

WHILE SHE IS a proud recipient of the ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award 2015, Ms Wendy Ong is quick to point out that she is but one person doing her part in the big picture that is early childhood education. "Winning this award has inspired me to look at opportunities to elevate the professional profile of early childhood educators and raise awareness of the importance of early childhood educator," says Ms Ong, who feels strongly about developing and elevating the early childhood education sector. "It impacts children's lives and moulds their future - and by that token, also moulds the future of our country." As principal, Ms Ong sees it as part of her job to help the

educators set up appropriate environments for their classes. She also pays special attention to building strong relationships and often organises meals, gatherings, celebration parties and retreats for her staff. One of the biggest challenges is building a highly motivated staff team who have the right mindset, the knowledge and skills to deliver a quality programme. "It's about building a bond and partnership so that the staff will feel supported and guided, and find joy in working at the centre!" she shares. This has brought about a collaborative work culture where educators are happy to help each other out. Beyond team-building,

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//Ms Wendy Ong

Ms Ong is also committed to nurturing positive and trusting relationships with the children and their families, and is willing to go the extra mile if needed. "Last year, a kindergarten 2 child couldn't

attend school because the grandmother who is the primary caregiver had a serious fall. Through Temasek Cares - Project Hand-in-Hand, we found somebody to bring the child to school and even support the child's daily meals at home. Further on, we even helped to enrol the child in a primary school near his home," recounts Ms Ong. Ms Ong also conducts talks for parents. "We have an eight-part series of talks conducted at the centre every Friday, where we discuss strategies for improving literacy, bonding and many other parenting issues. There is another series on children's social interaction with peers, adults and family members," shares Ms Ong.

Parents who face challenging behaviours in their young children are also invited to focus group discussions every quarter. "If we are able to establish positive relationships with parents, they will have trust and confidence in us as educators and will be assured that our work with their children is always in their best interests," she says. ♥



Ms Wendy Ong (second from right) believes in collaborative partnerships, be it between her teachers or with parents.

Nurturing A Learning Community

Education is a collaborative effort between parents and educators for Ms Wendy Ong, Executive Principal of My First Skool at Blk 140 Serangoon North.



Encouraging The Love Of Mandarin

Ms Sun Ning'er leads her children on wondrous adventures through dynamic learning environments and the imaginary world of books.



reading programme. Children are encouraged to read with family members which helps the use of Mandarin at home. Following which, the children will share the story outline of what they have read with the rest of the class through drawings and an oral presentation. Through storytelling sessions, Ms Sun observes that children are eager to share their views on books they have read. "This way, the children are encouraging each other to explore new books, while developing their own language and thinking skills," she says.

On every object in the classroom, Ms Sun pastes the corresponding Chinese words for it to increase print awareness and visual memory. "The environment is like a silent teacher, and the classroom setup should reflect the 'invisible lessons' to further support learning. The Chinese stickers make the children feel that Chinese

is everywhere, and through this immersive environment, they learn to read, write and speak the language."

On receiving the ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Teacher Award 2015, Ms Sun shares, "It is a recognition of my efforts and I now try

to lead by example and encourage my colleagues to go the extra mile too. It has spurred me to develop even better curriculum that is aligned to the children's preferences, so that learning and using the Chinese language becomes enjoyable for them." ♥

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C HINESE LANGUAGE CLASSES are often associated with rote learning - but not when they are conducted by Ms Sun Ning'er. The 39-year-old educator's sessions at PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Tampines Central Blk 867A (CC) strongly emphasise nurturing the children's love for Mandarin and are always full of fun.

In a corner of a classroom, Ms Sun has created a small library with a sizeable collection of carefully-curated, age-appropriate Chinese story books. "I teach children aged five to six years,

and select books - written simply and in a repetitive style. This helps the children revise the words and phrases that they have learnt. I also choose story topics that are wide ranging, spanning morals to local history which illustrate children's emotions through them. I find that the children tend to pick out such books voluntarily and enjoy them very much!"

Apart from regular storytelling sessions, the children bring a book home every Friday in a weekly centre-wide

PHOTO COURTESY OF PCF SPARKLETOTS PRESCHOOL

PARENTAL GUIDANCE

Tips from Ms Wendy Ong and Ms Sun Ning'er on how educators and parents can build a strong rapport with each other.

- ★ Address parents and educators by their names
- ★ Take time to listen
- ★ Engage parents through parent-teacher meetings, as a curriculum resource (eg. storytelling) or even in designing activities for the children
- ★ Provide information and regular updates on events and happenings in the centre and class through the various channels (eg. portal, mobile devices, newsletters) on what's going on in the class and what the children are learning, as well as their accomplishments on a weekly or bi-weekly basis
- ★ Be aware of the importance of good communication, as language is powerful and keep interactions warm and positive
- ★ Invite parents to participate in events or activities
- ★ Have regular ad hoc communication or informal chats (eg. a hello in the mornings, share about their weekend)
- ★ Share expectations

