



Mr David Chiem says MindChamps is unique in that it has incorporated ground-breaking scientific research into its programmes. It trains its teachers to not only teach what the content is about, but also how it relates to the pupils, and the relationships between each concept within a given context. PHOTO: MINDCHAMPS

SMESpotlight

MindChamps' curriculum brings on the Smiles

Early childhood education provider's success hinges on equipping kids with skills for future

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Early childhood education provider MindChamps has been formulating educational strategies to fill the gaps that have been occurring in education systems globally since it began its research 20 years ago.

Founder and chief executive officer David Chiem explained that these gaps exist because "we are often taught what to learn and not how to learn".

Traditional education systems often impart just the content, but not the strategies and mindset of a

life-long learner.

"Every child is born with an unlimited potential for success encoded in his DNA. To unlock this potential, we had to design a new model that will equip children with the necessary skills for the future and offer them an opportunity to express their potential," said Mr Chiem.

The result was the creation of a future-oriented education model called the "3-Mind Revolution", which was introduced in 2008 when MindChamps PreSchool was established.

"No expert or futurist can tell us what the future will be like. In a world where information is dou-

bling every two years, and where the old methods of memorisation and reiteration are no longer relevant, we need to equip our children with the skills, flexibility and mindset to thrive in a rapidly changing and information-saturated environment. Based on our research, we know that the academic mind alone is not enough. That is why we need the 3-Mind approach," said Mr Chiem.

The model combines neuroscience, psychology and theatre in its three elements: the Champion Mind, the Learning Mind and the Creative Mind.

The Champion Mind celebrates uniqueness, encouraging the learner to go beyond conventional wisdom and overcome difficulties to achieve success.

The Learning Mind devises strategies that actively help the learner to

understand, recall and synthesise information and concepts.

The Creative Mind connects multiple perspectives and integrates them to generate innovative ideas.

This unique and revolutionary approach to education has won them numerous awards, including the 2017 Enterprise 50 Awards.

RESEARCH-BASED CURRICULUM

Research has always been a principal element in MindChamps' work and it influences MindChamps PreSchool to use the Smiles curriculum, which stands for Sensory, Motor (Music and Movement), Intellectual, Linguistic, Emotional and Social. It consists of five core academic programmes and four enrichment programmes that encourage multi-sensory learning with different materials such as songs, puppetry and kinesthetic activities.

LEARNING TO LEARN

Everything in a great story or metaphor has a purpose. We create lesson plans in which things connect, where the objective is clear for the child. It is in this way that we activate their curiosity to discover answers for themselves and this is what makes active and engaging learning.



MR DAVID CHIEM, founder and CEO of MindChamps.

MindChamps' programme integrates both empirical and secondary research done by a team of international experts in education, neuroscience and psychology. The team includes Australian author and educator Brian Caswell, early childhood experts Kathy Hirsh-Pasek and Roberta Michnick Golinkoff, and former Raffles Girls' School principal Carmee Lim, to name a few. In particular, it draws upon the research of award-winning neuroscientist Allan Snyder from the University of Sydney.

"What is unique about MindChamps is that we have managed to incorporate ground-breaking scientific research into our programmes. For example, we have distilled the key ingredients of Professor Snyder's exploration of the 'Champion Mindset' and incorporated them into our curriculum," said Mr Chiem.

Prof Snyder's Centre for the Mind at the University of Sydney studies "champions" from all walks of life and diverse fields such as the sciences, entrepreneurship, the arts and politics to research on ways to instil the "Champion Mindset".

The centre also organises intellectual events, where "champions" such as Nobel laureates and Olympic gold medalists give talks and engage the audience.

Prof Snyder's research has shown that these "champions" almost inevitably possess three characteristics that separate them from others – an abhorrence to being "just ordinary", the willingness to transcend conventional wisdom, and the ability to accept and learn from adversity. These three characteristics conceptualised the Champion Mind, the Learning Mind and the Creative Mind on which the Smiles curriculum is based.

To ensure Smiles is executed effectively, MindChamps trains its teachers to go beyond simply teaching the content. According to Mr Chiem, MindChamps also trains them to teach what the content is about, how it relates to the pupils, and the relationships between each concept within a given context.

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metaphor has a purpose. We create lesson plans in which things connect, where the objective is clear for the child. It is in this way that we activate their curiosity to discover answers for themselves and this is what makes active and engaging learning," he said.

To protect its intellectual property, Smiles and its programmes are all registered as trademarks and protected under the Copyright Act in Singapore. MindChamps recognises that it operates in a very competitive field and believes it is crucial for it to protect the ideas and programmes it has developed.

"The reality of the business is that it is easy for people to imitate the MindChamps curriculum," said Mr Chiem. "Without trademarks, we have little value."

MAKING A GLOBAL IMPACT

Today, with seven company-owned and operated pre-school centres and 31 franchisees, MindChamps is the largest operator and franchisor of premium-range pre-school centres in Singapore. It also has centres in Australia, the Philippines and the United Arab Emirates. To date, MindChamps has more than 100,000 pupils who have graduated from MindChamps internationally.

In November last year, it became the first and only pre-school operator to list on the Singapore Exchange. Its initial public offering drew strong interest from both institutional and retail investors. Mr Chiem said the positive demand was a strong testament to MindChamps' "3-Mind Revolution" model.

With an increasing emphasis on the importance of early childhood education, MindChamps believes it has significant opportunities for growth and expansion. It is actively looking for ways to expand its operations and expects to launch its first centres in Vietnam, Myanmar and China by the year end.

• The writers are students at NUS Business School. This series is part of the Enterprise 50 Educational Project between the E50 partners and NUS Business School.