

TEACHERS' DAY - SHAPING LIVES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Zooming in on the kids

When the circuit breaker hit, pre-school teacher June Ng had to make drastic changes to her teaching methods, which included conducting classes through Zoom — BY AUDREY NG



When the circuit breaker was put in place in early April, pre-school teacher June Ng found herself having to conduct lessons in a radically different way — through video conferencing platform Zoom.

It was no easy task trying to digitally hold the attention of five-year-olds, engage them in discussions and ensure they get the chance to speak.

Ms Ng, 32, who teaches Kindergarten 2 children at Skool4Kidz Preschool @ Yishun Orchid Spring, says: "I tried to make my lessons as entertaining as possible with engaging materials like eye-catching images and catchy songs and videos. Prior to lessons, I also e-mailed parents to inform them of the materials they can prepare in advance for their children," she says.

To ease herself into the new teaching avenue, Ms Ng had to attend Zoom training sessions and also learn about cyber security to keep the kids safe online. She also did test runs on Zoom before lessons and went the extra mile to share with parents links to online material, along with teaching tips with those whose children were unable to attend lessons.

Classes have now resumed, but with the kids' regular hand-washing breaks eating into curriculum time, Ms Ng tries to make up for it by conducting informal lessons in spare pockets of time, such as reading and playing games with the children during breakfast. She also takes pains to keep parents informed about what took place in class so that the parents can also work with their children at home.

And her efforts have paid off. During the school's mid-year Parent-Teacher Conference, many parents told her that they appreciated her efforts and the teaching tips she shared — such as how



ILLUSTRATIONS: SHUTTERSTOCK

to introduce new books to children and encourage them to pick up new words — to help them manage home-based learning.

Many parents were also appreciative of the fact that she took the time to speak to them about their children's progress when they picked up their kids, and found the school's fortnightly e-mail and monthly newsletter very useful.

"Being a good teacher is not enough. We also need to keep the parents updated so that they can work together with us. When teachers have good rapport with and support from the parents, only then can we bring out the best in the child," says the young mother of three children aged one, five and seven.

COMING BACK TO HER PASSION

Ms Ng has always had a passion for working in the early childhood education industry and had pursued a Diploma in Preschool Teaching (English) from Modern Montessori International Group.

However, when she graduated in 2009, she found a lack of demand for professionals like her in that field, so she



PHOTO: TED CHEN

“Ever since you started teaching my son's class, I have seen huge improvements in him. He has learnt so much from you and looks forward to attending school now.”

Ms Priya Lathaa, parent of Jayden Aryan

went on to work in other sectors such as telecommunications.

But in 2015, she ran into an ex-colleague she met during her diploma practicum, who asked if Ms Ng wanted to join her at the school she was at.

Ms Ng decided to give it a shot and succeeded in her interview. She made the leap and her love for early childhood education was reignited.

Two years later, motivated to further her career and work closer to her home, she looked for a school that offered better career prospects and

“Thank you for the tips on reading. Now I understand why it took my son so long to pick up words despite my reading to him every day.”

Ms Vinodini, parent of Darshan Dave



joined Skool4Kidz.

Her capabilities were recognised when she was selected for Skool4Kidz's Hi-Po programme, a fast-track career programme for teachers with leadership potential, which made her hard work all worthwhile.

She says: "The programme has allowed me to learn more about teaching and be better at my job. But I believe it's also important to care and love the children like your own, be a role model and create a nurturing environment for them."



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Cultivating the love for Chinese at home

To make up for the lack of face-to-face interaction during online classes, two Chinese language teachers created fun videos and learning materials to engage the kids — BY KENNETH GOH



PHOTO: MOHAMED ISMAIL

Face-to-face interaction and fun activities — such as games, music and show-and-tell — are important to help young children pick up skills, and are even more so when it comes to the learning of subjects like Chinese language.

But what happens when the face-to-face teaching process is abruptly disrupted and lessons have to move to online platforms?

This was the problem that two Chinese language teachers at Safari House Preschool (Dover) faced when it was closed for two months during the circuit breaker.

Despite their initial anxieties, Ms Chen Chaoli (above, in purple), 45, and Ms Ma Ling (above, in pink), 44, knew that they had to be nimble in adapting their teaching methods, so that their lessons for more than 60 nursery and kindergarten students would not get disrupted.

Ms Chen says: "We wanted to ensure that the children were able to continue learning, so we took up the challenge to develop new skills to engage them virtually."

WORKING THROUGH THE CHALLENGES

In order to conduct lessons online, Ms Chen and Ms Ma

used Google Classroom, a web service that facilitates video lessons, to create fun videos and learning materials. In this way, the teachers were able to engage with students through themed lessons and check their work.

Some challenges of conducting virtual lessons included not receiving spontaneous feedback from students and controlling the order of the class. They also had to fine-tune their home-based learning strategy to make content relevant and interesting, and include a flexible format for busy parents who want to work with their children.

Since the pre-school reopened in early June, Ms Chen and Ms Ma have stepped up



ILLUSTRATION: GETTY IMAGES

TIPS TO HELP YOUR PRE-SCHOOLER LOVE CHINESE

Make it fun and relevant
If your kids love eating *zong zi* (rice dumplings), for example, you could make dumplings together with them, while telling them about the Dragon Boat Festival. That will also allow them to learn more about Chinese culture.

Broaden their exposure
A good way to encourage your pre-schooler's interest and competency in the language is to expose them to a wide variety of materials, such as poems, tongue twisters, cartoons and songs. These will not only entertain them, but also develop their reading and listening skills.

efforts to foster a safer learning environment, as well as to continue teaching the children good life-long habits such as hygiene and caring for others.

Ms Ma adds: "We are also taking the opportunity to cultivate the right values among children such as respect, showing kindness towards friends and personal responsibility, which are also in line with our school's values."