



# RAISED BETWEEN CULTURES

*A knowledge and reflection guidebook  
for intercultural practice in the early years*

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# Welcome!

Welcome to “**RAISED** *between Cultures: A knowledge and reflection guidebook for intercultural practice in the early years*”! This guidebook can be used as a reference for early childhood educators, care providers, and professionals working with culturally diverse children who are wishing to create intercultural spaces. It is meant to facilitate professional discussions about supporting children’s learning and development that are grounded in deep understanding of their families’ cultural backgrounds,



experiences, and challenges as well as strengths. It is accompanied by the “**RAISED** *between Cultures*” video. As Canada’s demographics continue to change, we believe that our early learning and care environments must reflect these changes and inspire optimal development for *all* children. Our goal is to engage early childhood educators and professionals in dialogue that will lead to the creation of a more intercultural early learning and care system, and we are excited that you are embarking on this journey with us!

# Preface

In this guidebook, we present key information from The Multicultural Early Childhood Assessment and Learning (MECAL) project. The project was a collaboration between the University of Alberta and several early childhood stakeholders from community-based organizations, immigrant serving agencies, government, and schools boards. Our goals were:

- To identify the most important factors to consider when working with immigrant and refugee children and parents that can lead to enhanced understanding of their developmental context and outcomes.
- To develop resources that can support intercultural practice in the early years. Working from a place of interculturality helps *all* children feel a sense of belonging, learn about each other's cultures, and acquire early skills for navigating multicultural spaces later on in life<sup>1-3</sup>.

The MECAL collaboration resulted in the **RAISED** between Cultures model, this guidebook and the accompanying video. The information presented here is based on a review of relevant literature, and consultations with key stakeholders including educators, practitioners (e.g., speech-language pathologists, family liaisons), cultural brokers<sup>a</sup> working in early learning settings, researchers, and decision makers from government, community agencies, and school boards.

The guidebook is divided into two sections. The first section outlines the **RAISED** between Cultures model. The model was designed to provide early childhood educators and professionals with a better understanding of the social, cultural, and migration experiences of immigrant and refugee young children<sup>b</sup> and families and how these experiences can influence their development. The second section of the guidebook explores the practical application of the **RAISED** between Cultures model using intercultural principles. We use the term “*intercultural*” to refer to an *approach* to working with culturally diverse children and families that encourages critical thinking about cultural practices and promotes intercultural dialogue. This approach recognizes children's social and cultural experiences, honours multiple ways of raising young children, and allows for the creation of new knowledge and practices



through mutual learning and exploration. Openness to difference and the expectation of understanding through dialogue, which does not necessarily mean agreement, is central to intercultural practice. Throughout the entire guidebook, reflective questions and examples are provided to help readers further their learning and gain experience with applying the model in their everyday practice.

## How to Use This Guidebook

This guidebook is meant to challenge readers to reflect on the information presented and apply it to their own work in early learning and care settings. To do this most effectively, readers are encouraged to engage in the following 3-step process:

1. Read: Carefully read through the information presented in each section.
2. Reflect: Thoughtfully reflect on the information and any questions it may raise for you.
3. Relate: Intentionally relate the information to your everyday work with children and families.

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## VOICES OF YOUNG CHILDREN WHO ARE RAISED BETWEEN CULTURES

“Mom, don’t wear that [referring to traditional clothes] to school”

“I want to be/speak English like my friends”

“I am making sambusa’s” (Somali food), said a young girl.

“No, you are making chapati, my mom does this at home” calls another girl. “No it’s pancake” says another boy

“Her hair is nice. Your hair is not nice” [said a young girl in the playground while pointing to a girl with dreadlocks in a high ponytail]

“Why do you wear this?” [Referring to the hijab]



## Introduction:

All children grow up in environments influenced by social and cultural experiences. As the quotes<sup>c</sup> in the box illustrate, from a young age children start to explore similarities and differences in their appearance, language, play, and behaviour. This is part of their social development as they begin to understand both themselves and others<sup>1,4</sup>. As part of these early social interactions, children who are of minority background, such as immigrant and refugee children, begin to feel different from their peers.

Early experiences of difference and exclusion can become more salient in early learning and care settings. These are often the first formal environments in which immigrant and refugee children experience the majority

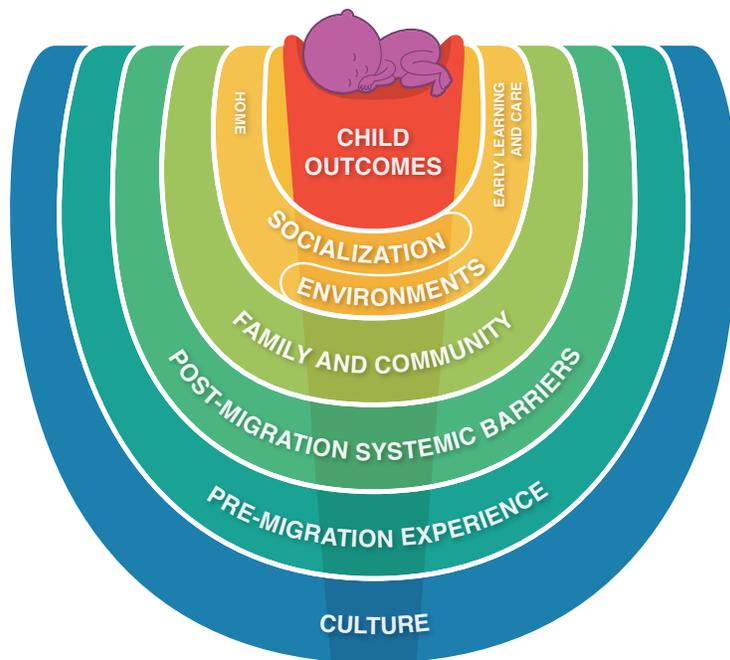


culture through interactions with peers and educators. At home, many of them experience their parents' cultures and often speak a language other than the language spoken at their program. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 30<sup>5</sup>, reminds us of the rights of children who are of minority or indigenous background to use their first language and practice their culture and religion. Research shows that bicultural identities and competencies are a *developmental asset* for immigrant and refugee children who grow up between cultures and languages, and that they contribute to a sense of belonging to both the minority and majority culture<sup>5-8</sup>. As children learn to adapt to multiple environments early on in life, it is most effective to support their bicultural and bi/multilingual development in the early years when their language, social, emotional, and cognitive skills are all being developed.

