

CAREERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Growing young minds with stories

Dr Louise Gwenneth Phillips highlights the importance of storytelling as a learning tool for young children

BY RATNA RAMLI

An early childhood and tertiary educator, storyteller, consultant and researcher, Dr Louise Gwenneth Phillips has more than 30 years of experience working with children across various settings. Currently, she is an associate professor on education at the Singapore campus of James Cook University. One of her research areas is storytelling in early childhood education.

"Storytelling is a universal, traditional art form that has been featured strongly in all cultures as an effective communication tool. Important messages are skilfully conveyed through storytelling, as the listener is entranced by the images the storyteller paints them, and brought alive by the dynamic use of voice and gestures," she says.

Dr Phillips says storytelling also helps to inculcate a love for reading from a young age.

"Children model our behaviours, so we need to show them the wonders of reading," she says.

She recommends that parents and educators take time to study each child and offer books that align with the child's interests. One way to engage the children is to use their names for the characters in the story.

"This is a great way to boost their self-esteem and capture their attention," she says.

Dr Phillips shares six ways storytelling can help children learn better.

- Trains their imagination as they get to visualise the characters and scenes.
- Enhances communication skills, by telling, listening to, understanding and interpreting stories.
- Extends their vocabulary as they hear and learn new words being used. A well-established oral vocabulary is essential for the development of their written vocabulary.



Dr Louise Gwenneth Phillips believes in the universal art of storytelling as an effective communication tool. PHOTO: JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

- Uses language that is more complex and structured than everyday conversations as a stepping stone for children to learn the structure of written sentences.
- Enhances comprehension skills, as children are required to listen carefully; this creates mental imagery as they have to make interpretations and connections.
- Develops social skills, as children share, discuss and work together.



Learning from a child's perspective

Lead teacher Tan Chiew Hoon strives to make learning relatable for her charges

Ms Tan Chiew Hoon believes that teaching must be interesting and meaningful to capture the children's attention. PHOTO: TED CHEN

BY RACHEL TAN

When Ms Tan Chiew Hoon, 29, first joined PCF Sparkletots @ Pioneer Blk 654B in 2011, she was not a qualified early childhood teacher yet.

At that time, she only had a bachelor's degree in Chinese language — and a natural affinity with young children. But her passion to teach Chinese to children and help them reach their full potential gave the preschool's centre principals confidence to groom her to be an outstanding teacher.

With their support, Ms Tan pursued and attained a Diploma in Early Childhood Care and Education (Chinese) from SEED Institute in 2015. After continued guidance and opportunities to put into practice what she has learnt, she has also become more attuned and confident with teaching children in ways best suited to their learning disposition. Ms Tan was promoted to lead teacher in April this year.

What is the most fulfilling part of your job?

"Seeing the children's happy faces at school in the morning brings me joy and fulfilment. Their excitement brings

me assurance that what we do benefits them.

Even though we couldn't meet the children during the home-based learning period, we found ways to be involved in their learning and keep them excited through the Educational Toolkits and pre-recorded videos that we shared with their parents."

What have you learnt about improving a child's learning experience?

"I've learnt that we must look at learning from a child's viewpoint to teach purposefully and effectively.

Teaching must be interesting and meaningful to capture the children's attention. They should be able to relate with what they are learning and apply it in their lives.

For example, children from non-Mandarin speaking families may find it difficult to use the Chinese words that they have learnt in their daily lives. One simple way we overcome this is by teaching Chinese through a cookery lesson. The children can easily share with their parents when they apply the words they have learnt to the food and things they see at home."

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