

Jess Pollard Southern Rise CC Wodonga

Website mentioned in this transcript:

<https://www.8ways.online/about>

Book mentioned in this transcript (PDF format):

<https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/documents/earlyyears/eyaddlangresource.pdf>

AK: This is Anne Keary from VicTESOL and I'm with Jess Pollard from Southern Rise Children's Centre in Wodonga. Jess, can you tell us about your role and your setting?

JP: I'm a preschool teacher for one of the Wodonga council preschools at Southern Rise Children's Centre and our service runs two preschools each day. We have two groups of 33 children attend a 15-hour preschool programme each week. Our preschool actually shares its campus with a local primary school. We share a building and we share the campus together. We have many children at our service who are bilingual or multilingual, so they speak in the two languages or more than more than two languages. I have some children and families who are learning to speak English for the first time enrolled in our preschool as well. We also have 15% of children attending who are aboriginal and we have some families who are also bilingual and multilingual and some families who have recently arrived in Australia and are learning English through a programme at the TAFE. We currently have eight children enrolled who are refugee or asylum-seeking families and many of these children were born overseas and preschool is their first time in any formal care or education setting.

AK: So, what are some of the ways you're building community in your setting?

JP: Our organisation, with Wodonga council, we've developed a multicultural team which has created a network of key stake holders that can facilitate children and family's

engagement in the early years. By early years we mean preschools as well as our maternal child health services that Wodonga council manage as well. The service, Southern Rise, and Wodonga council- sorry have employed a bilingual assistant who has supported educators and families to enrol at the preschool so she helps with families filling out enrolment forms translating information and giving us some keywords that we can use within our programme to help support the children. The organisation has also developed a network group with local members of the aboriginal community to support teachers and educators in embedding aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into our programme as well as us engaging and exploring with original pedagogies such as the eight ways of learning.

AK: Can you tell us a little bit more about the eight ways of learning?

JP: It's a curriculum framework that was developed by (*a collaborative research project involving DET staff, JCU's School of Indigenous studies, and Western NSW Regional Aboriginal Education Team*) in NSW and we've done some training through the eight ways online following the correct protocols through ... (I can't remember the name) and we've got permission for our organisation and our local Aboriginal council group to explore that further and adapt it to meet the needs of our context. So, we've been working as a team to explore the different ways and how we can embed that into our programme. How we can teach through that form of pedagogy as well.

AK: OK. So, what do you think has worked well in engaging families in particular?

JP: Having a bilingual assistant with us. We have an assistant who speaks Swahili as well as English and some other languages as well. That's really helped us with the language barrier because a lot of our families who have recently arrived in Australia don't speak a lot of English. They're starting to learn so that really does help break down that barrier and helps us to get some more information about the children and their families. She is able to

translate enrolment questions and support families fill out enrolment forms in their home language and she's also assisting with interviewing families so once their child enrolled gaining additional information that will help us. I've actually been using this book "Learning English as an Additional language in Early Years" and that's been a really good book to help with enrolment questions and strategies to help settle children into a new learning environment. The questions they might ask your likes and dislikes whether the child engaged in any other services, how many siblings they have and what their ages are, and any significant family or cultural events, as well as finding out the best way to contact families. Some like text messages or emails more than phone calls or face to face communication so just those little things, that information that we can get, that can help support family's engagement in this setting in the preschool.

AK: Was there anything that you did during the COVID-19 lockdown to support families and services?

JP: We do network with some local groups that work directly with newly arrived families so through the AWECC which is Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council and they have shared some information with us about the restrictions or the preschool. Our bilingual assistant translated some information about the current restrictions like; only having one family at a time coming in, or families having to wait at the gate. And we've done some zoom interviews, virtual network meetings, instead of our face to face ones to work on our action plan that we have as part of our multicultural project. And our bilingual assistant has continued to work virtually as well. Instead of face to face meetings at the preschool she's used the preschool phone to call families. So just adapting to different ways of communicating.

AK: Can you tell us share any sort of practises or stories about children using their home language in the preschool setting?

JP: I can work without bilingual assistant to provide us with some keywords that we can use in a preschool and we're still working on pronouncing those words correctly, so I won't have a go because I'm better when it's in writing, but labelling: toilet, food, drink, walking, and eating and kind of using those keywords and labelling all of our learning areas. We've got like painting, drawing, reading, bag, and we're trying to embed that not just in Swahili but in some other languages as well and that's something that we're trying to embed across the preschool.