# Section 1:

## The **RAISED** between Cultures Model

Growing up between cultures and languages is an experience many children of immigrant and refugee background share. The **RAISED** between Cultures model invites educators and practitioners to consider a more holistic understanding of children's play, behaviour, learning and development outcomes based on their social, cultural, and migration experiences. It has six levels, each outlining an important



factor to consider when working with children and families who are of immigrant or refugee background. Each tier of the **RAISED** between Cultures model is described in the following pages of this guidebook. The colours of the **RAISED** acronym relate to each level of the model, which are arranged to illustrate how each of these factors contribute to children's outcomes both together and separately.

- R** eveal Culture
- A** cknowledge Pre-migration Experiences
- I** dentify Post-migration Systemic Barriers
- S** upport Family And Community Strengths
- E** stablish Connections Between Environments
- D** etermine Child Outcomes Together With Families

# R **Reveal Culture**

Whether people realize it or not, we are all cultural beings! Culture is about different expressions of common life experiences: greeting one another, raising children, mourning loss, and celebrating the birth of a child. Some aspects of children's culture can be visible, like language, clothes, and food, but there are many other aspects that are less visible, such as children's play, eating habits, and social behaviours; parents' beliefs about early childhood development, assessment, and health; gender expectations; and ways of relating to family and friends.

## **Why is it important to reveal cultural influences on immigrant and refugee children's early development and learning?**

### **KEY POINTS:**

Culture impacts every aspect of a person's life.

Individualistic and collectivist cultures have differing expectations for children's behaviours.

Immigrant and refugee children can reveal their culture through play.

- Culturally-influenced behaviours and actions that may be seen as odd or problematic in one context may be cherished, necessary, and meaningful in another context. Without deeper knowledge of the meaning behind a behaviour or action, and how it may be culturally-influenced, one can make incorrect assumptions.
- Individualistic and collectivist cultures have differing expectations for children's behaviours that can be seen along a continuum. In some individualist cultures, such as Canada, young children are taught independence skills (e.g., how to use a spoon, put on their shoes or coat) from a very young age. Other cultures focus more on interdependence and social skills in the early years, such as obedience or greeting and respecting Elders, with independence skills taught a bit later<sup>10-13</sup>.

- These social skills are critical in cultures which are considered collectivistic and have extended family relations, as they help children actively participate in community life. For parents who may come from collectivist cultures and are raising their children between the heritage and new culture, it is about balancing both cultures by keeping what is meaningful from the heritage culture while learning new ways of raising children.
- Imagine if you moved to a new place and suddenly everything was new and different. Perhaps you were asked to do things that culturally didn't make sense. How would you feel? When important everyday cultural experiences are not recognized, children and families can feel excluded and disempowered. By revealing cultural differences and similarities, we begin to better understand each other's perspectives.
- Play is one way in which children bring their cultural experiences into the classroom. By observing children as they play, providing them with environments to enact what they know, and listening to what they share, children can reveal their culture while developing new skills and language.

***Reflect & Relate:***

1. *What do I know about the cultural background and experiences of the children I work with?*
2. *What behaviours have I noticed in the children that may be culturally influenced?*
3. *What are my expectations of children's behaviour and development?*
4. *How might family expectations and goals be different from my own? How do I find out?*

# A

## Acknowledge Pre-migration Experiences

Every immigrant and refugee family will have a pre-migration story and journey to Canada. Some families were forced to leave their country as a result of war and had to abruptly leave in order to survive, while others chose to leave due to economic hardship or an active search for better educational opportunities. Despite these differences, all families share the same dream of a better future for their children.

### Why it is important to acknowledge pre-migration experiences?

Pre-migration experiences can provide important background information about the child and the family context.

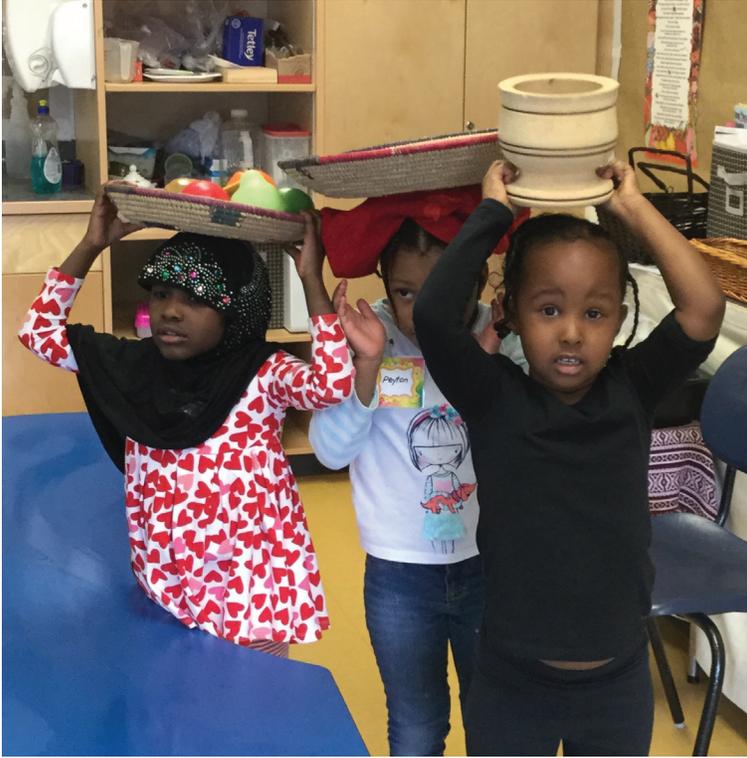
#### KEY POINTS:

Every family's pre-migration story is unique.

