



# Engaging Families in Early Education

Using Digital Stories for Professional Learning

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# 1. Introduction

The Engaging Families in Early Education project produced nine digital stories with families and educators. The stories capture real life experiences and serve as valuable tools for reflection. In this document, we briefly describe the research, how we partnered with participants to produce the digital stories and offer some suggestions on how they could be used for professional learning. Beyond professional learning, we encourage educators, services, service providers, policy makers and advocates to draw on these stories in their own ways to improve the experiences of families who experience economic adversity in early childhood education and care (ECEC).

## 2. The research | Engaging Families in Early Education

Most, but not all, children in Australia participate in early education before they start school. Families who experience financial difficulties can find it hard to use preschools, long day care and family day care (early learning services). Engaging Families in Early Education was a five-year research project funded by the Australian Research Council (ARC) and the NSW Government. The research focused on how families who are struggling financially in Australia can best access early childhood education and care (ECEC).

The project included researchers from the Social Policy Research Centre at UNSW Sydney, Western Sydney University, the University of Sydney, and Griffith University, with partner organisations Creche & Kindergarten Association, KU Children's Services, Goodstart Early Learning, Family Day Care Australia and Early Childhood Australia.

The research aimed to:

### 1. Learn about real family experiences

Generate new knowledge about the everyday lives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous families with young children living in high poverty contexts

### 2. Uncover what actually works

Provide deep insights into innovative, responsive and effective practices with these families that have hitherto not been effectively documented, strengthened and brought to scale

### 3. Guide better policies

Strengthen the evidence base for government policy making about the ECEC needs of families living in high poverty contexts.

The research team spent time with families and early learning service staff to learn what systems,

processes and practices best met the needs of families on low incomes. We visited five services in New South Wales and Queensland that are known for good practice in disadvantaged contexts to find out what works for families. These included two preschools, one long day care and two family day care services.

## **A need for targeted professional development when working in disadvantaged contexts**

The research found that professionals who work for and with families experiencing adversity require specialised skills. This is supported globally and noted in major ECEC reviews from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2025) and the Productivity Commission (2024). Educators need to work from a view that families are the experts about their children in their own situations and need to pay careful attention to each family to understand what keeps them safe and strong in precarious circumstances.

It is essential that educators have the insight to understand the resourcefulness of families that make do with very few resources, an understanding of the stigma attached to disadvantage in our society and the capacity to convey heartfelt genuine respect to families. In other words, it is essential that educators challenge deficit views and stigmas they may have internalised from broader society. It is essential that they do not attach to the power associated with feeling sorry for ‘those less fortunate’ and act from this position of power and privilege. It is always useful for professionals to reflect on how we would live if faced with similar economic and social challenges.

From a deeply respectful and equitable position, educators can then engage in deep listening and trust building and identify the inclusion practices that best fit their context. This can be a resource challenge for services. Our research participants reported that there was an absence of professional development to support them to engage families experiencing poverty in early childhood education services and to work with children with complex needs. In response to this shortage of professional learning materials, the research team have produced a suite of professional learning tools that are evidence based, capture the lived experience of the people concerned, and invite reflection and professional development via digital stories and professional learning courses. These resources feature real people and real stories. All the professional learning tools are available on the project website [www.engagingfamilies.org](http://www.engagingfamilies.org).

This brief offers insights into the approach we took to making the digital stories, as well as some ideas about how they can be used in teacher training and professional development. We have included weblinks to each story, contextual information and suggested questions for reflection.

The research team also developed professional learning courses that are available online through Community Early Learning Australia (CELA). The courses are low cost and are self-paced. They align with major Australian educational frameworks, including the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) and Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APST). They use our research findings and digital stories to explore key topics in detail. The professional learning courses are not the focus of this brief.

