



Young Immigrant Children in Transition: Best Practices

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BEST START ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2008

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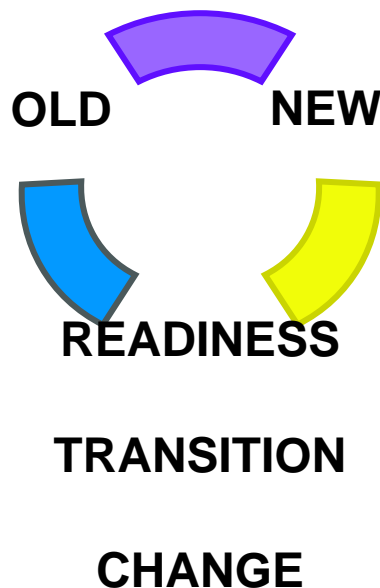
OBJECTIVES

IDENTIFY

- **Transition Issues –**
Readiness
- **Differences –**
Mainstream & Newcomer Populations
- **Best Practices –**
School Readiness & Future Success

TRANSITION

TRANSITION follows CHANGE
ABILITY TO CHANGE = READINESS



ISSUE: NEWCOMER OUTCOMES NEGATIVE

- **US newcomer well-being at risk
(Takanishi, 2004)**
- **Canadian ESL preschoolers score lower on
school readiness assessments
(Pelletier & Corter, 2005)**
- **Canadian school drop out rate high
e.g. 93% of students in grades 10-12 who arrive as
beginners in English (Duffy, 2004)**

Comparison: ESL & Non-ESL Anglophone Population – Canada – 2005

EDI DOMAINS OF READINESS	SK MEANS [Scale 0-10]			
	ESL		Non-ESL	
	N	MEAN	N	MEAN
Physical Health and Well-Being	5397	8.48	54476	8.78
Social Competence	5414	7.82	54602	8.36
Emotional Maturity	5326	7.82	54126	8.07
Language and Cognitive Development	5375	7.60	54248	8.51
Communication Skills and General Knowledge	5407	4.77	54566	7.90
	<u>36.49/5=7.3</u>		<u>41.62/5=8.3</u>	

ISSUE: PRIORITIES DIFFER

- **Canada – ESL & Non-ESL Parents:**
ESL parents more Academic goals, non-ESL parents more Social goals (Pelletier & Corter, 2005)
- **USA – ECLS-K: K Teachers:**
First 8 of 13 transition factors = Social (Lin et al., 20)
- **Australia – Mainstream parents and early childhood educators:**
Social Adjustment #1, Knowledge # 8 or # 6 of 8 school transition categories (Dockett & Perry, 2001)
- **Australia – Cultural and linguistic diverse (CALD) parents:**
Knowledge and academic goals higher than English speaking parents (Dockett & Perry, 2005)

CALD readiness issues - COMPLEX

USA: Lin –Transition Factors

Order of Importance to Kindergarten Teachers

N = 3,305 Kindergarten Teachers from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (1998-1999 Cohort)

	(S=Social)		(A = Academic)
1	Tells needs/thoughts (S)	9	Uses pencil, brushes (A)
2	Is not disruptive (S)	10	Has problem-solving skills (A)
3	Follows directions (S)	11	Names colors, shapes (A)
4	Takes turns/shares (S)	12	Knows most alphabet (A)
5	Is sensitive to others (S)	13	Counts to 20 or more (A)
6	Sits still and alert (S)		
7	Finishes tasks (S)		
8	<u>KNOWS ENGLISH (S)</u>		

Australia: Dockett & Perry – Transition to School Issues

Overview of Categories & Response Groups			
	<u>Children</u>	<u>Parents</u>	<u>Early Childhood Educators</u>
1	Rules	<u>Social Adjustment</u>	<u>Social Adjustment</u>
2	Disposition	Education Environment	Disposition
3	<u>Social Adjustment</u>	Disposition	Skills
4	<u>KNOWLEDGE</u>	Physical	Education Environment
5	Physical	Family	Physical
6	Skills	Skills	<u>KNOWLEDGE</u>
7		Rules	Family
8		<u>KNOWLEDGE</u>	Rules

