

THRIVE



Sharing And Caring

How little ones make a big difference in the community



Flour Power

Bake a sweet and spicy loaf of goodness



It's In The Bag

Make a snazzy holder for preschool supplies



IN YOUR HANDS
Let your fingers do the walking

Beanstalk

OCT-DEC
2023

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HOW DO CHILDREN LEARN?

Transforming practices together

5
WAYS
to be savvy grandparents



TRANSFORMING THE EARLY YEARS



Educators will have increased protected time to better support well-being and professional development. The revised Early Years Development Framework, launched at ECCC, and the Quality Teaching Tool being developed will help educators plan meaningful experiences for children and strengthen teaching practices. In the coming years, we aim to enhance our educators' skills and competencies to better support our children's holistic development and ease their transition to primary schools.

At ECCC, we also celebrated the professionalism and achievements of our EC educators and preschools. I congratulate the strong slate of ECDA Awards recipients and newly SPARK-certified preschools. Your efforts symbolise the unwavering commitment of the fraternity to uphold professional excellence and quality standards.

Testament to the strength of home-preschool-community partnerships, I am heartened to see more preschools and parents joining the 'Start Small Dream Big' (SSDB) movement, which plants the seeds of volunteerism in our young ones. It is essential we start early to inculcate good values in our children.

Let us continue to work together to secure for every child a good start in life, while tending to the well-being and development of our educators!

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

Many early childhood (EC) educators would have attended the two-day Early Childhood Celebrations & Conference (ECCC) held in October 2023, with the theme of 'Learning How Children Learn, Transforming Practices Together'.

I hope you have gained valuable insights from the science of how children learn and how this can guide and transform practices. As educators, the impact you have on children's lives is significant as you lay strong foundational skills and shape their future. What you do matters!

ECDA celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. Everyone in the EC fraternity — educators, operators, parents and the community — has contributed towards the significant growth of the preschool sector today. We must continue to build on the good work done.

In particular, EC educators play a critical role in nurturing our children and laying a strong foundation in their early years. The initiatives shared at ECCC 2023 demonstrate the Government's strong commitment towards your well-being and professional development.



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WINNER 2023 APEX AWARDS FOR PUBLICATION EXCELLENCE
Beanstalk clinched the APEX 2023 Award of Excellence in the Print Media (Education & Training) category!

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TRANSFORM PRACTICES FOR QUALITY PAR EXCELLENCE

RAISING THE QUALITY AND COMPETENCIES OF EARLY CHILDHOOD PROFESSIONALS.



ECDA's Chief Executive, Mr Tan Chee Wee (centre), and Minister of State for Social and Family Development, Ms Sun Xueling (on his left), with ECDA Awards winners

The science of how children learn, applying child development theories to practices, and shifting away from a teacher-directed mindset to embrace child-centred approaches were key strands at the Early Childhood Celebrations & Conference (ECCC) 2023, themed 'Learning How Children Learn, Transforming Practices Together'. More than 1,000 educators attended the event, which was held on 27 and 28 October 2023 at Suntec Singapore Convention & Exhibition Centre.

Through keynote presentations and concurrent workshops, educators gained multiple perspectives on how to design curricula and environments that



Getting the ball rolling, literally, for the celebrations on Day 2 of ECCC 2023

engage children with diverse interests and abilities. A celebratory mood was also in the air, as ECDA rang in its 10th anniversary and celebrated three signature events — the 'Start Small Dream Big' (SSDB) Finale, the Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) Certificate Presentation Ceremony, and the ECDA Awards for Early Childhood Excellence (ECDA Awards) Ceremony.



VIEWS AND NEWS

In her keynote speech, Associate Professor Cathrine Neilsen-Hewett from the University of Wollongong, Australia, discussed how children's experiences and interactions in the first five years of life are critical to their future well-being and capacity for successful participation in society, with EC educators playing a crucial role as "brain architects" (page 4).

The second keynote speaker, Professor Tan Oon Seng from Nanyang Technological University, offered further insights into how children learn. Sharing the honeycomb model he developed, Prof Tan addressed the psychology of emotions, the power of habits, and other elements essential for nurturing the early years (page 5).

Mr Masagos Zulkifli, Minister for Social and Family Development, announced key changes for the EC sector. These included launching the Early Years Development Framework (EYDF) 2023; developing a Quality Teaching Tool based on evidence-based pedagogical practices; and ensuring educators have protected time to support their well-being and professional development (page 8). "Centres must value professional development so that educators can continue to grow and deepen their practice," said Mr Masagos.

EXPANDING KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCE BASE

With 35 concurrent workshops, educators had the opportunity to network and engage in small-group presentations and discussions. The workshops covered a range of topics such as practices to strengthen home-preschool-community partnerships, social-emotional learning and outdoor play (page 6).

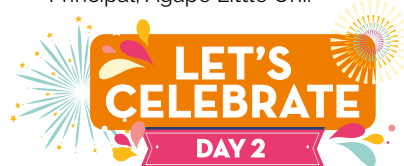
Minister Masagos Zulkifli announced key changes for the EC sector



Children exploring giant playground structures at the exhibition's ECDA booth

EC educators flocked to the exhibition zone comprising 18 booths, including a special showcase delineating ECDA's progress with the sector over the past 10 years. At the other booths, partners such as National Parks Board, Mandai Wildlife Group and National Library Board provided teasers of their programmes and resources, which educators could integrate into the children's classroom and learning experiences.

The first day of ECCC 2023 closed with a plenary session on the launch of EYDF 2023. Ms Melissa Goh-Karszen, Senior Lecturer, Early Childhood Education Programme, Singapore University of Social Sciences, moderated a panel discussion on key changes in the updated framework and how educators can apply it to transform their early years practices. Panellists included the two keynote speakers, Assoc Prof Neilsen-Hewett and Prof Tan; Ms Caroline Seng, Director, Professional Development & Standards, ECDA; Ms Cynthia Tan, Curriculum Specialist, NTUC First Campus; and Ms Lotus Lai, Cluster Principal, Agape Little Uni.



QUALITY STANDARDS AND PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE

This year, ECDA Awards were given out to 24 exemplary EC and early intervention (EI) educators, centre leaders and preschools by Ms Sun Xueling, Minister of State for Social and Family Development.

In her welcome remarks, Ms Sun noted that the EC sector has



ECDA's Chief Executive, Mr Tan Chee Wee (centre), and Minister of State for Education and Manpower, Ms Gan Siow Huang (on his left), with some of the newly SPARK-certified centres



The ECDA Awards display zone at the exhibition hall

grown and achieved much over the last decade through the concerted effort of educators, families and community partners. She also highlighted how good progress has been made in uplifting children who require additional support.

"The EC experience is just the beginning of a wonderful story, impacting and setting the stage for our children's future. I thank all educators for the extraordinary work you have done and will continue to do," said Ms Sun.

At the SPARK Certificate Presentation Ceremony, Ms Gan Siow Huang, Minister of State for Education and Manpower, congratulated all 127 preschools that were awarded SPARK Certification. Out of these, 25 centres achieved SPARK Certification (Commendation) status. This brings the total number of SPARK-certified preschools to 1,052, representing more than 50 per cent of existing preschools.

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Children gave a special performance to commemorate the SSDB 2023

Finale. Into its ninth edition, SSDB seeks to inculcate positive values such as kindness, compassion and respect in young children through community projects.

This year's movement, themed 'Many Helping Hands, Caring for Everyone', saw 77,000 children from 1,130 preschools volunteer in projects supported by 28 community partners. The children contributed 2.7 million hours of community service and raised over \$316,000 for charity, on top of other in-kind donations.



Cheering for fellow educators

EXTENDED HIGHLIGHTS

- See the full list of ECDA Awards winners and their showcase videos at go.gov.sg/2023-ecda-awards-recipients.
- See the full list of SPARK-certified centres at www.ecda.gov.sg/sparkinfo/iamSPARKCertified.
- Watch the SSDB 2023 Finale video at www.youtube.com/watch?v=dDT7POzV7ao.