The courses include:

- Course 1: Introduction to working with families experiencing poverty
- Course 2: A funds of knowledge approach to supporting children’s learning, development, and wellbeing
- Course 3: Using effective communication to build and maintain relationships with families
- Course 4: Strengthening mainstream ECEC service engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Course 5: Rethinking behaviour – strengths-based approaches to inclusion

They can be accessed at [www.cela.org.au/training/engaging-with-families-in-early-education](http://www.cela.org.au/training/engaging-with-families-in-early-education).

### **3. The process | Making the digital stories**

The digital stories have been co-produced with the people in the stories – families who have experienced significant adversities and the professionals who build strong partnerships with them. The process of developing these digital stories is as important as their content.

#### **Partnering with families | Collaborative non-extractive approaches**

There is evidence that strong relationships between educators and families in early childhood settings strengthen children’s engagement with education (Lewis et al, 2023; Hadley et al, 2021). However, when educators have poor understandings of family contexts and experiences, they may default to deficit approaches or withdraw from relationship building. Deficit approaches often take the form of professionals telling families what they think the family needs to know or making assumptions. If we do not dedicate time to relationship building, then we cannot help but deliver a one-size-fits-all service. Partnership and strength-based approaches require getting to know families and opening channels of communication that deepen over time. These digital stories are products of such relationships and can be used to build the capacity of the workforce to engage with the strengths in families.

Narratives from life are powerful tools for reflection in professional training and for changing organisational practices so they are aligned with the lived experiences of people they wish to serve. Research and evaluation has long been interested in people’s lived experiences as part of the evidence needed to develop effective systems and responses. However, traditional evidence production methods have relied on extractive techniques such as outcome measurement surveys or qualitative interviews where researchers guide participants through questions researchers deem to be important. It’s extractive because researchers or documentary makers ‘take’ what they believe will be valuable. Indigenous scholars Tuck and Yang (2014, p. 812) note the problems of this approach

“the stories that are considered most compelling, considered most authentic in social science research are stories of pain and humiliation. Reporting on that pain with detailed qualitative data and in people’s “real voices” is supposed to yield needed material or political resources; this is the prominent but unreliable theory of change in

the academy.”

In contrast, anticolonial/antipoverty/justice approaches question *Who gets to know? Who gets known? Where is knowledge kept, and kept legitimated? What knowledge is desirable? Who profits? Who loses/ pays/gives something away? Who is coerced, empowered, appointed to give away knowledge?* In the making of these digital stories, we have been attentive to these questions.

We worked with documentary filmmakers experienced in non-extractive co-production methods to develop stories meaningful to the people telling the stories. Non-extractive documentary making is as new as non-extractive research methods and there was much to learn. Engaging participants as co-producers of knowledge takes time. All participants in the research have had many experiences of having their knowledge, and ways of being, disrespected. Many people have developed ‘scripts’ to guard against intrusion while meeting the requirements that enable them to access the most basic of resources. Inviting people to share their stories in non-extractive ways requires working with their past experiences and building confidence in the capacity of researchers/professionals for deep listening.

The Engaging Families research team worked from outside in, starting with educators and moving to families once trust was built at the service level. We used iterative methods that began with asking families broad questions about children and their experiences of early childhood education and care. Through an iterative process, we reflected back on the interview with participants to open a broader discussion about what educators and policy makers would benefit from understanding. We then invited participants to create digital stories for teacher education and to influence policy making. Participants could withdraw permission at any time and, most importantly, at the end of a co-editing process. Sometimes, it took several years of engagement to arrive at consent for the digital story to be made available. For one digital story, the participant agreed for their digital story to be used for several purposes but not to be publicly available. In other cases, people agreed to have their story used but told by others, namely told from the perspective of their child’s trusted educator.

By engaging in a process that embraces the right of participants to control their information, people have told stories about their strengths. They offer insights into what is safe to say (and therefore to ask); how we understand strengths when they are not immediately obvious to us; what children may know that is not immediately obvious. We can then consider how we can use this knowledge in teaching.

