's progress and suggestions for home activities.

Ms Nur Huda Binte Affindi, whose son Haqqi Bin Khairul Anuar, 4, is in the K1 class, appreciates the range of options for parents' participation. "Preparing materials together for Show & Tell allows parents to reinforce concepts that have been introduced in the classroom, and gets children actively involved in constructing their knowledge. My son has grown to be a confident communicator," says Ms Huda. ●



At the Edible Garden, Ms Yusliza (left) and her team guide children in caring for plants, nurturing their connection to nature

Watch Ms Yusliza Yusof's winner showcase video at go.gov.sg/ecda-awards-2022-yusliza.



MOVING FORWARD TOGETHER

EMPOWERING FAMILIES AND CAREGIVERS IS NAOMI LEE'S SECRET TO SUCCESSFUL EARLY INTERVENTION.



Ms Naomi Lee (right) pairs picture cards with objects to teach Dana about colours as her mother looks on

"Every child thrives when educators and parents tap into his or her interests and needs to find developmentally appropriate strategies to encourage learning," says early intervention educator Ms Naomi Lee Shi En, who won the ECDA Outstanding Early Intervention Professional Award in 2022. This family- and child-centred approach undergirds her work at Rainbow Centre (Margaret Drive), where she helps children with developmental needs such as Down syndrome, autism spectrum disorder and cerebral palsy.

Ms Lee sees her role as a facilitator who supports and empowers parents to be advocates for their children. For instance, she explains early intervention terms and acronyms in simple language that parents can understand. If a child struggles with speech or with expressing himself or herself, she teaches parents to use gestures, picture cards, tablets, or other strategies and tools.

The individualised activities planned for the intervention sessions are interesting and motivating for children, yet still feasible for family members to carry out at home daily. Ms Lee explains, "I build a rapport with the children by showing interest in the things they like and being

curious about their environment. I also encourage parents to be a part of the planning, intervention and follow-up processes. It's a journey we take together."

BITE-SIZED LEARNING STRATEGIES

One of the children Ms Lee cares for is Dana Chan, 2½, who has Down syndrome. Mrs Jennifer Chan, Dana's mother, shares how sessions with Ms Lee have made a difference in her daughter's development.

> **Breaking down complex tasks into simpler ones.** To improve Dana's gross motor skills, Ms Lee gives her fun muscle-strengthening exercises. Mrs Chan notes, "Depending on how Dana responds, Ms Lee may break them down further to ensure Dana works specific muscles within her capability. Then, she guides me in conducting the exercise with Dana so that I know how to do it on my own." At Ms Lee's suggestion, she also encouraged Dana to be more active with her hands to strengthen her fine motor skills by providing sand play and peeling-related activities.

> **Adding little challenges to everyday tasks.** The centre has a daily greeting routine where Dana and her classmates identify their



Ms Lee (middle) and a therapist coach a mother on the proper use of facilitated seating during feeding



BELIEVE IN YOUR CHILD

Ms Lee has three tips for parents of children with developmental needs.

- **Change your mindset** Look beyond your child's disability. Believe that your child can thrive and learn to do many things, rather than limiting him or her to a diagnosis.
- **Join a support group** Whether it is a face-to-face or WhatsApp group, parents benefit from sharing experiences and resources, and offering mutual encouragement.
- **Connect with professionals** Deeper communication with your child's medical team and early intervention professionals enables parents to make more informed decisions.

photographs and say hello to one another. To make it more challenging, Ms Lee changes the location of the photographs every day so that the students need to look for them. "This has helped Dana exercise greater flexibility in her thinking and be more aware of her surroundings," says Mrs Chan.

"When I am able to help a child gain skills and work towards independence, the family's confidence increases and they learn to appreciate their child's capabilities," says Ms Lee. ●

Be inspired by Ms Naomi Lee Shi En at go.gov.sg/ecda-awards-2022-naomi



AT THEIR OWN PACE

EXPANDING PLAY ACTIVITIES APPROPRIATELY CAN PROMOTE MEANINGFUL LEARNING FOR CHILDREN.



