



Leading from the Field

Practices to Support Indigenous and
Newcomer Families

Prepared by:

Alvina Mardhani-Bayne, Chelsea Freeborn, and
Cheyanne Soetaert

MacEwan University
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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

Introduction

While much research defines high-quality child care and essential dispositions of child care educators, this research tends to be Eurocentric, erase the voices of children and families experiencing care, and collapse multifaceted groups into monolithic 'others' (Karoly & Gonzalez, 2011; Peeters & Vanderkerckhove, 2015; Quintero, 2012). As such, very little is known about the indicators of quality and educator dispositions that are expected, understood, and needed by Indigenous and newcomer families in the Edmonton context.

In order to address the gaps in our collective understanding, the Edmonton Council for Early Learning and Care (ECELC) and MacEwan University began a joint research project in the spring of 2020 to explore these areas. Specifically, the project focused on four 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?

To answer these questions, researchers first conducted a scoping review of current academic literature and identified existing understandings of indicators of quality and desirable educator dispositions (Freeborn, Mardhani-Bayne, & Soetaert, 2021a; Mardhani-Bayne, Freeborn, & Soetaert, 2021a). This information was then used to create guiding questions for focus groups made up of educators who support Indigenous and newcomer families, and Indigenous parents (Freeborn, Mardhani-Bayne, Soetaert, 2021b; Mardhani-Bayne, Freeborn, & Soetaert, 2021b). Finally, case studies were conducted on Edmonton child care centres identified in the focus groups as being of high quality. This document summarizes the findings of these case studies.

Definitions

While varying definitions are used throughout the literature, for the purposes of this research project, several definitions are used here and with case study participants. In particular, 'newcomers' are defined as families who have arrived in Canada in the last five years as immigrants, refugees, or through other means, from another country. We use the term 'Indigenous' to signify "persons of First Nations, Inuit, or Métis descent, regardless of where they reside and whether their names appear on an official register. Self-identification is a fundamental criterion for defining Indigenous peoples" (Government of Canada, n.d.). Additionally, 'child care,' 'child care centre,' and 'centre' are used interchangeably here to refer to the out-of-home spaces where children under the age of six years

old are cared for by adults other than their family members, including licenced child care spaces. The term 'educator' is used to denote the employed individuals who plan and care for children in child care centres. Finally, the term 'dispositions' refers to the "tendencies [of educators] to respond to situations in particular ways" (Ministry of Education, 2017, p. 22 as cited in Davitt & Ryder, 2019, p. 20). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) (2002) defines dispositions as "the values, commitments, and professional ethics that influence behaviours ... as well as the educator's own professional growth" (p. 53).

Case Study Participants

Case study participants were first identified through the focus groups conducted in an earlier phase of this project. In focus groups, educators and parents were asked to identify centres that they believed were of high quality and/or that were sites of positive experiences for them. This method of selecting sites ensured that the voices of participants drove the research project, rather than the expectations of the researchers. The centres identified by the participants were then contacted and asked to participate as case study sites. The table below provides an overview of the four case study sites described here:

	<i>Centre Description</i>	<i>Years of Operation</i>	<i>Program Focus</i>	<i>Staff Member(s) Interviewed</i>
1	Newcomer-Focused Centre (NFC)	Approximately 20 years	Newcomers	Centre Coordinator
2	Inclusive Centre (IC)	Approximately 50 years	Inclusive programming	Executive Director
3	Centre with Experience Working with Indigenous Families (CWIF)	Approximately 50 years	Multifaceted	Curriculum Facilitator Program Manager Family Liaison Worker
4	Indigenous-Focused Centre (IFC)	Less than one year (Umbrella organization: 40 years)	Indigenous	Program Manager Room Lead

Data Collection and Analysis

Once sites agreed to participate, researchers interviewed each centre's leadership team. Researchers based interview questions on the initial scoping review, relating to previously identified indicators of quality and educator dispositions (Freeborn et al., 2021a; Mardhani-Bayne et al., 2021a). A complete list of the case study interview questions is available in the appendix.

