

QUEST TO LEARN

INQUIRY-BASED LEARNING NURTURES CHILDREN'S CURIOSITY TO EXPLORE.



Ms Zhang guides and provokes children's inquiry by asking different levels of questions

The indoor hydroponics garden at Agape Little Uni. @ Thomson encourages children to plant, care for, and harvest vegetables that they use to prepare simple dishes.

Vice principal Ms Zhang Junnan, who won ECDA's Outstanding Preschool Educator Award in 2022, elaborates, "Activities like this are conducted within an inquiry framework. The inquiry cycle involves planning, asking questions, investigating, proposing solutions and making conclusions. Through this, children develop problem-solving, logical thinking and critical thinking skills."

LETTING CHILDREN LEAD

"Inquiry-based learning is built on the notion that children have an intrinsic desire to explore and learn more about the world," says

“I took home the recipe I had created in preschool and asked my grandmother to buy the vegetables. My brother and I made the salad. Mum and dad said it was delicious!”

LIAM GOH, 6



Ms Zhang. "Teachers facilitate by asking multi-level questions to scaffold their learning and understanding." For instance, during gardening activities, she poses the following questions which, in turn, generate further questions from the children:

- "What kind of plant is this?" (*Children remember, describe, discuss and explain*)
- "What are the similarities and differences between plants and animals?" (*Children analyse what they have learned*)
- "If you had a plant, how would you take care of it?" (*Children apply their knowledge*)

Instead of providing a solution when the children expressed concerns about remembering to water the plants, Ms Zhang showed them how to search for, process and analyse information from printed materials and online research. This led children to discover and experiment with self-watering eco-bottles, or terrariums.

CLOSING THE LOOP

To find out how well children understand a topic, Ms Zhang conducts two types of assessment. In peer assessment, children present their work (e.g., eco-bottles) and

SMOOTH THE WAY

Ms Zhang suggests ways to support children who find the inquiry process challenging.

- **Use differentiated instruction.** Tailor activities to children's abilities. When exploring how plants can be used, younger children can make tea from fresh mint leaves, while older children can use the leaves to make wind chimes.
- **Try different tactics.** Loose parts play with different materials, role play and the use of computers to supplement learning can spice up the process and foster creativity.
- **Pair or group children** so that they can help and support one another through the activities.

respond to questions from their classmates, who then evaluate the presentation using statements such as "I like ..." or "I understand ...". Children also carry out self-assessment by reflecting on their learning, at times using the online quiz game, *Kahoot!*.

Ms Zhang prepares take-home activities to further reinforce children's learning. For instance, on the topic of plants, the children created recipes with the vegetables they had grown and tried them out with their families. She also provides materials for parent-child projects and invites parents to attend 'Show & Tell' sessions in preschool via Zoom.

"The inquiry-based approach encourages creativity and collaboration. Children use their curiosity about the world to observe, explore, experience, and form their own perceptions and understanding of an issue or topic," she says. ●

Get more insights from Ms Zhang at youtu.be/Aa8QeFXAc8 or scan here.