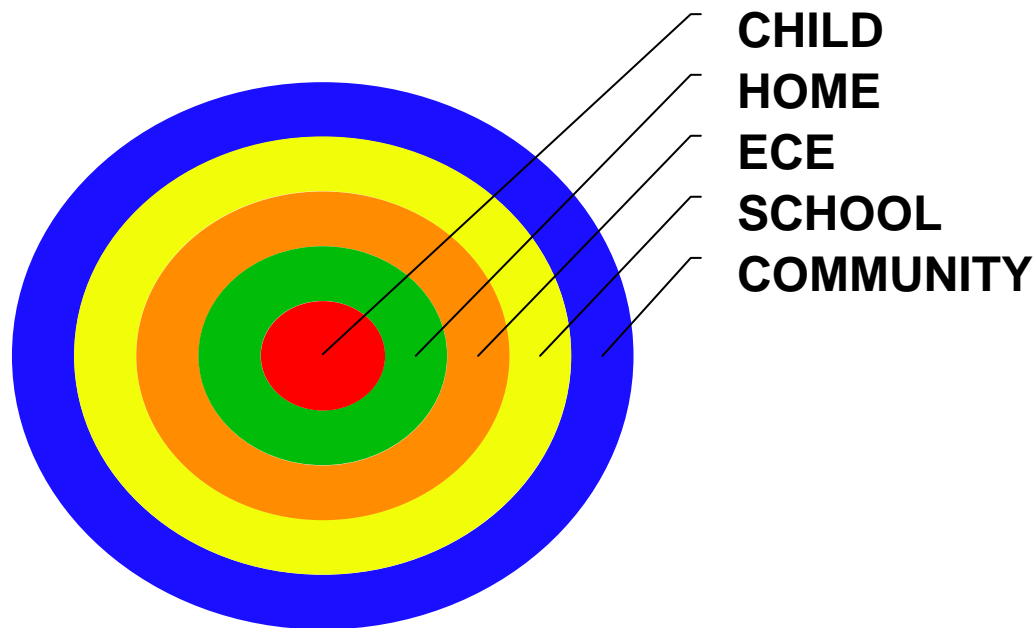
Australia – Bangladeshi Parents: What Children Must Know Before School (n=10)

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1 | Linguistic Factors – Speak or understand English 8 |
| 2 | Skills – Self-help skills – eat lunch on their own, go to the toilet, communicate needs, find belongings 8 |
| 3 | <u>KNOWLEDGE</u> – Know alphabets, numbers 4 |
| 4 | Physical – age at which they can go to school 3 |
| 5 | Rules – Can understand the expectations and rules of school; school is different from home; have homework 3 |
| 6 | Disposition - Willingness to go to school 2 |
| 7 | Adjustment – Able to be separated from parents 1; ability to go to big school 1 |

ISSUES ARE COMPLEX

- **Language** – parents clearly want children to learn English – yet, research says a strong background in home language essential
- **Skills** – parents want children to adjust yet continue parenting practices that differ from mainstream – e.g. feeding, sleeping
- **Family** – complexity of family issues may not be recognized in these studies

ECOLOGICAL APPROACH



- Observe **each child & family** carefully
- Understand transition in the **context** of home, ECE, school and community
- Reduce **discontinuities & incompatibility**

ARE MAINSTREAM PRACTICES COMPATIBLE?

■ WHAT ARE THE BENCHMARKS?

- National Association for the Education of Young Children, US
- National Family Child Care Association, US
- Province of Alberta, Canada

■ WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES?

- Inappropriate practices for newcomers?
- Inaccurate conclusions?
- Inadequate readiness?