## **4. The how | Using the stories for professional learning**

We encourage you to use these stories in discussion with your colleagues. This could be in a formal reflective session at a meeting or training or online discussion group, or in casual conversation. Share your reflections and ask how others might approach situations in other ways. Ideally, together you can develop new ideas to try. Then gather, reflect, refine and try again.

The digital stories themselves are deliberately open ended so they can be adapted to suit many training purposes. In the next section, we offer some ideas about how each story could be used to provoke reflection and provide additional optional resources. However, the stories are multidimensional, and you may see many themes in these stories beyond our suggestions.

## 5. The stories | Families and educators

As mentioned, these digital stories have been co-produced with the people in the stories – families who have experienced significant adversities and the professionals who build deep partnerships with them. We have very deliberately started with family stories, because communicating with families about their children, their circumstances, and expectations is the first step for educators. Typically, families do not start from a place of trust, rather this is built incrementally. As researchers, we shared the challenges of this imperative with the educators.

All digital stories have two versions – a version with captions and one without. They are also available on the Engaging Families project website [www.engagingfamilies.org](http://www.engagingfamilies.org)

### 5.1 Family stories

#### 5.1.1 Cultural practices and embedded values | Origami story

##### Description

In Japan, children are celebrated on 5 May with a public holiday, Children’s day, *Kodomo no Hi*. In this digital story, Kimi (pseudonym) shares her joy of being invited into her child’s preschool on Children’s Day to share her culture with the children. She chose a traditional activity – origami – which requires significant eye hand coordination, sophisticated use and agility with pincer grasp, fine motor precision, attention to minute detail, capacity to remember a complex sequence of moves and above all persistence. From a western developmental perspective the level of skills required are beyond what we would expect from children of this age. However, from a Japanese perspective, these expectations are appropriate. In a Japanese cultural context, dispositions to persist with difficult tasks is highly valued, so young children are frequently presented with tasks that require high level motor and cognitive skills.

##### Digital story links

[https://youtu.be/q9VLE4m-hWU?si=4A\\_vmLagFefELEAs](https://youtu.be/q9VLE4m-hWU?si=4A_vmLagFefELEAs) (captioned)

<https://youtu.be/lmOfckTnjl?si=dfhFZ5R7aXTk9ddk>

##### Citation

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *Cultural practices and embedded values | Origami Story* [Film; educational video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/q9VLE4m-hWU>



## Example reflective questions

1. Challenging assumptions – diverse beliefs about ‘the child’
  - a. What do you notice about the difficulty of the task from a western developmental perspective?
  - b. What are the key values that underpin the task?
  - c. What can we learn about this family’s beliefs about the child in the present (being), in the future (becoming), and connections to the social and material world) (belonging)?
2. Building relationships
  - a. What type of communication did the educator have with the family?
  - b. What made them welcome enough to offer a task based in non-western expectations of children’s development?
3. Teaching strategies
  - a. What is the approach to teaching and learning the parent shows in the video?
  - b. Consider whether the activity is adult- or child-led, whether teaching uses explicit or implicit instruction, modelling, scaffolding, co-construction, links to real world, etc.
  - c. What are the skills required to do the task?
    - i. Consider fine motor skills, mathematical skills of sequencing, measuring and so on, symbolic representation, language skills.
4. Learning environment (space)
  - a. What type of space would you need to use (eg: one that is out of the way, can be set up a few times)
  - b. How would you make it inviting?
5. Scheduling (time)
  - a. What amount of time would you need for the task?
  - b. What time of day?
  - c. How many repetitions?
  - d. How would you make this open for families so they can celebrate children’s learning?

## Additional optional resources

Tobin, J., Hsueh, Y., & Karasawa, M. (2009). *Preschool in three cultures revisited: China, Japan, and the United States*. University of Chicago press.