ECCC 2023 panellists discussing the revised EYDF (from left): Ms Melissa Goh-Karssen (moderator), Ms Caroline Seng, Assoc Prof Cathrine Neilsen-Hewett, Prof Tan Oon Seng, Ms Cynthia Tan and Ms Lotus Lai

TIP FOR TEACHERS

Talking to families is not the only way educators can nurture the home-preschool partnership. Assoc Prof Neilsen-Hewett suggests sharing photographs of preschool activities with parents via online platforms. Parents can use these photos to ask children how their day went. She explains, "It empowers the child's voice and supports oral language development. It fosters rich connections between children and parents. And it still makes the connection between home and preschool."

about the different contexts which children are exposed to because those are literally shaping their brains. EC educators are key levers in shaping children's brains. They play a critical role in creating rich and responsive environments while ensuring children feel safe and secure.

WHAT ARE SOME POSITIVE EXPERIENCES THAT EC EDUCATORS NEED TO PROVIDE FOR YOUNG CHILDREN TO OPTIMISE THEIR BRAIN DEVELOPMENT?

Two of the strongest predictors of success are oral language skills and self-regulatory skills, which include control of behaviours and executive functioning. To create rich play experiences that foster those skills, educators can:

- Support opportunities for rich conversation, including reading stories and singing songs.
- Encourage children to persist in the face of challenges and solve problems.
- Provide experiences where children can demonstrate curiosity, explore, and ask questions.

“Executive functioning skills, self-regulatory capacity and oral language ability are what really set children up for success.”

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CATHRINE NEILSEN-HEWETT, Academic Director of the Early Years, School of Education, University of Wollongong, Australia



LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR CATHRINE NEILSEN-HEWETT DELVES INTO THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF EFFECTIVE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN SETTING YOUNG CHILDREN UP FOR SUCCESS.

HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE "SUCCESS" FOR CHILDREN?

Success is relative, and certainly, there's a cultural lens when we talk about success. But essentially, success is linked to children's social and emotional well-being as well as their cognitive capacity.

From an **adjustment perspective**, it encompasses children's capacities to adapt to their environment, form functional and responsive relationships, and integrate socially with their peers, neighbours and family.

From a **developmental perspective**, we look at characteristics predictive of success. By the end of the preschool years, are children able to communicate their needs and wants? Are they able to demonstrate developmentally appropriate social and emotional maturity? Can they self-regulate? We also look at cognitive skills, such as numeracy and literacy ability.

WHY ARE THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF A CHILD'S LIFE SO CRUCIAL IN ACHIEVING THESE SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES?

The brain develops faster during the first five years than at any other time in our lifespan. So, if children are exposed to rich and responsive contexts and meaningful relationships, they develop rich neural pathways in their brain that set them up for success and learning.

YOU REFER TO EC EDUCATORS AS "BRAIN ARCHITECTS". CAN YOU ELABORATE?

Our genes give us a kind of blueprint of how we are going to turn out. But how we ultimately turn out depends on the quality of our environments, and the quality of the relationships in those environments, in the first five years of life. We need to think

LEARNING MAP

PROFESSOR TAN OON SENG USES HIS 'HONEYCOMB MODEL' TO EXPLAIN HOW EARLY LEARNERS LEARN BEST.

According to Prof Tan, there are six macro-level factors underpinning effective EC development. These interconnected factors can be arranged to form a hexagonal grid — like the honeycomb structure after which his model is named.



“The emotional centre of the brain is closely intertwined with its cognitive and learning centres. Thus, it is always important to connect before we correct.”

PROFESSOR TAN OON SENG, Dean, Special Projects and Centre Director, Singapore Centre for Character & Citizenship Education, National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University

1 UNDERSTAND THE ECONOMICS.

It is most cost-effective to invest in the early years than at any later time. By some estimates or previous international research, every \$1 invested in the early years yields a return of \$2 to \$17. This is achieved through maximising skills and abilities, reducing social costs, and increasing the nation's productivity.

2 APPRECIATE EQUITY ISSUES.

Lack of quality EC care and education affects disadvantaged children disproportionately. If left unaddressed, gaps in life outcomes will only widen as they grow older. It is crucial that we uplift the bottom rungs of society so that no child is left behind.

3 EMBRACE THE ESSENCE.

Foundations laid during the early years make a huge difference for a person's development and ability to flourish in the future. EC education should not be seen merely as a desire, but as a prerogative for setting children on the right path. The essence is about letting children enjoy their childhood and nurturing character dispositions.

4 BUILD THE SCIENCE AND ART OF EC EDUCATION.

EC education is grounded in structure and learning objectives,

yet also influenced by the child's feelings and opinions. The curriculum and pedagogy should be holistic. This means encouraging child-directed play and exploration, while mediating children's experiences towards desired outcomes.

5 EMPOWER EDUCATORS.

Educators need to be equipped with up-to-date knowledge on EC learning and be proficient designers of the learning environment. Supportive systems and policies should be in place to hone their professional development as well as manage their workload and burnout risks. At sector level, the EC profession needs to be accorded the recognition it deserves.

6 KNOW THE ECOLOGY.

A child exists in an ecosystem where different environments contribute to their development. Home and preschool are where children spend most of their time. Hence, close communication between parents and educators is important to ensure consistency and continuity in the child's learning and development across contexts.



POINTS OF INTEREST

Other takeaways from Prof Tan's talk.

> Emotions influence human actions, learning and behaviours.

Ensuring young children are well-regulated, happy and excited during learning is crucial for learning effectiveness and motivation. One of the biggest factors is a supportive and positive relationship, such as with their teachers.

> Power of habits versus novelty.

Our brains learn via two systems: patterning (habits and repeated experiences), and inquiry (novel objects and experiences). Rules and routines help children know what to expect and feel safe, understand appropriate boundaries, and learn to control their behaviours. Ambiguity and novelty help children learn new things. A balanced approach is key. For example, learning how to tie shoelaces (a motor skill) benefits more from habits and repetition, while novel experiences are required to develop problem-solving skills.



WORKSHOP HIGHLIGHTS



USING ASSETS-BASED APPROACH FOR A MORE EFFECTIVE HOME-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP WITH DISADVANTAGED FAMILIES

Children from disadvantaged families need intensive support. However, educators may find it challenging to build positive relationships with parents. In this workshop, participants learned how the assets-based approach offers a solution. Co-presenters Ms Juliet Tanuwira, Education & Development Lead at South Central Community Family Service Centre (SCCFSC), and her colleague, Mr Chan Xian Jie, share more.

> CHALLENGES FACED BY FAMILIES

- **Work demands and time.** Parents risk losing income when they miss work to attend parent-teacher meetings. Some employers do not offer childcare leave. Consequently, parents may experience difficulties balancing work and family responsibilities.
- **Cumulative effect.** Challenges often have a domino effect. For instance, when one child falls ill, other children in the family may become ill as well. This creates a cycle of health-related issues and absenteeism, impacting the family's well-being.
- **Physical and mental health.** Many parents struggle with their own health due to adverse childhood experiences, or a lack of social and extended family support.

> HOW TO DRIVE IMPROVEMENT

The assets-based approach aims to empower families and communities.

- Rather than merely helping or donating resources to disadvantaged families, **recognise the strengths and resources** they possess. This approach does not focus on deficiencies. Instead, it views families as resilient and capable of addressing challenges.
- **Seek community champions** within the local neighbourhood who can be role models and promote effective practices to others. Emphasising the strengths and resources within families and communities leads to more sustainable solutions.



(Above and below) SCCFSC runs activities for preschool-aged children at its centre, creating an informal setting to observe them and share developmental concerns with educators and families



> TIPS FOR EDUCATORS

Switch to the assets-based approach with these strategies.

- **Expanding perspectives.** Instead of focusing solely on children, embrace a holistic view that considers the child within the context of their family and community. This broader perspective recognises the assets within families, and their capacity to support their children's development.
- **Practical interaction.** Start conversations by asking parents how they are doing. It shows a genuine concern for the family's well-being. Share and celebrate small milestones achieved by the child with the family. This creates positive reinforcement and a sense of accomplishment. Work with parents to address challenges arising in a child's learning or behaviour. Set realistic goals and encourage progress in small, manageable steps.



Workshop participants learning how to use the Anger Volcano activity to improve children's self-regulation skills

WAGGA®: A RESOURCE FACILITATING SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING WITH CHILDREN

Social-emotional learning (SEL) enables children to acquire knowledge and skills to develop healthy identities, manage emotions, have empathy for others, establish and maintain friendships and relationships, and make good decisions. Children with such competencies are able to stay calm during frustrating situations, and less likely to engage in challenging behaviours.