■ WHAT ARE THE

- GOALS FOR NEWCOMER CHILDREN?
- BARRIERS?
- BEST PRACTICES FOR NEWCOMERS?
- CONSEQUENCES?**

CONTINUUM OF QUALITY

BEST PRACTICES



■ **PROMISING
PRACTICES**



■ **EVIDENCE/SCIENCE-
BASED PRACTICES**



TOP 10 CHALLENGES FROM MAINSTREAM BENCHMARKS

1. *Ask child's opinions.*
2. *Provide choices.*
3. *Adapt the environment.*
4. *Adapt the schedule.*
5. *Acknowledge feelings.*
6. *Encourage independence.*
7. *Value individual achievement.*
8. *Encourage interactions.*
9. *Stimulate communication.*
10. *Involve parents.*

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #1:

Ask child's opinions.

■ GOAL FOR NEWCOMER CHILDREN

- To answer questions & state views at school.

■ BARRIERS

- Children don't know how to express an opinion.
- Children are silenced at home for speaking out in ways that are encouraged in ECE or school.

BEST PRACTICES *Ask child's opinion*

- Check child's comfort level before asking for an opinion.
- Before asking, discuss the issue to give the child options.
- Model expressing an opinion.
- Ensure the child understands that every person has a right to express an opinion.

CONSEQUENCES

- Signs of respect at home (lowering of eyes) may be interpreted negatively at school & can lead to diagnoses of maladjustment.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #2:

Provide choices, support open-ended, child-directed play.

■ GOAL FOR CHILDREN:

- To choose & carry out activities without the help of a teacher or other adult.

■ BARRIERS:

- Newcomer children are not used to making choices.
- Children are unfamiliar with options – have had few – if any – toys.
- Plastic versions of real objects are confusing.
- Children are used to following instructions.
- Children are not familiar with games or play patterns.

BEST PRACTICES *Provide choices*

- Limit choices, ask about familiar toys.
- Focus on toys that teach children about their new world.
- Ensure children know how to play games & use toys.
- Start with teacher-directed activities & introduce open-ended play gradually.
- Assess progress in the context of child experience.

CONSEQUENCES

- Children miss opportunities for socialization.
- Children do not learn about their new world.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #3:

Adapt the environment

■ GOAL FOR CHILDREN

- To be comfortable in school and other settings.

■ BARRIERS

- Newcomers are not used to the size of the space.
 - *Too large – if from a city or refugee camp or who currently living in confined quarters with many family members*
 - *Too small – if from a rural village with open, common spaces.*
- Children used to homes feel strange in large public buildings.
 - *A school may be larger than any familiar structure.*
- Children are overwhelmed when faced with unfamiliar equipment & materials.

BEST PRACTICES *Adapt environment*

- Use safe objects like a carpet or pillows to make the space seem smaller.
- Limit the number of objects in the child's area & ensure that the child knows the name and function of each one.
- Provide games & activities that are interactive & involve people, rather than toys & other objects.

CONSEQUENCES:

- Child will wander aimlessly or hide under tables.
- Child will be confused by the number of objects.
- Child will not learn to feel comfortable in typical settings.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #4:

Adapt the schedule

■ GOAL FOR CHILDREN

- To be comfortable with routines & activities.

■ BARRIERS

- Mainstream routines are unfamiliar:
 - *Toileting, napping, food & eating practices and utensils - different (e.g. chopsticks) or used differently (e.g. a large spoon & fork, not a knife & fork).*
- Patterns of rest & activity are disturbed by excitement & changes.
- No space to play, especially gross motor & outdoor activities
 - *Families may be living in crowded apartments, no one to take children to parks or unsure/afraid to use them, not used to winter.*
- Newcomer abilities, developmental levels & language skills don't match standard learning goals.
- Newcomers experience high levels of stress.

BEST PRACTICES *Adapt the schedule.*

- Establish a regular pattern of activity, including quiet times.
- Ensure that children have opportunities to play outdoors and provide parents with information about safe parks in the area.
- Help parents know how to dress & have fun outdoors in winter.
- Model mainstream ways of eating & carrying out other routines.
- Respect differences – do not allow scolding or teasing.
- Set learning goals based on observations of the child & input parents.
- Ensure goals do not add to existing levels of stress.

