



Students from Refugee Backgrounds



A Guide for Teachers and Schools



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October 2009



Ministry of
Education

In general, refugees are persons who seek refuge or asylum outside their homeland to escape persecution. The following is the Geneva Convention definition recognized worldwide and signed by Canada:

Geneva Convention Definition of a Refugee, 1951, 1967

A refugee is a person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence..., is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.”

Source: “Convention and Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees,” Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, August 2007.

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Introduction

Families who arrive in Canada as refugees have overcome great obstacles and adversity. They bring with them strengths, abilities, and qualities to share, with hope of thriving in their new home country.

Teacher awareness and understanding of the backgrounds and needs of children and youth with refugee experience, as well as the individual strengths and cultural differences of these students, are important factors in student progress and success.

While adversity will impact an individual's future experiences and outlook, the resiliency of children and youth to survive traumatic experiences should not be underestimated. Resilience refers to an individual's ability to bounce back from adversity. See [Appendix A](#) for an illustrative profile of a resilient child. A person may be able to recover from disruptions or misfortune without being overwhelmed or acting in dysfunctional ways. Sometimes difficulties can be used as a springboard to positive development. It is important to note that the recovery process may differ for individual children and youth, depending on their ages and experiences.

Purpose

This guide is for teachers and other school staff. It has three goals:

- to provide background information about those with refugee experience
- to support all school staff in their work with children and youth from refugee backgrounds
- to offer strategies for teachers working with these children and youth

1. Students from Refugee Backgrounds: The Context

This section provides information about the circumstances of individuals with a refugee experience.

International

New patterns of survival, new relations with neighbours, and new dependencies and alliances have to be established.

In general, refugees are persons who seek refuge or asylum outside their homeland to escape persecution.

In 1950, the United Nations General Assembly created the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) as part of its recognition of the importance of refugee demographics in our modern world. This agency leads and coordinates international efforts to protect the rights and well being of refugees. It also provides advice and support to nations willing to help refugees.

Individuals seeking refuge or asylum are forced to flee from their home country into a life of uncertainty. A person may have no real sanctuary. The flight from their home country often leads to a difficult life in a camp, sometimes for many years. This may seem like the beginning of a long journey to nowhere. New patterns of survival, new relations with neighbours, and new dependencies and alliances have to be established. Refugee relief agencies work to bring a sense of normalcy to a new existence and stability in the face of uncertainty.

Canada

Immigration and Refugee Protection Act

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) is Canada's legislation pertaining to immigration. Implemented on June 28, 2002, it replaces the *Immigration Act* of 1976.

The IRPA reflects current Canadian values and enables faster and fairer processes to welcome immigrants to Canada, including those needing protection and a safe haven. At the same time, the IRPA strongly enforces national security and public safety. The full document can be found at www.laws.justice.gc.ca/en/I-2.5.

Policy

Canada, in its humanitarian efforts, responds to global crises and UNHCR special requests regarding those needing refuge. Refugees come from different countries, depending on current global crises.

Citizenship and Immigration Canada is the federal government department

responsible for immigration. Immigration policy is guided by three established, broad objectives:

- to reunite families
- to fulfill Canada’s international obligations and humanitarian tradition with respect to refugees
- to foster a strong viable economy in the regions of Canada

Refugees

“Canada offers refugee protection to people in Canada who fear persecution or whose removal from Canada would subject them to a danger of torture, a risk to their life or a risk of cruel and unusual treatment or punishment.”¹ Those needing refugee protection may obtain permanent resident status in Canada.

There are different types of refugees within Citizenship and Immigration Canada’s refugee category. Some refugees are directly sponsored by the Government of Canada or private organizations and are afforded permanent resident status. Others apply for refugee status.

Refugee Category	
Subcategory	Description
Government Assisted Refugees	Enter Canada as permanent residents and are supported by the federal government for up to one year from their arrival in Canada.
Privately Sponsored Refugees	Enter Canada as permanent residents and are sponsored by private citizens. Private sponsors commit to assisting and supporting these individuals throughout their first year of residence in Canada.
Refugee Dependants Abroad	Dependants (living abroad) of permanent resident refugees landed in Canada.
Asylum Refugees (includes private sponsorship, self-funded, and refugee claimants)	People in refugee-like situations who seek asylum in Canada because they cannot safely return to their home country.
Source: Citizenship and Immigration Canada www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/resettle-gov.asp www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/sponsor/index.asp www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/canada.asp (in Canada Asylum) www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/asylum.asp (outside Canada Asylum) www.welcomebc.ca/shared/docs/communities/fact-refugees.pdf	

¹ Source: “Refugees,” Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2009.

Refugee Claimants

“Refugee claimants are not eligible for all government benefits and programs for newcomers. For example, refugee claimants may not have regular medical insurance, such as a BC CareCard. Refugee claimants can apply for a work permit and income assistance.”

Source: “British Columbia Newcomers’ Guide to Resources and Services,” BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, 2009.

(In Canada Asylum Program)

Some refugees seeking asylum are living in Canada and have applied for refugee status. These persons, also known as refugee claimants, are awaiting decision by the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada. This board examines claims for refugee protection and decides if refugee claimants will be granted permanent residence.

The process of transition into Canadian society may be more difficult or confusing for refugee claimants than for other persons from refugee backgrounds who have already been granted refugee status. Claimants may be unsure of legal processes and their rights. The claim process may take years and the outcome is often uncertain.

The refugee claim process is illustrated in [Appendix B](#).

Resettlement Assistance

The Government of Canada directly assists some refugees in becoming residents of Canada. Government provides resettlement assistance to these Government-Assisted Refugees to help them start a new life in Canada.

Under the Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP), Government-Assisted Refugees are provided with financial assistance that includes loans for their transportation to Canada, a start-up allowance, monthly support allowance, and a bus pass allowance. They are also provided with a basic household goods package. Transportation loans are repayable.²

The Resettlement Assistance Program process is illustrated in [Appendix C](#).

British Columbia

British Columbia welcomes refugee immigrants to the province every year. Currently, refugees are more likely to settle in the Greater Vancouver area. Detailed immigration trends and facts about refugee immigrants in British Columbia can be found at www.welcomebc.ca/en/communities/facts_trends/facts.html.

² Source: “Faces of Refugees,” Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia, 2007.

The Refugee Experience

Through the years, educators in British Columbia have worked both with immigrant children and youth and those from refugee backgrounds. While there may seem to be similarities between the two groups – they are new to the country, they must go through a process of adjustment – immigrants and refugees are different. The following provides general observations of differences and may not apply to all students:

Refugees and Immigrants: Observation of Different Experiences	
Immigrants	Refugees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal business is taken care of before leaving home country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal business in the home country is left unsettled after leaving in a hurry.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education usually continues uninterrupted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education may be interrupted or postponed due to strife in home country or a wait in a refugee camp.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Time to prepare for the transition allows for development of an awareness of their new country and its culture. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sudden transition to a new culture/country creates difficulties, confusion, or uncertainty.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of loss and trauma is not necessarily present. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of loss and trauma may be profound; losses may include family members or personal property, and may have psychological impacts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Returning home is a personal choice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Returning home is not an option unless the crisis situation has stabilized or ended.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families are often intact, including parents and children, or other family members who are also caregivers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children may be without parents, or even family guardians.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrangements likely have been made for basic requirements, such as food, housing, and medical and dental care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Basic requirements, such as food, housing, and immediate medical and dental care, may be urgently needed.