In this workshop, participants picked up strategies on how to weave SEL into the preschool curriculum using the Wagga book series. Developed by a team of occupational therapists and psychologists from the Department of Child Development at KK Women's and Children's Hospital (KKH-DCD), the Wagga stories help children build core SEL competencies — namely social awareness, self-regulation and problem-solving skills. Ms Eunice Lee, a Senior Psychologist at KKH-DCD who led the workshop, elaborates.



Introducing KKH-DCD's Wagga book series for children

> LESSONS IN THE STORY

Wagga is a cute monster who often does not understand how to play fair, work with others, or calm down when angry. As the stories develop, Wagga learns to problem-solve and uses his newly acquired skills to achieve desirable outcomes.

Educators can read the Wagga books and ask children to reflect on the character's behaviour. Suitable for ages four and above, these stories have a local flavour to help children identify with the situations Wagga encounters. The books can also be used in one-on-one sessions for children who need additional support.

> EXPLORE WITH ACTIVITIES

A few of the stories contain follow-up, hands-on learning activities. For example, in *Wagga Learns to Cool Down*, a big picture of an 'Anger Volcano' with different colour levels is provided. Educators read out a scenario, then children indicate how angry they would be by writing their names on the corresponding volcano level. From this, they learn that individuals can react differently when facing similar situations. Educators and children can also discuss ways to regulate their emotions.

The Wagga books are available at eresources.nlb.gov.sg.

Play In Nature

Playgrounds usually have swings, slides and other man-made structures. The nature playgrounds set up by the National Parks Board (NParks), however, capitalise on natural elements such as rocks, sand and trees. This was the topic of a joint workshop by NParks and the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS), 'Creating Meaningful Play and Learning Experiences for Children at the Nature Playgardens'.

Research has shown that nature-rich settings help children feel relaxed, happy and free to imagine. In an unstructured environment like a nature playground, children are empowered to take charge of their learning and use items such as sticks and leaves to explore and create new play ideas.

Lead presenter Dr Sum Chee Wah, Associate Professor and Head, Master of Early Childhood Education Programme, SUSS, shares some tips for educators when organising a field trip to a playgarden:

- > Take advantage of the unique characteristics found in nature. Instead of taking a lesson plan designed for the classroom outdoors, consider what playgarden elements are present to support children's holistic development.
- > Encourage children to select natural materials for their play and decide how they want to play with them.
- > Collaborate and co-learn with the children. Scaffold their understanding by asking questions such as "What do you think will happen if ...?" or "How do you know that ...?".

For a full list of NParks' nature playgardens, visit www.nparks.gov.sg/gardens-parks-and-nature/nature-playgardens.

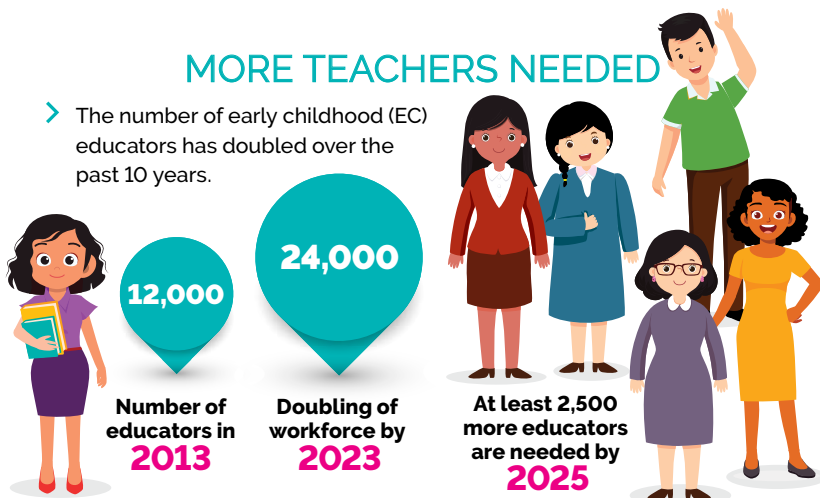


MAKING GREAT STRIDES

RECOGNISING OUR PRESCHOOL EDUCATORS AND PROGRESSING TO THE NEXT CHAPTER IN THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SECTOR.

MORE TEACHERS NEEDED

> The number of early childhood (EC) educators has doubled over the past 10 years.



ENHANCED WORKING CONDITIONS

EC educators can look forward to these improvements that will take place progressively.

- > From 2024, Teachers' Day and Children's Day will be designated as **preschool holidays**.
- > In addition, preschools will be allowed to close for six days as "**development days**" to focus on educators' development.
- > From 1 January 2025, educators will enjoy a **five-day work week** as childcare centres will no longer be required to operate on Saturdays.



SHARPENING FOCUS AND SKILLS

EC educators will have greater guidance on planning and designing learning experiences as well as pedagogical practices.

> EARLY YEARS DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK (EYDF) 2023

The EYDF 2023 supports educators in building strong foundations for children from birth to 3 years, with the following key changes:

- ➔ Greater alignment between the EYDF and the Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework
- ➔ Emphasis on four areas of development (cognitive, communication & language, physical, social & emotional) with developmental goals
- ➔ Introduction of five new guiding principles to guide educators in planning and implementing meaningful experiences for children

> QUALITY TEACHING TOOL (QTT)

Currently being developed, educators can use the QTT to:

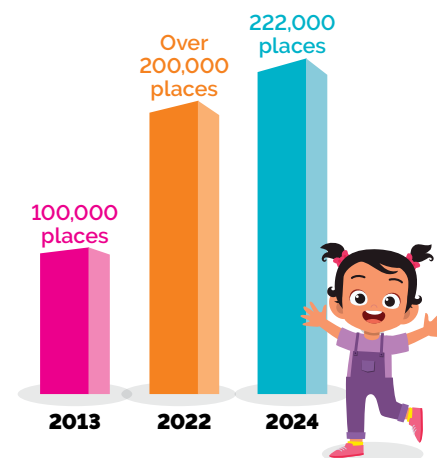
- ➔ Design meaningful learning experiences
- ➔ Facilitate quality teacher-child interactions
- ➔ Evaluate their own pedagogical practices to build on strengths and identify areas for professional growth and development



ECDA TURNS 10: OUR MILESTONES

- 2013**
 - The **ECDA Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Development**, held annually, recognises exemplary EC and early intervention (EI) educators, centre leaders and preschools with innovative teaching and learning practices.
- 2015**
 - The **ECDA Fellows** programme identifies pinnacle EC leaders to drive sectoral improvements and inspire the EC fraternity. Currently, there are 23 ECDA Fellows.
- 2016**
 - The **Skills Framework for Early Childhood** outlines job skills and competencies, along with career pathways and opportunities for EC professionals.
 - The **KidSTART** programme equips parents with skills and knowledge to support children's holistic development. To date, it has benefitted more than 6,200 children from lower-income families.
- 2019**
 - The **Early Childhood Development Centres Act** brings childcare centres and kindergartens under a single regulatory framework.
 - The **National Institute of Early Childhood Development** is set up to provide consistent quality training of EC educators.
 - EI services** under ECDA boost inclusion in preschools. Families of children with developmental needs receive more targeted support through the expanded **Early Intervention Programme for Infants and Children (EIPIIC)** and the **Development Support-Learning Support Programme (DS-LS)**.
- 2020**
 - The **Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK)** is enhanced with the introduction of the Quality Rating Scale for ages 0 to 6.
- 2021**
 - The **Early Childhood Industry Digital Plan** and **Early Childhood Digitalisation Grant** are launched. To date, half of all preschool operators have adopted digital solutions.
- 2022**
 - The **Leadership Development Framework** provides a common reference for EC leaders to attain the desired attributes, skills and competencies.
 - The **Early Childhood Learning Community** supports educators who are keen to become pedagogical leaders in key domain areas.
 - The **Nurturing Early Learners Framework** is updated for educators of children aged 4 to 6.
- 2023**
 - New revisions to the **Early Years Development Framework**, for educators working with children from birth to 3 years, are unveiled at the latest Early Childhood Celebrations & Conference.
 - More than 1,000 **Inclusion Coordinators (ICOs)** complete training. Each preschool can appoint an ICO to identify children with potential developmental needs, and to work together with parents and teachers.

