



## Educators Supporting Newcomer Families: Being Open and Flexible

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 **openness and flexibility are the most important dispositions**.

### Openness and Flexibility are the Most Important Dispositions

Openness and flexibility in childcare can be defined as suspending judgments and being genuinely curious about families’ experiences, thoughts, and values. Families value educators who respect their funds of knowledge and adapt to their needs in creative ways by incorporating these things into the learning environment.

### 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 – openness and flexibility are most important – educators shared the following dispositions valued in the field:



Willingness to Learn



Relational



Patience



Non-judgmental



**Educator Voices  
from the Field**

Many educators agreed that they must be open and flexible in a childcare environment to meet the needs of families and their children. However, educators often experienced challenges when educator values around child development and play contrasted those of the family. Nevertheless, educators shared that “adapting themselves and changing their mindsets about how to integrate [families’ cultural or language practices]” into childcare is integral for an inclusive environment.

## Relationship to Flight

Educators can foster an inclusive and culturally diverse childcare. Educators must be open to learning from families and to being adaptable because one universal approach to childcare does not exist; instead, it is based on the needs of each child and their family. The *Flight* Framework emphasizes that this openness and flexibility can be achieved through a practice of relationships (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 61-69). Educators are encouraged to create responsive environments that recognize children as “mighty learners,” which may include integrating practices, values, and traditions from the family (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 61-69). Additionally, educators who adopt a practice that focuses on multimodal literacies understand that children learn through many different methods, which can be influenced by their socio-cultural context (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 61-69). Refer to the *Flight* website offered in the references section for access to additional information and teachings.

## Barriers

When people have differing views on childcare practices, it can create tension and prevent that educator-family relationship from flourishing. Additionally, individual comfort levels may also play a role as many people are unwilling to change their perspectives. Finally, there may be a lack of support and resources available (such as workshops for learning opportunities and a healthy work environment that encourages a positive image of the families) that make it hard to be flexible and open to differences.

## Strategies

- Educators can build relationships with families through respectful and consistent communication to understand their needs and value their experiences.
- Educators can invite families to participate in the childcare environment by incorporating their ideas into programming. For instance, creating a balance between self-directed learning and child-led activities to honour families’ funds of knowledge while still following early learning beliefs and practices such as the *Flight* framework: [flightframework.ca](http://flightframework.ca)
- Educators can encourage a safe and comfortable childcare atmosphere by maintaining a positive image of the family and child. Once an educator understands that there are multiple ways of being, doing, and living, they can open themselves up to being flexible and adaptable.
- Educators can ensure that childcare effectively reflects children and families by implementing their culture, language, and experiences into the environment. For instance, educators can intentionally use material and space by collaborating with co-



workers, families, and other members to ensure that the learning experiences reflect the community.

- Educators can contribute to the morale of the childcare environment by showing up with a positive mindset and always speaking kindly when referring to or speaking about families.

## 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 the 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 contribute to an inclusive child care environment by standing up for the rights and opinions of families and recommend that support be individualized to meet the needs of children.

## References

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