AK: What about children using their home language during play?

JP: Some children will use their home language. Especially, we have a couple of children, like small groups of children who will speak the same language, so they'll often engage in play together and use their home language as they play. They will also go in and out of using some English then using their home language so that's really always quite nice to see and we can learn a bit from them as well. I might say word in Swahili and they might go "you're welcome" so to kind of crossover so they have that opportunity and we do try to group children together so that they do have some peers that do speak their home language and I know when transitioning to the primary school next door they also try to have and the students at least with one or two other peers that speak the same language just to help with that transition as well.

AK: What about your relationship with the primary school -the transition process and the children's siblings in the primary school?

JP: The primary school have the EAL teacher who's part she's part of our network, our multicultural project network. So, she comes in and we talk to each other regularly about

children going to school and she's coming to visit them. The school also have a person (I think I don't know his exact role)- but he supports families with speaking and with translating, so going to the homes and interviewing the families helping with enrolment forms so we'll liaise and kind of talk and touch base about the families that are going to school and whether or not there's any information that we need to share. And they also do have some siblings so some of their siblings we had last year and now they've got another sibling going school. So, we will see them and that's a relationship we continue to build because it's all quite new. We've started this in the past 18 months, so we're still working on developing and establishing the network and the processes and practises.

AK: what resources do you use to support your programme for diversity?

JP: We've joined FKA children services. We've got a membership with them so even though they're based in Melbourne and we can't really borrow the resources we've been working with someone from FKA to help us start to plan and develop what kind of resources we might look at purchasing or adopting it within our programme. One of those might be a bilingual library. I purchased a few books that are in Swahili and English and if you like- moja means one and jambo means hello -so that we've used with children and we've also made sure our programme is very culturally inclusive of all cultures so we're very aware of what pictures are in our puzzles and what pictures of children are up around the room. Story books that reflect different cultures and diversity, the home corner with different resources that reflect different cultures -so we are very mindful of that and it's something we definitely want to continue to improve within our service.

AK: OK So what would you say to another educator who's welcoming families from diverse backgrounds or aboriginal families into their early childhood setting?

JP: What would I say to another educator?

AK: Yes, what would you say to share about your practise?

JP: Inform them that we aim to be very closely inclusive setting service and obviously I think our learning environment does demonstrate that we are quite culturally inclusive with having embedded practise. Having different areas like drawing will reflect some Aboriginal perspectives and so will the puzzles as well as lots of different cultures like games that have people from all over the world, we have a world map with stories from different places within around the world as well. I think hopefully they can come in and they'll be able to see within the learning environment and just explaining to them like the different practises we do to ensure that we are culturally increased even sensitive to different cultures as well.

AK: I know you have some very strong networks in your community to support a range of families?

JP: We have worked with a range of local services that do support refugee and asylum-seeking families in particular. So the health services which is in that first point of contact when they arrive, so we've been some of the people that work in that service join a part of our network workgroup and services like Uniting Care, the Albury-Wodonga Ethnic Communities Council, which I mentioned before as well, so we have key workers from within those services where we aim to get together and share information and work out how we can best support each other to provide like the process of enrolling at preschool and attending maternal child health visits. So, we're starting to establish that network and as time goes on we can work out like the goals towards action plan, as well as FKA. They are helping us with cultural inclusion support and giving us ideas like the bilingual library strategies and support and possibly looking at school readiness funding and how that might fit in to continuing this project and providing those resources to families and children.

AK: OK so fantastic so is there any sort of message would like to leave us with or where do you see a programme going in the future?

JP: Yeah, so with our programme we have an action plan for the next 12 to 18 months. The action plan is about formulating that multicultural team, which we have done but, obviously with COVID we've had virtual meetings instead of face to face meetings and personnel change as well. I'm working on accessing data so making sure we have accurate data to ensure we know how many children are in the community that may need access to preschool that aren't accessing preschool at the moment, as well as developing a system. So, we're in the process of developing a system to refer families to preschool and maternal child health and that is using our bilingual assistant help with that. We just aim to continue to work towards the goals in our action plan and looking at developing an information pack. So, we have one for aboriginal perspectives and an information pack with families about preschools, and we're looking at developing one for Swahili speaking families in particular that way we have a pack that we can give them that's in their home language to provide some more information about preschool.

AK: Thanks for sharing your programme with us today and sharing the richness of it and how you cater for diversity within your community.

JP: Thank you