A PLACE FOR EVERY CHILD



➔ In 2022, **over 200,000** full-day preschool places catered to every child (Singapore Citizen or Permanent Resident) aged 3 and above. EI outreach grew, with DS-LS covering over 50% of preschoolers aged 5 to 6, and EIPIIC numbering 4,400 places.

➔ By 2024, **22,000** full-day preschool places will be added to meet the growing demand for preschool services, with 1,400 new places under EIPIIC.

➔ By 2025, **80%** of preschool-aged children will have a place in Government-supported preschools, up from over 60% today. About 60% of preschoolers aged 5 to 6 will be covered under DS-LS.

Check out ECDA's 10th anniversary video here to see more highlights.
go.gov.sg/ecda10thvideo



ENRICHING JOURNEYS

A STUDY TRIP TO NEW ZEALAND GAVE ECDA FELLOWS MUCH TO REFLECT ABOUT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SCENE BACK HOME.



Dialogues with Wellington-based government agencies helped ECDA Fellows gain fresh insights on education policy

To understand more about New Zealand's early childhood (EC) landscape and how its curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, works in practice, the ECDA Fellows went on a week-long study trip to Wellington, New Zealand, in May 2023. *Te Whāriki* (which means "woven mat" in Māori) weaves together foundational principles and strands into a framework for holistic learning and development. It guides educators in designing a localised curriculum that is responsive to their own settings and the diverse needs of children and families.

RETHINKING SCHOOL READINESS

The Fellows visited government agencies supporting EC care and education, training institutes for EC educators, and several top preschools. Their itinerary also included New Zealand's national museum, which has exhibits curated for preschoolers.

"New Zealand's emphasis on preparing school for children, rather than preparing children for school, presents an insightful perspective," shares ECDA Fellow Ms Shirley Tan, Executive Director, Catholic Preschool Education (Singapore) Ltd. By taking this view on board, she believes educators in Singapore can better

calibrate and enhance their teaching and learning approaches.

Here are some key practices Ms Tan observed.

- **Respect the uniqueness of each child.** Instead of using a pre-set checklist, New Zealand educators document their observations through 'Learning Stories' to assess children's progress. These are written narratives that create a comprehensive learning and developmental profile of each child. The preschools also make it a point to know each child's family background via a pre-registration

questionnaire. "It's how educators understand the child's family life, customs and traditions, and why the child behaves in certain ways," says Ms Tan.

- **Scaffold the children's learning.** New Zealand educators use scaffolding techniques to help children learn and acquire new skills. For example, Ms Tan observed an assistant teacher guiding a three-year-old boy to pick up scissor-handling skills. She used gentle prompts ("Can I help you with this?"), role-modelling ("This is how you cut") and encouragement ("That's good!"). Through her warm and friendly tone, the child was eager to practise this new skill.



- **Build open and authentic relationships.** New Zealand educators regularly engage parents in informal discussions about their children by sharing the Learning Stories. Accreditation reports, preschool policies and procedures, and meeting minutes are also readily accessible to parents. Parents therefore become close partners with educators in supporting their children's learning and development.

BACK TO BASICS

After the study trip, Ms Tan set about reviewing the curricular and pedagogical practices at the seven preschools under her care. One area of improvement was for centre leaders to spend more time in the classroom to deepen their understanding of how children learn and hone their curriculum-planning skills.

Ms Tan points out, "As leaders, we have to keep fine-tuning and strengthening our knowledge and skills. Only then can we effectively guide and mentor our teachers, and strengthen their teaching and learning foundations." ●

Visiting local preschools to observe professional practices and network with New Zealand counterparts

RISKS OF PLAYING IT SAFE

Three ECDA Fellows — Dr Jacqueline Chung, Ms Stella Pereira and Ms Hephzi Tee — presented a workshop at this year's Early Childhood Celebrations & Conference, titled 'Daring Discoverers: Supporting Risky Play in Early Childhood'. It was inspired by their study trip, where children as young as three were allowed to handle woodworking tools in Wellington preschools. Dr Chung explains more.

- ➔ Risky play is any **play that is thrilling and exciting** and involves some risk or uncertainty. Examples include playing with real tools or on uneven surfaces.
- ➔ Risky play teaches children to **cope with a healthy degree of fear, stress and uncertainty**. They learn to 'read' environments that are less predictable and hone their decision-making and problem-solving skills. It builds resilience as children become more willing to step out of their comfort zone, face challenges, and deal with setbacks.
- ➔ **Healthy risky play** is any situation where adults and children (through the support of adults) are aware of known and potential hazards in the play space and recognise the risk of physical injury. Children learn to negotiate and make decisions during play, while adults supervise and encourage them to take chances beyond what they would normally do. Such activities include stacking blocks or tyres and climbing over them, jumping from one box to another, balancing on rocks over water, or fencing with sticks.
- ➔ **Unhealthy risky play** occurs when there is a lack of risk assessment or supervision by the adult, exposing children to danger and injury. It is irresponsible to let children do as they wish in play spaces without proper assessment, preparation and guidance.

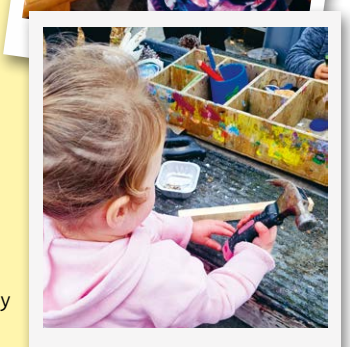
TO FACILITATE RISKY PLAY:

- Set boundaries while guiding children through progressive levels of risk, according to their different experiences and abilities.
- Encourage children to identify risks and discuss how to manage these together.
- Supervise children from a distance rather than hovering over them.
- Instead of forbidding children to do an activity, prompt them to think about it by asking questions such as "Does it feel steady?" or "Can you balance?"

TO ALLAY PARENTS' CONCERNS:

- Highlight the benefits of risky play and how a lack of exposure to it can affect children adversely as they grow older.
- Explain your risk assessment strategies to reassure parents that you have thought through the potential dangers.
- Share positive articles, photos, videos and testimonials from other parents and children.

Dr Jacqueline Chung is Academic Director at Anglican Preschool Services. Ms Stella Pereira is Cluster Director at The Little Skool-House International. Ms Hephzi Tee is Principal of Hebron Christian Preschool.



Woodworking projects promote healthy risky play in the early years



CHILDREN FIRST

DESIGNING AN ENGAGING CURRICULUM STARTS WITH UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD.



Teachers set up a learning space within the classroom to satisfy children's curiosity about light.

Running a large childcare centre like the 6,000 sqm E-Bridge Pre-School (20 Sengkang Square) presents its own set of challenges. Yet its scale provides plentiful opportunities to create a diverse and rich learning environment for children and educators. There are spacious classrooms and outdoor play areas such as a rooftop garden, sand pit and water zone, all designed to support children's learning and development.

FOCUS ON THE CHILD

E-Bridge Pre-School's programmes embrace the belief that children are curious, communicative, capable and confident individuals whose voices are to be heard and respected. Its guided-inquiry curriculum is founded on the idea that children's learning is a dynamic process that stems from their inquiries and experiences. Children are empowered to take ownership of their learning.



Digital microscopes allow young ones to examine objects in close detail.

"Creating a dynamic and engaging learning environment requires thoughtful planning, flexibility, and attention to the unique needs and interests of children," says senior centre leader Ms Angeline Goh. "We encourage children to pursue topics that intrigue them. When we place children's natural curiosity at the forefront, they become motivated to learn."

For instance, when educators noticed the children's interest in light and shadows, they developed a learning unit on light exploration and selected suitable materials such as different light sources and prisms for children to experiment with. Questions such as "What happens when you shine a light through this object?" and "Why do you think the shadow changed size?" sparked meaningful conversations, and fostered critical thinking and vocabulary development.

VERSATILE LEARNING SPACES

"Our learning spaces are intentionally set up to stimulate curiosity and encourage children to explore and wonder," says Ms Goh. For example, teachers merged the children's fascination with books and the outdoors to create an interactive 'Storywalk' experience. Pages of a book on nature or adventure

"I like going to the rooftop garden. We learn a lot about plants, plant seeds, and see the insects that live in the garden."