Upon completion of the interviews, each site was asked to share the following documents:

- Centre policies and guidelines
- Samples of communication from the centre to families (e.g. newsletters)
- Job descriptions for educators
- Outreach/marketing materials
- Any other written material that the leadership team wished to share with researchers

The purpose of obtaining and reviewing these documents was to further understand how ideas regarding indicators of quality and educator dispositions were being articulated and shared by each centre's leadership team.

Finally, researchers requested photographs of both indoor and outdoor areas that children and families may access, such as outdoor play spaces. The purpose of obtaining and reviewing these photographs was to determine how indicators of quality and educator dispositions were being realized in the materials and environments accessed by children and families.

Once all of the data were collected from each site, researchers reviewed the interview transcripts and documentation multiple times through the lens of a theory-driven approach (i.e., in consideration of the research that informs this study), so that answers to each research question were explicitly sought out in the data. Since data for each case study was available in multiple forms, the researchers were able to consider corroboration between the different kinds of data as deeper evidence of the findings described here (Yin, 2014). The research team also met several times to discuss findings as they emerged, leading to a deeper understanding of connections between different pieces of data (Warren & Karner, 2010).

Case Studies

Below, each case study is described in turn. First, the sites themselves are introduced with some background information. Then, indicators of quality for the site in question are discussed, followed by the essential dispositions of educators. The data described below are synthetically drawn from the interviews, documents, and photographs of the child care spaces. Direct quotations from the interviewees are included in quotation marks to provide additional information and to honour the voices and ideas of participants.

Case Study One: Newcomer-focused Centre (NFC)

The site for case study one is a newcomer-focused centre (NFC) that began operation as a single-room child care program approximately 20 years ago. This centre is currently part of a suite of programs and services available for families who are in their first three years of residing in Canada,

such as support in areas like finding work and connecting to communities. For the NFC in particular, adults attend English classes in the same building while their children attend child care. Educators at this centre come from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and many were once newcomers to Canada themselves.

What are indicators of quality in early learning and child care at this centre?

An important indicator of quality at the NFC is the diversity in languages among centre staff, and the match between educator languages and those of families. In terms of communication, the NFC and the families it serves benefit from being part of a 'one-stop shop' for newcomers. Educators at this centre are often multilingual and can thus use their language skills to communicate with families. If needed, educators can access additional staff in nearby services to translate. Additionally, since families sometimes visit the centre to seek settlement support, they occasionally arrive with their own electronic translators or a family member to support communication. While educators at NFC are proficient in a variety of languages other than English, this centre is also funded by grants that require a minimum level of English proficiency among all educators, which supports communication between staff.

Communication with families also occurs in the form of pedagogical documentation, where children's experiences and learning are captured in writing and images and then shared with families. At this centre, most families subscribe to a school readiness approach to learning that focuses on "the ABCs and the numbers," while some educators adopt a more open-ended, exploratory approach where children's interests form the curriculum. In order to facilitate conversations around these varying approaches and to support families in seeing the value of open-ended, emergent curriculum, educators at NFC use documentation. As the centre coordinator explained, "We work with the families when we do our documentation.... We try to show that learning is happening in many different ways." Through pedagogical documentation, families gain insight into the centre's approach and, in turn, increase their trust in educators.

In terms of the environment of the centre, an emphasis is placed on having materials from each family's and educator's home country accessible and shared with care. Multilingual and multicultural books, musical instruments, images, and art objects are available throughout the centre and are at both children's and adult's eye levels. Painted images of animals from each family's country of origin are part of a mural in one child care space. Additionally, children's snacks and lunches provided by the centre are intentionally selected to align with families' home countries and provide children with familiar foods while also exposing them to new options. For example, a morning snack on Monday may be fuul and injera bread (dishes associated with Sudan and Ethiopia), while lunch on Wednesday may be a tofu stir fry (associated with China). All of these elements - books, instruments, images,

objects, and foods - combine to support the transitions of children into care through their familiarity, which helps children feel comfortable in the space.

What are the essential dispositions child care educators must have at this centre?