Settlement Issues

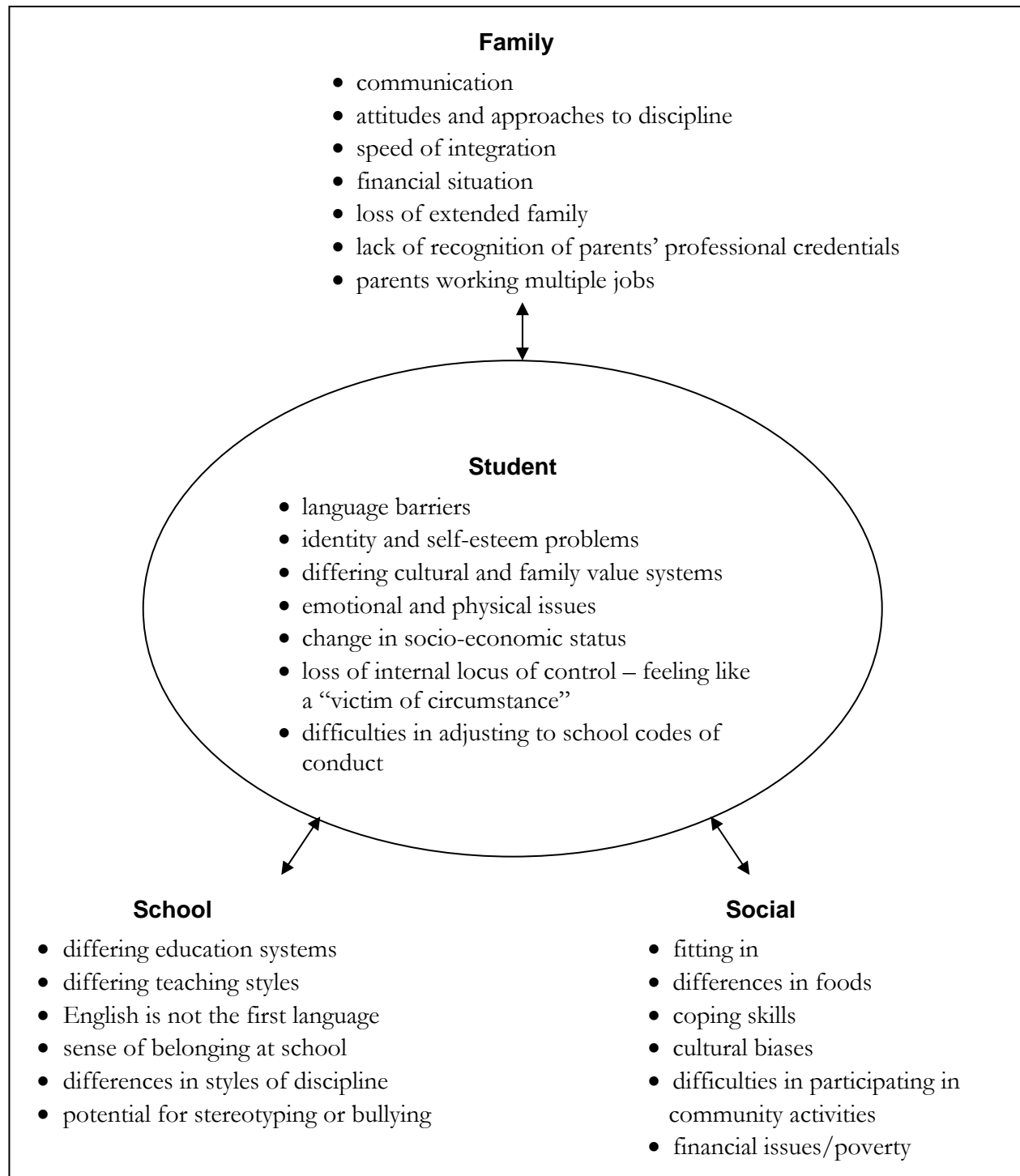
Many children, youth and families from refugee backgrounds who settle in British Columbia are grappling with significant settlement issues. In recent years, changes in refugee characteristics and trends are a direct result of the humanitarian provisions in the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and its emphasis on refugee protection and policy. The following table illustrates some general situations observed over the last decade:

Challenges for Children, Youth and Families from Refugee Backgrounds

- more delays and prolonged time periods in refugee camps for individuals and families
- little or no formal schooling (sometimes for generations) resulting in innumeracy and illiteracy in the first language as well as in English or French
- limited labour market skills, including those needed in a technology-based society
- limited access to resources to address health issues in their countries of origin or in refugee camps
- larger family sizes
- families sometimes composed of several blended families because adults have been lost
- use of less common languages that are difficult to identify, causing communication barriers
- serious and multiple physical and mental health concerns as consequences of war or torture
- inhibited emotional development due to exposure to violence
- limited income, resulting in poor nutrition and health
- lack of awareness of the dangers of city life, such as traffic or strangers
- families with parents lost in conflict or war
- families, accustomed to different cultural norms, who struggle with role reversals, such as a woman as head of a family as opposed to a man, or children taking on adult responsibilities for their parents (from translation to employment responsibilities)
- isolation and loneliness for adults and children
- different parenting styles arising from cultural norms
- negative emotions and stress that have a detrimental effect on children and youth
- loss of identity and self-esteem

Personal Adjustment Issues

Along with overall settlement issues, students with refugee experience are grappling with many aspects of adjustment when they come to a new country, including those associated with self, family, school, and society.



Source: “Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Settlement and Immigration,” British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, pp. 8-11.

2. Students from Refugee Backgrounds: The School

This section provides information for all school staff working with children and youth from refugee backgrounds.

First Impressions

School staff has the opportunity to make positive first impressions on families and set up students for early success.

Many cultures in the world are represented in the population of British Columbia. In each cultural group, traditional beliefs, values, and customs may be retained to varying degrees by different individuals. Factors such as social class, religion, level of education, and rural or urban region of origin in the home country contribute to differences within immigrant groups. These factors influence:

- the beliefs of the student and the student's family about teaching and learning
- their expectations of teachers and school staff
- their willingness to seek help

While learning the English language is essential, children and youth from refugee backgrounds have additional needs that may impact their ability to benefit from our school system. Coming to a new country and adjusting to a new way of life can be difficult and frightening. Older immigrant youth may be particularly challenged by starting life in a new country. The first year or two are very important. Schools can smooth the adjustment process by providing suitable services and programs for these students. School staff has the opportunity to make positive first impressions on families and set up students for early success.

Roles of School Staff

Teachers can begin to have a positive impact as soon as children and youth with refugee experience arrive by establishing and maintaining a positive, welcoming climate. Much of the children's introduction to school life and early relationship building may take place in the classroom with the support of the teacher, other school staff, and peers. It is important to recognize that teachers may not have all the necessary training to help the child deal with traumatic experiences. To best support the child, teachers should be one part of a team made up of various professionals:

- the principal
- counsellors and/or other student support staff who may be accessed through the district's support services department, school administrators, or existing school based teams
- English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers
- settlement workers
- integration support teachers

Principals have a leadership role to play, ensuring that students are provided with the support they need and that the school is a welcoming place for all students. Counsellors can assist with information and support in understanding the emotional needs of the student and can assist with referral to youth mental health services and other community support agencies.

It is important for school staff to be presented with professional development and in-service opportunities geared toward understanding and addressing the unique needs of immigrants from refugee backgrounds.

The ESL specialist teachers, along with classroom teachers, can play significant roles in helping refugee children and youth learn English, adjust to a new way of life in a new country, and achieve success in school. As well, settlement workers offer information and support services to immigrant students and their families, helping to smooth their transition into a new school and community. Integration support teachers can provide classroom teachers with teaching strategies, behaviour management support, and assistance with adaptation and modification of materials.

It is important for school staff to be presented with professional development and in-service opportunities geared toward understanding and addressing the unique needs of immigrants from refugee backgrounds. Local immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies have expertise that may help (see “[Resources](#)” starting on page 28).

Working toward the goal of providing specialized and additional services to students from refugee backgrounds, keep in mind that the majority will eventually integrate into grade-level classes. When integrated, they will follow the prescribed curriculum of the Ministry of Education, and they will be expected to perform to the same standards as their English-speaking peers.

Suggested Strategies for Orientation to the School

For students:

- introduce the school system gradually
- provide a tour of the school and grounds, possibly supported by a visual aid, such as a map
- provide accessible information on the school, such as information in the student’s first language where available
- provide an introduction to the surrounding neighbourhood, and a map
- consider using a translator during initial contact
- get to know parents and siblings
- ensure that support services are in place
- provide a buddy for the new student
- minimize the number of teachers for the student, if possible
- provide an assigned locker or compartment storage space
- provide a smaller class in at least one circumstance where possible
- keep students informed about events at school so they feel included
- use consistent messaging about appropriate behaviour

For parents:

- introduce parents to the classroom teacher, settlement worker and/or multicultural worker, or principal
- consider using a translator during initial contact
- plan first language forums for parents, with helpful school and community information
- provide accessible information on cultural and school orientation, including some in the parents' first language where available

Key Points to Consider

Many children and youth from refugee backgrounds were born and/or raised in refugee camps and have had little or no formal schooling. They need extensive orientation. There are a number of things we take for granted that may be foreign for these students. The starting point for learning may be as fundamental as coping with the expectations of performing a task, or behaving in a set way. The box below includes examples of things with which children and youth from refugee backgrounds may be unfamiliar; school staff may need to help and mentor students so the students understand and become accustomed to these conventions:

