



What We Heard About Child Care

Focus Groups with Educators & Indigenous Families

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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 to explore 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?

To seek answers to these questions, and following the completion of a scoping review to determine relevant academic literature, researchers engaged in a series of focus groups with Indigenous families as well as educators who have experience working with Indigenous children and families.

Focus group discussions revealed the following themes:

- There is an identified need for educators and programs to support family cultures in child care environments, but this process must be determined and led by families
- Engaging in a reflective practice of relationships, not focusing solely on programming or activities, can meet the needs of Indigenous children and families
- For some Indigenous families, the role of trust is key in their relationships with educators
- Families' ability and feasibility to access and engage with child care must be at the forefront of policy, program and practice decisions
- *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* influences centres' abilities to offer quality child care with qualified staff

Findings from focus groups with educators who support Indigenous children and families indicate that educators believe that *a practice of relationships* as described in *Flight* is essential for high-quality support of Indigenous families and children (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014). When a practice of relationships includes the meaningful participation and active engagement of families in the decisions regarding the care of their children, this also reflects the childcare recommendations in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action (TRC, 2015).

Based on these findings, it is recommended that:

- Educators receive professional learning opportunities to engage in their work with concepts from *Flight: Alberta's Early Learning and Care Framework* (Makovichuk et al., 2014)
- Future research be conducted to explore voices and experiences of Indigenous families not captured with these findings
- Immediate follow up research be conducted regarding how child care centres currently conceptualize, act on, and respond to the themes presented above

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

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) (2015). *Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. Retrieved from <http://www.trc.ca>