

Principals matter – New leadership programme to gear up 150 preschool principals for the future

Amid the SkillsFuture movement, a Lien Foundation-led coalition of local & international organisations consulted 50 early childhood leaders to develop training programme on preschool leadership

Singapore, 27 April 2016

1. Leaders matter. Effective principal leadership influences the quality of early childhood education¹. Research has shown that leadership of principals is second only to teaching in terms of impact on child outcomes². Stronger and more capable principals ultimately benefit children in the most formative period of their learning and development. Without good principals as role models to lead the teachers and effect changes, any efforts to drive long-term improvements in the ECE sector could be short-lived.
2. To develop preschool principals, the Lien Foundation is launching a new leadership development programme, *Principal Matters*, in collaboration with four local and international organisations: SEED Institute, Singapore’s largest training provider in early childhood education; Wheelock College, a U.S. liberal arts college founded in 1888; SIM University (UniSIM), Singapore’s only private university that focuses on lifelong learning; and Korn Ferry Hay Group (KFHG), a global people and organisational advisory firm.

Experiential training with overseas exposure

3. This \$2.7 million training programme adopts an experiential, multi-disciplinary approach that gives participants overseas exposure to best practices, as well as diverse learning opportunities with mentors and leaders outside ECE. It will develop 150 preschool principals (with three to ten years of experience as principals), close to 10% of Singapore’s preschool principals. The programme, valued at over \$16,000 per principal, comes free with no strings attached for the principals selected.

¹ Aline-Wendy Dunlop, *A Literature Review on Leadership in the Early Years*, April 2008

² Wahlstrom, K., Seashore-Louis, K., Leithwood, K., & Anderson, S. (2010). *Investigating the links to improved student learning: Executive summary of research findings*. New York, NY: The Wallace Foundation.

4. The programme comprises bite-sized modules spread over 6 months: A five-day workshop by an organisational development firm that trains senior civil servants and corporate leaders; a 12-day visit to Boston, the educational hub of America; a mentorship programme with nine ECE leaders (including ECDA Fellows); a public symposium showcasing the principals' capstone projects; and a research study on the evolving nature of preschool leadership amid changing societal norms and family dynamics.

What makes good leaders

5. Principal Matters is built atop a new competency model specially developed by KFHG for the Singapore ECE sector. Developed through interviews with 50 leaders including ECDA Fellows, business owners, veteran principals and young principals from private, non-profit and anchor operators, the behavioural competencies of outstanding preschool principals of the future were identified, coded and benchmarked against KFHP's global database of leadership competencies.

Principals need investment in their leadership development

6. Investment in preschool principals is important not only because development in the early years is crucial, it is also because the weight of this crucial task often falls disproportionately on the shoulders of a single individual – the principal.
7. Singapore's preschool principals tend to be young, rising up to take the helm as a result of high teacher attrition rates. Official statistics are unavailable but anecdotally, many teachers become principals in their mid to late 20s due to the manpower crunch. In a few short years, they go from managing a class of children to having to manage a business – from supervising and retaining teachers of different ages and backgrounds and engaging increasingly well-educated parents who are often older than them, to maintaining enrolment and keeping costs low in a competitive market.

Principals under pressure

8. Preschool principals are also under pressure to implement the slew of recent changes and new ECE policies. Furthermore, in the last five years, the number of childcare centres has expanded by almost 40% in spite of persistent manpower shortages³. Principals spend lots of time and energy to obtain SPARK (Singapore Preschool Accreditation

³ See figures in Annex B: Facts and Figures on ECE and Leadership Training for ECE practitioners

Framework) for their preschools, as this rigorous quality assurance framework has become a favoured benchmark by parents, business owners and the government. This year, five mega preschools are slated to open, requiring the principals to manage enrolment and staff teams that are three to five times bigger than typical preschools. Soon, all principals will need to stay abreast of new regulations under the Early Childhood Development Centres Act when it is tabled in Parliament later this year. The sector would also need to adapt to a new Skills Framework introduced as part of SkillsFuture.

9. In spite of these rising demands, the available training for preschool principals is limited. The well-known ECDA Fellowship of 14 ECE veterans serves more as a platform for service to the sector rather than leadership development. Currently, less than 20%, or seven out of 47, of the courses in the ECDA prospectus on Continuing Professional Development cater exclusively to principals.⁴

10. The training opportunities for principals and vice-principals at MOE (Ministry of Education) primary and secondary schools are markedly different. They have a robust and generous choice of development courses such as the Leaders In Education Programme, Management and Leadership in Schools Programme, and Building Educational Bridges Programme⁵. Alongside these, MOE principals are part of a vibrant professional body – the Academy Of Principals – that conducts, among others, a successful yearlong mentorship programme for newly appointed principals.

