

SENSE OF WONDER

EDUCARER JANICE ONG BELIEVES IN GIVING CHILDREN TIME AND SPACE TO LEARN FROM RICH SENSORY EXPERIENCES.

As an educator, Janice Ong believes she has a responsibility to instil the right values and cultivate a sense of wonder and curiosity in children at the early stage of their lives.

APPROACH TAILORED TO TOTS

"Toddlers experience life differently from older children," the recipient of the 2019 ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Educator Award points out. "They are experiencing many things for the first time in their lives. They need lots of time and space to explore, discover and make sense of what is happening around them. They need to feel safe to explore, take risks or even make mistakes. More importantly, they need adults who are patient, understanding and supportive."

PLAY THAT ENGAGES ALL SENSES

Janice stresses, "Children at this age need more hands-on experiences.

Learning should engage all their senses. Brain development research supports this."

This ethos is reflected in her teaching approach, which emphasises outdoor learning and play. Janice encourages the children to discover the sights and scents in the centre's garden planters. They even bring interesting finds back to the classroom, such as a fallen coconut, which becomes the focus of conversation.

She suggests, "It is good to provide open-ended materials for toddlers to explore during play. Bring them out for walks. Allow them the time to observe and examine things that are of interest to them."

These are some of the concepts which she brought to the table as a member of the project team developing the content for "Creative Conversations: Around the Neighbourhood", a toolkit that empowers parents and teachers to

SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

Janice shares tips to better support infants and toddlers:

- **Pause and observe them** in your daily interactions.
- **Free your mind from biases** and ideas on how and what they should develop.
- **Do not hurry them** to pick up concepts or knowledge we think they should have.
- **Support learning** by giving them time and space to make connections.

Hear what Janice has to say about working with toddlers at youtu.be/n5qZlr7oSOI.

bring learning outdoors in a fun and meaningful way.

"It is also important to be animated and engaging when interacting with children," says Janice. "With the younger ones, singing is an effective and excellent way to engage them." ●



Janice stimulates children's curiosity through hands-on experiences such as watering the centre's garden planters



DOWNLOAD THIS

"Creative Conversations: Around the Neighbourhood" is an online resource with activity ideas, practical tips and book recommendations to help parents and teachers harness learning opportunities outdoors. Download it from go.gov.sg/aroundtheneighbourhood. This online edition is an extended version of the "Creative Conversations: The Scent of Spices" resource kit which was launched in July 2019.



Tree climbing gave children the opportunity to conquer their fear of heights and build their confidence

ACTIVE DUTY

THE LITTLE SKOOL-HOUSE AT-MINISTRY-OF-EDUCATION USES OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES TO HELP CHILDREN DEVELOP PHYSICAL RESILIENCE AND OTHER LIFE SKILLS.

Rock climbing and tree climbing were some of the activities organised for children at The Little Skool-House At-Ministry-Of-Education as part of its programme called "Kindergarten Two Graduation Camp — To the Enchanted Forest". Before the actual camp, children attended two preparatory workshops to equip them with safety awareness, self-help skills and organisational skills.

The programme was developed in partnership with Outdoor School Singapore. The aim was to develop resilience in children, boost their

confidence, and enhance problem-solving and interpersonal skills.

SPIRIT OF ADVENTURE

The activities with height elements gave children opportunities to take risks and tackle challenges together with their peers in a natural environment. "This will help children develop a keen sense of risk assessment and, more importantly, greater self-confidence. Such experiences will come in useful when they encounter new or challenging situations in the future," observes Executive Principal Ms Christine Lee.

Teachers took on the role of reassuring and cheering the children on. As they understood each child's



Children had fun repeatedly sliding down the hill slope, showing their ability to assess and handle risk

“After taking part in the outdoor school programme, Zuhayra's self-confidence really grew. She learned to push through when facing challenges, and now insists on doing many things herself and is more receptive of new experiences.”

MDM FARHANA BINTE ABDUL RAHIM, mother of Zuhayra, 7

personality and ability, they were able to cue the facilitators on how much to further challenge the children.

OVERCOMING FEARS AND LIMITS

Egged on by the teachers and facilitators, and watching their friends accomplish the tasks, children became more open to trying out the activities. "As they completed each activity, they would beam with pride. The children also began to show more perseverance after the camp. In class, they became more receptive to new challenges and situations. Hence, it is crucial to develop physical resilience in the early childhood years," says Ms Lee. ●



TIPS FOR TEACHERS

- **Ensure that activities are safe, developmentally appropriate yet challenging. Consult or engage experts and community partners, if necessary, on suitable programmes or activities to build resilience in children.**
- **Don't force a child if he is unwilling or frightened. Segment activities into smaller and more doable tasks.**
- **Provide more opportunities to build children's physical resilience, such as going for longer walks or trying different terrains.**
- **Trust children's abilities to accomplish physical challenges. They become fearful when they notice adults being overly cautious.**
- **Verbalise what children have accomplished when they persevere. This helps them link resilience to achievement and growth.**
- **Maintain open communication with parents to help them understand the objectives and importance of physical resilience in children.**

STRONGER WITH EACH TRY

BRIGHTON MONTESSORI @ RIVER VALLEY SHARES THEIR STRATEGIES ON NURTURING RESILIENCE IN CHILDREN.



By expressing their feelings, children learn to identify and self-regulate their emotions

Perseverance, determination and resilience are qualities that Brighton Montessori @ River Valley wants to instil in children, especially before they enter the formal setting of primary school.

Senior Principal Mrs Stacy Oberoi explains why this is important: "In primary school, children will not have their teachers with them all the time. They will have to deal with challenges and setbacks on their own." To equip them with the right mindset and values, the centre has incorporated these age-appropriate practices into the curriculum.

STRATEGIES TAILORED TO EACH LEVEL

For pre-nursery children working on Montessori Practical Life activities such as threading small beads on a string, they are encouraged to keep trying even if they are unable to succeed on the first few tries. This

sends the message that failure is not a big deal but what matters is that they keep trying.

At nursery level, competitive games are organised, and children are encouraged to cheer on their peers. At the end of each game, teachers remind them that winning or losing is not as important as long as they try their best. By reinforcing this, children learn the value of perseverance.

The kindergarteners start each day by gathering in a circle to talk about their feelings. Teachers encourage them to express their emotions and articulate why they feel that way. By guiding them towards self-awareness, it develops children's ability to identify and self-regulate their emotions.

Collectively, these practices prepare children to face challenging situations, develop a better understanding of themselves and build confidence — all of which help them grow into resilient individuals. ●

“I support what the teachers are doing to develop my child's resilience by reinforcing problem-solving skills at home and teaching him that every action has a consequence. Also, spending one-on-one time with my child has helped us to build an emotional connection that will give him strength and enable him to overcome difficulties.”

BHARAT DARYANANI, father of K1 child Riaan



DOs & DON'Ts FOR PARENTS

- **DON'T provide the answers.** Ask children questions to stimulate their thinking and encourage them to come up with their own solutions.
- **DO talk about feelings.** All feelings are important, and helping children identify their emotions enables them to make sense of what they are experiencing.
- **DO embrace your child's mistakes.** Try not to focus only on the outcome, as it might deter children from trying new things. Embracing mistakes helps promote a growth mindset. Remind your children that mistakes are part of life and help them learn.



Brighton Montessori @ River Valley is a SPARK-certified centre. SPARK is a quality assurance framework to help preschools identify their strengths and areas for growth, and work towards continuous improvement. A preschool is SPARK-certified when it has met quality standards for its teaching and learning practices, as well as management and administrative processes. To find out more about SPARK certification, go to www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo.