



Educators Supporting Newcomer Families: Home Language

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 **there is tension between home language and majority languages in childcare.**

There is Tension Between Home Language and Majority Languages

Families who come from a culturally diverse background may speak a language other than English, which is the dominant language used in Alberta, Canada. While most educators agreed that the development of the home language is vital for wellbeing and identity, the majority of educators in the focus groups cannot provide that support as most are only fluent in English. As a result, tension is created due to a language barrier.

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 – there is tension between home and majority languages – educators shared the following dispositions valued in the field:



Understanding



Creativity



Resiliency



Willingness to learn



**Educator Voices
from the Field**

Most educators valued the significance of incorporating a child's home language into childcare, recognizing how it "creates a common ground." However, many experienced barriers that prevented multilingualism from taking place, which created an environment that was not very "reflective of our multicultural society."



Relationship to Flight

Educators can foster an inclusive and culturally diverse childcare experience by collaborating and respecting others. However, many challenges may arise when a family's home language does not mirror the dominant culture. The *Flight* Framework acknowledges this sentiment and suggests that educators actively engage with families to become more knowledgeable in their linguistic identity (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 107-112). This includes taking the initiative to form relationships, learning from families and communities. In addition, educators must reject negative stereotypes and engage in a life-long learning process to lessen the tension regarding a family's home language (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 107-112). Refer to the *Flight* website offered in the references section for access to additional information and teachings.

Barriers

A lack of resources (such as technology) and access to multilingual educators may limit reciprocal and consistent communication. This disconnect may create tension between educators and families, which prevents an inclusive and culturally diverse community from forming.

Strategies

- Educators can approach families from a strength-based perspective and make an effort to create a childcare experience reflective of children's languages. Educators can achieve this by using images or items to help communicate and inviting families to give their input regarding language to foster communication that honours their identity.
- When available, educators can invite multilingual community members into the learning environment to participate in childcare experiences.
- Educators can suspend any judgments and engage in a practice of relationships to reduce tension.
- Educators can use descriptive language and hand gestures whenever possible and always check with families to ensure that information is clear and understood.

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 advocate for additional resources such as access to translators, so families can communicate and have a platform to share their voices.
- Educators can visit the Early Childhood Services: English as a Second Language fact sheet on the Government of Alberta website to learn more about bilingualism and early learning: <https://open.alberta.ca/publications/early-childhood-services-english-as-a-second-language-esl#summary>

References

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