

# BROADENING MINDSETS

**EARLY CHILDHOOD LEADERS RETURNED FROM STUDY TRIPS OVERSEAS FILLED WITH RICH INSIGHTS AND REFLECTIONS TO SHARE.**

**S**tudy trips provide valuable opportunities for early childhood (EC) educators to see overseas teaching approaches in action, learn good practices from schools and institutions, and reflect on and improve existing practices in Singapore. Last year, the ECDA Fellows and participants of the Professional Development Programme (Leaders) or PDP(L) visited Australia and Taiwan, respectively.

## AT CENTRE LEVEL

Centre manager at the Li Hwan branch of Pre-school By-The-Park, Say Xiang Rui, was one of 20 EC leaders from the inaugural batch of PDP(L) who visited preschools and interacted with EC professionals in Taiwan. Some of her takeaways from the trip:

- **Lead to inspire and transform.** Change should start from within, before we can influence others. The preschool leaders in Taiwan were intentional in modelling good professional development practices. They kept up with EC research and stayed abreast of the latest trends and developments through regular readings and reflections. As leaders, we are reminded to set aside protected time for our educators to share readings with one another and how they can be made relevant locally. We agree that leaders should create opportunities for the team to be part of the decision-making process.
- **Empower children.** Children in Taiwan were given ample opportunities to experience the world around them through their five senses. Their parents and teachers helped them make connections with their learning.

We observed that play-based and child-focused learning helped children take ownership of their learning. This resonates well with our philosophy in Singapore. The visit also affirmed our belief that children need time and space to explore, learn and have fun.

- **Create a learning network and fraternity.** According to McNamee (2019), "The word 'connection' is the key to the theory... to a new way of teaching, a new pathway that will serve children well in their future." Some ways to nurture connections and learning among teachers in Taiwan included taking turns to do peer observations, as well as sharing good practices and research insights. We agree with the importance of peer learning. Together with other leaders, I hope to build on this leadership connection and collectively make a difference to our EC sector in Singapore.

## AT SECTOR LEVEL

Oh Chui Hwa, ECDA Fellow and Principal of Far Eastern Kindergarten, together with other ECDA Fellows, visited centres, academic institutions and government agencies in Sydney, Australia. She shares her reflections:

- **The image of the Singapore child is important.** Construct the image of the child based on child development

theories, brain development, observations of the child and good practices. This guides how we design, plan and implement curriculum and pedagogical practices, and experiences for the children. It is also important for all — parents, educators, community — to own this shared image of the child, as lack of alignment can cause confusion, differing expectations and an uneven playing field for children.

- **An educational leader is an agent of change.** The leader is committed to nurturing a culture of collegiality among the teachers and supporting their professional development. This builds a cohesive fraternity where teachers share and learn, in order to improve teaching and learning practices and grow professionally.
- **A thinking teacher is a reflexive teacher.** Reflexive teachers are keen observers and critical thinkers. Most importantly, they are critics of their own mindset and practice, and engage in professional dialogues with their peers and others. They see the curriculum as a living document and translate it into a reflexive curriculum which is attuned to the children's needs. The main goal of teachers is to pursue better outcomes for children. ●



PDP(L) participants at an early childhood conference in Taiwan



ECDA Fellows visited the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority in Sydney

# THOSE WHO CAN, TEACH

**ECDA SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT OON SIU SUAN CREDITS GOOD MENTORS FOR FACILITATING HER CAREER SWITCH.**

**W**hen Oon Siu Suan took on the job as a temporary kindergarten relief teacher during her polytechnic school holidays, she did not expect it to become her calling. The teaching stint opened her eyes to the important role of a preschool teacher and the diverse skills needed — understanding children's development, planning developmentally appropriate activities, managing behaviours, preparing learning materials and communicating with parents, among others.

The experience, though brief, enriched her. "I learned numerous skills and felt that I had grown and gained much as a person," she says. With this, Siu Suan decided to make a career switch despite graduating with a Diploma in Medicinal Chemistry in 2015.

## STRONG SUPPORT SYSTEM

As a novice educator with no relevant teaching experience, Siu Suan faced challenges such as balancing the demands of a part-time early childhood diploma while working full-time. Fortunately, her attachment centre had an induction programme and assigned her a senior teacher as her mentor.

Siu Suan recounts one incident where she had to handle some challenging behaviour in class as a new teacher: "There was a child who

had frequent meltdowns. I felt lost and did not know what to do or how to calm him down. But my mentor was patient and guided me along the process. She helped me see how we could address the behaviour." Together with her mentor, she researched visual cues that might be helpful in communicating with the child and worked with his parents to better understand and support him. "Till today, my mentor continues to guide and support me whenever I call upon her for suggestions and advice," Siu Suan adds.

Now 24, Siu Suan has been a kindergarten teacher at PCF Sparkletots Preschool @ Sengkang Central Blk 292B for four years. She is thankful to her principal, who encourages her to excel. Last year, Siu Suan embarked on her part-time Bachelor of Early Childhood Education degree at Singapore University of Social Sciences and received the ECDA Scholarship to support her aspirations.

## ASPIRING TO INSPIRE

Working and studying at the same time is definitely not easy, she admits. "The advantage is that something you learned today can be tried out tomorrow and reviewed. I love to bring back what I have learnt and share it with my principal, who is open to ideas and supportive of what I want to try out."



Siu Suan has found her calling as a preschool teacher

## KEEP IT R.E.A.L.

**Siu Suan shares her survival strategies as a new teacher.**

**R – Relationships:** Building good relationships with the children will help with class management and support their learning and development.

**E – Embrace:** Embrace challenges positively as each one that you overcome will make you a more insightful teacher.

**A – Ask:** Ask whenever you are in doubt, be it in your studies or at work. Learning from peers and others can help you grow professionally.

**L – Love notes:** Keep letters of encouragement from parents and children — these will motivate you whenever you face challenging times.



Besides using her new knowledge to improve the quality of care and education at her centre, she hopes to contribute to making the curriculum more meaningful for children with special needs. She also aspires to be a mentor to others, just as how her own mentors have encouraged and supported her. ●



Early childhood educators keen to further their studies in Early Childhood and take on larger roles in the sector can apply for the ECDA Scholarship. Visit [www.ecda.gov.sg/Pages/ecda-scholarships-for-master-and-degree-programmes.aspx](http://www.ecda.gov.sg/Pages/ecda-scholarships-for-master-and-degree-programmes.aspx) for more information.