At the NFC, a central disposition of educators is understanding and honouring each family "as an individual family with their own family culture." In practice, this means getting to know each family as its own unit by asking questions about their practices at home and within their cultures, building a relationship with each family, and, when possible, incorporating each family's practices and needs into the routines of the centre. In their orientation materials for new staff, the NFC emphasizes the need for "respecting home language and cultural practices" of educators, families, and children.

Closely related to the understanding and honouring of individual families is the educator disposition to be lifelong learners and curious. In orientation materials for new educators, the idea of co-learning is related to family support and defined as "helping families to learn to integrate into Canadian society at the same time as we learn about their practices and beliefs." Educators are encouraged to share their practices and approaches with families while also respectfully seeking more information from families. Additionally, educators at NFC experience professional development on a variety of topics, such as migration, immigration, trauma-based care, working with dual language learners, and body language.

At the NFC, other important dispositions include perseverance, the ability to listen well and observe, a love of children, strong organizational skills, and the ability to work well within a team and communicate well. When asked about the process of selecting educators to join the centre, the centre coordinator indicated that her first consideration is the certification of the candidate (e.g. degree or diploma that leads to a levelled Early Childhood Educator Certification through Alberta Children's Services). Next, the previous experiences of the candidate are reviewed, with an eye towards selecting someone who has experience with young children. Additional experiences and qualifications that are seen as assets are then weighed, such as experience supporting diverse families and/or a multilingual background.

After being hired, educators are introduced to the "foundational principles" of the centre, closely related to the dispositions that educators can demonstrate to meet the varying needs of newcomer children and families:

1. "The practice of hope," which is described as the "intentional" bringing of hope in both work and into our lives in general
2. "Intercultural practice," which recognizes the fluidity of cultures and prompts educators to "honour our different ways of knowing and being."

3. "Cultural-historical learning," which values the social, cultural, and historical context in which humans develop
4. "Holistic integrated practice," which recognizes the complexities of people's competencies, strengths, capabilities, and needs
5. "Community of practice theory," which underlines the value of mutual engagement in learning and actions

Case Study Two: Inclusive Centre (IC)

The site of case study two was founded approximately 50 years ago, initially as two playrooms within a church. Since then, this centre has grown to offer child care at two different sites, along with many other supports for families such as counselling and connections to other services. The site of much change as the landscape of funding and child care has changed in Alberta over the last 50 years, this Inclusive Centre (IC) has focused on serving the community rather than a particular group such as newcomer or Indigenous families.

What are indicators of quality in early learning and child care at this centre?

At the IC, the most prevalent indicator of quality is the individualization in support and care that each family receives. Rather than utilizing a "one-size-fits-all" approach, the IC individualizes initial and ongoing communication with families, as well as curriculum planning and implementation for each child. This individual approach is new: In describing the evolution of the IC, the Executive Director described how in recent years the centre moved away from processes that focused on learning about "food, fashion, whatever" aspects of each family's culture to long-term and personalized relationship building. For example, if a parent or guardian needs to complete an intake form for their child, staff at the IC will offer a time to meet and complete the form *with* the parent or guardian, and will use that time to engage in deep, trust-building conversation. Based on this conversation, educators plan for individualized approaches to communication: families can connect with educators in person, on the phone, through email, through an app, or by reading pedagogical documentation and newsletters, depending on their preferences. This communication with families then informs children's experiences at the centre.

Indicators of quality are also present in the materials and environment that children and families access and experience. At the IC, both indoor and outdoor play spaces include loose parts and found natural objects that children can use in a variety of play experiences. For example, large pieces of cloth are hung over some play structures in the centre, and baskets full of acorns are part of a kitchen play area. Additionally, images of the children themselves are displayed throughout the centre. Together, these elements - individualized support and care, loose parts, natural objects, and the

images of children - mean that each family at the IC has many opportunities to build relationships with educators and can express their backgrounds, choices, and needs in multiple ways.

What are the essential dispositions child care educators must have at this centre?