CONSEQUENCES

- Children will be unsettled, excited & confused.
- Children will not be able to function successfully at school.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #5:

Acknowledge feelings.

■ GOALS FOR CHILDREN

- To name their own & others' feelings and promote self-regulation & appropriate behaviour at school.

■ BARRIERS

- Each person has a different ability/desire to express feelings.
- Cultures don't agree on the value/meaning of expressing feelings:
 - *Open expressions of feelings may be seen as signs of weakness.*
 - *Expressing feelings after trauma may not be seen as therapeutic.*
- Newcomers are still be experiencing **shock** & are unable to express feelings associated with former lives or recent changes.
- Newcomers lack L1 or L2 language skills to express feelings.

BEST PRACTICES *Acknowledge feelings*

- Be sensitive to individual expressions of feelings & emotions.
- Learn how feelings are expressed in families & cultures.
- Give children time and space to sort out their feelings, including their feelings related to separation.
- Reduce stimulation from the environment.
- Choose items that will help children express their feelings (e.g. art supplies or dolls for pretend play).
- Model expressions of emotion, appropriate in mainstream culture.
- Help children name feelings – their own & other's.
- Recommend help when necessary.

CONSEQUENCES

- Children may carry emotional scars into adulthood.
- Children may not get the help they need.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #6:

Encourage independence.

■ GOAL FOR CHILDREN

- To master self-help and other skills expected of age-mates at school & elsewhere.

■ BARRIERS

- Some cultures do not value independence – survival may have depended on saving resources, sharing, & working with others:
 - *Mothers feed children so food is not wasted.*
 - *Children drink from bottles to save water.*
 - *Children sleep with parents in crowded spaces.*
- Traditional parenting does not promote independence - mothers are more nurturing & children more dependent.

BEST PRACTICES *Encourage independence*

- Do not assume that children have mastered basic skills.
- Model basic skills.
- When children make “mistakes,” help them learn new ways.
- Respect parents & their teachings & inform them about mainstream expectations.

CONSEQUENCES

- Children may be criticized or teased because they lack the basic skills (e.g. feeding) expected of others.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #7:

Value individual achievement.

■ GOAL FOR CHILDREN

- To take pride/pleasure in their own achievements at school & elsewhere.

■ BARRIERS

- Some cultures value collective achievement not individual accomplishment, consensus not personal opinion.
- Self-esteem is based on contributions to the good of the whole, not individual achievement.

Competence = Ability to Work With Others

BEST PRACTICES *Value individual achievement*

- Help children identify their specific achievements and become more comfortable appreciating their own accomplishments.
- Support children's values by linking their personal achievements to benefits for the group.

CONSEQUENCES

- Child may have difficulty integrating into a groups with other values.
- Praise of personal achievement may make child uncomfortable.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #8:

Encourage interactions.

■ GOAL FOR CHILDREN

- To be socially competent at school and group settings.

■ BARRIERS

- Indicators of social competence are different in different cultures.
- Newcomer children are shy, wary of strangers.
- Newcomers are overwhelmed by new experiences.
- Newcomers are embarrassed by their “old” ways.
- Children do not have language skills to communicate.

BEST PRACTICES *Encourage interactions*

- Let the child take the lead.
- Recognize that interactions look different in different cultures.
- Use verbal & non-verbal strategies to model social skills (e.g. entering groups, participating in conversations).
- Ensure opportunities for child/teacher & child/child interactions.

CONSEQUENCES

- Children may be misunderstood at school – social competence is an important readiness skill.
- Children may not make friends easily.
- Children may not do well on group assignments.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #9:

Stimulate communication.

■ GOAL FOR CHILDREN

- To exchange information & construct new knowledge at school and elsewhere.