Redd, A., (2019, March 19). *Preschool in Three Cultures, part 1* (A Videotape Companion to *Preschool in Three Cultures* by Tobin, J., Wu, D., & Davidson, D.) [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uGddSi4T1kY>

### 5.1.2 The settling nature of bees | Working with funds of knowledge

#### Description

This digital story features parents talking about their experiences of growing up with food insecurity and how gardening and growing their own food is a value that has been passed through the generations. The two parents are from different cultural backgrounds (Aboriginal/Islander for one and

Vietnamese for the other) but this focus on cultivating food connects them. They talk about the practice of Harmony Day which calls on their children to select a 'culture to be' and how they manage this schooling practice which has little resonance in their family. The mother, Lisa, speaks about her daughter Lily's reticence to engage in early childhood education and how their preschool incorporated a beehive and experiences with gardening to build connections between home and the preschool.

### **Digital story links**

This film has some restrictions on its use – please contact the research team about gaining access.

### **Citation**

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *The settling nature of bees | Working with funds of knowledge* [Film; educational video]. YouTube. [contact research team for YouTube link]

### **Example reflective questions**

[Reflective questions for either group or individual reflective practice that unpack what FOK were evident, and how this info could be used moving forward in pedagogy etc]

1. Challenging assumptions about the child/family
  - a. How do Lisa and Tye present themselves in terms of both culture and financial experiences?
  - b. At what point do they discuss the food insecurity in their families as they were growing up?
  - c. How do they present this information?
  - d. How has this experienced shaped their values?
  - e. What experiences do they share with their children to support these values?
  - f. What type of child rearing practices are evident in the film (free exploration, instructional learning etc)?
2. Building relationships
  - a. How did the educator find out about their everyday life?
  - b. What does the educator do to support the family's experiences and concerns?
  - c. Was the family forthcoming about their funds of knowledge?
  - d. What strategies do educators use to learn about children's funds of knowledge?
  - e. Children's interests are different to their funds of knowledge. Using this film, identify examples of children's interests and funds of knowledge.
3. Teaching practices
  - a. How are funds of knowledge put to work in learning experiences in the film?
  - b. Beyond children's cultural background and identity, what other funds of knowledge do children bring to ECEC.
  - c. Think of three elements of children's funds of knowledge you could incorporate into the curriculum.
4. Learning environments
  - a. What might Lisa and Tye like to see in terms of eating routines at the setting?
  - b. What type of eating routines do you have in your setting?
  - c. How is food valued?

- d. What can you do in the environment to encourage families and children to share stories from home?
- e. How can you schedule time for rich exchanges with families?

### **Additional optional resources**

Skattebol, J., & Press, F., (in press) Curricular justice through relationships: What can we learn from early childhood? *The Curriculum Journal*

Fenech, M., Arthur, L., Jones, A., Woodrow, C., Blaxland, M., Press, F. & Skattebol, J. (2024). *Course 2: A funds of knowledge approach to supporting children's learning, development, and wellbeing* [Online course]. Community Early Learning Australia. <https://www.cela.org.au/training/self-paced/funds-of-knowledge-approach> (APST aligned).

## **5.1.3 Experiences of early education | Somali Families**

### **Description**

This digital story is about families who are unfamiliar with preschool education. These families are refugees and have experienced extreme shortages and trauma prior to arriving in Australia. They face many structural barriers as they adjust to life here. Their community is among the most economically challenged communities in Australia. They found a sense of belonging in a small not-for-profit preschool (kindy) in their local area where Somali inclusion staff were employed. In this digital story, two Somali educators and a Somali parent talk about the experiences with education in their community.