Underlying the prevalence of individualized support and care at this centre is an actively cultivated “funds of knowledge” disposition throughout the centre. The Executive Director discussed how a foundational expectation for educators at the IC is that each child's culture be “evidenced” in the curriculum and environment. Each family's culture is viewed “individually,” “holistically” and as “layered,” so that each family is seen as its own unit of ideas, expectations, and needs. The centre's policies state an expectation for “responsive and reciprocal” relationships with children and families, along with quotations from *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* around the idea of working within a practice of relationships (Makovichuk et al., 2014).

Additionally, the Executive Director described how it is important for educators to have the humility and vulnerability to be “constantly in a state of learning and unknowing,” and that this disposition is sought out when hiring new educators. She discussed how, for example, interview questions regarding educators' images of the child include follow-ups to extend beyond the “I've-studied-for-the-interview-questions' answers” towards deeper, “authentic” answers. At the IC, importance is placed on a disposition of constant self-examination than on knowledge of the seemingly objective. Part of this disposition is an openness to new ideas and possibilities, including learning from other educators, from families, and from children. The Executive Director summed this disposition up as the ability “to be living in the gray.”

In terms of the education and schooling of IC educators, an emphasis is placed on encouraging diversity within the educator team's cultural and educational backgrounds. The Executive Director spoke about how hiring only educators of a “similar age with a similar educational background” can “really flatten things,” and how ensuring that the educator team had complementary and multifaceted backgrounds contributes to a “rich tapestry.” In a powerful example of her own continuous learning, the Executive Director described how she believes that there are “critical foundational skills” for child care, but that she was still discovering and articulating what those skills might be, especially in relation to the families served by this centre.

Case Study Three: Centre Working with Indigenous Children and Families (CWIF)

The site for case study three opened approximately fifty years ago with a mission to support families experiencing periods of vulnerability. This centre works with Indigenous children and families (CWIF) and has grown and evolved to offer multifaceted programming using an integrated service model to ensure that staff meet the varying needs of the children and families they work with. They consider

partnerships and relationships with other organizations pivotal to removing barriers that families face when accessing childcare services in Edmonton.

What are indicators of quality in early learning and child care at this centre?

The centre has been working to create a new strategic plan to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion are represented within all goals, objectives, and tasks of the centre. They intend to move beyond anti-biased care to an anti-racist approach. The centre leadership team spoke of a consideration of culture that looks at culture "as being so much more than race, socioeconomic status, religion;" rather, the leadership team seeks to embed perspectives of culture as rooted in each family, and that these cultures are represented in every room space.

The CWIF's leadership spoke to the role that *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* has in the centre, both related to curriculum as well as intercultural competence and communication with families (Makovichuk et al., 2014). These considerations ensure that children and families are represented in the spaces, and decisions regarding policy and practice are intentional as they must be important and relevant for children and families. For instance, an interviewee shared about a family whose connection to their own Indigenous culture is very important to them. "They live out those practices daily, and so we want to bring activities, experiences, or whatever they need to see themselves represented in the play rooms." Having a sense of belonging and "membership" with the community at the centre is something, according to the leadership team, that supports attendance in the program.

The centre's mission, vision, and values centre around being person-centred and relentless at putting those they serve at the heart of the work, as well as being inclusive and celebrating diversity. In addition, the centre seeks to collaborate through the building of authentic relationships and partnerships. Thus, the three core values of relentlessness, inclusion and collaboration, according to the leadership team, "really speak to engaging with families in an authentic way that creates partnership and relationship. And that means seeking to understand."

One of the approaches for supporting authentic connection to community was the creation of a group of staff who proactively collaborate and work as Indigenous supports to all employees at the centre. They work in partnerships with Indigenous community members to facilitate internal programming for both staff as well as families. Prior to COVID-19, the centre also arranged regular visits with Indigenous Elders to each play room for morning smudges and culturally based activities.

The centre facilitates an environment where children have a sense of self, belonging, safety, and are in relationship with others. And that approach is reflected in their approach with families as well. It is the hope of educators that families "feel like they belong, that we've supported them, their ability to

advocate for their child. And hopefully [feel] supported in engaging with their child and noting all the amazing things they are doing."

What are the essential dispositions child care educators must have at this centre?