- using North American bathroom facilities
- opening and closing doors
- waiting in line
- waiting one's turn
- sitting still
- speaking one person at a time
- staying in one room for long periods of time
- staying in school for long periods of time
- understanding common non-verbal cues
- recognizing the letters of the alphabet in any language
- recognizing that information in English is organized left to right, top to bottom
- holding a writing instrument
- using a book; copying passages from an original source
- using technology, such as cell phones and computers
- understanding the concept of mathematics
- accomplishing simple arithmetic

Learning Environment Checklist: School

The following considerations for introducing students to their new school are offered as a checklist to help with planning. There is a second checklist for teachers in Section 3 (see page 21). See also the complete Learning Environment Checklist in [Appendix D](#) (consider these in combination with “[Cross-Cultural Communication](#)” on page 23):

Social and School Adjustment

- program assignment/placement
- introduction to classroom teacher
- introduction to layout of the school and classroom
- assignment of mentor or buddy
- language assistance if needed
- consistent routine or schedule

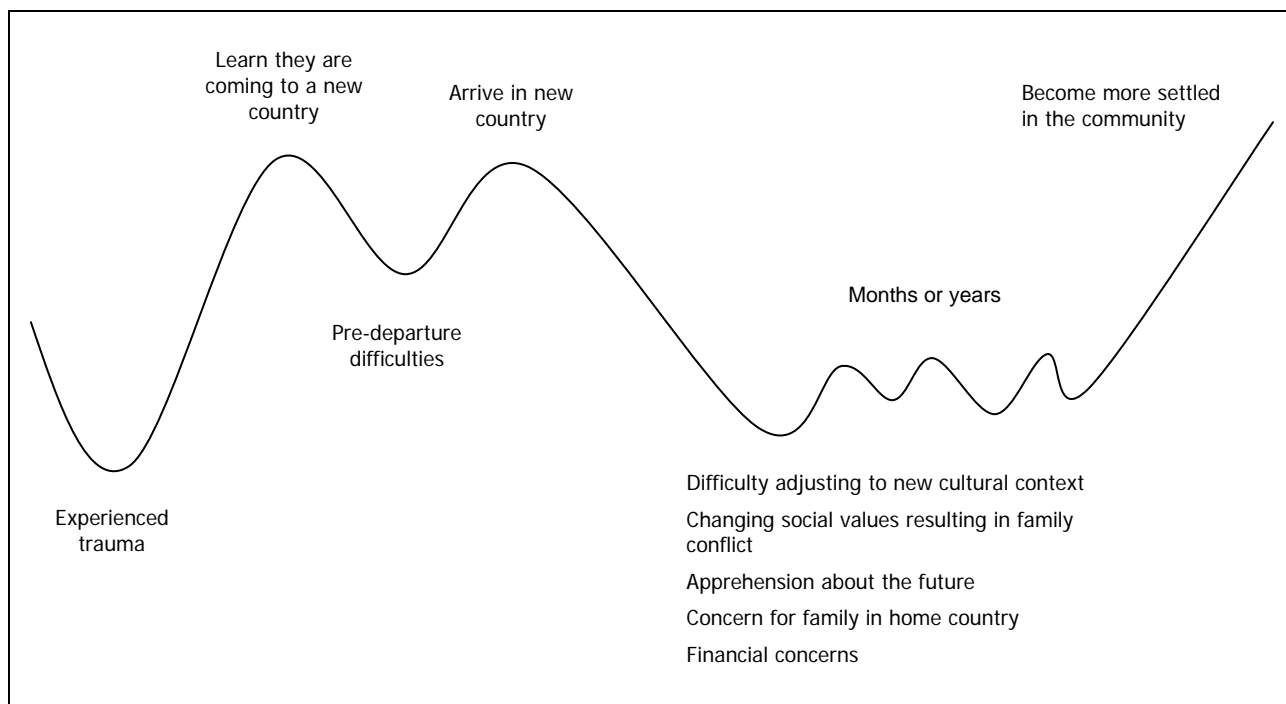
Physical Needs

- school supplies
- textbooks/resource materials
- lunch/snack
- orientation to bell schedule
- access to a quiet area or place of refuge
- assessment of any medical needs, such as hearing and vision

Adjusting to a New Culture

Students and their families new to British Columbia’s culture and schools and with a limited command of English will go through a period of adjustment and settlement. This may impact students’ learning. A sense of dislocation, or the trauma that new arrivals sometimes experience upon leaving their homeland, can cause them to appear withdrawn, fatigued, or uninterested.

The course of adjustment can be challenging, filled with a series of highs and lows:



Source: “Count me in!: A resource to support ESL students with refugee experience in schools,” Minister for Education, Literacy Secretariat, Government of South Australia, 2007.

Stages of Adjustment

While individual circumstances and personal responses will vary enormously, it is common for new arrivals to go through four stages of adjustment. Within all stages there will be periods of ‘silence’. During the early stages of settlement and adjustment, this ‘silent time’ may be due to a lack of vocabulary to respond in English. Later on, this silent period may be due to emotional transitioning. This is a time when students are trying to make sense of their new world.

Parents may also be silent for a variety of reasons:

- lack of English
- translating between the first and second languages
- feelings of inadequacy about knowing the communication norms when talking with English-speaking adults or persons in positions of authority
- embarrassment at having to rely on their children as interpreters and communicators
- different cultural views of the role of parents in relation to teachers and school
- unfamiliarity with the social or school context

The following is one model of the stages of adjustment, and includes four stages:

1. The Honeymoon Stage

This takes place when people first arrive. Individuals may demonstrate the following traits:

- enthusiasm, fascination, curiosity
- optimism, excitement, and hope for a new life
- unmistakable foreignness
- little identification with British Columbia
- fatigue
- anxiety regarding the future
- superficial attempts to adjust

To help the students, school staff can find out as much as possible about students' backgrounds and cultural differences (see pages 20 to 22) and inform the parents or guardians about schooling and programs.

2. The Hostility Stage

After about four to six months, reality can set in. This is most often the time when culture shock becomes evident. Newcomers know a bit about getting around and have begun to learn how to manage, but where they are now is not like their home: the food, appearance of things, life, places, faces, and ways of doing things are different. Gradually they begin to feel that they hate their new country and want to go back home. Individuals may demonstrate the following traits:

- culture shock
- feeling the 'strangeness' of BC schools
- little verbal communication, except with others who speak their language
- slow second language retention
- distraction by unsettled family life or growing family problems
- confusion over Canadian social norms and expectations
- frustration and possible withdrawal or depression
- inexplicable or erratic behaviours
- difficulty sitting still
- possible cultural disorientation and misunderstandings, both verbal and non-verbal

At this stage, school staff can: help the students and families to set realistic goals and expectations; create opportunities to build students' self-esteem; encourage students to take pride in their heritage and language; show compassion and understanding; and highlight student success.

3. The Humour Stage (or Coming to Terms)

Gradually, newcomers work toward resolution of their feelings and their sense of being torn between the old and the new. They begin to accept their new home and to find friends. They begin to discover that there are good things about where they are living and come to terms with both the old and new ways of life. Individuals may demonstrate the following traits:

- proficiency in conversational English
- disengagement from English as a Second Language classes
- peer influence at its greatest
- some attitudinal and value changes
- parent-teen conflict at its worst
- behavioural problems
- improvements in economic situation as at least one parent finds acceptable employment

During this time, school staff can: help students to see the value in their original culture as well as in their new culture; present opportunities for students to communicate about their past; and offer students the opportunity to become role models and peer supporters.

4. The Home Stage (Integration)

This is the stage at which students and families realize they are here to stay. This last stage may take years, and for some will never fully take place. Students may still respond in unexpected ways to particular classroom situations or events, due to cultural conditioning or because their cultural values and beliefs differ from those of other students. Individuals may demonstrate the following traits:

- proficiency with both their first language and with English
- appreciation of cultural symbols of original and adopted countries
- viewing him or herself as an integral part of a multicultural society
- friendships with individuals from different ethnic origins
- participation in school and community activities
- acceptance and identification with host culture, without giving up on original identity

School staff can take pride in the role of supporting each student's unique process of adjustment and integration.

Source: "Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Settlement and Integration," British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, pp. 2-5.

“Post traumatic stress disorder is an anxiety disorder caused by exposure to a traumatic event that threatened or caused death or grave physical harm.”

Source: “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” Canadian Mental Health Association, 2009.

“There is no cure for trauma. However, there is a need for victims to learn to care for themselves and move on.”