### **Digital story links**

<https://youtu.be/1B9hoBjDllo?si=TqHcRMESRN0wWtUp> (captioned)

[https://youtu.be/WwGg1B\\_V7\\_o?si=sWV0J1mvBNzukUEy](https://youtu.be/WwGg1B_V7_o?si=sWV0J1mvBNzukUEy)

### **Citation**

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *Experiences of early education | Somali Families* [Film; educational video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/1B9hoBjDllo?si=TqHcRMESRN0wWtUp>

### **Example reflective questions**

1. Challenging assumptions| Welcoming families
  - a. What do you notice about the difficulty of finding information about local ECEC services?
  - b. What are the key information channels?
  - c. What families in your neighbourhood may not be aware of or find it difficult to approach early childhood services?
2. Building relationships
  - a. What do these families want children to achieve in ECEC?
  - b. How important are basic needs (food, hygiene, sleep) for the families?
  - c. What key strategies can educators use to build open communication?

d. What value does building relationships in the local community bring for children's learning?

### 3. Teaching strategies

a. What is the approach to teaching and learning the parent discusses in the digital story?

b. Consider whether the activity is adult- or child-led, whether teaching uses explicit or implicit instruction, modelling, scaffolding, co-construction, links to real world, etc.

c. What are the skills required to do the task?

d. Consider fine motor skills, mathematical skills of sequencing, measuring and so on, symbolic representation, language skills.

e. How do you build these skills?

### 4. Learning environment (space)

a. What types of spaces do families find welcoming and reassuring?

b. How would you set up your learning environment to ensure families are receiving information about the things they value for their children?

### 5. Scheduling (time)

a. What amount of time would you need for communicating with families?

b. What times of day would you need to be available?

c. How important might small events be for building a profile in the community?

## Additional optional resources

Press, F., Skattebol, J. (2025). Curricular justice through relationships: What can we learn from early childhood? *The Curriculum Journal* (in review).

Skattebol, J. (2024, Jul 25). Stakeholder engagement: The fertile edges of early childhood practice [Invited lecture]. 2024 June Wangmann Memorial Lecture, Sydney, Australia.

<https://youtu.be/5H4VlwMRWcU?list=PLvW1evjftfn914yLYCWUyYa1I-nf4JbU>

## 5.1.4 Securing affordable housing | Somali families

### Description

This digital story is about Somali refugee families living in Brisbane. These include families who have experienced extreme shortages and trauma prior to arriving in Australia and who face many structural barriers as they adjust to life here. The setting is a small not-for-profit preschool (kindy). Experiences of poverty in the local community are high. Children who attend the service come from culturally and linguistically diverse families, including families from Somalia. In this digital story, two Somali educators and a Somali parent talk about some of the housing challenges Somali families face in Australia.

### Digital story links

<https://youtu.be/PGem3-eBzxU?si=y5aQ3oVJm9Cym0DI> (captioned)

[https://youtu.be/rEm84HaoZnU?si=yE\\_JyDJIAQJhFh1S](https://youtu.be/rEm84HaoZnU?si=yE_JyDJIAQJhFh1S)

## Citation

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *Securing affordable housing | Somali Families* [Film; educational video. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/PGem3-eBzxU?si=y5aQ3oVJm9Cym0DI>

## Example reflective questions

1. Challenging assumptions – Understanding family diversity and stigma
  - a. What are the difficulties of securing basic resources for these families?
  - b. What difficulties do they face in building an ‘ethnic or linguistic’ community in Australia?
  - c. What messages are they receiving about their worth and value in the broader community?
  - d. How does this impact on families’ ongoing sense of belonging?
  - e. What does this mean for children’s sense of being, belonging and becoming?
2. Building relationships
  - a. How can educators communicate respect for families with resource challenges?
  - b. What types of incursions and excursions may benefit families and children?
  - c. What type of service networks do you need to be able to support families well?
3. Teaching strategies
  - a. What are some of the assumptions we make about ‘home’ when we set up play experiences for children?
  - b. What types of homes should we represent?
  - c. How do we support children to be inclusive in their play?
  - d. Consider whether the activity is adult- or child-led, whether teaching uses explicit or implicit instruction, modelling, scaffolding, co-construction, links to real world, etc.
4. Learning environment (space)
  - a. What type of spaces do families find welcoming and reassuring?
  - b. How would you set up your learning environment to ensure families are receiving information about the things they value for their children?
5. Scheduling (time)
  - a. What amount of time would you need for communicating with families?
  - b. What times of day would you need to be available?