Some pre-migration experiences can be adverse.

Families' experiences with early learning and care in their home country vary.

- When moving to another country, families rely on their pre-migration knowledge and “back home” experience for navigating early learning and care programs or other early childhood services. The new country's systems will likely be different from those of their home country. For example, in some cultures it is the role of the teacher and education system to introduce literacy and numeracy activities. Some families may come from systems where play is something you do for fun and might feel confused by play-based learning.
- Some parents and/or children may have experienced adversities pre-migration, especially if they were forced to leave their country as a result of war. Young children may have been exposed to trauma and certain behavioural responses (e.g., becoming anxious when



hearing loud noises) may be trauma-related. If the child and/or parent experienced trauma due to war, family separation, or other pre-migration experiences, they may need additional psychological supports in the new country<sup>d</sup>.

***Reflect & Relate:***

- 1. What are my or my family's heritage roots?*
- 2. What do I know about the pre-migration story of the children and families I work with? How can I find out, or who can I ask?*
- 3. How might a child's pre-migration experiences influence their behaviour in my classroom? What supports can I provide to children to help ease their transition?*
- 4. How might parents' pre-migration experiences influence their program involvement? What information can I provide to help families learn about my early learning and care program?*
- 5. If pre-migration experiences are traumatic, who do I approach for help in assisting families and children in dealing with such experiences?*

# Identify Post-migration Systemic Barriers

Settling into a new country is a long and stressful process. The first few years can be particularly challenging for many newcomer families. Many experience hardships post-migration like social isolation, discrimination, poverty, language, or other systemic barriers. Systemic barriers arise when systems (e.g., health, education, social services) have practices, policies, processes/procedures, and beliefs that do not take into account the social, cultural and language realities of all families and may prevent meaningful participation and equitable access to programs and services.

## Why is it important to identify post-migration and systemic barriers?

### KEY POINTS:

The first few years of settling in a new country are very challenging.

Post-immigration barriers create stress on the family.

Systemic practices such as completing a form may be a barrier for some families.

- Identifying the post-migration family context can contribute to a better understanding of what stressors the family may be facing on a daily basis. These stressors can impact the mental health and wellbeing of both parents and children. They can also influence parents' involvement with the program and children's transition from home to early learning and care. For example, if the family is socially isolated children may not have the opportunity to interact with other children very often and the early learning program may be their first experience in a structured, peer-play program.
- When trying to navigate new systems that do not acknowledge their cultural experiences, families may feel overwhelmed and unsafe in communicating their worries and concerns. Even when parents speak some English,



some may feel that their English is not good enough and may be reluctant to engage in program activities with their child.

- Common program practices such as sending a letter home, asking parents to complete a form, or attend a parent meeting may not be feasible or meaningful for all parents depending on their daily realities (e.g., work flexibility, child care for younger children, knowledge of English, and access to transportation). By identifying these barriers, we can better understand parents and children and avoid making incorrect assumptions.

### ***Reflect & Relate:***

1. *What do I know about the daily life and challenges this child and family are facing outside the early learning and care environment? How can I find out in a respectful way?*
2. *If I were in a context in which I could not communicate with the people who care for my child or was not familiar with how the school or child care system works, what would I like others to do to ease my anxiety?*
3. *Given the post-migration circumstances of newcomer families, how can my centre/school/program facilitate parents' involvement? What would parents identify as meaningful involvement in their children's learning?*

# S Support Family and Community Strengths

Immigrant and refugee families have a lot of strengths they bring with them that can positively contribute to children’s development. These strengths are sometimes referred to as “funds of knowledge”<sup>14</sup> and may include: resilience, strong intergenerational networks, extended family relationships, hope, educational aspirations, ethnocultural community supports, cultural wealth, and first language and bi/multilingualism.

## Why is first language an important strength for immigrant and refugee children’s development?

### KEY POINTS:

Children and families have a lot of strengths such as resilience, ethnocultural community supports, and multilingualism.

First language is an important strength for children who grow up in two cultures that needs to be nurtured.

- Language carries the spirit of a culture and helps convey the meaning of cultural experiences.
- Children have the ability to learn two or more languages with proper supports and encouragement. Many immigrant and refugee young children grow up speaking a first language other than, or in addition to, English.
- Speaking multiple languages provides children with different perspectives on the world.
- While learning English is important for children’s academic success and social integration, maintaining their first language also has developmental benefits for children who are raised between cultures.



- First language can:
  - » strengthen bonds and communication between children and their parents
  - » help children to maintain social and emotional connections to grandparents, extended family members, and the broader ethnocultural community
  - » help children with the development of their second language (e.g., English), especially when children have a strong foundation in their first language. When children learn English as a new language, they go through stages of learning that may be different from monolingual children [Note: For more information on ELL children and bilingual development, see “Working with Young Children who are Learning English as a New Language” in our Additional Resources list (pg. 28)]

***Reflect & Relate:***

1. *What are some personal and familial strengths of the children I work with?*
2. *How can I find out what these strengths are and build my practices around these?*
3. *What is one example of cultural wealth/capital of the families I work with?*
4. *How can I support immigrant and refugee children’s English language development while also honouring their first language?*

# E Establish Connections Between Environments

Immigrant and refugee young children are socialized in many different environments: home, early learning and care, their ethnocultural community, and the broader community. At home and in ethnocultural community settings, many children experience their parent's heritage culture and begin to develop a sense of cultural identity. In early learning and care environments and the broader community, children experience the Canadian culture and begin to develop a bicultural identity.