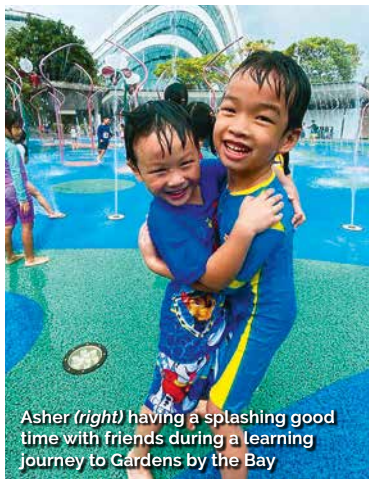
“Understanding and adapting to children’s developmental stages and interests enable child-directed learning in a way that allows them to thrive at their own pace and enjoy their learning,” says Ms Kartini Binte Johari, principal of Cherie Hearts @ Charlton.

The centre uses the Early Years Development Framework, to plan play-based activities for children aged 18 months to three years old, and the Nurturing Early Learners Curriculum Framework for those aged four to six.

Ms Kartini says, “By using these frameworks, coupled with an understanding of the different stages of play in early childhood [see box], teachers are able to design play-based experiences that are developmentally appropriate, engaging and meaningful.”

WELL-ROUNDED EXPERIENCES

Teachers use classroom observations, daily reflections, monthly curriculum review meetings and parent feedback to modify and enhance their pedagogical practices,



Asher (right) having a splashing good time with friends during a learning journey to Gardens by the Bay



Toys with wheels are used as makeshift paintbrushes in this child-directed Messy Day activity

bringing together play and learning. This has resulted in an expanded repertoire of play experiences for the children.

During monthly Messy Days, for instance, children can engage in water play and sand play or experiment with art materials, either independently or with their friends. The act of pouring, measuring, sifting, moulding, spraying, mixing and painting — coupled with conversations with peers — help to nurture their communication skills, fine motor skills, imagination and creativity.

The same is true of the monthly outdoor learning sessions at a neighbourhood park. Teachers design age-appropriate games such as a solo pebble hunt and group-based music and movement

“I enjoy outdoor activities the most. I get to play with my friends and learn new things. We play games that teach us to work as a team.”

ASHER TAN, K2

STAGES OF PLAY

How children’s play changes as they grow and develop social skills.

- **Solitary play (0 to 2 years old)**
A child plays alone and does not interact with others (e.g., playing with a toy or flipping through a board book by themselves).
- **Parallel play (2 to 3 years old)**
A child plays next to or near others, with the same play materials, but does not talk to them (e.g., imitating what a playmate is doing).
- **Associative play (3 to 4 years old)**
A child plays side-by-side with others, with little interaction or coordination (e.g., playing at the same playground and talking to each other, but doing different things).
- **Cooperative play (4 to 6 years old)**
A child plays together with others and collaborates on an activity (e.g., building a block tower together).

activities, while cultivating children’s connection to nature. Likewise, outdoor experiences are brought indoors through dramatic play, where children can use natural objects that they have found as props and learn to take turns using them during role-play activities. These experiences build confidence and help promote social-emotional development.

Ms Kartini shares, “When children are supported in their holistic development, it strengthens their foundation to develop positive values, learning dispositions, knowledge and skills.”



The ‘Find the Eggs’ tuff tray aids infants’ grasp development as they sift through shredded paper to pick up plastic eggs

TUFF LOVE

SENSORY PLAY SUPPORTS AND ENRICHES LEARNERS’ DISCOVERY OF THE WORLD.

Children investigate the world around them through using their senses. To enhance the sensory play experience for them, Agape Little Uni. @ Upper Serangoon introduced a versatile learning tool: tuff trays.

These are large, shallow trays that can be filled with a variety of materials and objects to encourage hands-on exploration, experimentation and discovery. “Used effectively, tuff trays allow children to lead and explore without predetermined expectations of how activities must unfold. They also make excellent conversation starters,” says English Mentor Teacher Ms Samantha Ho.

By observing children as they engage in the activities, teachers are able to better understand the diverse learning needs and personalities in their classroom. “This is especially pertinent for children who are



A tuff tray filled with soil gets children thinking about how best to grow plants from seeds

developing their language skills, as it helps us facilitate their learning appropriately and provide the right support,” adds Chinese Senior Teacher Ms Li Liying.

ONE TRAY, MULTIPLE BENEFITS

Teachers customised the tuff trays and used them to:

Integrate learning domains.

Different materials were selected to achieve different learning objectives for each age group. For instance, for infants, a ‘Water Babies’ tuff tray had water-absorbing beads to enhance sensory perception and eye-hand coordination. The ‘Soapy Suds’ activity for N1 children comprised different types of loofahs and sponges to exercise their fine motor skills, while they learned about cause and effect by mixing soap and water to produce foam and bubbles. The kindergarten group’s ‘Ocean Animals’ tuff tray, which contained marine animal figurines, pebbles, shells and other materials, allowed them to explore natural habitats and ecosystems.