The leadership team shared that there are many expectations educators have of themselves regarding their role at the centre. This includes a desire "to enter into relationship with children and families - authentic, reciprocal relationships." Educators thus have high expectations of themselves to engage in meaningful conversations with families about their children. To deepen their understanding of families' home cultures and practices, educators intentionally seek to engage with families as this, according to the leadership team, is how they are in a practice of relationships. One interviewee shared that "We recognize that part of building a relationship with children is building a relationship with [the parents], so that is really key from day one."

How that specifically occurs is through genuine engagement, communication, and relationship building "every time you see [the family]." It is part of the centre's culture to actively facilitate a bridge between child care and home. As such, when educators see a child expressing an interest, or something happening for families, they seek opportunities to genuinely engage with that interest. Another way that educators work with children and families is through the process of pedagogical documentation, guided by *Flight*, to uncover children's interests (Makovichuk et al., 2014). This process includes the intentional engagement of families as well.

Furthermore, educators are supported in their reflective practice. Leadership at the CWIF facilitates educators in their development of reflective practice in order to ensure they are supporting children and families authentically. "For instance, in [one of the play rooms], educators are working on helping young toddlers have agency and autonomy because that is such a powerful thing for them to have. [The educators] are creating a community that helps children be recognized and see their ideas fulfilled.' This reflective approach represents a powerful image of the child, rooted in educators' observations and in their knowledge of "not just child development, but their knowledge of the child who is in front of them." The centre uses *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014) to guide their practice and professional development, and, according to one member of the leadership team, view it as the "foundation for best practice... It provides staff with the language to communicate with each other, to others in their profession, and to families"

One of the interviewees shared that the most important dispositions of an educator are having a foundation of knowledge regarding early childhood, holding a very strong image of the child, and understanding social cultural perspectives and how children learn in the context of community. Furthermore, educators must possess a disposition of curiosity and "a willingness to learn and to grow and to change."

Case Study Four: Indigenous-focused Centre (IFC)

Case study site four recently opened in Edmonton, under the umbrella of a centre in operation for approximately forty years, offering culturally based childcare grounded in Indigenous cultures. This Indigenous-focused centre (IFC) highlights self identity and a sense of belonging for children, exploring languages and traditional teachings as well as supporting the overall wellness of both children and families. The creation of this centre was sparked by grassroots interest and community need for an urban, Indigenous-focused child care program. By acknowledging the historic loss of cultural teachings, this IFC offers both children and families opportunities to engage in a safe, nurturing, and well-resourced environment. The centre's mission is to create an inclusive program for both Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous children in an environment that delivers culturally based programming with Indigenous cultures.

What are indicators of quality in early learning and child care at this centre?

The centre places an emphasis on the natural environment and ensures that children have opportunities to engage in play through nature on a daily basis. Additionally, the environment inside the centre reflects a calming atmosphere intended for children and families. As one interviewee shared, "It's super open, bright, very calming to come into and usually smells like smudge which is amazing. It's very welcoming. It's such a good home feeling... We display a lot of our documentation that incorporate Indigenous experiences, everything that we're doing inside of our classrooms, all throughout our building." This focus on the environment through artwork as well as the use of the Medicine Wheel to share information and display children's activities supports the centre's intention to offer a learning environment that reflects an Indigenous-focused approach.

Another strong consideration for IFC's programming is the incorporation of culturally based activities for both children and families. The centre offers a smudging ceremony every morning. The centre's curriculum is based on the Seven Traditional Teachings, values that guide how to treat oneself and others. These teachings are based on the values of love, humility, courage, wisdom, honesty, respect, and truth, with the intention that this focus will lead to a "good way of life." The centre hosts a parent group on a regular basis as well that currently includes virtual activities such as making bannock and creating talking sticks. In the future, with the possible lifting of COVID-19 restrictions, the centre hopes to further embed cultural activities such as the involvement of Elders as well as programming such as drumming and singing.

What are the essential dispositions child care educators must have at this centre?

