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I began my career in early childhood as an assistant teacher of 3–4 year olds in a kindergarten in Singapore after completing secondary school. This led to a full-time position and also a decade of working with children in a kindergarten as well as with children with cerebral palsy in a special needs school. During that period, I completed two Certificates and a Diploma in Early Childhood and began initiating changes in the kindergarten program and environment. It was very challenging as I was the youngest, newest and most inexperienced staff member. Completing my Diploma led to my decision to further my studies at Macquarie University leading to Bachelor and Masters degrees as I was hungry for knowledge about working with young children in diverse settings. I have now also completed postgraduate studies on research methods as I am interested in pursuing PhD studies.

In Sydney, I worked part-time while completing my degree. Upon graduation, I was employed as the temporary authorised supervisor and room leader of the 2–3 year old room in a community-based childcare centre. In these roles, I was responsible for the curriculum and program for the centre, mentoring staff and overall management of the daily operations together with my director and administrator. I do not usually shy away from responding to challenges as a beginning leader but have realised over time that I tend to question issues as a way of understanding their relevance to my current practice and then develop goals, strategies and timelines in response to challenges encountered in day-to-day work.

Who or what has influenced your work in early childhood to date?

My journey as an educator has been influenced primarily by my parents/family and our Catholic values and beliefs. From my choice of becoming an early childhood professional to engaging in further studies in this sector, I have always felt grounded in my decisions and comforted by the challenges as I have considered them as answering God's call for me. Obtaining university qualifications and having the opportunity to apply what I have learnt into the programs with children and families that I have worked with have also shaped the way I think and behave as a leader. An important part of this is the constant reflection of where all the knowledge fits in my philosophy as an educator. My approach is also influenced greatly by the two countries where I have lived and worked.

As a beginning leader, numerous factors can also either support or hinder one's progress. In my case, the university qualifications I had completed and my experience in the sector can be viewed as being important in terms of the roles I was expected to perform. Age and culture are also particularly challenging as these are not factors that I could change! This was the case when I first graduated from Macquarie University and my colleagues at the centre in Sydney were all older and were mainly Anglo-Saxon. It was not uncommon for those colleagues to say 'it is not the Australian way of doing things' or 'you have not lived in Australia long enough'.

Having immigrated to Australia from Singapore, what has assisted you in making the transition to work as an early childhood educator in this country?

I still call Singapore my home although I have been living in Sydney for almost a decade. This is primarily because I consider home being where my family is. My parents, sister and extended family including my grandparents live in Singapore and I miss not having them around with me in Sydney. However, living in two cultures, understanding two ways of doing things and two ways of being have been a constant for me whether I'm working in Sydney or in Singapore. I feel it is the recognition that I

am both, not either or, that has helped me with each transition between countries and cultures. I do feel I am continually transitioning as I progress in my professional journey. Whichever country I am in, I feel myself shifting and balancing who I am as a professional is reflective of the expectations and values of the role I perform in each setting.

What advice would you have for other educators interested in working in different countries?

Be open to what you can learn from different countries. One of the goals that I set myself when I first came to Sydney as an international student was to always be aware of the different practices, values and beliefs, how they sit in that particular setting and context and how they are reflective (or not) of my own cultural background. A consistent challenge for me is how diverse approaches in different countries have impacted on my early childhood philosophy and how these can be incorporated in my work with children and their families. This is also the way in which I have incorporated values and beliefs of my home culture to the way I work in Sydney and vice versa.