Inculcate good values.

Reminding children to treat materials gently so that their friends can use them afterwards

reinforced values of care and consideration. Getting children to assist in the clean-up process taught them about responsibility.

➔ **Promote language and thinking.** Through small group play, children practised their communication, teamwork, reasoning and problem-solving skills.

➔ **Encourage creativity and curiosity.** As tuff tray activities were open-ended, they supported child-directed play, innovative thinking and experimentation.

TRAY PLAY AT HOME

Not only do tuff trays cater to a variety of themes and topics, but they are also easy to recreate at home. The centre conducted a parent workshop, followed by a take-home activity where parents were encouraged to create their own tuff trays and play together with their children. They were also provided with written guides and resource packs.

Mr Yeo Hwee Kian was among the workshop attendees. With his son Ashton, 4, they set up a beach-themed tuff tray containing sand, pasta shells and toy animals. “Ashton used his hands or small shovels to dig and bury items, create mini sandcastles, and explore the textures and shapes of the objects,” says Mr Yeo. “The activity had a noticeable impact on his fine motor skills, imaginative play, and language and communication skills.”



GET A GRANT Agape Little Uni. @ Upper Serangoon tapped on the ECDA Innovation Projects Grant for this project. Visit go.gov.sg/cpd-innovation-grant or scan here to find out more.



SPARK NEW IDEAS! Cherie Hearts @ Charlton is a SPARK-certified centre, which means it has been recognised for its continued efforts in providing quality preschool education. See www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo for more information on the SPARK framework.

Q&A SUPPORTING CHILDREN'S LEARNING THROUGH CHILD-CENTRIC, PLAY-BASED PRACTICES.

FOR PARENTS



Q My child's teacher says children learn through play. How can I support this at home?

A stress-free play environment can support young children's holistic development. Through play, they can come up with a mental play script and imagine what they want to say and do. It allows them to see different perspectives and express their feelings. By playing with peers, they develop language and communication skills, and practise turn-taking, negotiation and cooperation.

To support children's play:

- > **Provide space, time and materials.** For example, set up a kitchen play corner with toy utensils. To bring in the real world, give children leftover dough or materials such as leaves and twigs gathered from outside. Allow for one to two hours of uninterrupted playtime.
- > **Do not dominate their play.** Join in only when invited. When you do play, paraphrase children's comments to extend their language development. For instance, if your child says, "Drink slow", you can respond with, "Oh, the tomato soup is hot. I have to drink it slowly."
- > **Read stories to them.** This enriches children's imagination, which in turn triggers executive functioning. Acting out the story requires them to recall and retrieve information from their working memory. As they use the materials at hand in their play, they exercise flexible thinking and creativity.



DR REBECCA CHAN is a lecturer with the Psychology and Child & Human Development (PCHD) academic group at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University.



DR DORA CHEN is an associate professor and heads the Early Childhood Education Programme at the S R Nathan School of Human Development, Singapore University of Social Sciences.



FOR EDUCATORS

Q What are some key considerations for designing a meaningful curriculum for young children?

A well-designed curriculum involves plans with clear intended learning goals that include the knowledge and understanding children need to acquire, skills and competencies, as well as the values and dispositions they need to develop. It should outline scaffolding strategies, including well-thought-out resources and materials to be used. It should also include plans for how ongoing assessment will be conducted.

Here are some tips for designing an effective curriculum:

- 1. Think about the pedagogy, not just content.** Focusing too much on *what* to teach (as opposed to *how*) may lead to a "drill and grill", teaching-to-the-task method of instruction, where children are led to produce expected answers. Instead, use conversations and questions to motivate children to think, reason and ask their own questions. Encourage children to seek the answers themselves or in collaboration with their peers and teachers.
- 2. Design or adapt the preschool curriculum** so that the activities you expect children to do are relevant to them, to enable meaningful engagement. Observe children's interests to guide activity planning. You can also generate and pique children's interests through discussions and stories.
- 3. Reflect on the effectiveness of implementation.** Reflections should not be about whether children achieved the expected outcomes. Rather, critically consider what worked well, what did not, and what was done that could have led to the observed outcome(s). Use this self-evaluation to decide what you will do next to engage children. Engage in reflections with colleagues by initiating and inviting peer feedback.