The centre shared that they seek to support children through the lens of culture and a sense of belonging. This includes specific approaches such as considering cultural means of communication such as eye contact, as well as ensuring that educators use children's Indigenous names if possible. Every classroom includes an educator who identifies as Indigenous to support not only children's

learnings but also co-learning with non-Indigenous educators. Educators also actively seek opportunities to honour children's funds of knowledge during play. An example of this was the use of imaginary guns during play: Educators took opportunities to understand how the use of guns in children's play were focused on hunting for food.

Educators at IFC demonstrate a strong image of the child as "worthy of getting to know, not just getting to mind." The image of the child, through a lens of Indigenous child rearing, was shared as "beautiful, wild, and compassionate." The program manager at this IFC emphasized that there is a general lack of understanding regarding Indigenous child rearing, and supports an environment where learning alongside one another can occur between educators.

Educators are encouraged to be open and seek opportunities to learn. An interviewee shared that "A lot of times we want [educators] to have a willingness to learn new things. [When hiring educators we look for] how well [educators] adapt, how open they are, if they're open to learning new things, learning a new culture, and all the things that that encompasses. So that is part of our interviewing process. So we want to make sure that they are kind and open."

At IFC, a central disposition is honouring each child and family in a practice of relationships through a sense of identity and belonging. An interviewee shared that "We welcome our families to come in when they bring their children in. We've had two young boys in our program and their grandfather would always drop them off. We always just enjoy conversations and catch up. Anything from what they do when they're at home, who they go visit, their families, even from talking about sports and things like that. So it's been nice just building those relationships for sure. And I hope that within the next little while we can start inviting Elders to come in and share stories and experiences."

Meeting families where they are at and embracing families in whatever form they come is another strong disposition at IFC. This means embracing varying family structures and ensuring that all families feel welcome in the centre. During the interview, it was shared that one child "got his cousin to pick up, or an auntie's picking up and it could be five percent aunties, but as long as we have ID and we know they're coming, then it just makes it seem like it's normal. But for them it's normal. So we're just kind of building our relationships that way." A practice of relationship is woven throughout communication, interactions, and relationship building at the centre.

Discussion

This study reveals numerous findings regarding both similarities as well as differences between case sites in terms of their strategies for supporting children and families. Policies and practices that support children and families existed in all sites used for this study, and it is important to note the numerous and varying approaches were employed to realize quality. Thus, there is not necessarily a "one size fits all" approach when considering both aspects of quality as well as educator dispositions for child care centres in Edmonton.

Distinctions Between Case Studies

In sites analyzed for this study, a spectrum of approaches in regards to programming was noted. Whilst some sites focused on a very particular group such as newcomer or Indigenous families, other sites did not have a particular program focus. Nevertheless, all sites thoughtfully considered how programming and practices impact every child and family.

For some sites with a particular focus such as newcomer or Indigenous children and families, policy, programming, and practice decisions were made through the lens of culture. Culturally related programming included curricula for both children and families related to culturally based practices such as parent groups, language-based activities, and culturally distinct nutrition for children. Culturally based programming at these sites was grounded in one or more cultures to support the unique and individualized values and strengths of children and families attending the centres. Furthermore, cultural "matching" between educators and children was an explicit consideration for the specific program-focused sites. Thus, program decisions grounded in culture are a conscious and overt part of the culturally responsive care that these sites offer children and families.

Another distinction that sites with a particular focus on newcomer and/or Indigenous children and families have are the programming-based decisions regarding the physical environment at the centre. The site environment is used to further explore and share culturally based approaches to child care programming such as the use of a variety of materials, displays, images, and music. These curricular decisions for the physical environment can promote a sense of belonging for children and families when they are able to see themselves reflected in child care spaces. *Flight* mirrors the importance that should be placed on the physical environment, as being an extension of the relationships between educators and children (Makovichuk et al., 2014).

Connections Between Case Studies

Despite the uncovered distinctions, all sites shared some similarities related to educator dispositions. First, developments in the field of professionalism in early childhood, as shared in the case study interviews by all sites, indicate the need for educators to continually seek opportunities for learning, reflection, and curiosity. The educator as a professional is no longer stagnantly following their

pre-professional learning; rather, educators across all sites actively seek opportunities to further their evolving professionalism through professional development (both internal and external), opportunities to reflect on their practice, and maintaining a sense of curiosity for learning. Educators learning alongside children and families to inform curricular decisions is foundational according to *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014). Educators are able then to use such learnings to create places of vitality for children and families. These desires to learn can only be realized with the full support of and strategic decisions from the leadership team for sustainable learning processes of educators.