YUAN XINEN, 6

E-Bridge Pre-School (20 Sengkang Square) won the 2023 ECDA Outstanding Centre for Teaching & Learning Award! Scan here to watch the video. go.gov.sg/2023-ecda-awards-outstanding-centre-for-tnl-e-bridge



Playing in the sand pit develops physical, social-emotional and cognitive skills

were strategically placed along a nature trail or outdoor pathway, so children would encounter different parts of the story as they walked along the path. After the walk, teachers facilitated discussions to reinforce the children's comprehension and literacy skills.

Open-ended play is emphasised across various age groups. At the sand pit, infants are free to make sandcastles or engage in pretend cooking, while older children can build more complex structures together. Items from nature, such as flowers and stones, can also be brought into the classroom, either as materials for loose parts play or to study them closer under a digital microscope. ●

MINDSET MATTERS

Ms Goh's tips for creating a child-centred mindset among teachers.

- **Be flexible in lesson planning.** Continually observe and adapt the curriculum based on children's interests, abilities and developmental stages.
- **Create opportunities for partnerships and collaboration.** Hold dialogues for educators to discuss children's progress and follow-ups, as well as review and share good practices. Encourage parents to contribute observations and ideas.
- **Invest in professional development.** Allocate time and resources for educators to attend workshops, conferences and training sessions.

OPEN TO CHANGE

BREAKING AWAY FROM RIGIDITY IS THE KEY TO UNLOCKING CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY AND STRENGTHENING PARENT ENGAGEMENT.



Children create self-portraits based on their own ideas and choice of materials

Art nurtures children's creativity, and how the activities are conducted influences learning outcomes. At Little Footprints Preschool @ Woodlands 877, Senior Principal Ms Yvette Mae Rosete shares, "We continuously reflect on the art activities we plan for the children. We look out for any missed opportunities and rectify these in our follow-up plans."

Motivated by this sense of purpose and with the collective drive of the teachers, the centre went on to achieve SPARK Certification (Commendation) in 2023.

UNLEASHING CHILDREN'S CREATIVITY

Exposure to new ideas and strategies can help educators revisit and reinvent their teaching practices. Training, for



A parent sharing about her occupation as a nurse to the curious children

example, has helped them become more aware of designing open-ended activities that encourage creativity. For instance, a typical art lesson on pointillism would see educators selecting an image for children to recreate using this technique of applying small colourful dots. Now, children are encouraged to choose their own picture to paint in that style.

"The biggest challenge we faced was acknowledging the need to be open and adaptable in our teaching practices," says Ms Rosete. "We learned to embrace mess and uncertainty in how children express themselves, as it reflects their creativity and individuality."

PARENTS AS PARTNERS

Using the SPARK framework, the centre identified the need to further strengthen its partnership with parents. "Although we had good relationships with parents, we felt more could be done to partner them in class activities," says Ms Rosete. "To do this effectively, we needed to overcome our discomfort of having parents around while conducting activities, and the fear of being judged."

Beyond the usual parent-teacher conferences, the preschool now

A TEAM EFFORT

Ms Rosete's top three tips for centre leaders working towards SPARK certification.

- 1 Remember the purpose.** SPARK assessment serves as a guide for centres to work on areas for growth and build on strengths to raise centre quality.
- 2 Make documentation meaningful.** Think through how documentation can be part of your daily operations and aid your centre's improvement journey.
- 3 Involve teachers.** When teachers understand the rationale driving certain practices or why change is needed, they are more proactive and engaged in the improvement journey.

invites parents to the classes twice a term, where they assist teachers in reading stories, singing nursery rhymes, or giving talks about their occupations. Mindful of the constraints faced by working parents, the centre also encourages them to participate virtually.

The children are delighted when they see their parents act as 'teacher for the day'. Parents in turn can have a firsthand experience of the centre's curriculum and environment. Says mother of two, Mdm Wendy Goh, "The preschool actively involves parents in classroom activities, so I know what and how my two boys are learning. In terms of their social-emotional development, they have become more independent and better at expressing their emotions over the past year." ●



The children's pointillism artworks



MORE SPARK! SPARK-certified centres, such as Little Footprints Preschool @ Woodlands 877, are recognised for their continued efforts in providing quality preschool education. See www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo for more information on the SPARK framework.



Setting up shots for claymation videos cultivates patience and digital know-how.

MODEL MAKERS

TAKING CLAY PLAY FURTHER WITH STOP-MOTION ANIMATION GIVES CHILDREN A BOOST IN DEVELOPING 21ST-CENTURY SKILLS.

Preschool teacher Ms Reyna Cabalhug is always exploring new ways to engage children meaningfully. She first came across stop-motion photography in a training workshop, which led her to research more about 'claymation' — a stop-motion animation technique that uses movable clay figures.

"I was intrigued by how claymation can help children cultivate their sense of agency as well as build essential thinking and communication skills," recalls Ms Cabalhug, a teacher at PCF Sparkletots @ Ayer Rajah-Gek Poh Blk 41. She spearheaded a year-long project to integrate claymation into the preschool's curriculum for the Nursery 2 and Kindergarten classes. This project saw the preschool win an ECDA Early Childhood Innovation Award (Distinction) in 2023.

BUILDING KEY SKILLS

The children worked in pairs or groups to develop their own storylines and characters. They then moulded clay characters based on their drawings and took pictures one frame at a time to create the claymation videos.

"I was amazed at the children's focus and how engaged they were throughout the process. They worked

together and built on each other's ideas," says Ms Cabalhug.

The process provided children with different learning opportunities. She elaborates, "Writing the storylines engaged their creative thinking and language skills. Moulding the clay improved their fine motor skills. Working in small groups enhanced



Aqil moulding a clay turtle for his group's story

"I like claymation because I can form my characters the way I want. I can decide the shape, size and colour of clay to use."

AQIL ARYAN BIN RIDWAN, 6



Children using a tablet to edit stop-motion photos

their communication, collaborative and social-emotional skills. The children also showed confidence in presenting their projects during Show & Tell sessions."

INTEGRATING TECH

Another useful 21st-century skill that the project imparted was digital literacy. Children explored the use of digital cameras to snap stop-motion photos. They did simple photo and video editing and voice recording using apps such as iMovie, InShot and Microsoft PowerPoint. They even learned how to add transitions, music and filters to their videos.

The project also trained children's patience as it took time to set up the clay figures for each shot. It was especially challenging if they missed a frame and had to redo the set-up.

Although it progressed slowly at times, children enjoyed the process immensely. For example, Jena Tang, 6, made a clay octopus for her team's story about marine creatures playing tag in the sea. "I liked using the iPad to edit photos because I could choose different filters to make the photos look bright," she says.

Observing the impact of the project on children's learning, the teachers decided to dedicate a permanent space at the preschool for a claymation learning centre. Equipped with digital gadgets, plasticine of different colours, and writing and drawing materials, it allows children to continue to work on their stop-motion projects. ●

Visit go.gov.sg/2023-ecda-awards-innovation-project-showcase or scan here to check out the full list of winners for the 2023 ECDA Early Childhood Innovation Award.

RAISING GLOBAL CITIZENS

THROUGH ACTION AND CREATIVITY, CHILDREN BELIEVE IN THEIR POTENTIAL TO SHAPE A BETTER WORLD.



Making their self-designed treehouse for displaced hornbills a reality

Pre-school By-The-Park (Dunearn) believes that children can play a role in addressing global issues, such as preserving the natural environment and rescuing endangered species. This initiated an annual project, 'Make Believe', for which the centre received an ECDA Early Childhood Innovation Award (Distinction) in 2023. The children used STEAM concepts — the integration of science, technology, engineering, the arts and mathematics — to work on solutions to protect wild animals and the places where they live.

"The project encouraged children's creativity and helped them learn about the importance of environmental conservation and wildlife protection," says senior Mandarin teacher, Ms Steph Chu. "It gave them a sense of empowerment — a belief that they can make meaningful contributions to address the planet's challenges."

INGENIOUS SOLUTIONS

Driven by the mantra, "If I believe it, I can make it", children worked in groups to create secure habitats for animals that had lost their homes. They embarked on a self-directed

learning journey, from brainstorming ideas to searching for materials and constructing prototypes. When challenges arose, educators provided resources such as videos, picture books and news articles, which the children used to find answers on their own.

For example, Ms Chu's group of K2 children came up with the idea of a 'Hydrotter Drone' to save otters affected by water pollution. Made from recycled materials such as cardboard boxes, toilet rolls and plastic bottles, their prototype machine would be powered by clean energy and be able to fly over the sea, collect floating trash, and transport it to a recycling plant for sorting. To avoid startling marine creatures, the garbage collection boxes at the ends of the drone arms were designed to resemble turtles and fish. There was even a water filtration feature to ensure clean water.