11. Underlining the need for greater investment in preschool principals, Mr Lee Poh Wah, CEO, Lien Foundation said, “Today, the demand for experienced and capable principals is higher than ever. This is driven by the dramatic growth of preschool centres and intense government-directed, sector-wide initiatives to enhance professionalism and standards in early childhood education. It puts principals under tremendous pressure to perform.” He added, “If the changing and increasingly complex ECE sector continues to suffer from deficit in leadership development, it will not be able to respond to these growing demands. *Principal Matters* aims to nurture a pipeline of professional, high-calibre preschool leaders who are able to align their values and actions to effectively initiate change for the better. This learning journey takes place amidst the SkillsFuture movement as we join hands to foster personal and professional growth of incumbent principals.”

⁴ <https://www.ecda.gov.sg/Documents/Prospectus%202016.pdf>

⁵ <http://www.nie.edu.sg/leadership-professional-development/leadership-programmes>

Distinctive emphasis on effective practice

12. Ms Ho Yin Fong, Academic Director, SEED Institute, said, “Presently, leadership diploma programmes cover fundamental theories like qualities of a good leader and team-building. We want to go one step further with *Principal Matters*, to help principals translate vision to practice; to not just know what the management tools are, but how to apply them to bring about change in their schools, organisations, and ultimately the ECE sector. The behavioural competencies will bring participants from knowledge to effective practice.” SEED Institute will lead the Singapore leg of the programme, comprising workshops, mentorship sessions and a symposium.

13. Developed to be easily applicable by principals, the behavioural competency model highlights 10 key leadership traits – believe in people, manage yourself, care for people, develop people, lead the team, drive change, lead strategically, influence people, partner the community and harness opportunities.

14. “The study identifies the behavioural characteristics essential for a centre leader in the early childhood sector to produce outstanding outcomes for the centre and the sector. With this, we lay the foundation for more targeted development efforts for leaders in the sector,” said Ms Tan Khai Ling, Managing Consultant, Korn Ferry Hay Group. KFHG will also develop feedback tools to track the principals’ behavioural development after 12 and 18 months.

15. Echoing the importance of behavioural competencies, Ms Shaireen Selamat, a PhD candidate in ECE leadership said, “To teachers, a principal’s behaviour is more important and a better reflection of their leadership ability than their knowledge. How a principal relates, reacts and manages the preschool has great impact on teachers, and on the teaching or guidance children receive. Principals are ‘frontliners’ who can’t hide behind meetings and emails. Their position requires healthy and visible leadership that influences and impacts the quality of teachers, teaching and subsequent outcomes in the children’s development.”

Best minds, best practices from Boston

16. The cadre of principals under the programme will gain first-hand knowledge of best practices in early childhood education. Led by Wheelock College, they will meet experts

from renowned institutions such as Harvard University's Centre on the Developing Child⁶, the Boston Children's Museum, and leaders from other fields during their overseas training in Boston. They will have attachments in leading early childhood environments, such as those from inclusive public preschool systems, internationally recognised private early childhood models, and research-based public programmes such as Head Start⁷.

17. Dr. Linda Davis, Dean of International Programs & Partnerships at Wheelock College said, "Boston is the hub of innovative research and best practices. It is our aim to leverage this fact to our advantage and expose principals to some of the best expertise available, cutting-edge research and an out-of-the-box experience that will challenge the way they think and do things."

Chance to apply their learning & solve problems

18. The programme's unique focus on practice will require participants to identify a specific leadership challenge they are facing at their preschool at the start of their training. These could be challenges such as the need for new parent engagement strategies or how to be more inclusive of children with special needs. Each principal will work towards the solution for the problem throughout their training and present it at the Principal Matters Capstone Symposium, which concludes the programme. Each graduating cohort of principals will contribute by helping to mentor future cohorts, creating a professional community of practice of ECE principals.
19. The programme will be complemented by a qualitative and ethnographic research study by UniSIM that identifies examples of principals' practices in Singapore. This is to improve understanding of leadership practices locally, and enhance policy formulation.

First cohort of Principal Matters in August

20. Applications have opened for interested principals with three to ten years of experience. The 150 selected principals will be trained in six groups of 25, with the first cohort starting on 22 August 2016. The closing date for application for the first batch is 18 May 2016. Interested applicants who would like to join later cohorts are encouraged to apply in advance. *Principal Matters* will run till 2019, with the total training sessions per cohort

⁶ <http://developingchild.harvard.edu>

⁷ About the Head Start programme <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ohs/about/head-start>

taking about 100 hours over six months. The application form can be downloaded at www.principalmatters.sg.