### 5.1.5 Disability and inclusion | Somali families

#### Description

This digital story is about Somali refugee families attending a small not-for-profit preschool (kindy) in Brisbane. Their local community has few economic resources and is among the poorest in Australia. Children who attend the service come from culturally and linguistically diverse families, including families from Somalia. In the digital story, two Somali educators talk about the importance of being culturally responsive - being respectful of a family’s beliefs and cultural practices, taking time to build trust before starting to introduce the family to early intervention.

## Digital story links

<https://youtu.be/ZQfoG4tPVEM?si=pRFgVyycUrT-cwo> (captioned)

[https://youtu.be/Wlw4QcQu9to?si=72VhKXoH\\_UA6rDIZ](https://youtu.be/Wlw4QcQu9to?si=72VhKXoH_UA6rDIZ)

## Citation

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *Disability and inclusion | Somali families* [Film; educational video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/ZQfoG4tPVEM>

## Example reflective questions

1. Challenging assumptions | Diverse ideas about what it is to be human
  - a. How do the families in the film understand basic human relationships and needs?
  - b. How is this different from western frameworks of health?
  - c. Are these belief systems about the nature of being human static or dynamic?
  - d. How important is it for educators to understand families' belief systems?
2. Building Relationships
  - a. How can educators to convey respect for each family's belief system?
  - b. What key strategies can educators use to build open communication?
  - c. What value does building relationships in the local community bring for children's learning?
  - d. What service networks would you need for working with these families?
3. Teaching Practices
  - a. What professional knowledges can support educators to select the appropriate teaching practices? (e.g. second language acquisition)
  - b. Consider whether practice should be adult- or child-led, explicit or implicit instruction, modelling, scaffolding, co-construction, links to real world, etc.
  - c. What are the skills required to do the task?
4. Learning environment (space)
  - a. What type of spaces can accommodate children with complex needs?
  - b. How can you accommodate allied health specialists?
5. Scheduling (time)
  - a. What amount of time would you need for communicating with families?
  - b. What type of time frames for discussing early interventions?
  - c. How important might small events be for building a profile in the community?

## 5.2 Educator stories

### 5.2.1 Respecting faith as a fund of knowledge | Jackie

#### Description

The setting for this digital story is a not-for-profit preschool licensed for 40 children a day. The preschool is situated in a richly diverse community in the outer suburbs of a major Australian city.

Families who attend the service come from culturally and linguistically varied backgrounds, including First Nations families and families who have newly migrated to Australia. The area where the preschool is located is also among the most disadvantaged communities in Australia. Jackie, the director, shares aspects of her own funds of knowledge with the children and respectfully engages with children, families, and staff, to build her knowledge. She talks about tuning into children's religious knowledge and what happened when she did.

### Digital story links

<https://youtu.be/jxKI-HL7l1w?si=fvlekc2oko6EtmZ8> (captioned)

<https://youtu.be/OjRJx0dFDsU?si=jLphtE-RV9kA5Vg6>

### Citation

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *Respecting faiths | Jackie* [Film; educational video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/jxKI-HL7l1w>

### Example reflective questions

1. Challenging assumptions| Inviting in religion and spirituality
  - a. How effectively does mainstream Australian society deal with divergent religious beliefs?
  - b. What are the key information channels?
  - c. Should early childhood educators challenge a 'religion blind' approach?
2. Building relationships
  - a. How forthcoming were families about their religions?
  - b. What key strategies can educators use to build open communication?
3. Teaching practices
  - a. What is the approach to teaching and learning the educator discusses in the video?
  - b. Consider whether the activity was adult- or child-led, whether teaching uses explicit or implicit instruction, modelling, scaffolding, co-construction, links to real world, etc.
  - c. What are the skills required to do the task?
  - d. What difference might this activity have made for children, for the staff team and the whole service community?
4. Learning environment (space)
  - a. What types of space are required for this work?
5. Scheduling (time)
  - a. What amount of time would you need for communicating with families?
  - b. What times of day would you need to be available?
  - c. How important might small events be for building a profile in the community?