Source: “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,” Dr. Y. de Andrade, lecture notes, April 28, 1995.

Emotional Considerations

Post Traumatic Stress

Those who have been victims of war, violence, torture, or crime may suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Not everyone in a war environment, however, will experience stress in the same way, nor will they react the same way to the same experiences. Some may be able to deal with their experiences and move on with their lives. Others may no longer be able to deal with their lives in meaningful ways because the horror of their experiences is too much to bear. Most adults and children fall somewhere in the middle, exhibiting post traumatic stress in a variety of ways and at different times in their lives.

Trauma

The role of the educator does not include the provision of therapy; however, school staff will likely need to deal with some of the behaviours and associated feelings related to trauma and PTSD in students. Understanding and patience could be tested to the highest degree.

Trauma may lie hidden or may manifest in seemingly unrelated behaviours. These behaviours may be emotional, cognitive, physical and/or interpersonal. There may be delayed onset of the symptoms of trauma and grief, which may occur in response to unrelated stressful situations or reminders of traumatic events. It may be months, or even years, before symptoms occur.

Traumatic experiences may also have an indirect effect on other immigrant and refugee children, children whose relatives have been or are refugees, children with relatives unable to leave war-torn regions, school staff, or other students in the school.

Recognizing when to refer children or youth for additional services is critical. If you are concerned about a student, connect with your school counsellor or school-based team regarding school and district services that are available to help students who have experienced trauma. These may include the services of a school psychologist or mental health clinician. Refer to page 28 for a list of resources, including immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies that provide trauma support for refugees.

Associated Behaviours

The following are possible behaviours manifested by refugee children and youth who have experienced trauma:

- difficulty in concentrating and completing tasks
- tiredness because of lack of sleep
- avoidance of particular activities and situations
- physical ailments, such as headaches, vomiting or stomach aches
- irritability or hyper-alertness
- impaired memory
- exaggerated startle responses
- preoccupation with violent events (conversations, drawings)
- unrealistic worries about possible harm to self and others
- excessive distress upon separation or when anticipating separation from parent
- recollection of traumatic events

Students who manifest the above behaviours may be experiencing

- violent nightmares or flashbacks
- disturbing memories
- feelings of being in danger
- feelings of betrayal
- anger
- denial
- pervasive or generalized anxiety

Source: "PTSD in Children and Adolescents" and "Survivors of Natural Disasters and Mass Violence," National Center for PTSD, August 11, 2009.

Triggers

For children and youth from refugee backgrounds in particular, occurrences in their new school-based environment may remind them of negative experiences in their homeland or of leaving their homeland and may have detrimental effects. The following are some of these school-based triggers:

- dark hallways
- uniformed policeman coming to or being in school
- sound of boot-like footsteps
- harsh language
- bells
- earthquake drills or any evacuation procedures
- groups of children talking loudly
- situations that may seem out of control, like children “horsing around”
- other children staring at them
- not understanding English, or some of the other languages children speak outside the classroom
- body language that may be misinterpreted
- unfamiliar festivals and celebrations, such as Halloween with masks or firecrackers

Source: Dr. Y. de Andrade, personal communication, July 26, 1999.

Buffers

One way to counteract or avoid an unwanted trigger experience is to create predictive experiences, or buffers:

- following a schedule
- classroom routines
- knowing that dismissal bells go off at the same times every day
- providing a sense of community
- minimizing changes in courses and teachers
- cooperative learning, facilitating peer connections
- learning through games

Source: Dr. Y. de Andrade, personal communication, July 26, 1999.

3. Students from Refugee Backgrounds: The Classroom

This section provides information for teachers working with children and youth from refugee backgrounds.

Understanding Diversity

Teachers, students, and families all bring their beliefs, expectations, and practices to the education process. When the process involves a student from another cultural background, it may be important to explore the student's cultural experiences, values and attitudes in order to effectively assess the student's learning needs.

Every culture is dynamic, with shared beliefs, values, and experiences among people from a given cultural group as well as widespread diversity within the group. This diversity prohibits generalized assumptions about individual beliefs and responses to specific circumstances. The degree of adaptation to a new life in Canada does not necessarily compare with the length of residence in the country, and integration in aspects of Canadian life does not imply a rejection of traditional ways.

Knowing some of the key characteristics in the traditional cultures among us may improve mutual understanding and ability to work effectively with students from different cultures.

"The most important thing for refugees is safety. They need a safety net. Canada, by definition, is a safety net."

Source: Dr. Y. de Andrade, personal communication, July 26, 1999.

To help understand the backgrounds of immigrant students, this website from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada has very useful information about almost every country in the world:

www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/countryinsights-apercuspays-eng.asp.

A Warm and Welcoming Environment

Teachers have the opportunity to create a warm, friendly, and safe environment with an appropriate educational program and opportunities for interaction and understanding.

Setting the Stage for a Smooth Transition

A child's first impression of the learning environment is affected by the way they are welcomed and introduced to their new life. This can be a very vulnerable period for students. For example, this is a time when some adolescents and youth may be particularly susceptible to gang recruitment. Teachers can help by carefully monitoring students' social, emotional, and cognitive development.

A predictable routine and stability are very important for students who have experienced many challenges as refugees and are starting a new life in a new school environment, all the while dealing with the trials of growing up.

For the first few days at school, especially for those unaccustomed to the North American school setting, it may be difficult for some students to stay in school or one classroom for long periods of time. While keeping safety in mind, it may be necessary for flexibility in some students' daily timetables.

The Ministry of Education *ESL Standards* (2001) document provides information about preliterate learners who may have received very little formal schooling. This particular information can be found in [Appendix E](#). The full document is available at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/standards.pdf.

Learning Environment Checklist: Classroom

The following are considerations for introducing students to their classroom and educational program, offered as a checklist to help with planning. This is a continuation of the checklist for the school in Section 2 (see page 13). See also the complete Learning Environment Checklist in [Appendix D](#) (consider these in combination with tips for “[Cross-Cultural Communication](#)” on page 23):

Tips for Teachers

- become familiar with refugee background
- be aware of adjustments of children and youth
- speak slowly
- pay attention to non-verbal cues
- become aware of the cultural background
- be aware of cultural differences in mannerisms and responses, e.g., eye contact
- consider different cultural norms associated with gender
- contact settlement worker for support

Instruction

- assess educational background – essential for placement
- assess need for pre-literacy and pre-numeracy instruction
- assess need for language assistance
- determine any learning disabilities
- use age-appropriate resources
- use direct, explicit instruction
- offer a variety of activities to start
- use visual aids
- use repetition, or find opportunities for multiple exposures to information, if needed

Awareness of Cultural Differences

It is important to be aware of cultural differences that can arise in the school and in classrooms. The following chart presents some North American education practices, behaviours, and expectations that may differ from other cultural norms. Students from other cultures may need assistance with understanding and adapting to the new customs.

North American	Some Other Possibilities
Praise is overt.	Praise is embarrassing.
Eye contact is expected.	Eye contact may be seen as rude.
Physical contact is usual, especially with younger children.	Physical contact is taboo, especially between genders.
A polite or acceptable physical distance between people is 40-70 cm.	Physical distance is either much closer or much further apart.
Silence is never prolonged; an instant answer is expected.	Silence is comfortable and can imply thought.
Most feelings may be displayed but not necessarily acted upon.	Feelings must be hidden, or, in other cases, displayed with gusto.
Some personal topics can be discussed openly.	Taboo topics are highly variable and culturally defined.
Punctuality is prized.	Time is flexible.
Relative status is not emphasized.	Status is very important.
Roles are loosely defined.	Role expectations are strict.
Competition is desirable.	Group harmony is desired.
Politeness is routine; lapses occur and are forgiven. Thank you is enough.	Politeness and proper conduct are paramount, especially in children.
Education is for everyone.	Education is for males first.
Girls and boys are educated together.	Girls and boys are educated separately.

Source: "Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Cross-Cultural Communication," British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, p. 12.

Cross-Cultural Communication

Newcomers are trying to adapt but may not yet share Canadian cultural values. We have to help them understand these values and provide an educational program that will meet students' needs. To do that, we may need to increase our understanding of their values. Our body language may confuse those who do not understand its meaning in the new cultural context, so it is necessary to be aware of reactions to body language and make adjustments accordingly.

