An excerpt from the Facilitator’s Guide to Family Creative Learning *ScratchJr Edition*
Facilitating Facilitators

Facilitators play key roles in creating a welcoming and creative learning environments for youth and families to create and learn together. In these stories, we wanted to recognize the practices, questions, and growth that facilitators experience as they support children and families. The content featured here was pulled out from the Family Creative Learning Facilitator Guide, ScratchJr Edition. Go to familycreativelearning.org for more details.

Who are these stories for?
We hope facilitators or organizations that support facilitators can use these stories to reflect and recognize the complex practices and roles of facilitators.

Facilitators can bring a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experiences to the learning experience. When supporting facilitators, it’s important to surface their interests, strengths, and needs and identify ways they can contribute to the experience.

How might I use these stories?
Each story features a facilitator, each with different backgrounds and key experiences in their development. With each story there are a set of questions to reflect on on your own or with your team. Page 4 has a set of questions to consider for all stories.

How were these stories created?
The stories are based on research conducted by the Creative Communities team at the University of Colorado Boulder and are grounded on the real reflections and experiences of facilitators who participated in the Family Creative Learning (FCL) program implementations. FCL is a series of workshops that invite entire families to create and learn together with creative technologies like ScratchJr or Makey Makey.

Family Creative Learning facilitators
Building trust and relationships
Learning is a social process. Get to know your learners and help them get to know you. Learning new things requires learners to be open and vulnerable. Being around people that they know and trust can facilitate the learning process. (We believe it also retains families.)

Hold the tools as a last resort
It’s tempting to grab the mouse, but try describing the steps rather than doing it for learners. If you have to grab the tools, let them try it again for themselves after you show them and guide them along.

Ask questions rather than giving answers
It may be tempting to give the answers to questions right away, but if it’s possible, ask questions instead so that learners can arrive at their own answers. Even something as simple as “Can you explain what your program does? What do you want it to do?”

You can learn so much by listening to learners, noticing what they do, and recognizing their voices, interests, and goals — and careful about making assumptions about what their interactions mean.

Mistakes and failures are welcome!
Rather than avoiding mistakes, encourage learners to be open to them. As you support them through it, help them see what they are learning in the process.

Use technical words cautiously
Be aware of the words you use. Avoid technical jargon. If you have to use it, use it as a learning opportunity to explain the jargon.
Put yourself in their (unique) shoes
Learners are not empty vessels to be filled. All learners including facilitators have stories, skills, knowledge, and cultural resources. Create an environment that invites and builds on these resources.

Authentic enthusiasm goes a long way
Sometimes learners, especially beginners, can feel unsure about their projects. Some encouragement or cheerleading can help them feel good about their work and their next steps.

Encourage exploration, experimentation, and risk-taking
Not all learning is given or received. Encourage families, especially parents, to try things out and see what happens.

Be a learner not an authority
Everyone is a learner including you. You don’t have to know everything. Instead, learn and collaborate with the families and facilitators around you - figure things out, explore, and tinker together.

Reflect and then reflect some more
Not everything will go according to plan or as you expected. Individual and collective reflection as a team is essential in continuing to work towards engaging families in equitable experiences.

Surface their interests
It can sometimes take time for people to know what they want to do. Create an environment that is open to many interests. Ask questions like “What do you like to do?”
Facilitator stories are based on real facilitator’s reflections and learning. We hope these stories can make some of the facilitating fundamentals concrete. We decided to make their experiences visual because facilitation isn’t just what we say, it’s also what we don’t say: how we move our bodies, how we use tools, how we work with others.

**Story 1: Michelle (pages 5-6)**
Michelle’s story showcases how to connect with families, even across languages.

**Story 2: Maria (pages 7-8)**
Maria’s story captures what many new facilitators feel when they’re unsure about their technology backgrounds.

**Story 3: Sam (pages 9-10)**
Sam’s story highlights the balancing act that many facilitators face when trying to support families.