THRIVE

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

Try this little experiment to show how plants take in water. Put white flowers in clear jars, add food colouring and watch the petals magically change colour in hours!



learn



18 Enriching reading experiences and STEAM programmes for children

grow



21 Berries and milk make a great National Day smoothie

play



22 Give Teacher a specially-made Tic-Tac-Toe game set



Each public library features an Early Literacy collection, filled with reading materials and resources for young children



GET THE WORD OUT

Weaving books into the fabric of children's lives from an early age benefits their holistic development.

Babies communicate through cooing, babbling, facial expressions and gestures. Preschoolers can do much more with words and phrases. Whether infant or preschooler, both have much to gain when parents read to them. Consistent exposure to the sounds of words and sentence patterns lays the foundation for children to develop language skills. It not only fosters critical thinking skills such as the ability to connect ideas, and stimulates creativity, but also strengthens the parent-child relationship.

"When parents expose their children to books from young, they begin a positive, lifelong relationship with the written word," says Ms Fa'izah Ahmad, Assistant Director (Early Literacy) of Programmes and Services at the National Library Board (NLB).

SEEDS OF EARLY LITERACY

"Making regular trips to the library is a fun family activity. Children are also more motivated to pick up the reading habit in a library environment, where there are plenty of books and they can see others reading," says Ms Fa'izah.

For parents with children aged three and under, she suggests exploring the Early Literacy collection. The books have been specially selected to support the five early literacy practices: talking, singing, writing, playing and reading. These include books that appeal to the senses, such as lift-the-flap and touch-and-feel stories; nursery rhymes; books that teach concepts such as the alphabet, numbers and shapes; books that introduce topics like occupations and animals; and books in the three mother tongue languages.

MORE THAN JUST BOOKS

Singapore's biggest public library is now the Punggol Regional Library, which officially opened in April 2023. It has dedicated facilities and programmes for children

across the first and second floors. These spaces cater to children across a wide span of competencies and different stages of development.

→ The **Toy Library** is meant for children aged six and below, including children with disabilities. The educational toys, which range from costumes and puzzles to musical instruments, cater to different types of play — dramatic, creative and sensory. Within this section is the **TinkerTots** space, where children can experiment freely with DIY tinkering projects.

→ The **Stories Come Alive Room** uses moving images and text, as well as light and sound effects, to create an immersive storytelling experience for children aged four to 10. Parents with infants and toddlers can also join programmes where they learn to use songs, rhymes and finger play to interact with their little ones.



Learning through play at Punggol Regional Library's Toy Library and TinkerTots spaces



NLB also supports community initiatives like ECDA's annual 'Start Small Dream Big' (SSDB) movement. One of the SSDB preschools is PCF Sparkletots @ Kreta Ayer-Kim Seng Blk 8, which has partnered NLB for a project on the topic of "Caring for Our Environment, Caring for the Public Libraries".

In June, the children visited the Geylang East Public Library where they attended an interactive storytelling session and learned about library etiquette, including appropriate ways to handle books. Parents were also encouraged to bring their children to the library and complete a sustainability-themed challenge together.

"By familiarising children with what the library offers, we hope to instil a love for reading in them. We want them to treat books with care and show appreciation to the librarians who work there," says the centre's vice principal, Ms Toh Fang Jia. Highlights of the SSDB project will be displayed at Toa Payoh Public Library from 1 to 30 August.

Such preschool collaborations highlight the fact that today's libraries are much more than treasure troves of



reading materials. As Ms Fa'izah puts it, libraries are also spaces for bonding and learning, with a variety of programmes for children that cover topics such as literacy, science, technology, arts and sustainability.

Children at the PCF Sparkletots centre supplemented their library visit with a sustainability-related activity in preschool



NO ACTION IS TOO SMALL

President Halimah Yacob launched SSDB 2023 on 28 April with the theme, 'Many Helping Hands, Caring for Everyone'. A total of 77,000 children from 1,130 preschools – supported by 28 community partners – have joined the movement this year. Now into its ninth edition, SSDB seeks to inculcate positive values in children and encourage them to give back to society.



KidsSTOP™'s fun and engaging exhibits provide ample opportunities for STEAM learning

DOWN TO A SCIENCE

Many people think STEAM (science, technology, engineering, the arts, mathematics) subjects are beyond the ken of preschoolers. Look past the abstract concepts, and one will realise that STEAM is a natural fit for children's innate curiosity.

