



## Educators Supporting Newcomer Families: Multimodal and Multilingual Communication

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 **multimodal and multilingual communication with families is paramount.**

### Multimodal and Multilingual Communication with Families is Paramount

Multimodal communication refers to various forms of conversation that include face-to-face interactions and other virtual forms of connection (newsletters, apps, phone calls, learning stories, etc.). Multilingual is the use of several different languages. Educator-family communication may occur in numerous ways, through many times in the day (drop-off/pick-up time) and with language specific to the family.

### 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 – multimodal and multilingual communication is paramount – educators shared the following dispositions valued in the field:



**Flexibility**



**Respectfulness**



**Creativity**



**Resourcefulness**



**Educator Voices  
from the Field**

Most educators agreed that communication with families is integral to building connections and establishing a foundation for a strong relationship. They also agreed that there are numerous styles of communication that vary across cultures. Therefore, educators believed that it is their role to “correspond with families [in a manner that] works best with them.”

## Relationship to Flight

Through a practice of relationships, educators will learn the preferred communication styles of families and respect their social and cultural traditions, strengthening the vitality of the community (Makovichuk, Hewes, Lirette, & Thomas, 2014, p. 27). Reciprocal dialogue allows educators to create connections and better respond to children (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 50). Children learn to communicate through interactions within their environment. Educators who recognize this significance can co-create and explore various literate identities with children and their families (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 50). According to the *Flight* curriculum, educators commit to seeking knowledge and participating in the child's cultural life (Makovichuk et al., 2014, p. 107). Refer to the Flight website offered in the references section for access to additional information and teachings.

## Barriers

In childcare, limited resources such as access to technology or multilingual employees may prevent educators from effectively communicating with families. There are also challenges associated with a lack of knowledge regarding different cultural backgrounds that may result in misunderstandings. For example, many expectations regarding eye-contact and physical space may get lost in translation, which can create a barrier for communication.

## Strategies

- Educators can approach families from a non-judgmental stance and learn from them by inquiring about their preferred type of communication. This can occur during the initial intake meeting or during drop-off/pick-up times, so families feel comfortable and learn about their children's day.
- Educators can bridge connections by using creative methods such as visual aids and translation websites.
- Educators can build relationships through consistent communication; families appreciate when educators initiate conversation and do so regularly.
- Educators must be humble when addressing conflict and uphold respect for cultural and linguistic differences to encourage rather than diminish diversity.
- Educators can incorporate multiple languages into the learning environment by exposing children to books, words, images, or songs that reflect children's linguistic and cultural identity.



## 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 various forms of communication in childcare during meetings to develop awareness and encourage support for families.

## References

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