Another theme transcending case study sites was educator engagement with children and families, where educators build unique relationships with children and families based on the desire to meet them where they are at. This multifaceted and complex role in a practice of relationships with children and families is discussed in depth in *Flight* (Makovichuk et al., 2014). Recognizing that families are the experts in their children and thus know them in ways that educators cannot, educators view families and their relationships with them as pivotal in the care of children. Educators must also reflect on individual family practices that support children's identity in order to deepen their understanding and relationship with children and families. Although specific approaches varied, each site demonstrated a strong focus on this practice of relationships, thus recognizing the complexities of experiences for children and families within a strength-based approach.

Finally, a strong image of the child and family were omnipresent in all case study sites. A strong image of the child, according to *Flight*, is the internal image educators hold that "direct how [they] are with children in everyday experiences - influencing how we plan, how we engage, how we talk about children and how we interact with families" (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 39). The image of the child (and family) reflects educators' perspectives on socio-cultural learning and the role that cultures play in children's environments. For this reason, having a strong image of the child and family deeply influences relationships, and educators must actively seek regular opportunities to engage with their image of the child and family.

Through this case study inquiry, we were able to acknowledge the myriad of ways in which quality can be achieved in an urban child care environment. There was not a "one size fits all" approach to programming or practice. The varying strategies to realize quality suggest that both culturally focused programs as well as mainstream programs can achieve positive outcomes despite very divergent approaches. What was important, however, was leadership support for the development of educator dispositions such as co-learning, seeking a practice of relationships with children and families, and conscious and reflective strong images of the child and family.

Next Steps and Recommendations

The themes emerging from the case study conversations highlight the role that educators have in meeting the needs of Indigenous and newcomer families. In response to this research project, documents will be created for both educators as well as centre leaders in the field. These documents will be one-page summaries of the themes derived from the research of both the focus groups as well as case studies.

The documents will act as a resource for educators and centre leaders and will provide them with clear links to the research. Each document will begin with a definition and brief explanation of the theme, giving clarity and offering an introduction. Specific examples of the theme will then be included to communicate the idea and give more context for child care providers. Educator thoughts derived from the focus groups and case studies will be integrated into each document. The purpose of this is to create clear connections to the research. In relation, the documents will reference *Flight* by drawing connections between the themes and Alberta's curriculum framework (Makovichuk et al., 2014). The aim is to connect the research with programming that is already being used by educators in the Edmonton area to encourage application of these ideas. A summary of identified barriers associated with each theme will then be outlined to bring awareness to the challenges that may arise. Along with this, a series of strategies will be explored to offer possible solutions and problem-solving techniques. Finally, the documents will close with a list of specific recommendations to offer educators and centre leaders practical ways to apply, explore, and follow-up with these findings.

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Appendix: Case Study Interview Questions

General

	Can you tell us a bit about the history of your centre?
	<p>Does your centre serve or focus on a particular group?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Indigenous families: We use the term Indigenous to mean persons who identify as of First Nations, Inuit or Métis descent, regardless of where they reside and whether their names appear on an official register 2. Newcomer families: We use the term Newcomer to mean someone who has moved to Canada in the last five years from another country 3. No special focus or neither of these groups. <p><i>Depending on response, move to the appropriate set of next questions below</i></p>

