

Leap Of faith

Gladys Chan, this year's ECDA Outstanding Teacher, finds fresh ways to engage her students.

MRS GLADYS CHAN may not quite fit the profile of your usual pre-school teacher. She came to be one only when she had returned to Singapore after living in Jakarta for 11 years. Mrs Chan was 38 when she started on her second career as an educator.

"At my job interview at the Living Sanctuary Kindergarten (LSK), I told the principal then, Mrs Joyce Tan, that I would probably not last two weeks as I might not be suited for the job," she says. She was hired, and has been teaching at the kindergarten since then.

Mrs Chan started as an assistant teacher. That was 16 years ago. In September this year, she won the ECDA Outstanding Teacher

GLADYS CHAN
54, Senior Teacher,
Living Sanctuary
Kindergarten

Award. Winning the award, she says, was "a good reflection process for me. It is an affirmation that whatever I have been doing is recognised and valued."

Creative Teacher

In this age of iPads and the Internet, even pre-schoolers are well informed and don't always rely on teachers for information. Mrs Chan, 54, now a senior teacher, says teachers are challenged these days on how to hold children's interest in class. "You have to engage the children and spark their interest so [that they would] ask questions and explore the subject [further]."

For example, when a K2 class was learning about water recycling, they made a visit to the NEWater Visitor Centre at Koh Sek Lim Road to enable them to connect what they had learnt in school to saving water at home by using recycled water for washing floors and watering plants.

Her innovative methods and dedication led LSK's Principal, Mrs Elsie Tan-Chua and Mrs Chan's colleagues to nominate her for the award. "Gladys has been an exemplary and outstanding teacher who is passionate and enthusiastic in nurturing early learners," says Mrs Tan-Chua.

Teaching to Mrs Chan is more than a job. "Our work touches the lives of the children in our care," she says. The benefit is mutual too. "Early on [in my career], I saw how the children would come to me and express their affection. When I fell sick and did not come to work, they gave me hugs the next day and said they missed me!"

Part of the pioneer batch of the Certificate in Early Childhood Teaching graduates in 1999, Mrs Chan went on to obtain a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education five years later. ♥



In the classroom, it's all hands-on experiences and learning through play



THEY MAY BE pre-schoolers but the children at EtonHouse Pre-School Vanda are already busy exploring the world beyond their classroom, thanks to the school's holistic approach to learning.

The school has in place an integrated 'Inquire-Think-Learn' curriculum designed in such a way that development in one area influences, or interacts with development in another area. For example, when K1 children were exploring the 'language of food', they learnt through hands-on cooking experience. Their teachers told them to ask their parents to share some recipes, which they then went through with the educators. Using scales, the children then measured out some ingredients — thus exposing them to the mathematical concept of weight.

"They also learnt what happens when ingredients are mixed. They also created their own recipe books, chef hats and aprons. So such an exercise can involve creativity, arts, maths, language and play," says Ms Ng Shu Ping, 35, the school's principal. "We believe in cultivating children's attitudes and interest towards learning. In the classroom, it is all hands-on experiences and play. You will not see them sitting at tables working on worksheets."

It is this approach towards teaching and a child's learning that earned EtonHouse Pre-School Vanda the Outstanding Centre for Teaching & Learning award at the ECDA Awards for Excellence in Early Childhood Development 2014 in September.

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//Ms Ng Shu Ping, Principal

The award cites the school as believing "in a child-responsive approach to its curriculum and strives to offer a multi-dimensional programme with many diverse and spontaneous learning opportunities".

The element of play in learning is something that Ms Ng feels strongly about. "We in the pre-school sector should not just be thinking about preparing pre-schoolers for primary school. This is about preparing the foundation for life. Early childhood is important in itself — it is not a pathway towards something else."

EtonHouse Pre-School Vanda, housed in a two-storey bungalow just off Dunearn Road, opened in 2001. It is one of EtonHouse's chain of nine pre-schools. The pre-school has 21 employees, 16 of whom are teaching staff.

"The award is a team award that acknowledges everybody's effort — from the cleaner, cook, and the teachers to the administrative staff," says

Ms Ng, who joined EtonHouse Pre-School Vanda as a teacher in 2006 and became its principal in 2013. ♥



SPARK-ING AGAIN

EtonHouse Vanda Pre-School first received SPARK certification in 2011 which was valid for three years.

In 2014, it achieved SPARK re-certification and is recognised for progress in teaching and learning.

Embarking on SPARK certification has helped the school to be "more thorough" in its process of continual evaluation, improvement and quality assurance, says its principal Ms Ng Shu Ping.



The Right foundation

Providing an environment in which children feel confident to learn and play clinched EtonHouse Pre-School Vanda an award for Outstanding Centre for Teaching & Learning from the Early Childhood Development Agency.

5 THOUGHTS TO TEACH BY

- **Be Teachable** – Listen and learn
- **Be Bold** – Have a "dare to try" spirit
- **Be Adventurous** – Fear not failure even if fear is real
- **Be Persistent** – Don't give up, continue good practices
- **Be Patient** – Wait for results as every process takes time



ETONHOUSE PRE-SCHOOL VANDA