"The prototype initially had two legs for support, but this contraption was unstable and damaged the drone's body," Ms Chu recalls. "Instead of pointing out the flaws, I showed the children photos of famous structures like the Eiffel Tower. By thinking things through and experimenting, the children discovered that adding two more legs would make the drone stable."

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Families were invited to a Make Believe Day, where children



Another group invented a floating machine with motion sensors to alert turtles to poachers



The children's initial blueprint for their Hydrotter Drone

unveiled their inventions and performed skits in both English and Mandarin.

Ms Jo Ong was very impressed with what her daughter Sophia Tan, then in K1, helped create: a treehouse made from used boxes for displaced hornbills. "Besides providing used boxes, I sewed costumes for the skit and made props such as a woodcutter's axe out of scrap material," says Ms Ong. "Through this project, Sophia learnt about deforestation and its threat to wildlife. I am pleased that she has become more environmentally conscious." ●

WELL-ROUNDED DEVELOPMENT

Ms Chu lists a few other positive impacts of the Make Believe challenge.

- **Empathy.** Thinking about issues from diverse perspectives, such as from animals' point of view, helps children understand the needs and feelings of others.
- **Conflict-resolution skills.** Disagreements between teammates provide opportunities for them to discuss and reach a consensus.
- **Resilience.** Faced with design constraints or other setbacks, children can explore new approaches and learn from failures confidently.



Q&A PRACTICAL WAYS TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND THINKING.

FOR PARENTS



Q How do I cultivate positive habits in my child to support his learning and development?

Establishing **consistent and predictable routines** for your children around sleep, meals, play and other activities forms a stable foundation for them to learn and develop.

Another way is to encourage your children to help with **household chores** from around two years old. These tasks should be appropriate for their age and developmental stage. It is a great way to improve children's concentration and their ability to stay on task. They can also strengthen their motor skills and develop a sense of responsibility and self-esteem as they gain confidence in their abilities.

Here are some learning opportunities in doing household chores:

- > **Sorting and folding clean laundry** sharpen children's organisational and fine motor skills. Children aged two to three can match socks, while those aged four and above can be given more complex tasks such as sorting the laundry by family member and folding clothes.
- > **Dusting spaces** involves breaking down tasks sequentially and helps develop visual memory and problem-solving skills. Two- to three-year-olds can dust clear spaces such as low tables and chairs, while older children can clean areas that require small items to be removed and put back.
- > **Taking out the trash regularly.** Suitable for children aged four to five, this chore helps them understand the concept of a recurring schedule.



FITRIANI KWIK is a Senior Psychologist at the Child Development Unit, Khoo Teck Puat – National University Children's Medical Institute, National University Hospital. With over 12 years of experience, she assists parents and caregivers of children under seven years old with developmental needs.



ZAITON BTE MOHD ALI is an Executive Principal and General Manager at Iyad Perdaus Ltd. She is an ECDA Fellow and serves as a Board Member of the National Institute of Early Childhood Development. She was a recipient of the 2020 SkillsFuture Fellowship award.

Q How do I teach children to think about their thinking?

Teaching children to think about their thinking, or metacognition, helps them become aware of their thought processes and actively participate in their own learning.

Some scenarios where educators can guide children in their thinking include the following:

1. **During block-building**, you might ask, "What are you building?" or "Where would you like to place the rectangular piece and why?". These questions encourage children to pause, process and respond.
2. **After children complete a drawing**, facilitate their thinking with questions such as "Why did you decide to use those colours?" or "What if you had used a different colour?". This helps them think about possibilities and analyse their decision-making process.
3. **When reading two similar stories**, ask children which one they liked better and why. This prompts them to reflect on their preferences.

When children learn to think about thinking, it increases their motivation and curiosity. They feel more in control of their learning and have the confidence to express their ideas and thoughts. It hones their critical thinking skills and sets a robust foundation for lifelong learning.

FOR EDUCATORS



THRIVE

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



learn

grow

play



18 Teaching children to be kind and compassionate



21 'Tis the season to bake a Yuletide loaf



22 Tote preschool supplies in a cute bag



DSA's Ms Sulyanna (right) and Bryan, an adult with Down syndrome (centre), joined My First Skool children in creating handmade resin art

KAMPUNG SPIRIT

Community engagement provides children valuable first-hand lessons on kindness, respect and embracing differences.

Children learn when they volunteer in the community and contribute to society. More than just an opportunity to do good, it opens their eyes and minds to the world beyond what they know. In the process, they learn important values such as kindness, care and empathy.

Through ECDA's 'Start Small Dream Big' (SSDB) movement, preschools collaborate with community partners on projects that encourage children to give back to society. Two such organisations are Singapore Art Museum (SAM) and Down Syndrome Association (DSA), long-time supporters of SSDB who also participated in the 2023 edition, themed 'Many Helping Hands, Caring for Everyone'.

Ms Pauline Cheong, Assistant Director of Learning at SAM, notes, "Children need to understand that no action is too little. Something that starts as a small act of kindness can have a profound effect on communities." To support children's learning, SAM developed a resource kit that uses contemporary art to help preschoolers understand the differing life experiences of individuals with visual impairment.

In the same vein, DSA works closely with preschools to create greater awareness of the Down syndrome community and the challenges they face. "We want to inculcate compassion and inclusivity, starting with young children. Preschools are a great place to start as we can engage the children as well as their teachers and parents," says Ms Nur Sulyanna Sumali, an Executive (Volunteer Management & Community Partnership) at DSA.

RAISING AWARENESS AND FUNDS

One preschool that DSA partnered for SSDB 2023 was M.Y World @ Woodlands. Ms Sulyanna kicked things off with a virtual talk about people who have Down syndrome and ways of supporting them. The preschool then planned activities to continue building children's awareness.

Kindergarten classes used letter templates provided by the Singapore Kindness Movement to write letters of encouragement to DSA beneficiaries. Wanting to be included in this effort, the younger children spent art and craft sessions making items to raise funds for DSA. Toddlers created colourful bookmarks, while nursery children hand-painted tote bags and decorated plant pots. These were sold to their parents, raising a total of \$617.

On his tote bag, Chew Kai Xing, 4, wrote the word 'kindness' and painted three heart shapes to represent his parents and himself supporting children with Down



M.Y World toddlers making fingerprint art bookmarks



M.Y World children's artworks, including Kai Xing's tote bag (left), supported a good cause



syndrome. His father, Mr Chew Han Seong, says, "The SSDB project made Kai Xing more aware, thoughtful and welcoming of children with disabilities. While walking around the neighbourhood one day, he said we needed to make a slope so they could walk up more easily."

ART FOR GOOD

My First Skool at Blk 209 Ang Mo Kio also partnered DSA for its SSDB project. DSA brought a group of volunteers and a beneficiary — Bryan, an adult with Down syndrome — to the preschool for a series of resin art sessions. Besides making resin keychains together, the children and visitors played and danced with one another.

English teacher Ms Miza Afiqah Binte Mahdi observed the children happily interacting with their new friends, taking turns to place objects such as dried flowers and beads in the resin mould. "In their eyes, Bryan was no different from any other person learning and playing alongside them. In fact, the children's questions were focused on the fun activities they were doing together," she says.

Funds from the resin art pieces, sold at a preschool fundraising event, will be channelled to various DSA initiatives, such as its Children and Adult Education Services and its Enrichment Programmes.

FROM ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

As an extension of its art-for-charity project, the My First Skool centre tapped on SAM's SSDB resource kit. This kit was based on the SAM Touch Collection — a series of

SAMily Funday
2 DEC (SAT) 2023, 1PM TO 5PM
LEVEL 1, SAM AT TANJONG PAGAR DISTRI PARK

This bi-monthly event offers a family-friendly line-up for all ages, from craft activities to exhibitions. Try your hand at puzzles, get creative with drawing, or join a storytelling session for ages 4 and above. Register at bit.ly/SAM-Events.



“We should not ignore people with disabilities. We should make them feel welcome and be patient with them.”