Indigenous Families

We would like to learn more about your experiences with culture at your child care centre.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How do families see their own culture/community in the child care program? In other words, how might someone visiting your centre see representations of family/community cultures? (Hare, 2011; Bowes et al., 2011) ● What expectations do you have for educators at your centre to learn about families' cultural/community practices? (Endfield, 2007) ● Are there any direct connections to Indigenous communities, such as an Elder, involved with the childcare program? (Greenwood & Shawana, 2003; Sims et al., 2012) ● What role do community cultures have in your hiring process?
We would like to learn more about children's learning at your child care centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What aspects of the child care program do you think are working well for children and families (such as what children are learning, activities, how programs communicate about what is happening, supporting children's specific needs, etc.)? (Sims et al., 2012) ■ What expectations do you think families have for the child care program? (Martin, 2017) ■ Are children exposed to any Indigenous language learning in child care? (Binesi, 2018) ■ What kind of early childhood curriculum (if any) do you follow at your centre? Why do you support this program?
We would like to learn more about your relationships with families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ How do you involve families in the day to day experiences of children in the program? (Bang et al., 2018) ■ How does the child care centre start and build relationships with families? (Lampert et al., 2014) ■ As a supervisor, how do you know if an educator has built a strong relationship with a family? What might you see or hear or observe?
We would like to learn more about what you think	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ When you think of an early childhood educator, what kind of qualities are important to you? What do you look for in the hiring process?

makes a good child care centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What kind of factors do you think make it challenging for children and families to attend child care? (Mulligan, 2007) ■ What kinds of professional development opportunities have the educators at your centre experienced in relation to Indigenous families?
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ What additional aspects of your child care centre (such as programming/curriculum, location, staff, cost, etc.) are working well for Indigenous children and families? ■ Is there anything else you would like us to know about your child care centre that was not covered today?

Newcomer families

We want to learn more about your experiences with communication at your centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can you tell us about how your centre supports newcomer parents who prefer to use a language other than English? (Poureslami, Nimmon, Ng, Cho, Foster, & Hertzman, 2013) ● When hiring an educator, what are your considerations about their skills or experience with newcomer parents who prefer to use a language other than English?
We want to learn more about your experiences with families' cultures at your centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What are your expectations around how educators at your centre learn about families' cultural practices? (Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020; Yamamoto & Li, 2012) ● What are your expectations around how educators at your centre incorporate families' cultural practices? (Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020; Yamamoto & Li, 2012)
We want to talk about your thoughts on learning at your child care centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ideally, how does a child learn things at your child care centre? In other words, if I walked into your centre and saw a child learning, what would they be doing? ● What have you heard from families about the importance of self-directed learning opportunities, where children make decisions about what they do, and educator-directed learning opportunities, where educators decide what children do? (Yamamoto & Li, 2012)
We want to learn more about what you think makes a good child care centre	<p>When you think of an early childhood educator, what kind of personal qualities are important to you?</p> <p>What does the ideal educator look like in terms of their educational background? (Yamamoto & Li, 2012)</p> <p>What kinds of professional development opportunities have the educators at your centre experienced in relation to newcomer families?</p> <p>What additional aspects of your child care centre (such as programming/curriculum, location, staff, cost, etc.) are working well for newcomer children and families?</p> <p>Is there anything that we did not talk about today that you think makes a good child centre? (Jun, 2006)</p>

No special focus or neither of these groups

<p>We want to learn more about your experiences with communication at your centre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can you tell us about how your centre communicates with families? • Has your centre created or used communication strategies to engage either Indigenous or newcomer families? For example, has your centre ever had a newsletter translated into a language other than English in response to a family's language practices?
<p>We want to learn more about your experiences with families' cultures at your centre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are your expectations around how educators at your centre learn about families' cultural practices? (Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020; Yamamoto & Li, 2012) • What are your expectations around how educators at your centre incorporate families' cultural practices? (Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2020; Yamamoto & Li, 2012)
<p>We want to talk about your thoughts on learning at your child care centre</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ideally, how does a child learn things at your child care centre? In other words, if I walked into your centre and saw a child learning, what would they be doing?
<p>We want to learn more about what you think makes a good child care centre</p>	<p>When you think of an early childhood educator, what kind of personal qualities are important to you?</p> <p>What does the ideal educator look like in terms of their educational background? (Yamamoto & Li, 2012)</p> <p>Have the educators at your centre experienced any professional development opportunities related to Indigenous or newcomer families? If so, what are those opportunities?</p> <p>Is there anything that we did not talk about today that you think makes a good child centre? (Jun, 2006)</p>