"STEAM is all about discovering the world around us, which children start doing from birth," says Dr Lee Song Choon, Director of KidsSTOP™, Singapore's dedicated Children's Science Centre. "Science process skills such as observing, comparing and predicting can be developed from young. The same goes for engineering design process skills like questioning, prototyping and testing ideas."

It is important to provide hands-on experiences and varied challenges in an environment where children can safely explore and discover concepts on their own. KidsSTOP™ is purpose-built for such observation and experimentation.

Some pointers for parents to facilitate their children's STEAM experiences:



Consider the child's interests. Work closely with teachers to plan STEAM activities that are meaningful and engaging for your child. Update one another about your child's interests, progress and concerns.



Encourage open-ended exploration. Let your child come up with his or her own ideas and solutions. Leave room for your child to make mistakes and learn from them.



Avoid complex instructions or concepts. Break down activities into manageable steps with clear instructions, depending on your child's age, so that he or she will not feel overwhelmed.

WHAT'S NEW

➤ Rex's Rawsome Party

The latest edition of the KidsSTOP™ Little Footprints adventure trail kit is designed for children aged four to

eight. To plan a birthday party for Rex the dinosaur, they must visit various KidsSTOP™ exhibits and complete STEAM-based missions. Along the way, they learn about the diet and habitat of the rainforest animals on Rex's guest list.

The kit consists of an interactive adventure booklet, a sticker pack and two mission bags containing a puzzle and diorama. To purchase, go to www.science.edu.sg/visit-us/kidsstop/for-families/little-footprints.



→ Three lucky readers will each receive a pair of weekend tickets (1 adult and 1 child) to the STEAM Festival in November. Get ready to explore the science of all things yummy through a delectable array of fun and immersive exhibits, workshops and other activities. More details are at for.edu.sg/sf2023.



Simply answer this question:
Name one factor to consider when planning STEAM experiences for children.

Submit your answer online at go.gov.sg/beanstalk-thrive-contest or scan this QR code.

Closing date: **25 August 2023**



THE BERRY BEST

Raise a toast to the nation with this delicious red-and-white drink full of natural goodness.

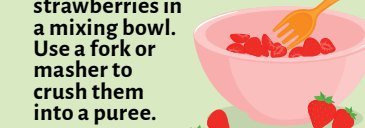
Strawberries and milk

SERVES
4



Follow these steps

- Place three-quarters of the strawberries in a mixing bowl. Use a fork or masher to crush them into a puree.
- Chop the remaining strawberries into small pieces with a knife. Add them to the bowl.
- Add sugar and mix well. Cover the bowl and chill in refrigerator for 1 to 2 hours.



TIP! For a more vivid colour, transfer the strawberry syrup to an airtight container and chill it overnight in the fridge.

- Divide the cooled strawberry syrup evenly into four glasses, and pour milk on top. Serve immediately.



- Before drinking, swirl gently with a spoon to mix the syrup and milk. Top off the drink with a Singapore flag on a skewer for National Day vibes!



A Lesson In Contrast

This recipe uses different techniques to prepare strawberries, allowing children to learn about **different textures** as they compare the smooth puree and the chunky pieces. They also get an introduction to **scientific principles** like the density of different liquids and how the separate colours combine when they mix the ingredients.

→ WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 280g fresh strawberries, rinsed and stems removed
- 35g sugar
- 4 cups milk



Strawberries



Milk



Sugar

Optimise Play

How to engage little ones who cannot yet read or are just starting to.



> Playing with Baby: Research-Based Play to Bond with Your Baby from Birth to One Year

By Laurie Hollman

Written by a psychoanalyst and winner of the Mom's Choice Awards, this book explores engaging play activities for parents to create a secure attachment with their babies even before the latter can communicate with language. Based on the latest developmental psychology and infant neuroscience research, it offers practical examples and guidance on pleasurable play and communication techniques to strengthen baby's overall development.

Contributed by Anisah Mohamed Sheriff, Associate Librarian, National Library Board



> What About X? An Alphabet Adventure

By Anne Marie Houppert and Daniel Wiseman
OverDrive link: nlb.overdrive.com/media/5733541

All the letters of the alphabet are going camping in this playful picture book! Everyone has chosen something to pack for the trip. A is packing apples, B is bringing binoculars, and so on. But X cannot think of what to bring — what is useful and starts with the letter X? Hence, X goes on a long journey in search of ways to contribute. After several twists and turns, X eventually learns that bringing himself is more than enough.

