



Educators Supporting Newcomer Families: Funds of Knowledge

In spring 2021, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and MacEwan University conducted focus groups with in-service educators who support newcomer families. Many themes were derived from these conversations, including that **educators value the funds of knowledge of families and children.**

Educators Value the Funds of Knowledge of Families and Children

Funds of knowledge refer to the social and cultural information that families and children acquire based on personal experiences at home and in the greater social community. This knowledge may include cultural traditions, values on child-rearing, beliefs about family roles, and perspectives shaped by lived experiences. This definition extends beyond ‘traditional education,’ referring to understandings derived outside of the classroom.

Educator Dispositions

In the focus groups, individuals identified various characteristics that guide educators in their practice with children and families. In relation to the specific theme – educators value the funds of knowledge of families and children – educators shared the following dispositions valued in the field:



Open-mindedness



Respectfulness



Humbleness



Compassion



**Educator Voices
from the Field**

Many educators believed that valuing families’ and children’s funds of knowledge enriches the quality of childcare, promoting cultural safety, and building relationships in the community. One participant stated that funds of knowledge can equip educators to better “support the child and include them in the community.”



Relationship to Flight

Specifically referring to a relational practice, the *Flight* Framework emphasizes the role of the educator in creating connections with families. A key component of relationships is active participation, which may include inquiring, learning from, and engaging with others (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 50-52). In addition, educators must respect and value the cultural and social knowledge practiced by families. When educators appreciate and acknowledge families' experiences, they foster a culturally safe atmosphere where children can learn and grow alongside others (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 50-52). Refer to the *Flight* website offered in the references section for access to additional information and teachings.

Barriers

Differing expectations regarding what constitutes 'funds of knowledge' may lead to cultural barriers. If educators do not value and respect the knowledge and experiences the families bring, it may strain relationships, stop trust from forming, and prevent diversity from flourishing.

Strategies

- Educators can approach families from an open-minded and strength-based perspective, remembering that knowledge comes in many different forms, which should be acknowledged and valued.
- Educators can ask families about their experiences and cultural knowledge to strengthen relationships and foster an inclusive child care environment that invites participation from all.
- Educators can integrate families' funds of knowledge into childcare by including images, props, toys, books, music, and activities that match and honor their knowledge and skills.
- Educators must recognize that differences in knowledge can foster moments of understanding from a respectful and flexible standpoint that creates a positive image of the family.

Recommendations

- Educators can read the additional "inspirations for practice" documents to fully understand the themes and how they work in conjunction with each other.
- Educators can seek knowledge from other organizations, professionals, and families to engage in a process of life-long learning.
- Educators 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>
- Educators can advocate for an inclusive and enriched learning environment that values families' funds of knowledge by including them in everyday programming decisions.
- Educators can research different organizations/resources in the area (such as Flight) that focus on respecting families' funds of knowledge to gain a more holistic perspective and increase this knowledge: flightframework.ca

References

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