



Trying out different art techniques



Completed revamp of the art centre

# THE ART OF INQUIRY

MY WORLD @ WOODLANDS REFLECTS ON ITS PRACTITIONER INQUIRY JOURNEY TO REVAMP ITS ART LEARNING CENTRE.

One of the children's favourite play spaces at MY World @ Woodlands is the Art Learning Centre, where they explore and experiment with different materials and art techniques.

Children are encouraged to work independently with minimal guidance from teachers. "This approach has several benefits. The children learn to express themselves spontaneously without feeling inhibited. They engage in problem-solving and tend to focus on exploration and creation. I observe that this increases their sense of competence and well-being when the children have greater ownership of their artworks. This is evident when they share with peers and teachers," says centre principal, Ms Cheryl Chang. Prior to the revamp, the Art

Learning Centre was a run-of-the-mill art space for children to paint, draw and colour or cut and paste, and little else. When teachers observed that there was not much to engage and sustain the children's interest, they felt that they needed to address this issue. Embarking on a centre-wide practitioner inquiry (PI) project provided that tool to assess the effectiveness of the Art Learning Centre.

## REFLECTIVE TEACHERS, CREATIVE KIDS

To kick-start their PI project, the teachers:

- ▶ Observed how meaningfully the children were engaged in the Art Learning Centre
- ▶ Devised an action plan to enhance the aesthetics of the space, the type of activities and the choice of materials



Transferring print to paper

## WHAT GOES INTO A GOOD ART LEARNING CENTRE?

Ms Chang shares three must-haves:

- ☛ Have a variety of open-ended art materials and rotate these. Place new materials in front of older resources. Make it a practice to induct children to these resources. This will encourage children to use them.
- ☛ Make available primary (red/yellow/blue) and neutral (black/white) colours. Let children experiment and discover how to mix and blend colours to create different shades and tints.
- ☛ Have at hand rags and other clean-up materials. Children will learn to be responsible and clean up after themselves. At the same time, do assure them that it is all right to "mess up".



Meeting with teachers for the PI Project

- ▶ Researched articles to find out how to enhance the aesthetics of the space and make it inviting for the children
- ▶ Held a collective drive to encourage parents to contribute recycled materials
- ▶ Underwent training to strengthen their understanding of art, facilitation skills and expand their art-related vocabulary

The upshot is a revamped Art Learning Centre that caters to different developmental levels and abilities of children, supporting their interest and engagement. Open-ended materials such as acrylic paint, masking tape, sequins, glitter

glue, plastic utensils and other recycled items are clearly labelled and accessible. Art, too, is given an intentional focus. For example, the curriculum also has "Artist of the Month" themes where children focus on specific artists and their pioneering techniques (e.g. Picasso and cubism). Children also have free rein to draw and illustrate their thoughts at the "Imagination Cove" chalkboard. "When children have the autonomy to choose and select the art materials, it encourages their creativity. The PI process has given us a valuable pair of lens to approach and issues," says Ms Chang, who notes that her teachers are now more confident in implementing new art activities. ♥



Practitioner Inquiry (PI) workshop



## SCALING UP QUALITY WITH PI

Dr Pamela Sharpe, formerly Associate Professor from the Early Childhood and Specialised Education Academic Group at the National Institute of Education, conducted a workshop, "An Overview of PI for EC Educators" on 8 February 2018. In an interview with *Beanstalk*, Dr Sharpe talks about how a teacher can benefit from engaging in Practitioner Inquiry (PI).

- ▶ It creates opportunities for you to continue having professional conversations with your peers. Learning from each other through the exchange of ideas and knowing that you have their support will build your confidence in addressing challenges.
- ▶ It improves your teaching practices, planning and understanding of how children think and learn.
- ▶ It helps you focus on your professional values and ethics (e.g. integrity, responsibility) by reflecting on and questioning existing or long-held practices. For instance, asking oneself: "Is it better for children's developmental milestones to

guide their play rather than taking cues from the children themselves when they play?" or "How do we employ questioning techniques throughout the curriculum (e.g. 'How do you know this?', 'Why did you choose this?', or 'What if we did this differently?') rather than merely informing or instructing the children?"

### Finally

- ▶ You can play a part by shaping the culture of professional practice in your centre. When PI is embraced collectively, the inquiry process will help teachers develop similar competencies and standards in their work, and create a shared perspective and understanding about children, teaching and pedagogy.

**Dr Pamela Sharpe**  
formerly Associate Professor of Early Childhood & Specialised Education Academic Group, NIE



### THINKING ABOUT PI?

Visit <https://www.ecda.gov.sg/Educators/Pages/PI-Grant.aspx> or write to [ECRF@ecda.gov.sg](mailto:ECRF@ecda.gov.sg) to find out more about the PI Grant.

## WHAT PARTICIPANTS SAY

Pre-schools have to be comfortable and open to acknowledging that there is an issue or problem that needs to be looked into. As Dr Sharpe said, if the PI project makes a positive difference in the classroom or centre, then it's worth doing.

Ms Sharon Lim, Curriculum Specialist, Between Two Trees Preschool

With the action research tools, I now know how to go about collecting and analysing data, and make recommendations. I will be able to make meaningful changes to my teaching practice and bring positive changes to children's learning and development.

Ms Nadirah Binte Othman, Teacher, Al-Mukminin Mosque Kindergarten