## Why is it important to bridge between home and early learning and care socialization environments?

### KEY POINTS:

Children are socialized in many different environments including their ethnocultural community.

When children see their home culture reflected in early learning and care environments they feel a sense of belonging.

- Through socialization, children develop language, social-emotional skills, and identities, for navigating their social environments.
- All children, when they move from their home to an early learning and care setting, need time to adjust to new people, expectations, and routines. For immigrant and refugee children, this transition may also include learning a new language and culture.
- When immigrant and refugee young children do not see themselves or their home culture and language reflected and valued in early learning and care environments, they begin to feel different. They start to perceive their home, which is the minority culture, as less valuable than the dominant, majority culture.
- This is a tough space in which minority children risk losing connections to their home culture and have to learn to navigate from a



young age. This can be a detriment to their overall development because strong cultural connections and having a bicultural identity can have a protective effect on minority children's development<sup>8,15</sup>. They can protect against experiences of racism and exclusion as they grow older, contribute to mental wellbeing in childhood and adolescence, and ultimately create a sense of belonging to both the minority and majority community contexts.

***Reflect & Relate:***

- 1. How can I provide continuity of experiences between children's home and early learning and care cultures?*
- 2. How can I help children to feel a sense of belonging to both of their cultures?*
- 3. How can my early learning environment and activities reflect the cultural and linguistic environment of the children's home/community?*
- 4. How can I involve families and communities in creating culturally relevant environments and activities that are meaningful and engaging?*

# D Determine Child Outcomes Together with Families

Children’s learning and development outcomes are related to their experiences at home and in early learning and care settings. For children who grow up between two or more cultures, first language, cultural identity and cultural social competence are additional outcomes that contribute to optimal development and need to be supported. As culture is complex and family realities vary, we need to work together with families to determine optimal learning and developmental outcomes for their children and how to best support them.

## Why is it important to collaborate with families to determine children’s outcomes?

### KEY POINTS:

Children who are raised between cultures experience additional outcomes: first language, cultural identity and cultural social competence.

Each family may practice their culture differently.

Culture is fluid and changes over time.

- Each family is different and the extent to which families practice their culture and language may vary depending on many factors.
- Culture is fluid and changes as families move to new places and learn new ways of raising their children. Making assumptions of parents’ expectations and experiences based only on where a family is from or what language they speak can lead to incorrect conclusions.
- Parents, educators, and care providers all want young children to have the best future possible. To achieve this, it is important to work together towards common goals. A large part of being welcoming and culturally responsive involves creating opportunities for families to share their hopes, dreams, and concerns. Such opportunities need to take into account the families’ pre- and post-migration realities and



be meaningful to both parents and educators. Trust is gradually built by connecting with and supporting the family, which leads to a stronger support network for the child's optimal development.

***Reflect & Relate:***

1. *What do I consider optimal learning and behaviour outcomes for young children?*
  - a. *How might these differ from parents/families I work with?*
  - b. *How do I find out what the parents of the children I work with consider optimal developmental/behavioural outcomes in early childhood?*
2. *How can I balance my learning goals with the parent's goals?*
3. *What can my collaboration with parents look like? How can I facilitate this collaboration?*



# Applying the **RAISED** between Cultures Model

Think about a time that you struggled to understand or work with a child in your care/classroom. What assumptions did you make? Did you consider the impact of the family's cultural background or pre-migration experiences? Were there systemic barriers that you were not aware of or felt unable to remove on your own? Who could you consult with to help you understand some of the barriers and connect the family to community resources (e.g. family liaisons, intercultural consultants, settlement agencies, cultural brokers)?



Below we provide the stories of three young children and illustrate how the **RAISED** between Cultures model can be used to gain a better understanding of children's and families' experiences outside the program. The three stories included here have been purposefully crafted (fake names have been used) to illustrate the complexity of family's experiences and to allow for more in-depth use of the **RAISED** between Cultures model. However, it is important to remember that children and family stories vary. As you read the story, we encourage you to reflect on the questions and/or information provided.

# Qamar's Story

## Consider the following:

- *What is the situation here?*
- *What am I feeling?*
- *What assumptions am I making?*

Qamar is 3 years old and attends an early learning program at her neighborhood childcare centre. She does not engage with the other children in the classroom and does not participate in group activities. She talks very little to the educators and other children, and the staff are not sure she can understand them. Even though the parents have been asked twice to come to the center to talk about Qamar's progress, they have missed both meetings.

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Qamar's mom has no concerns about her daughter's development. She says Qamar is behaving like all young girls in her culture. In fact, community members often praise her for her daughter's good behaviour: sitting quietly at community events and listening to her Elders. When the center staff

suggested doing a language assessment, the parents refused, saying that Qamar is still very young and that she will learn the language by speaking it.

Qamar's family came to Canada 4 years ago. Her mom spends most of her day at home, as she has a five-month old baby. Qamar's dad works shifts with irregular hours. He was an engineer back home but he could not find a job here without taking extra classes. He took some workshops but it was too costly to enroll in school again and he needed to support his young family and his parents back home. Qamar's dad speaks English well, but her mom doesn't. Her mom speaks 2 other languages: Urdu and Punjabi. She was initially enrolled in English language classes but stopped attending after the baby was born as she has no childcare for her baby.