Questions to consider while you read the facilitator stories:

- Where do you see the facilitation fundamentals in action?
- What questions do these stories raise for you?
- What would you do in the facilitator’s situation?
- In what ways do you relate to the facilitator’s experiences?
- How do you see facilitators using their bodies and physical spaces in their facilitation?

How might you use these stories with your team? We suggest reading through the stories and discussing the reflection questions together.

Each story has its own unique set of reflection questions, but we also recommend reflecting on these questions after each story.
Facilitator Story: Michelle

Meet Michelle. Michelle has done coding workshops before with young women, but she doesn’t have much experience working with families.

On her first night, Michelle did her best trying to get to know the families around her table during Eat.

In her FCL, many of the parents primarily spoke Spanish.

As families started to work on their Scratch Jr projects, Michelle noticed one family that was still working on their storyboard and hadn’t started working on Scratch Jr.- Socorro and Andres

Take a moment to reflect:

What do you think of Michelle’s facilitation moves so far?

What else might she try to support Andres and Socorro?

What supports do you think Michelle needs?
Later when Michelle walked by again, she noticed that Andres had added Socorro to their storyboard.

Michelle continued to interact with the family throughout the workshops.

Socorro also shared photos of her other sons in the workshop.

At the last workshop, during the group photo,

Mis hijos...

This is my four year old brother!

They’re warming up to me!

Socorro called Michelle over to stand next to her family.
Take a moment to reflect:

What do you think of Maria’s experience so far?

What might you suggest for Maria?

What supports do you think Maria needs?
Facilitator Story: Maria

Think of it this way... knowing all the answers is not as important as figuring it out together with families.

Maria was surprised that she didn’t need to be an expert.

She went into the next workshops ready to help - this time with the attitude of trying it out with the families.

Hmm... no estoy segura... todavía estoy aprendiendo.

Todos estamos aprendiendo juntos!

Next time a family asked her a question, she sat next to them and worked together to figure it out.

Whenever they needed extra help, she called another facilitator to continue to figure it out - together.

The experience taught Maria how open and curious parents could be. They were willing to just jump into something new and try it out because they were all learners - like herself.
Facilitator Story: Sam

Sam is a staff member at the community center hosting FCL. He enjoys helping kids create with new technologies like robots, but he has less experience working with families.

Sam met Julia and Eric, a mother and son. He noticed they were both quiet.

Hi, I'm Sam.

I like to build things with my legos!

I love legos too!

What do you like to do at home?

I like to build things with my legos!

I love legos too!

Near the end of the second workshop, Sam started to grow concerned about Julia and Eric.

I don't know about this...

Ours doesn't look right...

When it was finally time to share, he sensed a low energy from them as they described their project.

I wonder what else I could do to support them...

He checked in with them and learned about their idea to tell a story about a rollercoaster ride.

When it was time to begin family projects, Sam watched as Eric and Julia discussed their project.

When it was finally time to share, he sensed a low energy from them as they described their project.
Facilitator Story: Sam

I want them to be proud of what they’re doing and to be able to realize their vision...

Maybe I need to give them more support?

Sam shared his concerns during the facilitator debrief.

Take a moment to reflect:

What do you think of Sam’s facilitation moves so far?

What might you suggest for Sam?

What supports do you think Sam needs?

In the next workshop, he decided to work more closely with Julia and Eric.

What do you want to do next?

Great! Let me show you.

What do you think of adding riders to your rollercoaster?

Yeah!

During the facilitator debrief, Sam continued to reflect. He struggled to find the right balance in his facilitation during the workshop series.

I’m worried I’m giving too much guidance.

I felt like I was over-facilitating this time

Sometimes I feel that way too, it’s hard to find a balance.

What was the family’s reaction to your suggestions?

They seemed to like the idea...and they used it in their project

You know, if they weren’t excited about it, I might’ve backed off, but it seems fine here!

In the following workshops, Sam continued to think about balance, and about taking cues from families.

Family Creative Learning
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The research behind these facilitators stories was conducted by members of the Creative Communities research group at the University of Colorado Boulder. To learn more about our research on facilitators and their development, go to familycreativelearning.org/research.

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Relevant research: