



EMPOWERING TODAY TOGETHER

HOW CHILDREN BENEFIT WHEN EMPOWERED PARENTS
AND EDUCATORS WORK IN SYNC.

A child's experiences are shaped by the collective efforts of parents, early childhood (EC) educators and the community, with each playing distinct but interconnected roles. On 24 June 2024, ECDA launched the 'Empower Today, Shape Our Tomorrow' campaign, calling for all stakeholders to come together to create a supportive ecosystem that enriches children's development and well-being. In so doing, we create a better tomorrow where children can develop holistically to fulfil their potential and become well-adjusted, resilient, happy adults.

Empowerment enables stakeholders to collectively harness and leverage their diverse strengths. *Beanstalk* asks educators and parents to share their views on empowerment and its impact on their children. Joining in the conversation is Ms Heidi Rafman, Chief, Healthy Ageing Department, Agency for Integrated Care (AIC), who offers her perspective on the role of community partners.

EDUCATORS, WHAT DOES 'EMPOWER TODAY, SHAPE OUR TOMORROW' MEAN TO YOU?

Jasmine Yap: It is about building a strong relationship with families to share strategies and creating a positive environment for children to thrive holistically at home and in preschool. I welcome the enhanced focus on preschool educators and parents working hand in hand to empower the next generation in creative and imaginative ways.

Nelson Ng: What stands out for me is the affirmation of the complementary roles of educators and parents in

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MS JASMINE YAP, 33
Preschool Educator,
Agape Little Uni. @ Gambas

Empower today,
SHAPE
our tomorrow

ECDA's 2018 'Shape Our Tomorrow' campaign gets a new tagline in 2024: 'Empower Today, Shape Our Tomorrow'. The campaign advocates for parents and EC educators to complement each other's roles so that they can form a strong foundation for children's holistic development. Follow @BeanstalkECDA on Instagram to find out more!

a child's development. By fostering strong partnerships, trust and open communication, we can create a unified and consistent approach that supports the child's growth at home and in preschool.

HOW DO COMMUNITY PARTNERS FIT IN THIS SUPPORTIVE ECOSYSTEM?

Heidi Rafman: Community partners like AIC can contribute diverse resources and expertise to enhance the support network for young children. AIC fosters intergenerational activities between children and seniors in senior care centres and nursing homes. These interactions empower both generations, offering a sense of validation and accomplishment. Engaging with young children brings joy and a renewed sense of purpose to seniors, which enhances their mental and emotional well-being. As for children, they learn to appreciate seniors and develop important values such as respect, kindness, care and empathy.

EDUCATORS, IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU FEEL EMPOWERED IN YOUR WORK WITH CHILDREN?

Jasmine: I feel empowered when I am given the autonomy to implement creative teaching methods and ideas. Although lesson plans are provided, I am entrusted to adapt lessons that are appropriate for the children based on my observations and understanding of child development. I can decide on class projects, and this has enabled me to collaborate more effectively with the children. I was also given the opportunity to manage a 'Start Small Dream Big' (SSDB) fundraising project for the visually impaired, where the children sold handmade bracelets. It included tasks that extended





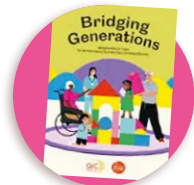
Working with preschools for their SSDB projects, AIC's intergenerational activities benefit both children and seniors in rich ways

beyond the classroom, like preparing the budget, sourcing for materials, and setting up a temporary webstore for parents to purchase the bracelets.

Nelson: It is empowering when parents trust and respect us as professionals, not merely as caregivers. A father once asked me for advice on his four-year-old's mealtime challenges, namely sitting down and finishing his meals. I shared about the approach and strategies we use to address similar behaviours in preschool: setting clear expectations, teaching socially responsible behaviours and explaining consequences. The following week, he came back with positive feedback on how the mealtimes had transformed. Such instances validate our role as professionals and affirm the

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MR NELSON NG, 35
Senior Preschool Teacher,
Pre-School By-The-Park (Evans)



GET THIS GUIDE

A long-time partner of SSDB, AIC has released a new intergenerational guide with ECDA and other partners to commemorate SSDB's 10th anniversary. **Bridging Generations: Intergenerational Guide for the Community Care and Early Childhood Sectors** is a handy reference for preschools and community care organisations. Download it at for.sg/aic-wellness-programme.

specialised knowledge and skills we possess. When we collaborate with parents to address their concerns, it leads to better outcomes for the child and a more rewarding experience for both parents and educators. This builds trust and strengthens parent-educator partnerships, creating a supportive system for the benefit of the child.

HOW DO YOU HELP YOUR COLLEAGUES FEEL MORE EMPOWERED IN THEIR WORK?