When she is not at the center, Qamar spends most of her time with her mom at home. She helps her mom prepare food and take care of the baby. Qamar's mom doesn't drive so they rely on Qamar's dad for everything. They rarely have the opportunity to interact with other families, except on a few weekends when dad is not working. As a result, the mom rarely leaves the house and feels very lonely. The mom wants to go to parent meetings, but does not feel comfortable because she thinks her English is not good enough to communicate.

The other day, a new girl arrived in the classroom who also spoke Urdu. Qamar was very happy and spent the entire day speaking to the new girl and playing with her, showing her how we take care of babies. The two girls seemed to connect really well and shared a language. When Qamar went home she told her mom how her friend's grandmother was wearing the same clothes as her own grandmother.

Using the **RAISED** model, the following information is reflected on:

**REVEAL CULTURE:**

- Being quiet, listening and observing is valued for young girls
- Assessing young children is not a common practice back home
- Qamar has cultural knowledge about babies

**IDENTIFY POST-MIGRATION SYSTEMIC BARRIERS:**

- Lack of recognition of credentials and cost of going back to school
- The mom does not speak English well and doesn't feel she can contribute
- The family is socially isolated
- Mom doesn't drive

**SUPPORT STRENGTHS:**

- Multiple languages are spoken in the home
- There is commitment to family and relationships with relatives back home

**ESTABLISH CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS:**

- The new girl speaks a familiar language
- Classroom was a new environment for Qamar. She felt at ease to see her culture and language in the new girl

**Next steps:**

- *What can I do in the present situation?*
- *What can I do in a future situation?*

# Rashad's Story

## Consider the following:

- *What is the situation here?*
- *What am I feeling?*
- *What assumptions am I making?*

Rashad is 4.5 years old and is in a junior kindergarten. He joined half way through the year when his family came to Edmonton as government-sponsored refugees. At inconsistent times during the school day Rashad would panic and start crying uncontrollably. No one knew what caused him to cry. Since he didn't speak much English, the teacher went to find his older sister who was in Grade 5 to see if she could understand what made him anxious. As soon as Rashad saw his sister, he calmed down. This happened a few times and the staff realized that the way to calm him down was to let him see his sister. He is doing better now and is participating in classroom activities. Educators are still a bit concerned about his independence skills because he always needs help to put his shoes and jacket on. His older sister always does that for him because

he is the "baby". He also sometimes falls asleep in class, but the mom doesn't seem worried about that. She never comes to the school, and communication has been very difficult.

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Rashad's family (mom, dad, 13-year-old brother, and 10-year-old sister) came to Canada less than a year ago. The family escaped the war back home and lived in a refugee camp for almost 2 years before coming to Canada. Rashad was looked after by his aunt back home as both his parents were working. The oldest son has a disability and the dad seems to be struggling with trauma from the war. The mom is unsure where to go to get him support. He is a proud man who does not accept help easily.

Rashad's mom and dad are

currently working at a local restaurant owned by community members, and hope to save enough money to sponsor his uncle to come to Canada. The sister helps her parents take care of Rashad and his older brother. The parents are both taking English classes to get a better job. They want to move to a better house. They feel unwelcome in their current place; the neighbours made racist comments and the landlord is not willing to do basic house repairs. The mom sometimes feels very overwhelmed but wants to do what is best for her children. The family is connected to settlement agencies. The mom was referred to the Multicultural Health Brokers cooperative for pre-natal support, as she is currently pregnant. The cultural broker helped connect the family with other resources in the community and helped them access further assessment and supports for her oldest son. They were also able to put the dad on a waitlist for counselling. The waitlist is quite long so they are unsure when they will be able to get the support they need.

Using the **RAISED** model, the following information is reflected on:

**REVEAL CULTURE:**

- Young children are taken care of by parents and older siblings, and independent skills will develop naturally as children grow older.
- Sleep routines are flexible to allow for children's participation in family activities.

**ACKNOWLEDGE PRE-MIGRATION EXPERIENCES:**

- Family lived in a refugee camp
- Dad and Rashad seem to experience mental health difficulties related to pre-migration trauma

**IDENTIFY POST-MIGRATION SYSTEMIC BARRIERS:**

- Counselling waitlist is long
- Racism
- Housing conditions are poor and the family wants to move but are struggling financially

**SUPPORT STRENGTHS:**

- The parents are working hard to support their family in Canada and sponsor their uncle back home
- Older sibling supports the mom
- Family is connected to agencies and ethnocultural community

**Next steps:**

- *What can I do in the present situation?*
- *What can I do in a future situation?*

# Jon's Story

## Consider the following:

- *What is the situation here?*
- *What am I feeling?*
- *What assumptions am I making?*

Jon is almost 4 years old and attends an early learning program at his neighborhood school. He is constantly seeking attention from caregivers in the playroom, and has difficulty listening to instructions and sitting still for an activity. He is always excited to play with the other children, but doesn't like to share toys and others don't always want to play with him. He is also a very picky eater and doesn't like the meals and snacks prepared at the centre. When the mom visited the program, she was surprised that all they do is play and wants to move Jon to another program.

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The family came to Canada 6 years ago. Both parents are working to support the family, so the grandmother is usually the one taking care of the children. This is Jon's first experience in a centre-based

program. The family lives in a small apartment, with little room for outdoor play. The grandmother is worried about letting Jon be outside with his 14-year old brother as he is the youngest child and is not old enough to be on his own.

Mom was upset and confused after visiting the centre and talking with the educator. She was wondering why the children only play and are not learning "from books" like they did back home. She was also confused when the teacher mentioned that he is a picky eater because at home he always eats his vegetables, which are always cooked. She knows her son can be hyperactive sometimes and feels it is her fault.

The mom has expressed interest in becoming more involved in her community and wants her children to

be proud of their heritage. She also wants them to be involved in other activities, but with her work schedule she isn't able to take them to many community events.

