

LEADING LIGHT

AN EFFECTIVE LEADER IS ONE WHO NURTURES EDUCATORS, WORKS WITH PARENTS AND EMBRACES TECHNOLOGY, SAYS AWARD-WINNING PRINCIPAL PEARLYN TAN.



Ms Tan (right) gives her team of educators the autonomy to plan and tweak lessons based on children's needs and interests

As the Executive Principal of NTUC First Campus' My First Skool at 49 Rivervale Crescent, Ms Pearlyn Tan cites three tenets of effective leadership — being able to influence and inspire, leading by example, and embracing lifelong learning. These helped her clinch the ECDA Outstanding Early Childhood Leader Award in 2021.

LEADERSHIP ESSENTIALS

Ms Tan believes in nurturing a team of educators who are reflective and intentional in their teaching practices and have a sense of empowerment. Monthly curriculum meetings allow teachers to discuss and review teaching practices. They are also given the autonomy to plan and tweak lessons, based on the children's diverse learning needs and interests.

To promote a supportive and respectful work culture, Ms Tan has put in place a buddy system. New educators are partnered with senior educators, who provide guidance on teaching methods, care for children and communication with parents.

Professional development is vital for teacher quality, Ms Tan emphasises. "In addition to mentoring and internal curriculum meetings,

I encourage teachers to attend training to enhance their knowledge and skills and have in-depth conversations about their learning."

REACHING PARENTS THROUGH TECH

"As a child's first teachers and our co-partners, parents should be part of their children's learning and development," says Ms Tan, who plans at least 10 parental engagement activities a year. "I work with educators to bolster their confidence and skills to provide parents with the appropriate support to facilitate their children's development."

The situation created by COVID-19 and Safe Management Measures (SMMs) opened up new possibilities for using technology to maintain communication channels and sustain connections with parents. Parent-teacher conferences and orientations were conducted virtually. Parents received regular updates on their children's learning activities via a Digital Parent Portal. Ideas for craftwork, teacher-guided reading sessions and other resources were also made available for parents on My First Skool's Home Learning Portal.

Parents used the centre's learning resources on the Home Learning Portal



BUILDING DIGITAL LITERACY

How parents can help children make sense of messages in digital media.

- **Consume media with children.** Explain what is happening when watching an educational video or playing a digital game together, instead of using these as time-fillers.
- **Use current issues to ask questions or role-play.** Ask questions such as "How do you feel about this news?" or "What would you do in this situation?". Children learn to think about what they read and see online and can better discern what is authentic.
- **Set limits and offer alternative activities.** Encourage children to engage in offline play, indoors and outdoors, that promote exploration and stimulate creativity and innovation.

Mrs Pamela Chua, whose son Ian, 2, attends the preschool, is a fan of the Home Learning Portal. "It has practical resources and activities which we can easily access at home. Engaging in these activities with Ian has helped us extend his learning and strengthen family bonds," she says.

"Technology is a useful tool, which allows us to engage and involve parents in their children's development," Ms Tan acknowledges. "However, there is a caveat. Technology cannot replace face-to-face interaction and communication to build close rapport and trust with parents. A blended approach is advisable." ●

WATCH THIS! Scan to hear Ms Pearlyn Tan's philosophy on leadership practices. go.gov.sg/ecdaawardwinner-pearylntan

