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I completed my diploma in EC in Singapore and came to Sydney to complete my undergraduate studies as an international student. In order to gain a better understanding of the cultural shift I had to make in becoming a teacher here, I worked as a casual staff at various centres while completing my studies. I came to realise each centre had its own culture and pedagogy and can differ greatly between contexts. I was employed as an EC teacher room leader with the three to fives upon graduation at the community-based centre. During that time, I was given space to explore the responsibilities of my role as a teacher and how I would shape the curriculum. As a new teacher, I was mentored in developing principles around working with families and staff and learnt how to articulate my thinking and pedagogy. I also began my professional journey as a supervising teacher to students who were undertaking their EC degrees and diplomas. These first few years as a full-time EC teacher laid the foundations of my future work with children, families, staff, students, volunteers and community.

I decided to take on part-time postgraduate studies after a few years, completing a Master of EC while working full-time. I saw upgrading my knowledge as an important aspect of being a teacher—an opportunity to consolidate some of my learning and to extend my pedagogical thinking and values. It was an opportunity to re-engage with theoretical understandings and because of my practical experiences and encounters I was able to make connections between theory and practice. After a semester of my postgraduate studies, I began working at Mia Mia Child and Family Study Centre at Macquarie University, Sydney as the EC teacher team leader of the three to fives room.

Mia Mia has a threefold vision; teaching, research and community. Carrying out my responsibilities and being accountable to this vision is part and parcel of my everyday work. I was challenged with my perspectives and beliefs not only about teaching but the EC sector in general. We believe in investing in qualifications of staff as a factor that contributes to quality education. Hence, every classroom has a degree-qualified (or higher) EC teacher as the team leader, leading each classroom. Our centre director, Wendy Shepherd, has a vision for Mia Mia to work towards a teaching team of teachers. Hence, staff are encouraged to upgrade themselves with the assurance there is a career pathway, where their employment will continue with their new qualifications. We are now seeing through our fourth staff member upgrading from a diploma to a teaching degree.

I was the first team leader who had to rethink how the room will work and look like with two degree-qualified teachers in the same classroom. With my knowledge and understanding of responsibilities of an EC teacher, I was able to create a framework that envisioned how team teaching and leadership would happen in our room. I took on the role of a mentor, supporting the neophyte teacher in her new role, setting goals with her and pacing the responsibilities she had to undertake as an EC teacher. During this time of team teaching, it was clear maintaining the role of the team leader held by the more experienced teacher is still an essential part of what makes it successful. I have always believed in the importance of investing in people: colleagues, volunteers and students. My vision and philosophy in establishing team teaching in my room is not about one teacher now having to 'step down' or where 'responsibility is now less for each teacher'; rather, it means 'our plate has become bigger' as the neophyte teacher now has to 'step up' and the quality of our work with children and families should also grow. Our team teaching experience should signify double the joy, double the thinking, double the perspectives—bringing more depth to the curriculum and working towards a seamless flow in our accountability and challenges to the school's vision.

Being just as observant as I am with children, to understand what the neophyte teacher's strengths and areas to work on are, to learn about their pedagogical goals and then developing shared goals towards the room's vision to support them in their achievements and progress helps them to know what is expected and what to work towards. Knowing when to do some hand-holding (coaching) and when to let go is important—mentoring

should develop from a coaching relationship to a peer mentoring one. This includes evaluating a situation after it has occurred; at times playing the devil's advocate; and knowing and understanding how the other person would like to be supported. Being generous with my time, knowledge and experiences, unpacking decision-making processes, and explaining why and how things are handled and evaluated will enable the neophyte teacher to understand better.

Growing in leadership must be supported with opportunities for professional development. Our annual staff retreats—attending conferences, workshops and presentations—have contributed in extending my pedagogical thinking and perspectives. Sharing my work at our annual Pedagogical Dialogues day (also known as Open Day) with the EC sector; during visits from local, national and international visitors to our school; through in-house and sector-specific publications and professional presentations; and opportunities to give lectures and tutorials to teacher education students have extended my skills and wealth of knowledge. A willingness to learn, to be thrown into the deep end, to take critical feedback with humility and grace, to stand up for my opinions and values, and to be open to differing opinions, feedback and perspectives are dispositions I continue to work on.

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