■ BARRIERS

- Newcomer children do not speak English (L2)
- Newcomer children are only beginning to speak home language (L1)
- Newcomer children are not yet talking
- Parents do not encourage L1 & are just learning L2.
- Parents regard books as something to be treasured.
- Parents are illiterate.

BEST PRACTICES *Stimulate communication*

- Adapt your communication style to each child.
- Engage the child in age-appropriate conversations.
- Be active, address children directly & prompt responses.
- Set up learning situations that stimulate communication.
- Use music, pictures & other non-verbal strategies.
- Model conventions of reading & writing.
- Recognize different communication styles & respect L1.
- Encourage parents to read to children & support L1 at home.

CONSEQUENCES

- Parents and children cannot communicate with each other.
- Children do not have a strong enough foundation in L1 to express themselves well in L2.
- Children are misunderstood & cannot fully participate in activities.

BENCHMARK CHALLENGE #10:

Involve parents.

■ GOALS FOR CHILDREN

- To receive support from parents while at school & elsewhere.

■ BARRIERS

- Parents do not know how to participate –
 - *May see teacher as an authority figure.*
 - *May be uncomfortable with gender roles.*
- Parents are be unfamiliar with “school” –
 - *May have been educated in a different system.*
 - *May never have gone to school.*
- Parents do not have time, language skills or opportunity to participate.

BEST PRACTICES *Involve Parents*

- Encourage parents to participate.
- Make parents comfortable in your setting.
- Encourage parents to support L1 & culture.
- Help parents have positive feelings about L1 & culture.
- Observe parents as they interact with their children.

CONSEQUENCES

- Parents will be unable to support their children at school.
- Parents & children will increasingly occupy separate “worlds.”

ADDITIONAL CHALLENGE



■ *Balance:*

□ *Individual characteristics*

- Change according to culture, personality, individual traits & experience
- Observe carefully, adapt practice.

□ *Developmental milestones*

- Physical development the same across all cultures
- Observe carefully, consult, adapt practice.

SUMMARY: CHALLENGES

- 1. Ask child's opinions.*
- 2. Provide choices.*
- 3. Adapt the environment.*
- 4. Adapt the schedule.*
- 5. Acknowledge feelings.*
- 6. Encourage independence.*
- 7. Value individual achievement.*
- 8. Encourage interactions.*
- 9. Stimulate communication.*
- 10. Involve parents.*

SUMMARY: 10 STEPS ...

1. Focus on individual children & parents.
2. Observe carefully.
3. Be aware of your own point of view.
4. Consider benchmarks.
5. Identify challenges to newcomers.
6. **IDENTIFY BEST PRACTICES FOR NEWCOMERS.**
7. Introduce best practices gradually.
8. Be patient.
9. Respect efforts.
10. Celebrate progress with children & parents.

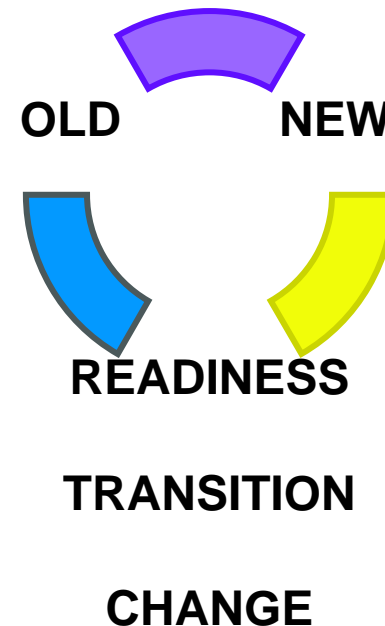
CONCLUSION: OUTLOOK IS POSITIVE

■ We KNOW

- Readiness & early childhood programs lead to more positive outcomes for young newcomer children (Pelletier & Corter, 2005; Lanfranchi, 2004; Spiess et al., 2003).

■ We NEED to

- Consider new ideas
- Identify best practices for newcomer children.
- Implement best practices.
- Investigate outcomes.
- Improve chances of success.



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