The following are some tips to help facilitate communication:

Communication Tips

- Speak slowly.
- Speak clearly.
- Write down key information (points, details).
- Keep your vocabulary and sentences direct and simple.
- Avoid the use of metaphors, jargon or popular sayings.
- Allow time for a response.
- Acknowledge and support the student's efforts to communicate.
- Check for comprehension frequently.
- Repeat and paraphrase patiently.
- Link verbal and visual cues.
- Use visuals (diagrams, photographs, etc.) whenever possible.
- Use examples to illustrate your point.
- Avoid making assumptions about people and resist stereotyping.
- Make sessions short and concise since communicating across languages is demanding and tiring.
- Be patient.

Source: "Settlement Workers in Schools Module on Cross-Cultural Communication," British Columbia Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development, pp. 14-16.

Some Cautions

As noted earlier, children from refugee backgrounds often have experienced extremely traumatic or chaotic situations. Therefore, some typical school tasks may not be appropriate for them in the beginning stages of their adjustment:

Show and Tell

This activity may prove to be a painful reminder of what they no longer have.

Current Events Discussions

Current events are a part of daily work in many classrooms. However, it would be ill advised to ask students from refugee backgrounds to share their experiences in refugee camps, discuss their views of the war in their homeland, or comment on refugees in general. When students are prepared to discuss the more sensitive areas of their past, they will do so.

Detentions

Giving detentions may be an alien concept, both to the students and their parents. It may also be construed as a form of arrest. It is important to explain clearly to both students and parents (translators may be needed) the normal routine of consequences and expectations in Canadian schools.

Busy Work

Giving work to students that simply has them filling in worksheets is not recommended. All work should clearly relate to the subject area and language needs of the lesson.

Seating

Many refugees have little or no school experiences. They need to be placed next to a good role model and close to the teacher so these students can learn how to conduct themselves in schools and classrooms and so comprehension can be monitored.

Field Trips

Using the word “camp” in any school field trip may create apprehension and bring up a host of bad memories. An explanation needs to be provided about all field trips, especially “camps”.

Families may not understand the need for field trips, and it may be a challenge to have permission forms signed and returned to the school. An explanation about the value of field trips may be needed.

Cultural Views on Gender

There are different cultural views on gender. Some students from refugee backgrounds may not want to participate in activities that include both genders (e.g., physical education and group projects).

Clubs

There may be a misunderstanding with the word “club”. Parents’ understanding of the word may only apply to a night club. An explanation about school clubs such as “drama club” or “chess club” may be needed.

Providing Opportunities for Peer Interaction and Learning

Children and youth learn best by interacting with their peers and practising what they have learned. Classroom interaction also helps teachers ascertain the level of need of individual students. This is an area that will help teachers to discern how well the children and youth from refugee backgrounds are managing their adjustment to Canadian society, and can provide an opportunity for helping these children and youth begin to cope with their traumatic experiences.

Children and youth who are shy need to be encouraged to participate in the context of an accepting, safe learning environment, in which class members can confidently express themselves. Children and youth who are reluctant to interact with others need to be encouraged to work in situations where they have a significant role to play in the success of the group. It is through meaningful interactions that children and youth develop friendships.

Instructional Strategies that Facilitate Classroom Interaction

- Vary group size: pairs, triads, small groups, circle of knowledge.
- Use cooperative learning strategies: brainstorming, role playing, jigsaw, think-pair-share.
- Use questioning strategies.
- Provide opportunities to practise conflict resolution techniques.
- Focus on similarities among children and cultures; as children learn about the things they have in common with others, they develop a sense of belonging and overall comfort in the classroom.
- Communicate that school-wide rules and behavioural expectations apply to all children equally and equitably.
- Be explicit about classroom rules, and post them.

Sources: “The Multiple Intelligences Handbook,” B. Campbell, 1994, p. 50; “Educating Everybody’s Children,” R. Cole, 1995, pp. 24, 38, 65, 146, 149, 152; and “Teaching to Diversity,” M. Meyers, 1993, pp. 72-82.

Older Refugee Youth

Older youth who immigrate to Canada in their mid to late-teens or early adulthood with little or no English and limited formal or interrupted education and/or work experience in their home country may need help with the following issues:

- ambitious academic goals and aspirations as they arrive as well as the frustrations that may follow if these are not immediately achieved
- inability to meet BC graduation requirements within the expected time
- social isolation
- lack of knowledge about BC learning, vocational training, and recreational opportunities
- need or desire to enter the work force before they are able to acquire adequate BC education or orientation

- vulnerability in the labour market (e.g., with little opportunity to move beyond minimum wage employment)
- in some cases, post-traumatic stress disorder, low self-esteem, negative outlook for the future or vulnerability to problematic behaviour, including violence, gang membership, criminal activities, and substance abuse

Possibilities to Consider for Older Students

- Encourage and support students to stay in school as long as possible.
- Connect students with adult education programs and clearly explain opportunities for school completion as an adult – see www.aved.gov.bc.ca/abe.
- Provide time for students to complete all work in class, rather than assigning homework.
- Offer support blocks where necessary.
- Consider work experience programs as appropriate.
- Focus on literacy and work skills programs for those not able or not intending to graduate.
- Provide translated information where possible.
- Discover and nurture student interests.
- Display posters and signs reflective of the diversity of students.
- Offer interpreter-supported clubs, e.g., homework or computer.
- Recognize efforts or accomplishments, formally and informally.
- Encourage peer supports and buddy systems.

“Transitions almost always involve changes in locations, expectations, rules, services as well as peer groups, staff, jurisdiction, and/or lifestyle.”

Source:
“Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools,” BC Ministry of Education, 2001.

Grade to Grade Transitions

In addition to the challenging adjustments that immigrant students face, like all students, they will experience significant transition points throughout their education. Transitions from home or daycare to kindergarten, from class to class, school to school, from school district to school district, and from school to post-secondary or work situations are all time in which students may need support.

In establishing procedures for transition points, school district personnel should keep in mind that the transition process:

- is continuous
- should occur as part of a planned education program
- requires preparation, implementation of supportive strategies and evaluation
- benefits from awareness and use of support services by school teams

Transition planning involves individual transition plan development, follow-up with students, and long-range planning. It is essential that school districts and individual

schools establish procedures to support collaborative consultation in the transition into, within, and from the school system. Planning should involve school personnel, district staff, and representatives from community services, such as pre-schools and post-secondary institutions, professionals from other ministries, parents, and students.³

The Ministry of Education document *Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools* offers information about transitions for students learning English (pages 43 to 51) at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/moe_clt_resource_rb0144.pdf.

Community Connections

Making these community connections can be of great benefit to students, their families, and the school.

Many communities have immigrant-serving agencies that offer various supports for immigrant and refugee families (for a complete list refer to www.amssa.org). Making these community connections can be of great benefit to students, their families, and the school. Your school or school district may already be closely associated with these organizations or may be involved in special projects to promote the settlement and immigration of families new to Canada.

The following are examples of services offered by immigrant- and refugee-serving organizations:

- out of school transition programs for youth
- programs for youth at risk
- pilot projects and initiatives to promote welcoming communities
- early childhood development programs for young siblings of school-aged immigrants
- youth buddy programs

³ Source: “Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools,” British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001.

Resources

The following is a list of agencies, resources, and websites that provide information and assistance to students from refugee backgrounds. Please note that possible services for immigrants may be provided in your community by organizations not listed below, such as church groups or cultural centres. Information Services Vancouver – www.communityinfo.bc.ca/index.html – offers the *Red Book* containing a list of agencies in the lower mainland that may be able to support schools.

WelcomeBC

WelcomeBC is the Province of British Columbia’s main website for immigration and settlement, and includes helpful information for immigrants, service providers, and those wishing to find out more about immigration and settlement in the province.

www.welcomebc.ca/en/index.html

Services in the Greater Vancouver Region

Health

- **Bridge Community Health Clinic**

Located in Vancouver, this health clinic provides primary health care services for refugees with or without legal status and within their first three to five years in Canada.

www.welcomebc.ca/shared/docs/community_health.pdf

Telephone: (604) 709-6540

- **Health Regional Offices**

This website provides contact information for all of British Columbia’s health authorities:

www.health.gov.bc.ca/socsec/contacts.html

- **New Canadian Clinic**

Located in Burnaby and Surrey, these clinics provide health care services for newcomers to Canada who have difficulties accessing the regular medical system. A referral is required from health or social service providers. These are not walk-in clinics; service is by appointment only.

Burnaby – Telephone: (604) 412-6580

Surrey – Telephone: (604) 953-5030

Refugee Claimants

Many settlement service organizations provide a variety of services for refugee claimants in Metro Vancouver and in British Columbia. For details please check with settlement organizations in your community.