21. Outside of Singapore, some countries like the U.S. rely on legislation and policies to support the training and development of high-quality leadership in early childhood education. In some states, principals have to be licensed practitioners who are required to undergo annual training. As Singapore's early childhood education evolves, consideration of such measures may do well to provide greater rigour and professional empowerment to the leadership. In addition, an academy like the U.K.'s National College of Teaching and Leadership, which also develops leaders of early childhood education, could transform the heartbeat of Singapore's ECE sector from the inside out.

Annex A - The *Principal Matters* Journey

Annex B - Facts and Figures on ECE and Leadership Training for ECE practitioners

Annex C - Overview of the Behavioural Competency Model in *Principal Matters*

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About the Lien Foundation

www.lienfoundation.org

The Lien Foundation is a Singapore philanthropic house noted for its model of radical philanthropy. It breaks new ground by investing in innovative solutions, convening strategic partnerships and catalysing action on social and environmental challenges. The Foundation seeks to foster exemplary early childhood education, excellence in eldercare and effective environmental sustainability in water and sanitation. In the area of early childhood education, the Foundation aims to create a better playing field by strengthening capacity in this area and opening up opportunities for disadvantaged preschoolers.

To advocate greater access to quality early childhood education, the Foundation commissioned a study, *Vital Voices for Vital Years* that examined leaders' views on improving Singapore's preschool sector. In June 2012, the Lien Foundation released a global benchmark study called *Starting Well* that ranked 45 countries on their provision of preschool education. The use of I.T forms a key strategy in the Foundation's efforts to increase efficiencies and enhance professionalism in the preschool sector.

The Foundation championed a community-based model of care where specialists go into mainstream preschools to help children with learning difficulties. Its success has inspired a scaled-up national version in Singapore. In its push for inclusivity in education, the Foundation set up Singapore's first inclusive preschool, *Kindle Garden*, with AWWA (Asian Women's Welfare Association). To improve outcomes for disadvantaged preschoolers, the Foundation spearheaded *Circle of Care*, a child-centric model of care where teachers, social workers and therapists look after the children's holistic development and the needs of their families in an integrated way.

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Annex B – Facts and Figures on ECE and Leadership Training for ECE practitioners

A Preschools in Singapore

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	as of July 2015 ¹
1.	Number of childcare centres ²	855	944	1,002	1,077	1,148	1196
2.	Number of kindergartens ²	493	495	504	498	503	499
	TOTAL	1,348	1,439	1,506	1,575	1,651	1,695

		2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
3.	Enrolment in childcare centres ²	66,193	73,547	79,679	86,124	92,932
4.	Enrolment in kindergartens ²	68,720	67,652	67,734	68,057	68,999
	TOTAL	134,913	141,199	147,413	154,181	161,931

5.	Annual attrition rate of preschool teachers (2013)	15 to 20% ³
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¹ <http://skoolopedia.com/preschool-singapore-2015-infographic/>

² Yearbook of Statistics Singapore, 2015, https://www.singstat.gov.sg/docs/default-source/default-document-library/publications/publications_and_papers/reference/yearbook_2015/yos2015.pdf

³ <http://www.todayonline.com/singapore/master-plan-develop-early-childhood-educators>

B Leadership programmes for preschool principals

	ECDA Fellows	Principal Matters	ECDA Leadership Series⁴	WSQ Build Team Relationships⁴	WSQ Lead Team⁴
For	<p>Pinnacle ECE leaders with high levels of leadership and professional expertise, minimum of 10 years' teaching and/or leadership experience in the early childhood sector</p> <p>* ECDA Fellowship is more a platform for service to the sector, rather than training of the Fellows themselves</p>	<p>Preschool Principals with 3 to 10 years experience as a Principal</p>	<p>Preschool Principals with 1 to 2 years experience</p>	<p>Preschool Principals</p>	<p>Preschool Principals</p>
Duration	<p>ECDA Fellows serve a 3-year term with 100 hours of service a year.</p> <p>Compulsory 2 week full-time milestone course in the first year</p>	<p>104 hours, about 17 working days over 6 months</p>	<p>77 hours, about 11.5 days</p> <p>Consists of 5 parts. Part 1 is required before attending any or all of the other modules</p>	<p>18 hours</p>	<p>16 hours</p>

⁴ ECDA Prospectus 2016 <https://www.ecda.gov.sg/Documents/Prospectus%202016.pdf>

B Leadership programmes for preschool principals (cont'd)

