

Inspired to teach and learn

The Learning Lab's strong support system and positive working environment is a draw for English teacher Shuli Sudderuddin

BY MEREDITH WOO

Ms Shuli Sudderuddin, 31, loves working with young people and children as “there is no competition, no politics and no game playing — just an honest and heartfelt attempt to help students reach their personal best.”

She ran writing workshops for adolescents while she was studying for her master's degree in the United Kingdom, and found that teaching came naturally to her.

The ex-journalist found her true calling at The Learning Lab (TLL).

“My colleagues at TLL work hard but with great purpose.

“Everyone — from operational staff to the curriculum unit to teachers — works with the sole aim of making learning enjoyable, interesting and easy for students,” she says.

The enrichment centre offers programmes for pre-schoolers up to junior college students, and employs over 400 teachers across its eight facilities.

Ms Sudderuddin teaches students from Secondary 3 to Junior College Year 2.

Multi-faceted career

Ms Sudderuddin started four years ago at TLL as an English teacher but gradually taught other subjects as well, such as General Paper and sometimes English Literature.

She also mentors new teachers and assists with the writing of curriculum, something she greatly enjoys.

“In truth, I think I learn more from my students than they do from me, because, as my father likes to say, ‘When you teach, you learn twice,’” says Ms Sudderuddin, who holds a bachelor's degree in psychology from the National University of Singapore and a master's degree in writing from the University of Warwick.

“TLL allows me to focus more on teaching and less on administrative work, and to approach subjects and skills in my own way.

“While I would have to follow a set curriculum in



many other schools, we get a basic curriculum here and we can run with it any way we like,” she adds.

Moreover, one can try a management role alongside teaching or write the curriculum.

Primed for the job

Ms Sudderuddin experienced a steep learning curve when she first joined TLL.

But thanks to the centre's comprehensive in-house training programme and her mentor, she quickly eased into her role.

“We all receive intense training on topics that run the gamut of improving students' skills to dealing with adolescent problems,” she says.

Now, in addition to receiving training, she

is conducting sessions herself. She focuses on helping her fellow teachers improve students' presentation skills.

Unique work culture

TLL teachers are encouraged to pursue their personal interests, such as photography and travel, says Ms Sudderuddin.

As for the working environment, she observes: “Senior and junior teachers work closely together and everyone is very helpful and kind.

“I've never worried about raising questions or issues with anyone because everyone is so approachable and the hierarchy is rather flat.

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Having card-carrying biologists and chemists as well as mathematicians in the dynamic team contributes to the centre's ability to deliver far-reaching perspectives and the ability to handle even the most difficult questions, she says.

Another perk is the well-stocked pantry. Ms Sudderuddin, who has memorised the pantry-filling schedule, jokingly admits she will “wait at the side to get the most popular tidbits”

Heartware

She believes that, beyond the minimum qualification of a bachelor's degree in any discipline, the key qualities of a TLL educator are a love for imparting knowledge and a willingness to learn.

“The heart of a teacher is the heart of someone who is not interested in competition or reward, but rather in helping students excel and even surpass their tutors. It is therefore generous without reservation,” says Ms Sudderuddin, quoting her mother's colleague.

To join the TLL family, visit www.thelearninglab.com.sg for more details.