Jon was always proud to say where he is from and that he speaks three languages, but for the last month he has refused to speak any language other than English. He said that some of the children at his school told him he "sounded weird," so he wants to speak only English from now on. This has broken his grandmother's heart, as she wants him to value and be proud of his cultural heritage. She herself does not speak much English and worries how she will communicate with him.

Using the **RAISED** model, try to identify what factors may be contributing to child's and parents' behaviors:

<b>REVEAL CULTURE:</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	<b>ACKNOWLEDGE PRE-MIGRATION EXPERIENCES:</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	<b>IDENTIFY POST- MIGRATION SYSTEMIC BARRIERS:</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____
<b>SUPPORT STRENGTHS:</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	<b>ESTABLISH CONNECTIONS BETWEEN ENVIRONMENTS:</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____	<b>DETERMINE OUTCOMES TOGETHER WITH FAMILIES:</b> _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ _____

**Next steps:**

- *What can I do in the present situation?*
- *What can I do in a future situation?*

# Section 2:

## Intercultural Practice in Early Learning and Care Settings

Diversity can be a resource in early learning and care environments. When nourished through intercultural practice, it can provide all children with valuable competencies for navigating multicultural spaces. Practicing from a stance of interculturality:<sup>2,13,16</sup>

- Promotes equity and justice in a diverse society.
- Honours the multiple ways of learning, living, and socializing with others.
- Recognizes the position of dominance that majority culture has and creates spaces that give equal power and voice to minority children's experiences.
- Provides all children with skills for respectfully navigating multicultural spaces.

It can be challenging to figure out how to put principles of interculturality into practice, as they are not innately built into early childhood systems. The following pages provide a starting place by outlining some ways in which interculturality can be practiced in early childhood settings based on research and local knowledge and experience.

### FROM THE ALBERTA EARLY LEARNING AND CARE CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK<sup>16</sup>

"In early childhood communities, intercultural competence and communication is revealed in the ways that we act and also in ways that we relate to/with one another. Understanding, appreciating, and respecting our commonalities and our differences strengthens our local communities and cultivates a rich experience of sharing and learning about many ways of being and knowing the world" (p.26)

## How to Put Interculturality into Practice

Through environments and activities that provide children opportunities to learn about each other's cultures and affirm their cultural identities

Through dialogue and relationship building with families that can enhance understanding of each other's perspectives

Through educator self-awareness and reflection that contributes to deeper realization of our own assumptions

### ***Reflect:***

*Before exploring ways to practice interculturality, reflect on your feelings about it. On the continuum below, mark an X to show where you position yourself:*



*Cultural diversity creates problems that need to be fixed.*

*Cultural diversity is an asset. We can learn from each other even when there are tensions.*

## Creating Intercultural Environments and Activities<sup>e</sup>

Designing early learning and care environments and activities in ways that cater to children's social and cultural experiences outside the classroom makes children from diverse backgrounds feel more included and engaged, and gives children from the majority culture the opportunity to experience other cultures.

Planning activities with an intercultural focus requires going beyond a simplistic view of culture based only on special celebrations and festivals to designing activities that build on children's everyday cultural experiences. It can seem difficult to include diverse cultures in classroom planning while trying to balance regular curriculum requirements; however these changes can begin small and grow incrementally.

### FROM THE FIELD:

"When we think about planning intentional activities... lots of it is creating that open invitation... We have done what we would call cultural snack sharing... We would bring something from our culture and model for the children where our families came from and then invite families to do the same so every child would have a chance to participate... When children have an opportunity to participate in cultural activities that reflect their culture they are excited, they have a sense of pride, and they are really willing to share that with their peers... I find that it's not necessarily just the children from that particular culture that are engaged in cultural experiences but all children are quite excited... they are very willing to participate, especially when the staff is willing to model what that looks like. That's that critical piece if we can show excitement and acceptance and ask questions." - Educator

### Culturally-relevant activity elements<sup>f</sup>

When planning activities consider the following culturally-relevant elements:<sup>17</sup>

- Songs and rhymes from different cultures and in different languages.
- Storytelling and story enactment, using books that represent diversity of experiences and protagonists that reflect the classroom diversity.

- Food-related activities – preparing food is an experience many children share, but their experiences vary. Consider exploring with children what foods are cooked at home and how the foods are cooked, and invite parents to share cultural food.
- Arts and crafts that are inspired from different cultures and traditions that can support children’s motor skills, creativity, and problem solving.
- Dramatic play, which allows children to re-enact and share their home experiences.

### An Example: Storytelling and Story Enactment



Story time. The teacher reads “Handa’s Surprise”. First language and cultural facilitators can share the story in their own language. Children are asked about their favourite fruit or vegetable and how they eat them at home. This helps build their language skills based on what they know. When selecting books and stories, think about how they represent the diversity of children in the program.

In the story, Handa carries a basket of fruit on her head. Dela said that her grandmother does that. She said that they visited back home last summer and she saw her grandmother do that. The first language and cultural facilitator demonstrates how they do it back home. The children want to try it. As there are not enough baskets, some children get creative and use other artefacts. Fatuma walks around the classroom perfectly balancing the basket on her head as if she has been doing it every day.

