



Policy, Programming and Practices

*In spring 2021, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and MacEwan University conducted four case studies with childcare directors and senior staff to learn how support for newcomer and Indigenous families can be realized in the Edmonton region. Many themes were derived from these conversations, including that for all sites **policy, programming, and practice decisions are made through the lens of culture.***

Policy, Programming, and Practice Decisions Are Made Through The Lens of Culture

In the case studies, centres spoke about the importance of implementing policy, programming and practice decisions reflective of the children and families they serve. In other words, centres must take the initiative to learn about families' culture, values, and experiences to create a childcare environment that is respectful, inclusive, and responsive to all. Each centre shared specific examples of how they make these decisions through the lens of culture:

At the **newcomer-focused centre**, several approaches were used to incorporate and honour the cultures of children and families:

- One important indicator of quality is language-based supports and activities. This learning environment offers direct support to newcomer families by employing multilingual staff and

providing access to services (such as translators) that foster communication.

- Additionally, the centre facilitates conversation with families through pedagogical documentation: “a tool for meaning making” where educators reflect, reveal and interpret childhood experiences (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 145). This documentation helps update families on their children's learning, allowing them to see the purpose of child-led and educator-led activities.
- Finally, this centre acknowledged that culture is a significant component of childcare. One participant stated that the centre honours all families by “respecting [their] home language and cultural practices” to create a culturally safe and responsive environment. Therefore, they engage with families in a relational manner to meet them where they are at and build trust.

At the **Indigenous-focused centre**, programming is rooted in Indigenous cultures to foster belonging, promote wellbeing, and offer an environment that is safe and nurturing.

- The centre implements cultural activities and experiences (such as smudging) to create a space that reflects children and families.
- Additionally, policy, programming, and practice decisions are based on the Seven Traditional Teachings to honor the beliefs and practices valued by this community.

- Finally, the centre offers a parenting group where families can engage in various culturally-based experiences (making bannock, creating talking sticks, etc.). This centre's commitment to programming through the lens of culture strengthens the community.

Relationship to Flight

According to *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework*, children learn through interactions with their social and cultural environment (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 27). Working from a practice of relationships, *Flight* emphasizes the importance of creating a learning atmosphere reflective of children's identity and the greater social community (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 27, 50-56). Centres that implement culturally responsive programming foster a safe space for children to grow and learn. Therefore, this Framework advocates for the needs of families, encouraging childcare centres to involve families and community members "in decisions regarding [their] programs, procedures, and policies" to create an inclusive learning experience (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 112). Refer to the *Flight* website offered in the references section for access to additional information and teachings.

Recommendations and Next Steps

- Childcare centres can inform themselves on the historical, cultural, social, and political contexts of Indigenous and newcomer families to provide a learning experience that is meaningful and inclusive for all.
- Childcare centres can encourage educators to work from a practice of relationships when engaging with children and families. Centres that implement this approach in their programming and policies create a culturally safe atmosphere



that builds trust and fosters belonging. Refer to the *Flight* website for more information on this: flightframework.ca

- Childcare centres can provide opportunities for families to be involved in programming and policy decisions to create an environment that reflects their experiences. Centres that incorporate families' funds of knowledge (culture, values, beliefs, etc.) into practice offer childcare that promotes wellbeing and supports identity.
- Childcare centres can implement flexible and adaptable programming to meet the diverse and changing needs of the families and children they support. For example, centres can offer various formats of communication (verbal, written, images, etc.), include educator-led and child-led activities, and provide an array of learning experiences that reflect families' cultural backgrounds to provide relevant learning and support.
- Childcare centres can refer to the additional "inspirations for leading" documents to fully understand the themes and how they work in conjunction with each other.
- Centres can search the Edmonton Council of Early Learning and Care website and click on the 'resources' link to gain additional knowledge and learn more about different organizations/ partnerships in the area: <https://www.ecelc.ca/resources>

References

Makovichuk, L., Hewes, J., Lirette, P., & Thomas, N. (2014). *Flight: Alberta's early learning and care framework*. Retrieved from flightframework.ca