Contributed by Tan Li Lin, Librarian, National Library Board



READING TIME

Bond with your child through books! Some tips to make reading relaxed, animated and enjoyable:

- Let your child choose the books.
- Encourage your child to talk about the illustrations.
- Observe your child's facial expressions to see what he or she is drawn to in the book.

Families for Life's storybooks will be available in libraries from August 2023. For the e-versions, visit go.gov.sg/ffl-storybooks.

For more expert parenting resources, visit www.familiesforlife.sg/parenting.



FOR YOUR DAILY DOSE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD INSPIRATION...

Grow@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



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.



Start a career in EC at www.ecda.gov.sg/ShapeOurTomorrow, or scan the QR code



Follow our Facebook page to stay updated and informed on the EC sector. You can also engage in healthy discussions with fellow educators and parents.



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



Check out our Instagram page for exciting developments in the EC sector. Be inspired by what educators say about giving a good start to every child.



Follow us at [@beanstalksingapore](https://www.instagram.com/beanstalksingapore), or scan the QR code



Skimming It

> **Regular consumption of milk** is beneficial for children. It contains essential nutrients such as calcium, protein, vitamin D and riboflavin, which help promote growth and build strong bones and teeth. For children aged two years and above, plain low-fat milk is recommended over whole milk.

Find out more at www.healthhub.sg/live-healthy/1719/catch-up-on-calcium.



→ WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 10 medium-sized pebbles or stones
- Shoebox (with lid)
- Plain cardstock
- Craft paint (2 colours)
- Paint brushes
- Pencil
- Scissors
- Markers
- Ruler
- Glue stick

Three In A Row

Create a homemade Tic-Tac-Toe game as a Teachers' Day gift.

Follow these steps

1. Paint five pebbles the same colour, and the other five pebbles a different colour. Let dry. If needed, apply a second coat of paint.



TIP! Smooth, flat pebbles are ideal for painting. Wash to remove any soil or grit so that paint can adhere better.

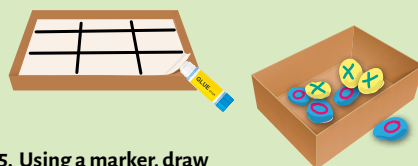
2. Place a shoebox lid on a cardstock sheet. Trace the edges of the lid with a pencil and cut out the shape.



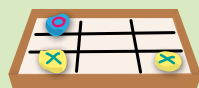
3. Use a marker and ruler to draw a Tic-Tac-Toe grid on the cardstock cut-out. There should be two vertical and horizontal lines each, equally spaced, for a total of nine squares/rectangles.



4. Glue the cardstock inside the shoebox lid. Let it dry.



5. Using a marker, draw an "X" on one set of painted pebbles and an "O" on the other. Start playing, and store the pebbles in the box once you're done!

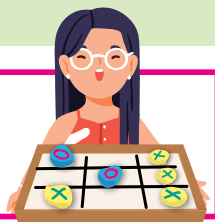


On The Grid

HEY PARENTS! Bring your child outdoors to look for small rocks or pebbles at the park, nature reserve or beach. Think of ways to recycle materials found at home (e.g., use buttons or bottle caps for game pieces; a small tin box or drawstring bag for the board; fabric scraps or washi tape for the grid pattern). To personalise the gift, your child can decorate the outside of the box or make a handmade Teachers' Day card.



Your child's masterpiece could be featured in the next issue of *Beanstalk!* Submit a picture of your child with his/her DIY Tic-Tac-Toe set online at go.gov.sg/beanstalk-craft-submission or scan this QR code.



5 TIPS TO ENGAGE CHILDREN IN MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

HOW TO KEEP THE DIALOGUE GOING.

Adult conversations with children tend to go along the lines of giving instructions (e.g., "Eat your dinner", "Put away your toys") or baby talk (e.g., "Do you want to mum-mum?"). But meaningful conversations do much more. In the early years, children are learning to put words together to build vocabulary, form phrases and sentences, and figure out speech patterns. Participating in back-and-forth exchanges is how they develop language and communication skills. Meaningful conversations help children learn about the world around them, process information, build trust and strengthen family bonds.



1 SPEAK AT THEIR LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING

While it may not be possible to have a dialogue with babies, you can engage them by making eye contact and smiling, narrate what you are doing, and describe their gestures and actions (e.g., "Oh, you are showing me that you are excited by moving your arms and legs"). Use repetition to help them associate certain words with actions or objects.