## Planning the activities

To plan these activities, you can invite parents, grandparents, community members, first language and cultural facilitators or multicultural animators<sup>8</sup> working in early learning and care settings. You may also look for resources online such as songs in different languages that can be used to create intercultural early learning environments. The following activities and examples are adapted with permission from Kirova and Paradis (2011)<sup>17</sup> (see references for link to the report):

ACTIVITY	MATERIALS	DESCRIPTION
Story-telling	· Picture books in several languages	· Read the story using simple language and hand gestures to facilitate children's ability to follow the story. Use fewer gestures each time, and eventually have the children tell the story. Ask children questions that can reveal their home experiences in relation to the story.
Cooking	· Cooking dishes · Food ingredients	· Describe the food and cooking instructions to the children to help build their cognitive capacity and language skills. Have children describe their favorite ingredients or dishes. · Invite parents to come in and facilitate cooking or sharing of traditional foods they eat at home.
Play	· Cultural artefacts, toys ( <i>Dramatic play</i> ) · Blocks, toys ( <i>manipulative play</i> ) · Writing utensils and natural materials ( <i>creative play</i> )	· Dramatic play: have the children re-create aspects of their lives by acting them out, which allows them to practice their language skills · Manipulative play: allow the children to use blocks and toys to create a play space, and have them describe what they are creating · Creative play: lead the children in crafting activities, and encourage them to create more culturally traditional crafts by showing them the process and allowing other children to explain their own home crafts

## An Example: Making Tea



*Children learn about spices and different ways of serving tea. They share how they or their parents drink tea at home.*



*First language and cultural facilitators or parents talk about grinding spices and demonstrates how it is done in Somali culture using a pestle and mortar.*



*Children try using the pestle and mortar. They smell the spices. Ayan shouts the name of the pestle and mortar in Somali because her grandmother uses it at home.*



*Children try different snacks that are served with the tea. Parents are invited to the tea serving to celebrate Mother's day.*

## Cultural Artefacts and Culturally Diverse Materials in the Classroom



*In the small kitchen area Faisa and Helen pretend to be cooking Ethiopian food using artefacts available.*



*Using the scarfs available in the play area and with the help of the teacher and first language and cultural facilitator, Sarah and Suri carry the babies. Sarah's mom carries the baby the same way when she comes to pick her up.*



Children best engage in learning when they see their home and community lives reflected in their surroundings. Artefacts can be anything that children see or use in their home such as scarves, bags or small purses, baskets, kitchen/cooking items, or other home items. Children can then use the artefacts during free play time or group activities, giving them the opportunity to enact their everyday experiences and demonstrate their otherwise invisible cultural knowledge. Culturally diverse learning materials (books, dolls, or musical instruments) are also important to have in the classroom.

### FROM THE FIELD:

“We know that environments should reflect a bit of what’s happening at home and what it looks like and feels like at home. . . We invited parents and asked them to look around rooms and write down what is familiar, what speaks of home, what else we can integrate in the space. And we have had parents who will contribute artefacts or clothing or cloth to the environments.” - Educator

## Nurturing Intercultural Relationships and Dialogue



*Art-making can be a creative strategy to engaging immigrant and refugee families and facilitate cultural learning between educators and families. In this program, parents constructed representations of their memories of home and were able to share them with their children and staff<sup>8</sup>.*

Parents and educators can each have different perspectives on early childhood learning and care. When engaged in intercultural dialogue, parents and educators become learners of each other's cultures, hopes, and expectations. This can contribute to a sense of community and stronger relationships.

Dialogue can happen as informal conversation. This can be part of everyday interactions with parents as they drop off or pick up their children. Asking parents questions, showing genuine interest in their culture and migration experiences and journeys can build trust and nurture relationships. Dialogue can also happen during scheduled parent events that provide the time and space for deeper conversations.

### FROM THE FIELD:

"When we had 2 or 3 big family events each year (a BBQ, carnival) we did have parents attend but we didn't have any intimate kinds of conversations, so we changed the nature of our family events. We have a family event every month...on a Friday night. Parents identified that as the best time. We provide food for children, families, and staff, and eat together and then children go to one of the play rooms and we sit with parents, usually a small group of parents, have coffee, and we usually do some activity and then have conversation while that is going on." - Educator



## Learning Stories as a Strength-Based Practice

Developing practices that more accurately reflect children's strengths, capacities, and funds of knowledge,<sup>14</sup> and in turn allow for more culturally responsive program development, is an ongoing challenge in the field. Learning stories use a strengths-based approach to provide an alternative way of looking

at the children's growth in the classroom and can reveal children's cultural experiences and nurture family relationships<sup>19,20</sup>. Children enjoy being read a "story" about themselves, and parents gain important insight into how their child learns and plays.

### FROM THE FIELD:

"It was good to read the story... I don't always pay attention to those skills...so the story helped me to learn about how she is doing in the classroom and helped me notice how she developed new skills" - Parent reflections on receiving a learning story about her daughter

## An example of using aspects of a learning story to capture a child's home experiences<sup>h</sup>:



*“You’re making mandhaza... look she is making mandhaza...”*



*“Just like your Mom makes at home”*

### What happened here?

Maryam and Karin were playing at the play-dough table when Maryam noticed that Karin was cutting and stacking the play dough in a manner consistent with making Mandhaza.

Once Maryam recognised the activity Karin became more engaged in the whole process of cutting, stacking and frying the bread.

### What it means?

Karin is usually fairly quiet during classroom activities. She tends to play beside children and adults as she watches and observes how she might insert herself in play or activities. Today, Karin took the lead on making the bread and Maryam joined her and extended the activity. Karin once again showed herself to be a good observer and was careful to make sure Maryam had everything she needed to finish making the bread. On the second round of ‘frying’ Karin was the one that completed the activity.

## Developing Self-Awareness and Reflection

Interculturality is not only about environments and activities, but also about self-awareness and willingness to learn through interactions with others. It is important for us as early educators to challenge our own assumptions of raising children and be observant of how children enact their home experiences in their early learning environments. Becoming interculturally aware requires stepping back and taking the time to understand and reflect.

This can be difficult to do because we are so often told that we just need to fix things. Interculturality is just as much about oneself and one's willingness to learn and change as it is about the external environment.