Jasmine: At our centre, we share teaching practices and resources with one another and offer support and advice. My centre leader and mentors have encouraged me to guide newer staff in areas such as classroom management, curriculum planning, and how to communicate with parents on sensitive issues. By pooling our individual experiences and strengths, we build a nurturing environment that inspires staff to be more confident and grow professionally.

Nelson: Teachers at our centre are given the opportunity to lead professional development sessions based on their areas of expertise. Respecting teachers' voices and giving each teacher a chance to be heard fosters a sense of ownership and accountability. I make it a point to shore up the teachers' resilience to better navigate challenges and failures, and to bounce back from setbacks. This is an important part of teacher empowerment and cultivates a growth mindset.

HOW CAN EMPOWERED EDUCATORS IMPACT CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT?

Jasmine: When teachers receive support to learn new skills and are given the autonomy to implement these in their classroom practices, they are more likely to be motivated to enhance their quality of teaching. This can lead to increased confidence in adapting the curriculum to meet the diverse needs and interests of children, as well as the ability to provide individualised support.

AIC photo courtesy of KidsCampus @ West Coast and Jamiyah Nursing Home.

Nelson: Empowered educators feel confident, valued and respected. They serve as positive role models, inspiring children to approach learning with

“ I feel valued and involved as a parent because of the supportive actions taken by Elia's educators.

MS SAMANTHA CHOW, 34
Financial Advisor, mother of Elia Teo, 4



enthusiasm and collaborate with peers. Empowered educators are more likely to create engaging and stimulating learning environments, integrating opportunities for children to think critically and creatively. This in turn empowers children. Empowered children feel supported in their growth and learn to trust their abilities.

PARENTS, WHAT ARE YOUR THOUGHTS ON EDUCATOR EMPOWERMENT?

Samantha Chow: As parents, we need to provide educators with space and support, and trust in their professional training to make informed decisions and implement effective teaching strategies. I find

POWER OF DESIGN

ECDA Fellow Dr Cynthia Tan, Assistant Director (Faculty and Leadership Development), National Institute of Early Childhood Development, encourages adults to “pass the power” to infants and toddlers.



How we empower children is influenced by our image of the child. While we acknowledge that they are vulnerable and dependent on adults, it is equally important to recognise their capacities, intentions, thoughts and feelings. This starts when children are very young.

Infants and toddlers are 'little scientists'. They are capable of observing, experimenting and discovering how things work. For example, consider how a baby might repeatedly drop a toy onto the ground. Think about their intentions or what they are trying to communicate by being attentive to their expressions and behaviours. We can then create an optimal learning environment that is responsive to their needs.

EMPOWERING SPACES

While the physical environment is important, it must come with supportive interactions and a conducive temporal environment which includes scheduling, routines and transitions. For instance, the physical environment can have meaningful learning resources. But it also requires educators to effectively facilitate interactions with the children and provide sufficient time for play.

Some points to bear in mind when designing empowering environments for infants and toddlers:

- **COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTIONS.** Respond appropriately to their gestures, expressions and vocalisations, such as making eye contact and being genuinely interested in what they may be telling you. Tune in to the child's needs, offering verbal and non-verbal support to convey understanding and empathy. Engage in back-and-forth interactions (e.g., taking turns, pausing) to allow and encourage the child to respond and participate.
- **MOVEMENT.** When infants and toddlers move, stand or crawl, they are not just building motor skills but also finding out about the world. Provide adequate space for them to move safely and freely. For babies who are not walking yet, let them play on the floor on their back, tummy or side. For infants who are pulling to stand, ensure sturdy furnishings are in place.
- **RESOURCES.** Provide a variety of sensory-rich objects and toys to promote sustained exploration

and support cognitive and physical development. For example, infants and toddlers love to throw balls or put blocks into containers. Such open-ended play contributes to building their understanding of how things work, and learning about themselves and what they can do.

- **AUTONOMY AND ACCESS.** Present choices of toys and activities within safe boundaries for infants and toddlers. Acknowledge and encourage their growing independence. For instance, provide opportunities for them to feed themselves or dress with assistance, move about, explore and play throughout the day.



that it creates a safe and collaborative space for my daughter Elia's teachers to share their insights with me on her progress, strengths and areas for further development.

Fadzil Wahed: Empower educators by providing them with opportunities to practise and expand their skill sets. When educators are intrinsically motivated to upskill, they take responsibility for their professional development. This sense of ownership drives them to seek out opportunities for learning, enhancing the quality of teaching over time. When they witness children thriving as a result, it will fuel a culture of continuous learning.

WHAT ARE SOME THINGS YOUR CHILD'S PRESCHOOL HAS DONE TO EMPOWER YOU?

