



YOUNG PROBLEM SOLVERS

AS A SPARK-CERTIFIED (COMMENDATION) CENTRE, LIVING SANCTUARY KINDERGARTEN HAS INCORPORATED PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS INTO ITS CURRICULUM, AS WELL AS ITS PHYSICAL SPACE.

Once a week, the children at Living Sanctuary Kindergarten (LSK) are given a challenge to face, such as not having enough bowls at snack time. They then have about 20 minutes to brainstorm possible solutions and implement the chosen one.

Problem-solving scenarios and activities are an integral part of LSK's curriculum, and children as young as three years old are engaged. This is to encourage them to think on their feet and learn to work as a team.

"Problem-solving is a 21st-century skill that even young children are capable of learning, and applying in real life. A child who believes in problem-solving tends not to rely on others for solutions, and is more open to giving suggestions," explains LSK's Principal Mrs Elsie Tan-Chua. This approach was one of the unique pedagogical aspects that won LSK the Outstanding Centre for Teaching & Learning at the ECDA Awards 2017.

Planned Opportunities

Incorporating problem-solving into the syllabus is an example of Elsie's curriculum leadership. The curriculum is developed in collaboration with LSK teachers who ensure that the problem-solving scenarios created are developmentally-appropriate. LSK's teachers also play an important role in facilitating the implementation of the scenarios. "Teachers have to pretend that they don't know what to do, and be open and non-judgemental in drawing out ideas from the children," says Elsie.

In LSK, the teachers intentionally create opportunities for the children to practise their problem-solving skills. As a result, they are gradually able to take on bigger challenges. For example, with the guidance of a teacher, each class undertook the planning and organisation of a relay game for the other teachers during LSK's Teachers' Day Celebration 2017. According to Elsie, the children's problem-solving mindset is not just confined to the pre-



GIVE THESE SCENARIOS A GO

- For Nursery level: Children enter the classroom to find that there are not enough chairs and tables for all of them. What should they do?
- For K2 level: Children enter the classroom and see orange juice spilled onto the floor. How can they clean up the mess?

school but is extended to their homes. Many parents have told her that they have been surprised when their children are earnest in helping to solve problems at home.

Thinking Spaces

LSK's commitment to developing children's problem-solving skills is also evident in its intentional learning spaces. The 'LSK Neighbourhood', which mimics a real-world community, includes a clinic, supermarket, ice-cream parlour and hair salon. Here, children engage in purposeful play — be it as a doctor, patient, waiter or customer — and think of solutions as they encounter issues such as a shortage of medicine at the clinic. Another space which has been intentionally set up to engage children in a repertoire of thinking behaviours is the Science Corner. Here the materials and apparatus, which include balance scales, microscopes and test tubes, encourage children to explore, observe, experiment, compare and contrast, and make predictions. Problem statements which accompany the activities prompt children to think deeply and critically. Teachers are always at hand to facilitate children's thinking. ♥

SPARK The Singapore Preschool Accreditation Framework (SPARK) aims to help pre-schools raise their quality by serving as a guide and providing quality benchmarks. It also provides recognition and support for pre-school leaders in their effort to improve teaching and learning, administration and management process. For more information on SPARK, visit www.ecda.gov.sg/SPARKinfo



CREATING A CREATIVE PLAY SPACE

TO FOSTER PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS, EDUCATORS, PARENTS AND CHILDREN AT ST. JAMES' CHURCH KINDERGARTEN (SJCK) WERE ROPED IN TO HELP DESIGN AND ENHANCE THE OUTDOOR PLAYGROUND AT THEIR GILSTEAD CAMPUS.

St. James' Church Kindergarten (Gilstead) recently transformed its existing playground into an upcycled (the creative re-use of unwanted materials into something new or better), community-built play space. Instead of rebuilding a usual playground, SJCK wanted one that provides innovative and creative play possibilities for the children, while ensuring that the elements in the play space are developmentally appropriate and safe. They decided to leverage on design expertise and, in collaboration with design organisation Participate in Design (PiD) and Lien Foundation, started the initiative called 'Hack Our Play' (HOP). What is so unique about this makeover is that the participatory design process enabled contributions from the children, their families and educators.

A COMMUNITY EFFORT PAYS OFF

SJCK together with PiD first held a series of engagement sessions at the pre-school in Gilstead to gather feedback. Two workshops were also organised for SJCK (Gilstead) educators, children and

The participatory design process led to greater community investment in the playground, and instilled a sense of accomplishment, ownership and pride in the end product. It also served as a good bonding activity between parents and children, and among the children themselves.

Ms Mizah Rahman, Director and Co-founder of PiD



A tyre structure painted by children and parents



Nursery children building a house to hide from the "Big Bad Wolf"

