



# Leading from the Field

Practices to Support Indigenous and  
Newcomer Families

Prepared by:

Alvina Mardhani-Bayne, Chelsea Freeborn, and  
Cheyanne Soetaert

MacEwan University  
May 2021

## Executive Summary

In 2020, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and MacEwan University began a joint research project aimed at examining the following research questions:

1. For Indigenous families, what are indicators of quality in early learning and child care?
2. What are the essential dispositions child care educators demonstrate that meet the needs of Indigenous children and families?
3. For newcomer families, what are indicators of quality in early learning and child care?
4. What are the essential dispositions child care educators demonstrate that meet the needs of newcomer children and families?

In addition to a scoping review of relevant literature, researchers undertook a series of focus groups with in-service educators to help answer these questions. Next, researchers conducted case studies with child care directors and senior staff to ascertain how support for Indigenous and newcomer families can be realized in Edmonton child care contexts. The case studies found that:

- A spectrum of approaches can support determinants of quality and educator dispositions; there is not a “one size fits all” approach that is necessarily suitable to all child care contexts.
- For some centres with a particular focus supporting newcomer or Indigenous children and families, many policy, program, and practice decisions are made through the lens of culture.
- Centres with a particular focus supporting newcomer or Indigenous children and families focus on the physical environment through the use of materials, displays, images, and music to promote a sense of belonging.
- All case study sites, despite their programming focus, indicated the importance for educators to continually seek opportunities and a disposition for professional development, reflection and deepened a sense of curiosity.
- The importance of educator dispositions that engage in a practice of relationships with children and families transcended all case study sites, recognizing the variety and complexity of family experiences within a strength-based approach.
- Educators in case study sites hold strong images of both children and families, and this disposition, as found in [Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework](#) (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014) influences how educators plan for, engage with, and reflect on children and families.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that:

- Leadership supports educator dispositions such as lifelong learning, seeking a practice of relationships with children and families, and the deepening of a strong image of the child.
- Practical tools are developed for educators and child care leadership to draw connections between this research, [Flight](#), and some practical strategies for achieving research outcomes.