Samantha: I feel valued and involved as a parent because of the supportive actions taken by Elia's educators. They are genuinely interested to know more about her interests and any concerns or observations from home, and conduct surveys to get our feedback. I volunteer my time as a member of the Parent Support Group and help at preschool events. I have also participated in parent workshops, where Elia's teachers shared educational approaches used in the classroom and tips for supporting her learning at home.

Fadzil: My two boys go to the same preschool. We communicate regularly with their educators about what happens in class and at home. They give suggestions on useful resources, such as book recommendations, and advise on managing certain behaviours. The educators are also open to our suggestions and invite parents to be a part of the curriculum by getting involved in preschool activities or sharing our expertise as guest speakers.



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MR FADZIL WAHED, 37
Operations Manager, father of Ezra Leong-Fadzil, 6, and Micah Leong-Fadzil, 2

HOW ELSE CAN EDUCATORS EMPOWER PARENTS TO BE ACTIVE PARTNERS IN THEIR CHILDREN'S LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT?

Nelson: Being respectful, patient and consistent is key to gaining parents' trust and building a strong partnership. We do not need to wait till formal meetings to inform parents about their children's progress. When I observe challenging behaviours in a child, I share it with the parents early on, set shared goals and collaborate on strategies with them, and have quick check-ins during drop-off and pick-up. Preschool celebrations and events are also good opportunities to involve parents as contributors. We also organise parent workshops twice yearly so that they have practical tools and information to reinforce their children's learning at home.

Jasmine: As a first step, we always reach out to parents before their little ones start preschool. It allows both of us to share our goals and intentions for the children. Subsequently, we maintain regular two-way communication with parents, be it over our preschool app, face to face or on calls. This enables us to update each other and support the child's learning at home and in preschool.

AS A COMMUNITY PARTNER, HOW DO YOU EMPOWER EDUCATORS TO FACILITATE POSITIVE CHILD OUTCOMES?

Heidi: Bringing together preschools and community care organisations which serve seniors offers rich learning opportunities for children. To empower educators, we have put together good practice guides and activity toolkits for their use. These resources equip educators with additional skills and insights to create meaningful intergenerational experiences in their programme planning. This ultimately fosters a more holistic approach in supporting the development of children.

FOR GOOD MEASURE

EC LECTURER MS SHANNA-MAE THERESE DE CRUZ OFFERS STRATEGIES FOR PRESCHOOLS TO EVALUATE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR PARTNERSHIP EFFORTS.



As preschools strengthen relationships with parents and community partners to support children's holistic development, it is equally important for centres to measure the effectiveness of such partnerships. Doing so empowers preschools to assess the impact of their collaborative efforts on their programmes and curriculum, make informed decisions, adapt teaching and learning approaches, and develop sustainable partnerships. Here are some ways centre leaders and educators can go about measuring effectiveness:

- **Surveys and questionnaires** can be used to assess the satisfaction levels of all stakeholders and identify the preschool's strengths and areas for improvement.

- **Partner retention rates** can provide insights into the preschool's approach to cultivating stakeholder engagement.
- **Referrals and feedback** can serve as indicators of success and demonstrate stakeholders' satisfaction and trust with the preschool's provisions for quality care and education.

BENEFITS FOR ALL

Strong partnerships with parents and the community benefit everyone. "Positive partnerships mean satisfied parents, happy staff and participative stakeholders working together to share information and support one another. Children receive quality care and education, ensuring a consistent approach to learning at home and in preschool," notes Ms de Cruz. Preschools can use the findings from surveys and questionnaires

to communicate with parents and equip them with strategies and skills, empowering them to further support their children's holistic development. This approach can motivate parents and cultivate a sense of collective responsibility towards the well-being and development of children. Sharing the findings with parents demonstrates transparency on the preschool's part. Similarly, seeking parents' feedback and making improvements, where possible, foster respect and trust, and further strengthen the partnership.

The feedback or data can also be used by educators to explore ways to enhance their teaching practices or anticipate potential issues in caring for children. This loop — receiving meaningful feedback to inform future plans — is a cycle that can support preschools in ensuring continual development of their staff, and improvement in their programmes and partnership efforts.



SHANNA-MAE THERESE DE CRUZ
Lead Lecturer, National Institute of Early Childhood Development – Institute of Technical Education Campus (NIEC (ITE))
With more than 20 years' experience in the EC sector, Ms de Cruz specialises in educational technology for engagement and teaching efficacy, language and literacy, and socio-emotional well-being. She is currently pursuing a Master of Counselling at Flinders University, Australia, and will be giving a presentation on socio-emotional well-being at the upcoming NIEC Conference in October 2024.