

BUILDING A LEARNING CULTURE

PURSUING A MASTER'S DEGREE TO BE A BETTER LEADER WHO DEVELOPS PROFICIENT TEACHERS.

Being promoted to principal of PCF Sparkletots @ Tampines West Blk 890A in mid-2019 was a turning point for Ms Nur Sulastri Binte Mohamad Riway Surya Putera. It inspired her to be more proactive in seeking out continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities to upgrade herself.

"I am aware that my beliefs and actions will influence the direction and culture of my centre. So, it is my responsibility to equip myself with the relevant knowledge, skills and attitude to lead my team," says Ms Nur Sulastri. Since January 2022, she has been pursuing a part-time master's degree in early childhood education at the Singapore University of Social Sciences on an ECDA Scholarship. The experience has been eye-opening, with many "aha" moments that made her reflect on her practices as a centre leader.

For instance, the topic on assessments prompted Ms Nur Sulastri to rethink the purpose of classroom observations — to encourage continuous improvement rather than use it as a form of performance appraisal. "Sharing this insight with my teachers allows for



Ms Nur Sulastri (second from left) in a brainstorming session with her teachers to improve teaching and learning practices

more open and candid discussions. My team knows that it is okay to make mistakes, and that we learn and grow from them," she explains.

WALKING THE TALK

Ms Nur Sulastri strongly advocates teacher training and plans to specialise in this area for her master's degree. "I remind my team that 'to teach 21st-century children, we need to be 21st-century teachers'. What we had learnt before may not be relevant now."

She is keen on blending different learning approaches for her team. For example, she combines online sessions for teachers to share research findings and theoretical concepts with face-to-face practical sessions to deepen understanding and facilitate application of teaching skills. Ms Nur Sulastri also

incorporates other strategies such as one-on-one coaching, paired discussions and learning journeys to other preschools. "This keeps learning relevant and interesting, and increases teachers' interest and motivation to grow professionally," she says.

"Peer learning is also important. My role is not limited to training teachers but also guiding them to be trainers or leaders," Ms Nur Sulastri notes. Two of her teachers have done just that — and taken ownership of their learning — by conducting a CPD session on outdoor learning for their colleagues. "We gain valuable insights from sharing and discussing with one another. It opens up new perspectives and enriches our practices. I, too, am always learning from and with my teachers," she adds. ●



Teachers need to constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills to engage 21st-century children

ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

Ms Nur Sulastri was among more than 270 aspiring and in-service educators who received the ECDA Scholarships and Training Awards at a ceremony on 11 October 2022. Since 2015, ECDA has given out more than 180 Scholarships and 2,700 Training Awards totalling \$86 million to support the career goals of early childhood educators and uplift the quality of the sector. For more information, visit www.ecda.gov.sg/Pages/ecda-scholarships-and-training-awards.aspx.