	ECDA Fellows	Principal Matters	ECDA Leadership Series⁴	WSQ Build Team Relationships⁵	WSQ Lead Team⁴
Focus	Recognition of pinnacle leaders who work with ECDA to train and mentor other early childhood professionals, Development of sector-wide resources	Practical, behavioural aspects of successful centre leadership This allows principals to develop leadership capabilities in a way that is experiential and multi-disciplinary, so principals know how to put their learning into action at their centres effectively Training built on behavioural competency model	Better understanding of recent research on leadership and how it might apply to their practices Leadership approach that emphasises teachers' professional development, building a centre-wide learning culture, coherence in purpose, plans and actions, and developing the child holistically	Helps participants develop team cohesiveness, resolve conflict within team, and participate in networks	Helps participants facilitate implementation of organisation strategies, promote compliance with corporate governance requirements, and provide direction and guidance to team leaders
Overseas learning journey	NA	Yes	No	No	No
Formal mentorship programme	NA	Yes	No	No	No
Conducted by	ECDA	SEED Institute Wheelock College UniSIM	ECDA	SEED Institute	WDA Trainer

⁵ ECDA Prospectus 2016 <https://www.ecda.gov.sg/Documents/Prospectus%202016.pdf>

C Leadership programmes for MOE principals and leaders

	Academy of Principals	Building Educational Bridges: Innovation for School Leaders	Leaders in Education Programme	Management and Leadership in Schools Programme
For	Principals and Superintendants of government, government-aided or independent schools	Experienced and successful school leaders, including principals	Vice-principals	Middle-tier leaders who can support principals in school reform
Duration	Different durations for different programmes	2 weeks, full time	6 months, full time	17 weeks, full time
Focus	Offers workshops, seminars, events, sabbaticals, study visits and mentoring opportunities for principals covering knowledge, skills, sharing of experiences and cross-cultural exchange	Explores key leadership issues in national and international contexts, contexts of leadership, generating ideas for innovation and driving change towards high performance education systems	Develops principalship capability that is values-based, purposeful, innovative and forward-looking, anchored on strong people leadership, strategic management skills and an appreciation of how principals could work effectively in a complex environment	Staff appraisal, self management, change leadership, team building and conflict management
Overseas learning journey	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Formal mentorship programme	No	No	Yes	Yes
Conducted by	Academy of Principals	NIE, UK's National College for Teaching & Leadership, and the Danish School of Education at Aarhus University	NIE	NIE

D Leadership training for ECE leaders in other countries – A comparison⁶

	Singapore	Taiwan	England	Finland	Massachussets, USA
Leadership requirements	<p>2 years of pre-school teaching experience</p> <p>Dip. in Early Childhood Care & Education -Leadership (DECCE-L) or Specialist Dip. in Early Childhood Care & Education (SDECCE) - Leadership Components or Advanced Diploma in Early Childhood Leadership⁷ (ADECL)</p>	<p>Five years of experience as a certified teacher or assistant teacher</p> <p>Complete a director's leadership training program of 180 hours to fulfil the qualifications by law</p>	<p>Two specialist training opportunities are available: The Early Years Professional Status offers equivalence to qualified early years teacher status, and the National Professional Qualification for Integrated Centre Leadership for leaders of multi-agency early years settings that is equivalent to a Masters degree</p>	<p>Bachelor of Education including kindergarten teacher education, or Bachelor of Health Care and Social Services (polytechnic) including studies in Early Childhood Education and care and social pedagogy to the extent as laid down by Government decree</p> <p>Adequate management skills</p>	<p>3 years experience (high school diploma holders), 18 months experience (bachelor's degree holders with 6 months as a Lead Teacher)</p> <p>12 credits in early childhood education, 6 college credits in ECE, administration of ECE, and other administrative topic</p>
In-service training	Not a requirement	Need to acquire 18 hours of in-service training on ECEC topics every year	Providers must support staff to undertake appropriate training and professional development opportunities. This is to ensure they continually improve on the children's quality of learning and development experiences. ⁸	Employees have the right to in-service training days every year	Full-time teachers are required to attend 20 hours of professional development training per year
Training opportunities	A mixture of free and paid training programmes. See table B.	Government works with local universities to provide several professional development opportunities and free workshops	The National College of Teaching and Leadership offers a range of opportunities to develop and inspire competent leaders of early years settings, including children's centres and schools	Not many leadership programs and providers focusing on early childhood leadership	A mixture of free and paid training programmes, e.g. CAYL Principals Fellowship Program by the CAYL Institute of Cambridge

⁶ Eeva Hujala Manjula Waniganayake & Jillian Rodd, 2013, Researching Leadership in Early Childhood Education, Tampere University Press, Pg 25-27

⁷ <https://www.ecda.gov.sg/Pages/ADECL.aspx>

⁸ U.K. Department of Education, Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, effective September 2014