### Additional optional resources

Fenech, M., Woodrow, C., Blaxland, M., Jones, A. (2025). A funds of knowledge approach to supporting children's academic learning in the Australian early childhood context. *Australasian*

*Journal of Early Education.*

Fenech, M., Arthur., L., Jones, A., Woodrow, C., Blaxland, M., Press, F. & Skattebol, J. (2024). *Course 2: A funds of knowledge approach to supporting children's learning, development, and wellbeing* [Online course]. Community Early Learning Australia. <https://www.cela.org.au/training/self-paced/funds-of-knowledge-approach> (APST aligned).

## 5.2.2 Recognising different communication styles | Paula

### Description

This digital story is focussed on the importance of attending to the micro interactions that are part of children's communication repertoires. The story is told by Paula, a Wiradjuri teacher, who has many years of experience working with families and children in high poverty contexts. She relates some stories from her setting which is a 40 place not-for-profit preschool situated in a diverse but low socio-economic community in a major Australian city. Many (around 50%) of the children at the preschool have a diagnosed disability. As Paula talks about her approach to understanding children's communication, she moves between professional language and informal language – in this case it is Aboriginal English. Paula not only has a sophisticated understanding of children's communication, she is a sophisticated communicator in the way she conveys information in this video.

### Digital story links

<https://youtu.be/1Gc-cX43VQQ?si=cwDj53a--LDgl0nQ> (captioned)

[https://youtu.be/MYcu\\_dm4ax0?si=UbW6bGOLDT4OEoRJ](https://youtu.be/MYcu_dm4ax0?si=UbW6bGOLDT4OEoRJ)

### Citation

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *Recognising different communication styles | Paula* [Film; educational video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/1Gc-cX43VQQ>

### Example reflective questions

1. Challenging assumptions: the child and family struggles
  - a. What beliefs about the child does Paula hold?
  - b. How does Paula understand the differences between families?
  - c. How does Paula's understandings of child behaviour diverge from psychologically dominant ideas about self-regulation?
2. Building relationships
  - a. What sources of information is she looking for when she is trying to understand the children she teaches?
  - b. What does Paula say that communicates a strength-based approach to children and families rather than a deficit approach?  
  
Notice where Paula switches from professional language to Aboriginal English?
  - c. How does she do this?



- d. Why might Paula do this?
  - e. What are the advantages of speaking in the two different language styles?
3. Teaching practices
- a. Does Paula watch the immediate the learning environment or does she scan the whole environment?
  - b. What gestures does she read as meaningful communication?
  - c. How does she reflect children’s expressions?
  - d. What postures does she use when interacting with the children? Closed body, open body?

### **Additional optional resources**

Morton, J. M. (2014). Cultural code-switching: Straddling the achievement gap. *Journal of Political Philosophy*, 22(3), 259-281.

HuffPost. (2018, Jul 14). *What Is Code-Switching? | Between The Lines* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNbdn0yuUw8>

## **5.2.3 Sharing culture | First nations perspective**

### **Description**

In this digital story, Paula, a Wiradjuri educator, talks about the importance of making a child’s culture visible in her setting and how this enables children’s sense of belonging and learning. Paula shares her experience of not knowing about her own cultural background while growing up and how this meant she struggled for a sense of belonging. She suggests that when educators can bring their culture to work, relationships between staff open up to become richer and more reciprocal.