The next time you interact with a new immigrant/refugee family, find yourself in a situation that challenges your way of working with children, or feel frustrated because you are not getting the result you expected, take a minute to reflect on your own assumptions and knowledge of the situation. These questions are designed to help you with your reflection process<sup>1</sup>.

### FROM THE FIELD:

“A challenge to practicing interculturality is my own lack of knowledge. How to work through that is to do some research. . . if you have the gift of a multicultural health broker or intercultural consultant ask questions. . . Gaining that understanding of what is culturally important. . . that innate desire to understand, to keep deepening understanding is a critical piece.” - Educator

“Adapting to a new culture is a process and everybody is different but it is not an easy process . . . and we, as staff, we need to learn or we need to use persons who help us to understand the differences.” - Speech Language Pathologist

### 1. CLARIFY THE SITUATION:

- What has happened?
- What am I feeling?
- Does this bother me, and if so, why?

### 2. DEEPEN YOUR EXPERIENCE:

- What was I expecting?
- What am I tempted to conclude?
- What assumptions am I making?
- How do I know these assumptions are valid?
- Is it possible my assumptions are not true?

### 3. EXPAND YOUR KNOWLEDGE:

- What are some other possible explanations?
- Using the **RAISED** model:
  - » What do I know about this child/family?
  - » Who can I consult with to find out?
  - » Does this new knowledge change my assumptions?

### 4. DETERMINE POSSIBLE ACTIONS:

- What can I do in my present situation?
- What can I do if I am in a similar situation in the future?

# Final Thoughts

While we may feel that we cannot solve larger systemic problems, we can inspire a wave of change by starting conversations about the complex issues newcomer families and children are faced with as they transition to early learning and care, which is sometimes their first encounter with the majority culture. These conversations will help to raise awareness about immigrant and refugee children and their unique experiences and strengths, and can ultimately lead to more effective supports. Starting these kinds of conversations and making these types of changes can be uncomfortable at first, but in the face of the growing diversity of children in early learning and care, we need to keep pushing institutional and societal boundaries to best support all of the children. It is a collective responsibility to start new conversations and ensure that they continue in the years to come.

The **RAISED** between Cultures model can help to start this conversation. By **revealing** cultural influences on development and learning, **acknowledging** pre-migration experiences, **identifying** post-migration systemic barriers, **supporting** child, family, and community strengths, **establishing** cultural continuity between early socialization environments, and **determining** development and learning outcomes together with families, we hope to be better able to identify and achieve optimal developmental and learning outcomes for immigrant and refugee children. When all of these factors are taken into account, we hope to have **RAISED** a generation of young newcomer children who feel they belong to a shared culture!

The value of the **RAISED** between Cultures model and this guidebook is in discussing it collaboratively with colleagues and using it to reflect on your own practice. We invite you to share it with others and use it in your everyday work!

# Additional Resources

## First Language and Bilingualism:

Working with Young Children who are Learning English as a New Language - <https://education.alberta.ca/media/1224523/working-with-young-children-who-are-learning-english-as-a-new-language.pdf>

- A document that provides information about children's language learning as well as strategies for working with children who have English as a second language

## Intercultural Practice

Cultural Resource Kits available from the Alberta Resource Centre for Quality Enhancement (ARCQE) - <http://arcqe.ca/services/resources/resource-kits/>

- With a resource access pass (similar to a library card), you can borrow various baskets full of cultural items and resources to use in your early learning and care environments. The Treasure Chest is one such basket. It is a cultural resource guide for integrating cultural diversity in early learning and care programs.

Here Come Everyone: Teaching in the Intercultural Classroom (Alberta Teacher's Association) - <https://www.teachers.ab.ca/sitecollectiondocuments/ata/publications/human-rights-issues/mon-3%20here%20comes%20everyone.pdf>

- Alberta Teacher's Association guide to teaching in the intercultural classroom that provides concrete activities and strategies for use in the early learning environment.

## Learning Stories

Tom Drummond: Resources and Writing - <https://tomdrummond.com/looking-closely-at-children/>

- Resourceful website that outlines the process of writing a learning story as well as provides downloadable examples of various kinds of learning stories for your reference.

Play, Participation, and Possibilities: Curriculum Sample Learning Stories - <http://childcareframework.com/portfolio-view/samplelearningstories/>

- A collection of learning story examples that were developed as a result of the Alberta Curriculum Framework.

# Endnotes

<sup>a</sup> Cultural brokers bridge between systems and families to reveal and address cultural, language, social, and power disparities. They are immigrants themselves who understand the realities of families and often share the same language and/or culture. They support families holistically to navigate new systems and adapt to a new culture.

<sup>b</sup> We use the term “immigrant and refugee young children” to refer to both foreign born children as well as children who are born in Canada to newcomer immigrant or refugee parents.

<sup>c</sup> These quotes were based on observations by educators and cultural brokers and shared during consultations.

<sup>d</sup> Please note that the RAISED between Cultures model is not designed to address trauma-related symptoms and concerns. It merely acknowledges that some families may have experienced pre-migration trauma so that educators and professionals become aware of it and to seek specialized assistance for these kinds of concerns.

<sup>e</sup> “From the Field” quotes are taken from interviewees who participated in the accompanying video.

<sup>f</sup> Activities described here are primarily for early learning programs and 3-5 year old children.

<sup>g</sup> We use the term “first language and cultural facilitators” or “multicultural animators” to refer to individuals who can lead cultural and first language experiences in the classroom.

<sup>h</sup> This learning story has been edited. Learning stories typically include additional sections on opportunities and parent perspectives. Taken and edited with permission from Kirova and Hennig, 2013. See references<sup>21</sup>.

<sup>i</sup> These questions were developed by Donna Mae Ford (Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative) for intercultural workshops and have been included here with her permission.

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