

# A SPACE TO CREATE

THOUGHTFUL DESIGN AND USE OF SPACES CAN FOSTER A SPIRIT OF INNOVATION.

“Our learning spaces are ever-changing,” says Ms Lim Yu Jie, principal of Between Two Trees Preschool, which clinched the 2021 ECDA Outstanding Centre for Teaching & Learning Award. “They evolve according to the development of class projects, as well as teachers’ observations of the children’s development and interactions.”

## FUNCTIONAL YET FLUID

Inspired by Reggio Emilia’s approach of the environment as the third teacher, the centre plans intentional spaces with thought-provoking materials for children to connect with, reflect, and generate further questions and discussions. For example:

➤ The **Art Space** is stocked with brushes of varying sizes and purposes, ink, watercolours, cloths, papers and other materials. It encourages freedom of expression as children work in groups, in pairs or individually to create.



The physical environment at Between Two Trees Preschool promotes both collaborative and independent learning

- The **Blocks Area** provides loose parts such as building blocks, paper towel rolls and bottle caps, for open-ended play.
- The **Provocation Area** is designed to build on children’s interests. Books, figurines, natural materials such as pinecones, coconut husks, pebbles and soil, and other objects are replaced frequently, based on the direction of class projects.

they were fascinated by the sound of planes overhead.

When the focus of interest shifted from planes to trains, educators created dramatic play opportunities by setting up a corner resembling a train station. Photos of trains and buses were also put up in the Blocks Area to inspire children to build independently or collaboratively.

## DIGITAL DIMENSION

“As digital technologies become an integral part of our daily lives, we recognise they can be a great teaching aid in our classrooms,” says Ms Sharon Lim. Guided by their teachers, children use laptops and tablets to research project-related information and watch videos. Apps like Zoom are used to engage in dialogue with experts, such as a scientist dad who gave a talk about his job making prostheses for people with disabilities.

One tech-enabled experience saw the children ‘swimming’ in the deep. Shares Ms Lim Yu Jie, “We used a projector to screen images of ocean life, and children pretended to be divers moving among the sea creatures!” ●



Regularly updated wall and shelf displays reflect children’s interests and learning activities

Wall and shelf displays showcase the children’s art pieces and photos of them engaging in these activities. Besides promoting a sense of belonging, children can revisit their works and reflect on the processes. Often, they are seen to engage in conversations as they describe the installations to others.

## GOING WITH THE FLOW

Ms Sharon Lim, the centre’s deputy supervisor and curriculum specialist, believes that being prepared to deviate from the planned curriculum is integral. “Lessons can change based on teachers’ observations of the children’s interests and experiences. We need to be flexible as teachers.”

For example, when three-year-olds became interested in airplanes after seeing them fly over the playground, transportation toys and pictures of aircraft were added to the Provocation Area. Educators also planned experiences for them to explore vehicle sounds when

“I like playing with blocks because we can create a house or build a hotel. It’s like making your own game!”



ALEXANDRA GAN, 5

**WATCH THIS!** Get a closer look at Between Two Trees Preschool’s child-first approach.

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