CHEANG YUN JIA, K2, My First Skool at Blk 209 Ang Mo Kio

artwork adaptations designed to make contemporary art more accessible to persons with disabilities such as visual impairment. The museum had also previously organised an exhibition titled *Hello Future: Let's Go Hand in Hand*, which featured the works of preschoolers inspired by the same collection.

Children were introduced to *Utama's Kitty* — a smaller version of local artist David Chan's wood-and-steel lion sculpture, *Utama's Cat*, and one of the pieces in the collection — through the resource kit. An image of the lion was embossed on a card, and children had to guess what the picture was by rubbing their fingers over the raised surface with their eyes closed. A QR code then directed them to SAM's website, where they learned how the artist was inspired by the legend of Sang Nila Utama to create *Utama's Cat*, and how he adapted his life-sized installation to cater to persons with disabilities.

Ms Cheong says, "Although our activity was simple, it helped children better understand the challenges faced by persons with disabilities. It provided an interactive way to learn more about inclusivity and put themselves in another's shoes."

Utama's Kitty is revealed by rubbing the embossed lion image with a pencil



LOVE ALL, SERVE ALL

Parents, make serving the community a family affair! Here are three ideas to bond with your child while contributing meaningfully to society.

- Lend neighbours a hand.** Children observe and model your actions. Make it a habit to perform kind acts, such as pressing the lift button or holding the door open for someone, and encourage them to do the same.
- Make care packs for essential workers.** Encourage children to show appreciation to delivery riders, construction workers and cleaners in your estate. They can put a few favourite snacks in little bags and hand these out.

- Get involved in preschool events.** Help out with preschool fundraisers or volunteer for class activities. It shows children the value of reaching out and belonging to a community.



win



→ Three lucky readers will each receive a 'Mad for SAM' tote bag.

Simply answer this question:
Name one artwork adaptation that can be found in the SAM Touch Collection for visually-impaired audiences.

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

Closing date: **22 December 2023**



Breaking Bread

Share the warmth and sweetness of the season.

Spiced apple loaf

MAKES 1



Follow these steps

1. Preheat oven to 180°C. Grease a loaf pan and line with parchment paper.

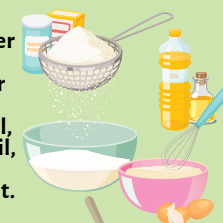


TIP! Leave some parchment overhang on the sides, for easy removal of the baked loaf.

2. Toss diced apples with cinnamon, sugar and salt. Set aside.



3. Sift flour, baking powder and baking soda together in a bowl. In a separate bowl, whisk eggs, oil, yoghurt and vanilla extract.



4. Pour wet batter into the dry ingredients and mix until smooth. Gently stir in apples and chopped nuts.



5. Pour batter into the pan and smooth out the top. Bake for 1 hour. Cover loosely with foil and bake for another 25 minutes, or until a skewer inserted into the loaf comes out clean.



6. Remove pan from the oven and let it cool for about 15 minutes. Then, lift the loaf out of the pan and let it cool completely before slicing.



Cooking is a great **sensory experience** that introduces children to shapes, colours, smells and textures. Use kitchen sessions to build children's **vocabulary** and hone their **motor skills**. Assign tasks suited to their **age and ability** — let younger ones stir the mixture, while older ones can crack the eggs.

→ WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- 2 large apples, cut into 1cm cubes
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- ½ cup brown sugar
- ¼ tsp salt
- 1½ cups plain or all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp baking powder
- ½ tsp baking soda
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- ¾ cup plain low-fat yoghurt
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 1 cup nuts, roughly chopped (e.g., walnuts, pecans)



Fuel Up On Fibre

► **Try this healthy baking tip:** Replace at least 10 per cent of white flour in the recipe with whole-wheat flour. Together with apples and nuts, it will add more fibre to your child's diet. Your child will take longer to chew, eat more slowly and feel fuller for longer, preventing weight gain.

Find out more at www.healthhub.sg/live-healthy/more-fibre-for-a-fit-and-fabulous-you.

Play Mates

How fun and games help children learn core life skills and values.



> Why Play Works: Big Changes Start Small

By Jill VIALET
OverDrive link: nlb.overdrive.com/media/6582934

A social entrepreneur, Jill VIALET explores how educators and parents can harness the power of play and build learning environments that enable children to thrive. This book puts together ways in which play can be a tool for bringing out the best in children, and shows how to incorporate play into spaces and day-to-day activities.

Contributed by Gladys Tan, Librarian, National Library Board



> Let's Be Friends

By Nicole Ong, Natalie Wong, Nadiah B. Afrina Masrani, Ragnild Ong, Regina Wong and Alicia Chan

This heartwarming picture book is written and illustrated by students from Singapore Polytechnic's Media, Arts & Design School. It follows Tapir, who goes around looking for an animal friend to play with. However, he faces trouble finding the perfect buddy because everyone is not like him. On this quest into the forest, young readers not only meet a variety of animals, but also learn to embrace differences in friends.

Contributed by Neo Wan Ting, Librarian, National Library Board



PERK UP YOUR EARS

Children often have lots of questions when they play. This is because they want to practise their new language skills and are curious about the world around them. Listening well is important as it makes your child feel that what he or she is thinking and saying matters to you, which in turn strengthens the parent-child bond.

To show your child that you are listening:

- Get down to your child's level, make eye contact, and give your full attention.
- Nod, smile, and show affection such as hugging and holding hands.
- Play close attention to your child's body language and behaviour, not just his or her words. It can reveal a lot about your child's emotions.

For more expert parenting tips, 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





→ WHAT YOU'LL NEED



Bag Of Fun

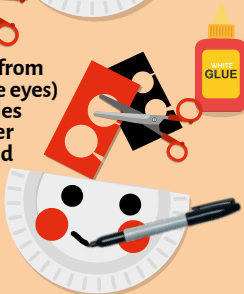
Gear up for class with this back-to-school craft.

Follow these steps

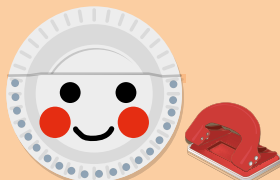
1. Cut off about one-quarter from one paper plate.



2. Cut out two circles from black paper (for the eyes) and two larger circles from red/pink paper (for the cheeks), and glue on the back of the paper plate. Draw on a smile with a marker.



3. Position the two plates with the insides facing each other. Holding them together, punch holes about an inch apart along the edges where both plates meet.

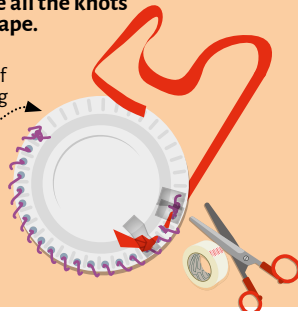


4. Cut a long piece of yarn. Knot it on one end of the plates, weave it through the holes, and tie a knot at the other end.



5. Cut ribbon to desired strap length. Knot it on both sides of the bag at the back. Secure all the knots with tape.

Back of the bag



6. Your bag is ready! Use it to store classroom stationery (e.g., pencils, erasers, rulers) or other small items.



Bag Of Many Colours

HEY PARENTS! Through this craft, children can nurture their **creativity**. Let them design or decorate the bag freely using materials found at home (e.g., paint, crayons, pipe cleaners, glitter, cotton wool, buttons). The extra flap on the back plate can also be folded over to close the bag. Through this craft, children can also learn to take care of their belongings and develop **organisational skills**.



Snap & Show

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



5 TIPS TO BE A BETTER GRANDPARENT

HOW OLDER ADULTS CAN FOSTER CLOSE INTER-GENERATIONAL CONNECTIONS WITHIN FAMILIES.

Celebrating Our Grands' is an annual initiative by Families for Life that honours that special relationship across the generations. While the occasion fell on 7 October this year, every day is as good a time as any to cherish this unique bond.

Here are some things grandparents (or older extended family members, such as grandaunts and granduncles) can do to strengthen bonds and express their **love, care and concern, commitment and respect** towards the little ones in their families. Dr Daniel Fung, a mental health expert and a grandfather himself, offers a firsthand account.



Dr Daniel Fung with his wife and three grandchildren



4 BE MINDFUL OF BOUNDARIES, ROLES AND EXPECTATIONS

Honour your children's parenting style, even if it differs from your own. "Where there are disagreements about how to manage grandchildren, the parent's views should always be respected to maintain a harmonious family relationship," advises Dr Fung. "For instance, if the parents dictate screen times and sleeping habits, grandparents must follow the rules with the grandchildren."