- **First Contact – Canadian Red Cross, BC Lower Mainland Region**

First Contact provides refugee claimants with one place to access assistance, on arrival, through a 24/7 multilingual information and referral phone line and an accompaniment service.

Multilingual Assistance includes:

- accurate, timely information
- referral to immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies; legal, paralegal and health services; housing; and other settlement services such as English classes and employment services
- accompaniment to appointments

www.redcross.ca/article.asp?id=27715&tid=078

Telephone: (604) 787-8858 for Vancouver area

Telephone: 1-866-771-8858 Toll free outside Vancouver area.

- **Legal Services Society of British Columbia**

The Legal Services Society provides a guide explaining the process of requesting refugee protection in Canada. Called *Your Guide to the Refugee Claim Process*, this handbook includes information on starting a claim in BC, filling out the required forms for the process, and getting legal help. An overview of the refugee claim process found in this guide is provided in [Appendix B](#). The complete guide can be found at:

www.lss.bc.ca/publications/pub.aspx?p_id=286

- **Vancouver Refugee Services Alliance**

An alliance of immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies formed to provide a continuum of services for refugee claimants:

www.vrsa.ca

Schools

- **Settlement Workers in Schools**

Many school districts in British Columbia employ settlement workers in schools to address the settlement and integration needs of immigrant students and their families. These specialists can be of great assistance to families and school staff, helping to ease the transition of newcomers to school:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/programs/settlement_program/stream1/swis.html

Contact numbers for school district Settlement Workers in Schools programs are included on this link from the WelcomeBC website:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/programs/settlement_agencies.html

- **Student Support Services**

Find out from the school district counselling or student services department who the team members are and be prepared to work with them. These may include critical incidence response teams or trauma support teams.

Settlement

- **Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)**

An affiliation of immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies throughout British Columbia, their website provides a complete listing of all associated refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia communities:

www.amssa.org

Telephone: (604) 718-2780 for Vancouver area

Telephone: 1-888-355-5560 outside Vancouver area

- **Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services**

Along with a wealth of useful information for newcomers to BC, the *British Columbia Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services* includes a listing of all the immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia. This information is found on pages 15 to 20:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/publications_and_reports/publications/newcomers_guide.html

- **Settlement Workers in Communities**

Throughout BC are immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies that employ settlement workers to address the settlement and integration needs of immigrant families. Many of these community agencies have relationships with schools and can provide information to families in schools where settlement workers are not on staff. They can also be of assistance to families outside of school. Links to the community agencies can be found at:

www.amssa.org

Trauma Support

- **DIVERSEcity Community Resources Society**

Located in Surrey, this agency offers a wide range of services and programs to immigrant and refugee communities, including grief and trauma counselling:

www.dcrs.ca/index.php

Telephone: (604) 597-0205

- **Immigrant Services Society (ISS) of BC**

With offices in Burnaby, Coquitlam, New Westminster, Richmond, Surrey, and Vancouver, this multicultural immigrant-serving agency provides a variety of services to Lower Mainland immigrant and refugee communities. These services include trauma support services for government-assisted refugees and refugee claimants residing in Vancouver and Burnaby. ISS of BC is also the contracted service provider for all immediate support services, including first language services and housing, for all Government-Assisted Refugees destined to British Columbia:

www.issbc.org

www.issbc.org/refugeeservices

Telephone: (604) 684-7498

- **Vancouver Association for Survivors of Torture**

This organization provides support services for and promotes the well-being of people who have survived torture and violence:

www.vast-vancouver.ca

Phone: (604) 299-3539

Services Outside Greater Vancouver

- **Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC (AMSSA)**

An affiliation of immigrant- and refugee-serving agencies throughout British Columbia, their website provides a complete listing of all associated refugee-serving agencies in British Columbia communities:

www.amssa.org

Telephone: (604) 718-2780 for Vancouver area

Telephone: 1-888-355-5560 outside Vancouver area

- **Health Regional Offices**

This website provides contact information for all of British Columbia's health authorities:

www.health.gov.bc.ca/socsec/contacts.html

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Many school districts in British Columbia employ settlement workers in schools to address the settlement and integration needs of immigrant students and their families. These specialists can be of great assistance to families and school staff, helping to ease the transition of newcomers to school:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/programs/settlement_program/stream1/swis.html

Contact numbers for school district Settlement Workers in Schools programs are included on this link from the WelcomeBC website:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/programs/settlement_agencies.html

- **Student Support Services**

Find out from the school district counselling or student services department who the team members are and be prepared to work with them. These may include critical incidence response teams or trauma support teams.

- **Victoria Coalition for Survivors of Torture**

In Victoria, a coalition of agencies and individuals responding to the needs of survivors of torture:

www.vcst.ca

General Information

International

- **Citizenship and Immigration Canada**

The federal government department responsible for immigration, their website provides links to a wealth of information about immigrating to Canada:

www.cic.gc.ca

Telephone: 1-888-242-2100 (in Canada only)

Deaf and hearing-impaired: 1-888-576-8502 (in Canada only) 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. your local time

- **Country Information from Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada**

The Centre for Intercultural Learning in Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada offers useful information about almost every country in the world:

www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/countryinsights-apercuspays-eng.asp

- **International Organization for Migration**

An inter-governmental organization in the field of migration and working with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners:

www.iom.int

- **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**

Since 1950, this office has been mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide, and to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. The website provides detailed information about refugees throughout the world:

www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home

National

- **Canadian Council for Refugees**

An umbrella organization for refugees and immigrants focused on the rights and protection of refugees and to the settlement of refugees and immigrants in Canada:

www.ccrweb.ca

- **Citizenship and Immigration Canada – Refugees**

The federal government department responsible for immigration provides detailed information about refugee settlement in Canada, found on this website:

www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/help.asp

- **Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada**

The independent administrative tribunal that makes decisions on immigration and refugee matters. Details can be found at:

www.irb-cisr.gc.ca/ENG/Pages/index.aspx

- **Immigration and Refugee Protection Act**

The federal legislation regarding immigration and the protection of refugees in Canada:

www.laws.justice.gc.ca/en/I-2.5

- **Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)**

This national humanitarian program provides funding to agencies to support Government-Assisted Refugees (GARs) in their first year in Canada. The program also provides income support to GARs in their first year in Canada. Information about Citizenship and Immigration Canada's Resettlement Assistance Program can be found at:

www.cic.gc.ca/english/refugees/outside/resettle-assist.asp

Provincial

- **Newcomers' Guide to Resources and Services**

The Province of British Columbia provides a guide for newcomers that includes comprehensive information to help newcomers settle in BC in the first few months after they arrive:

www.welcomebc.ca/en/service_providers/publications_and_reports/publications/newcomers_guide.html

- **Statistics from British Columbia**

Specific data and information about refugee immigrants to British Columbia is available through the WelcomeBC website at:

www.welcomebc.ca/shared/docs/communities/fact-refugees.pdf

- **WelcomeBC**

WelcomeBC is the Province of British Columbia's main website for immigration and settlement, and includes helpful information for immigrants, service providers, and those wishing to find out more about immigration and settlement in BC.

www.welcomebc.ca/en/index.html

Municipal

You may find helpful information in your local town or city, accessible at community centres, public libraries or on municipal government websites.

