



Educators Supporting Newcomer Families: Growing, Seeking, and Co-Learning

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 can always grow, seek, and co-learn.**

Educators Can Always Grow, Seek, and Co-Learn

Growing, seeking, and co-learning in early childcare is defined as taking the initiative to participate in professional development opportunities (workshops, certifications, and post-secondary education) and learning from children and families. In addition, a disposition of curiosity is integral to growth as learning is life-long and can take place in many different forms throughout life.

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 can always grow, seek, and co-learn – educators shared the following dispositions valued in the field:



Curiosity



Passion



Willingness to learn



Adaptability



**Educator Voices
from the Field**

Most educators agreed that learning opportunities are essential aspects of working in the childcare field. Educators believed that this can occur in various forms, including relevant university experience, professional development opportunities, and creating relationships with families to learn more about their experiences. One educator explained how their learning experiences have made them a “very unbiased educator; an educator who looks past... some of the very problematic thinking that we have here in Canada about newcomers.” Many educators believed that this disposition for learning encourages personal and professional growth.



Relationship to Flight

Flight – officially recognized as Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework – was created to support and guide educators in their practice with children and families (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 17-18). According to this framework, educators who participate in professional development and life-long learning opportunities will be better equipped to support the needs of families. As well, educators who value the learning process will continue to “grow and evolve...alongside children and their families” (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 13). *Flight* also offers numerous curriculum sample learning stories and a reflection and planning guide as additional resources to complement the framework, generate discussions, and encourage educator development (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 17-18). Refer to the *Flight* website offered in the references section for access to additional information and teachings.

Barriers

Obtaining education in a recognized educational institution and limited access to various workshops (time and location) can create financial challenges for educators in the field. In addition, educators who are unwilling to learn new perspectives may face numerous challenges in building relationships with families, which affects the co-learning process.

Strategies

- Educators can invite families to participate in learning experiences through volunteering, celebrations, and after-work community activities (family appreciation day). When educators

engage with families personally, they can learn alongside these individuals, fostering relationships and encouraging growth.

- Educators can be curious and seek information about families’ culture, values, and experiences respectfully to create relationships and learn about other worldviews and ways of living.
- Educators may attend a post-secondary institution (such as MacEwan’s Early Childhood Curriculum Studies) and seek other professional development opportunities to learn about child development.
- Educators can visit *Flight: Alberta’s Early Learning and Care Framework* homepage to download the curriculum, watch videos, and learn more about the content to guide the early learning practice: <https://flightframework.ca>
- Educators can seek out virtual early learning communities (such as visiting the Alberta Early Learning and Child Care Network social media site) for links to additional resources, access to virtual, low-cost professional development opportunities, and join a community of early learning professionals: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/430294927019850/>

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 become members of the Association of Early Childhood Educators of Alberta (AECEA) and learn about professional learning opportunities, funding, and resources in the area: <https://aecea.ca/ece-professionals/professional-learning>
- Educators can search the Alberta Resource Center for Quality Enhancement (ARCQE) for information about regional workshops, services, and resources: <https://arcqe.ca>

References

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