1 BE PRESENT AND PROACTIVE

Make the time and effort to connect with your grandchildren. Initiate regular interactions such as weekly family gatherings over meals or Zoom calls. "We have created play areas at home, for our grandchildren to play in whenever they visit," says Dr Fung. "This communicates a sense of safety and comfort, and allows the grandchildren to express themselves fully."

3 BE THE SOURCE OF CULTURAL VALUES AND TRADITIONS

Help your grandchildren respect and preserve their cultural heritage. This is important, explains Dr Fung, as it provides the child with a sense of identity, meaning and purpose in the long term. "For instance, you can speak to your grandchildren the language of their ancestors. What better way to transmit culture and history?" he says.

2 BE SUPPORTIVE OF ADULT CHILDREN

Cultivating a positive relationship between grandparent and parent influences the former's relationship with grandchildren. "Be aware of how you treat your children as fully responsible adults," says Dr Fung. "Allow their opinions to be heard and give advice only when asked."



5 BE AFFECTIONATE, NOT OVERINDULGENT

Jump at every opportunity to spend time with the grandchildren. "Having quality time playing, reading and doing things together is priceless," notes Dr Fung. "Show plenty of physical affection by kissing and cuddling your grandchildren. Praising efforts rather than outcomes will nurture a growth mindset that balances love without spoiling the grandchildren."

DR DANIEL FUNG, Chief Executive Officer of the Institute of Mental Health, is a father of five and a grandparent of three. He is also a member of the Advisory Panel on Parenting, Ministry of Social and Family Development.



COMING UP ROSES Parents, here's something your children can do to show how much they love and appreciate their grands! For a step-by-step tutorial to make a rosette personalised with a heartfelt message, go to go.gov.sg/celebrating-our-grands-2023-rosette-craft. For more content on grandparenting and parenting, visit www.familiesforlife.sg/parenting.

WE'VE GOT MAIL!

Parents share how they make use of opportunities at home and in the community to support their children's learning and development.



Learning through experience allows children to deepen their understanding

✉ My daughters are very expressive and active. They love to experience new things firsthand rather than reading about them. We encourage a lot of outdoor experiences to teach them about the importance of caring for others, animals and the environment. Recently, we took them to the goat farm, where they saw goats being milked and learnt how they are reared. They also got to feed the goats and had a great time!

JAYANTHI RAJARETHINAM, mother of two, aged 7 and 3

✉ Our firstborn, Caden, whined frequently when his little sister arrived because he was upset about having to share the attention. To help him adjust, we involved him in caring for the baby while showering him with praise. When he helped us grab a fresh diaper, we would say, "You are such a thoughtful brother!". We encouraged him to read books and share toys with his sister. We would also say that his sister was learning from him. This made Caden feel more secure and take pride in being a big brother.



Getting Caden to embrace his role as a big brother helped him grow socially and emotionally

JOSHUA TAN, father of two, aged 3½ and 7 months



Learning happens naturally when children take an interest in their surroundings

✉ Changes around us provide interesting topics for children. During our daily walks to preschool, I encourage my daughter to observe her surroundings. It could be the plants in a community garden, the residents' pets, or the construction of a mall. Passing by the same things daily allows us to enrich our discussions. When my daughter noticed a lot of flags along the road in August, I took the chance to talk about National Day. Such moments can improve children's communication skills, vocabulary and understanding.

POH CHAI YEIN, mother of a girl, aged 6

THREE IN A ROW

We showed you how to make a Tic-Tac-Toe game set in the Jul-Sep 2023 issue. Here are some of you with your DIY kits!



JOSEPH SADIKIN, 5



LAILA KARNO, 5



MOHD ZAYN ARFA BIN MOHD SHARIPUDIN, 4

SUPPORTING HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT FROM BIRTH TO THREE

Parents, share specific examples of how you support your baby's or toddler's physical, social-emotional, language and cognitive development. Attach a photo with your anecdote and your submission may appear in the next issue of *Beanstalk!*

Submit your story by **22 December 2023** at go.gov.sg/beanstalk-mailbag or scan this QR code.



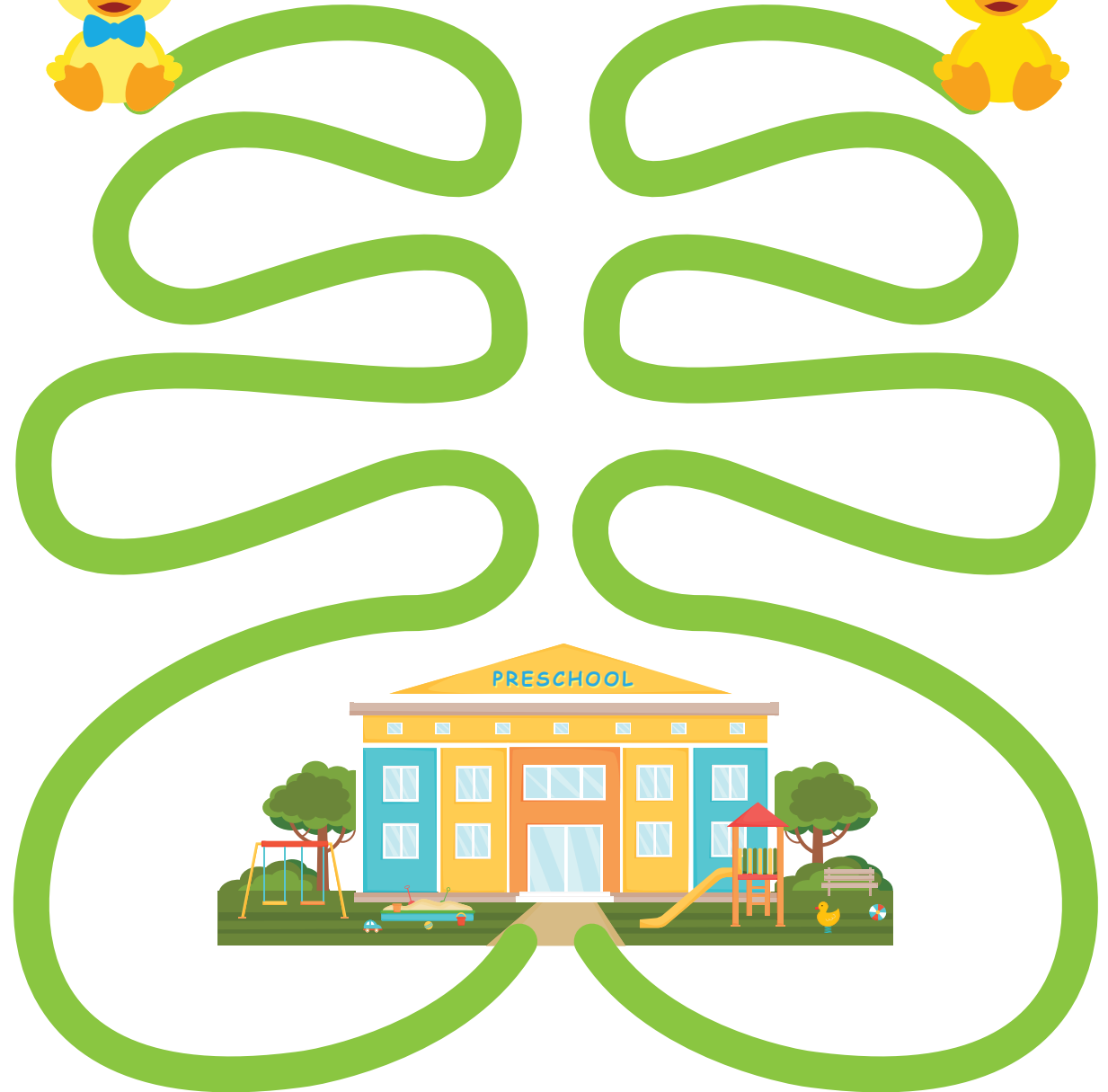
We have three Grab vouchers to give away to the best letters!

fun times



WALK THIS WAY

These little ducklings need help getting to preschool. Use both hands together and show them the way with your fingers!



Hey Parents!

In this activity, called finger steps, children use both hands at the same time to follow the lines. It helps strengthen coordination between the left and right brain in young children, which stimulates the whole brain. Tracing the steps with their fingers also improves their dexterity and focus.