For example, Vancouver offers a *Newcomer's Guide to the City of Vancouver* in five languages at:

www.vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/newtovancouver

- **Union of British Columbia Municipalities**

The Union of British Columbia Municipalities provides links to the web pages of local governments in BC through:

www.ubcm.ca/EN/main/about/ubcm-members.html

Education Resources (Kindergarten to Grade 12)

- **Career/Life Transitions**

The Ministry of Education document *Career/Life Transitions for Students with Diverse Needs: A Resource Guide for Schools* offers information about transitions for English language learners (pages 43 to 51):

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/docs/moe_clt_resource_rb0144.pdf

- **Diversity**

This Ministry of Education document provides a framework to assist the school system in its ongoing efforts to create and maintain learning and working environments that are responsive to the diverse social and cultural needs of the communities it serves:

Diversity in BC Schools: A Framework

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/diversity/diversity_framework.pdf

Website:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/diversity

- **English as a Second Language**

The following Ministry of Education documents pertain to policy and guidelines for English as a Second Language programs in British Columbia's public schools:

English as a Second Language Policy and Guidelines

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/policy/guidelines.pdf

English as a Second Language Standards

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/standards.pdf

English as a Second Language Learners: A Guide for Classroom Teachers

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/policy/classroom.pdf

English as a Second Language Learners: A Guide for ESL Specialists

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/policy/special.pdf

Website:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl

- **Safe Schools**

The Ministry of Education’s *Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide* provides provincial standards for codes of conduct and identifies attributes of and outlines strategies for safe, caring, and orderly schools. The guide was developed to support boards of education and schools as they strive to make the schools of our province as safe, caring, and orderly as possible:

Safe, Caring and Orderly Schools: A Guide

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/guide/scoguide.pdf

Website:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/sco/

- **Special Education**

This Ministry of Education document provides policies, procedures, and guidelines that support the delivery of special education services in British Columbia’s public schools:

Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed/special_ed_policy_manual.pdf

Website:

www.bced.gov.bc.ca/specialed

Child and Youth Mental Health Publications

The Ministry of Children and Family Development provides a number of guides and information sheets about mental health issues for children and adolescents. These publications, along with information about programs and services, are available at:

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health/publications.htm

Website:

www.mcf.gov.bc.ca/mental_health

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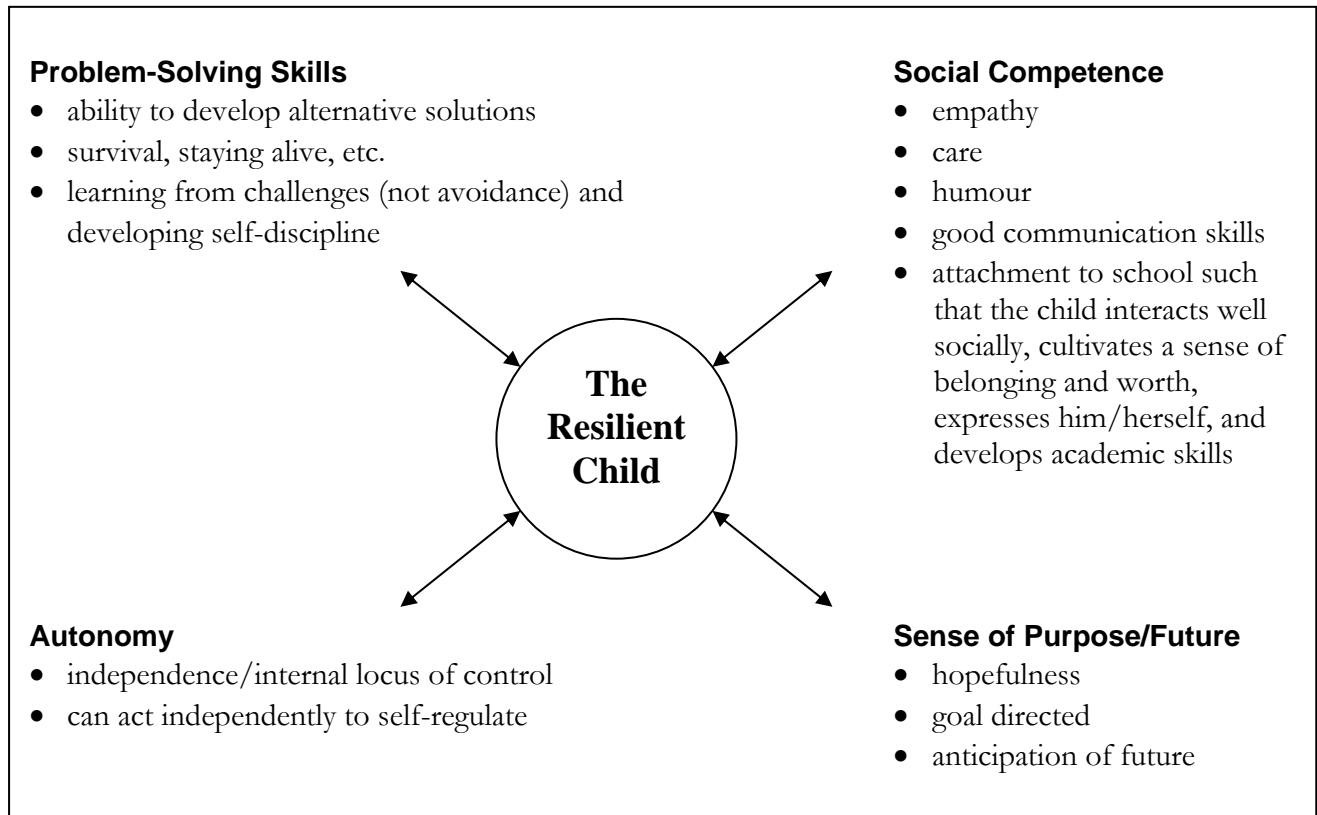
Acknowledgments

The Ministry of Education would like to acknowledge all who have participated in the development of *Students from Refugee Backgrounds: A Guide for Teachers and Schools*.

Lynn Archer	School District No. 41 (Burnaby) British Columbia Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association
Milan Boljuncic	School District No. 44 (North Vancouver) British Columbia Teachers' Federation
Sherman Chan	MOSAIC Settlement Services
Chinu Das	School District No. 40 (New Westminster) British Columbia School Superintendents Association
Chris Friesen	Immigrant Services Society of British Columbia
Dominic Fung	Immigration and WelcomeBC Branch BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development
Catherine Guzik	Immigration and WelcomeBC Branch BC Ministry of Advanced Education and Labour Market Development
Ron Hall	School District No. 41 (Burnaby) British Columbia Principals' & Vice-Principals' Association
Emilie Hillier	Diversity and Equity Unit BC Ministry of Education
Denise Johnson	School District No. 36 (Surrey) British Columbia Teachers' Federation
Caroline Lai	School District No. 36 (Surrey) Settlement Workers in Schools
Helen Myers	Diversity and Equity Unit BC Ministry of Education
Julia Poole	School District No. 36 (Surrey) British Columbia Teachers' Federation

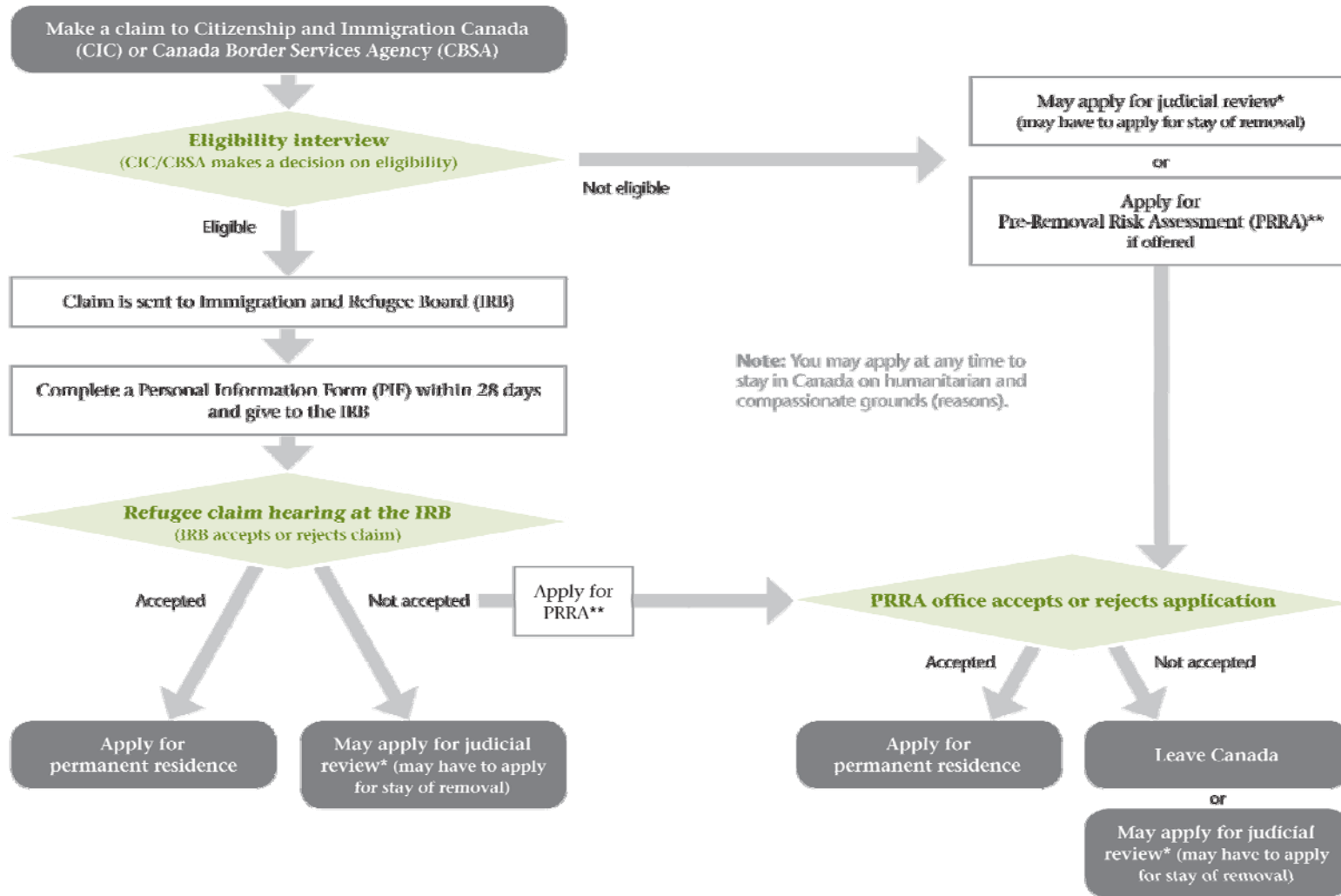
Appendix A – Profile of a Resilient Child