### **Digital story links**

<https://youtu.be/Rmae7yQdnpE?si=QczFZk89VPCrQq4z> (captioned)

<https://youtu.be/nr6pKSO600k?si=rU8RiEU-BsLkS-uP>

### **Citation**

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *Sharing culture | First Nations perspective* [Film; educational video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/Rmae7yQdnpE>

### **Example reflective questions**

1. Challenging assumptions
  - a. What is Paula’s experience as a First Nations person?
  - b. What is her approach to including First Nation’s perspectives in the educational program?
2. Building relationships
  - a. How does Paula approach communication with the local Aboriginal community?
  - b. What types of events do they plan and do?
  - c. What support does she have in her team?

3. Teaching practices
  - a. What teaching practices does she bring into the environment?
  - b. Does she expect the elders to follow a schedule and lesson plan for their interactions with children?
4. Learning environment(space)
  - a. What is required in the environment to be welcoming for First Nations people?
5. Scheduling (time)
  - a. What amount of time would you need for communicating with community and families?
  - b. What type of time frames do you think are needed for building these relationships?

## 5.2.4 Inclusion and neurodiversity | Nadine

### Description

In this story, Nadine, a Family Day Care Educator, shares her experience of working with a young child with additional needs and how this changed her practice. When the child began at her service, Nadine noticed he was not meeting all the milestones and she describes her journey of working with him and his family. She recounts the strategies that she used to raise her concerns with the child’s carers and how she needed to critically reflect on her own programming to ensure she was meeting the needs of all the children. This included designing the learning environment to support children’s self-regulation of emotions and behaviour.

### Digital story links

<https://youtu.be/WhEln0qwhM8?si=jwKy0R5P7Gj0vSow> (captioned)

<https://youtu.be/EEhpLyJYcfU?si=auRX589k9Ng1ysi6>

### Citation

Engaging Families in Early Education. (2024). *Inclusion and neurodiversity | Nadine* [Film; educational video]. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/WhEln0qwhM8>

### Example reflective questions

1. Challenging assumptions about the child/family
  - a. What beliefs about the child does Nadine hold?
  - b. How do these beliefs diverge from psychologically dominant ideas about self-regulation?
2. Building relationships
  - a. What sources of information is she looking for when she is trying to understand the children she teaches?
  - b. What does Nadine say that communicates a strength-based approach to children and families rather than a deficit approach?
  - c. How does Nadine approach communication with the family?
  - d. How does Nadine support inclusive relationships with the children in her service?

3. Teaching practices

- a. Does Paula watch the immediate learning environment or does she scan the whole environment?
- b. What gestures does she read as meaningful communication?
- c. How does she reflect children's expressions?
- d. What postures does she use when interacting with the children? Closed body, open body?

4. Learning environment (space)

- a. What type of spaces does Nadine build to accommodate children's different (and sometimes complex) needs?
- b. How does she encourage children to have a sense of belonging in the space?

5. Scheduling (time)

- a. What amount of time would you need for communicating with families?
- b. What type of time frames does Nadine use for discussing early interventions?

**Additional optional resources**

Skattebol, J., Press, F., Blaxland, M., Fenech, M., Newton, B. J., Jones, A., Woodrow, C. (2025). Reachable services in high-poverty contexts: Engaging families in early childhood education and care. *International Journal of Inclusive Education* (in review).

Skattebol, J., Arthur, L., Jones, A., Fenech, M., Woodrow, C., Blaxland, M., Press, F., Newton, B. J. (2024). Course 5: Rethinking behaviour – strengths-based approaches to inclusion [Online course]. Community Early Learning Australia. <https://www.cela.org.au/training/self-paced/rethinking-behaviour> (APST aligned).

## References

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- Lewis, H. R., Lipscomb, S. T., Hatfield, B. E., Weber, R., Green, B., & Patterson, L. (2023). Family–Teacher Relationships and Child Engagement in Early Care and Education. *Societies*, 13(3), 67. <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc13030067>
- OECD (2025). *Reducing Inequalities by Investing in Early Childhood Education and Care*, Starting Strong, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/b78f8b25-en>.
- Productivity Commission (2024). *A path to universal early childhood education and care*, Inquiry report no. 106, Vol. 1, Canberra, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/childhood/report>
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