With toddlers, speak slowly, use short sentences, and expand on what they say. For example, if he says "cat" when he sees one, you might add descriptive words such as "That is a big orange cat".

Preschoolers have a wider vocabulary but may not be able to process large chunks of information. Break it down into short, simple sentences (e.g., "We are going to the park. It's hot today. Let's put on your hat").

4 REMOVE DISTRACTIONS
Put aside your phone or tablet, close your laptop and turn off the TV. Giving children your full attention demonstrates respect and shows that what they have to say is important to you. Maintaining eye contact and lowering yourself to their eye level also make them feel more connected to you.



2 CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE

Some situations lend themselves naturally to starting a conversation, such as preschool pick-ups, at the dinner table or bedtime storytelling. Gauge children's mood and energy levels, and save deeper conversations for another time if they are tired or hungry.

3 ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

Effective conversation-starters tend to be open-ended. Asking "What was your favourite part of preschool today?" rather than "Did you have fun in preschool today?" is a better way to engage children. Questions that start with "how" and "why" also work well as they invite more than one-word answers. Such questions encourage children to remember, explain, reason and evaluate, which enrich their thinking and language.



5 CONNECT AND INVOLVE YOURSELF


Children love stories. Share your past experiences of school and friends, or how you dealt with current challenges or even funny moments. This encourages them to open up about their own experiences and concerns. Follow their lead and demonstrate interest by saying things like "Tell me more", "Wow!" or "Go on ...". Encouraging smiles and affirming nods indicate active listening.

Conversations are a two-way street. Give children time to form and articulate their response. Let them finish what they have to say before asking questions. Resist the urge to interrupt, jump to conclusions or judge.

WE'VE GOT MAIL!

Parents share how they support various aspects of their children's holistic development.




 I love bringing my children outdoors, where they can play and learn while soaking in the sights and sounds around them. Being outdoors improves their sensory experiences, promotes social interaction, and teaches them to care for Mother Nature. For example, at the playground, my older son has started taking the initiative to pick up rubbish and put it in the bin. He has also learned the importance of sanitising his hands to prevent the spread of germs. It is about teaching him to care for himself as well as the environment.




JENNIFER TEO, mother of two, aged 2 and 10 months



 Emotions are part of life and should be validated. When our daughters throw a tantrum over something that is seemingly no big deal, my husband and I always remind ourselves to first acknowledge their feelings before responding to them. For instance, our younger child knocked over something her elder sister had been building. Instead of reprimanding the latter for crying, we acknowledged her frustration. Then, we explained that it was an accident and encouraged her to try again. This way, our daughters understand that we empathise with them. I hope this will strengthen our relationship and build strong parent-child bonds.

CAROL TAN-FUJITA, mother of two, aged 4 and 2

 We do regular check-ins to see whether our son is meeting his developmental milestones. We build on his interest in trains and buses, and use this strategy to further enhance his learning and skills. For instance, to develop his executive functioning skills, we plan a train route together from one place to another. To improve his numeracy and literacy skills, we count the number of stops and read the MRT station names. We work on his adaptive skills by teaching him how to navigate around an MRT station. Drawing out the train route also hones his fine motor skills.



SUE-LYNN TEO, mother of a boy, aged 4

LEARNING HOW CHILDREN LEARN

Parents, tell us how understanding your little one (e.g., temperament, interests) has influenced the way you communicate and support his or her learning and development. Share specific examples where you felt a sense of achievement in seeing your child develop. Attach a photo with your anecdote and your submission may appear in the next issue of *Beanstalk!*

Submit your story by 25 August 2023 at go.gov.sg/beanstalk-mailbag or scan this QR code.



We have three **Grab vouchers** to give away to the best letters!

fun times



FOLLOW YOUR SENSES

Nature is full of surprises! Take a walk outside and record the things you see, hear, smell and touch.

FIND SOMETHING...

smooth

rough

that smells good

that makes a noise

red

yellow

that moves

tall

round

Hey Parents!

Outdoor play is essential for children's holistic development and well-being. This activity provides playful sensorial experiences for children to explore and discover the world around them. It also lets them practise their observation and documentation skills, as well as acquire language and literacy. To expand children's vocabulary, parents can describe objects in nature, such as a "rough" tree bark or the "chirping" sound of a bird.