Resilience is fostered by protective factors: the personal attributes and social supports that shape and affect a person's ability to trust, grow, and learn. Young people develop a world view and positive habits and attitudes in response to family support, school attachment, and a sense of personal relevance and significance in the community.



Source: Adapted with permission from Dr. Y. de Andrade, lecture notes, 1999.

Appendix B – Overview of the Refugee Claim Process

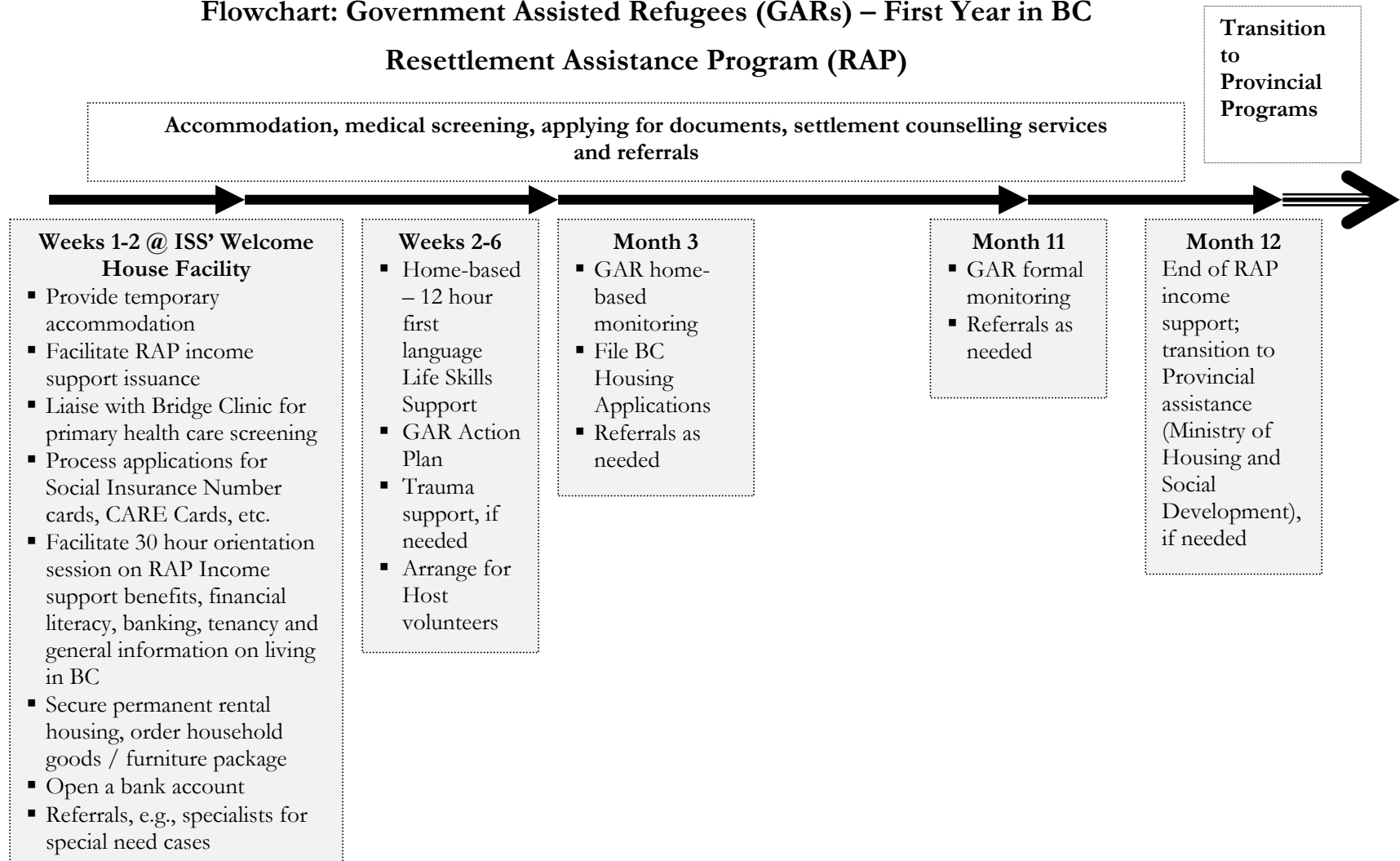


* Must apply to Federal Court of Canada within 15 days of receiving written decision.
 ** Must apply within 15 days of receiving PRRA application form.

Source: Used with permission from Legal Services Society of British Columbia.

Appendix C – Resettlement Assistance Program

Flowchart: Government Assisted Refugees (GARs) – First Year in BC Resettlement Assistance Program (RAP)



Source: Used with permission from Immigrant Services Society (ISS) of BC.

Appendix D – Learning Environment Checklist

Social and School Adjustment

- program assignment/placement
- introduction to classroom teacher
- introduction to layout of the school and classroom
- assignment of mentor or buddy
- language assistance if needed
- consistent routine or schedule

Physical Needs

- school supplies
- textbooks/resource materials
- lunch/snack
- orientation to bell schedule
- access to a quiet area or place of refuge
- assessment of any medical needs, such as hearing and vision

Tips for Teachers

- become familiar with refugee background
- be aware of adjustments of children and youth
- speak slowly
- pay attention to non-verbal cues
- become aware of the cultural background
- be aware of cultural differences in mannerisms and responses, e.g., eye contact
- consider different cultural norms associated with gender
- contact settlement worker for support

Instruction

- assess educational background – essential for placement
- assess need for pre-literacy and pre-numeracy instruction
- assess need for language assistance
- determine any learning disabilities
- use age-appropriate resources
- use direct, explicit instruction
- offer a variety of activities to start
- use visual aids
- use repetition, or find opportunities for multiple exposures to information, if needed

Appendix E – Preliterate Learners

At any grade level (Primary, Intermediate, or Secondary), there may be new students who can be characterized as preliterate learners. The age and level of developmental maturity of these students make them part of a particular school population (whether Primary, Intermediate, or Secondary), but they will have received limited formal schooling or pre-schooling. These students are generally recent arrivals to Canada, whose backgrounds differ significantly from the school environment they are entering. Some may have received schooling that was interrupted for various reasons, including war, poverty, or migration. Some may come from a remote rural setting with little prior opportunity for sequential schooling.

Preliterate students may have:

- little or no experience with print
- semi-literacy in native language
- minimal understanding of the function of literacy
- limited awareness of school organization or culture
- performance significantly below grade level
- insufficient English to attempt tasks.

Although many such students are at the beginning level of oral proficiency in English, some may have more developed proficiency levels. Yet, even the standards for Level 1 (on the Primary, Intermediate, or Secondary matrices – see the full document at www.bced.gov.bc.ca/esl/standards.pdf) may not yield a helpful description of their level of performance. These students typically require some intensive, customized support (including cultural bridging experiences) before they can gain from participation in “mainstream” classes. Although not fully skilled in the academic domain, these students possess valuable life skills that can serve as a basis for academic learning.

In terms of language skills, the preliterate student may:

- use pictures to express ideas (meaning)
- be able to copy letters, words, and phrases (style)
- begin to write strings of words (style)
- show little awareness of spelling, capitalization, or punctuation (convention)
- use single words (convention).

Source: “ESL Standards,” British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001, page 10.