



Welcome to the ANCIE Bulletin, a quarterly electronic newsletter that explore different topics about newcomer children living in BC, including immigrants, refugees, international students and children of temporary foreign workers.

## Early Childhood Education

Since 2007, there has been a general increase of service models for British Columbia's rapidly increasing immigrant and refugee child population and, in particular, an increase of early childhood education (ECE) programs. These programs are, in part, a response to the complex issues faced by immigrant and refugee children and their families.

### What is Early Childhood Education?

Early childhood education (ECE) is often overlooked as simply "child's play" or babysitting, however this is far from the truth. ECE can take many forms but most commonly involves play activities designed for children between the ages of 0-6. Childhood learning offers a foundation for a child's cognitive, social, physical, intellectual, creative and emotional development, and is also an opportunity for children to establish respect and an understanding of cultural diversity.

Early child development is a determinant of a child's health, well-being, and learning skills. Failure to provide optimum conditions for a child's development during early childhood can cause the developing brain to be physically different from that of a child who has experienced loving care, positive social interaction and play stimulation. Cultural background plays an integral role in the accessibility and suitability of ECE programs for newcomer children.

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### Why have ECE for Newcomer Children?

Newcomer families may experience a number of barriers related to ECE in Canada. Some immigrant and refugee families may not be aware of the

programs and services that exist; a number of immigrant families may not be able to access ECE services due to cultural, language and institutional barriers; and some of the ECE programs are unable to respond to the diverse needs of immigrant and refugee children ([Bridging Immigrants and Refugees with ECD Services](#)).

Cultural differences exist both in how the educational system is structured but also in the perceptions about academic education versus child development and learning. For newcomer children, ECE can be a very valuable tool. The purpose of ECE programs is to support healthy childhood development and they can be particularly valuable for helping integrate newcomer children into Canadian customs, language and skills and helps transition them into mainstream educational systems. Furthermore, ECE initiatives and government investments focus on early childhood development in BC are addressing the needs of both the parents/caregivers and the children by providing a safe and comfortable place where the needs of the children can be assessed and where the parents can share experiences and learn about the Canadian perspective on childhood development and learning.





## CASE STUDY

### *The value of engaging the family in the process of early childhood learning*

Hun Soo, was a four year old boy from China who lived with his parents and grandparents and did not speak any English. Hun Soo's father, who was studying at the University of British Columbia was worried about how Hun Soo would adjust in Canada and the language barrier was of particular concern.

The educator at Hun Soo's ECE program helped the father to understand the role of ECE for children. "As an educator, I reassured him that we will help Hun Soo adjust to the program and learn from Hun Soo the Chinese language. Also, I discussed with his father that Hun Soo will learn and develop readiness skills through play which will prepare him for Kindergarten. This is a very difficult topic as an educator and I brought it forward to my team of ECE's to come up with how we can support the goal of this family."

Because the father was studying at university, the family faced challenges with the scheduling of the ECE program, but by working together with the educator they were able to overcome some of these types of barriers and engage different family members to help support Hun Soo's learning experience. "It was difficult at first to involve the grandparents because they do not speak any English, however you could see the willingness to help support their grandson and overtime, Hun Soo adjusted to the program and is now comfortable with the English language."

## The Concept of "Readiness"

The degree to which ECE and developmental opportunities benefit a child can be measured by assessing the number of children who are 'school ready' upon reaching kindergarten age. For some researchers, school readiness is based on levels of knowledge, skills, maturity, language and cognitive development, and is representative of many early influences on a child's life, which will affect future school achievement. It also offers a discrete way to describe the complex interactions of events, influences and outcomes contributing to a child's overall health.

One example of this type of tool is the Early

Development Instrument (EDI), which has been used at a national and international level. The EDI is a population-level research tool that measures child development trends with a purpose of identifying vulnerable groups. (More information on the EDI and newcomer children will be available in the March 2012 ANCIE bulletin or visit <http://earlylearning.ubc.ca/edi/>.)

While it is important for children to be "ready" when they enter the school system, the definition of readiness varies across cultures. Cultures can place a different emphasis on learning and development—a child's ability to enter the school system may for example be defined by social, academic and/or emotional readiness.





JANUARY 2012

## Culturally Safe Curriculum

British Columbia is becoming increasingly diverse and these demographic changes are being felt most strongly in the early childhood population ([Bridging Immigrants and Refugees with ECD Services](#)). This trend presents potential challenges for the educational system in BC. Different cultures present a range of ideas about what constitutes healthy childhood development and “not all of these understandings are compatible with each other nor are they always compatible with Canadian perspectives.” ([Bridging Immigrants and Refugees with ECD Services](#)).

Cultural practices are central to a child’s developmental process. Therefore, culturally sensitive and contextual practices of child development should be considered in ECE programming.

“A culturally competent model refers to those components/strategies that help bridge the gap of learning and understanding.” ([Bridging Immigrants and Refugees with ECD Services](#)).

An opportunity to enhance cultural competence in ECE programs exists through:

- Training ECE educators on cultural awareness, community resources and communication skills
- Improving the programs and services delivered, by better understanding the needs of the children being served
- Involving the parents in the learning process
- Considering cultural perspectives when staffing programs.

In supporting immigrant and refugee children it is important to recognize the importance of culture identity. Effective ECE learning centres provide a safe environment that is sensitive, responsive and nurturing to newcomer children. High-quality

curriculum provides opportunity for exploration, discovery, positive interactions and encouragement to learn. In order to support newcomer children the ECE curriculum should also have direct hands-on experiences with people, objects, events and ideas.

## Investing in Early Childhood Education

In addition to the human rights and social perspective on the value of ECE programming, there is also a strong business case for government to invest in this issue. In 2009 it was reported that in BC “nearly one in three children entering kindergarten are at risk of failing to develop into the healthy, well-educated and innovative adults we need to secure our long-term economic prosperity.” ([Helping young children learn](#)).

Research suggests that an annual investment of \$3 billion to expand community programs and support learning opportunities for children will reap long-term economic benefits to Canada of greater than six to one. ([Helping young children learn](#)).

Furthermore, it is estimated that GDP will increase by 20% and expenditures to health and social services will

dramatically decline. ([Helping young children learn](#))

This was further supported by the HighScope Perry Preschool Study, which followed 123 at-risk children in poverty with and without ECE programs for 40 years. The research found the cost-benefit ratio to be \$16 for every \$1 invested into ECE programs.

This again, was demonstrated through a significant reduction in crime and health costs, as well as an increase in achievement in middle school, high school graduation, employment, and income ([HighScope Perry Preschool Study](#)).

- **Research.** Research in the field of the ECE and community reports that highlight the challenges

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JANUARY 2012

facing immigrant and refugee children provide a rich context for better understanding the different ways that service models address the needs of this population. While there is a range of innovative approaches and models of ECE programs, they are largely unaccounted for within existing reviews of ECE programming. To fill this gap, The Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies of BC in partnership with the University of British Columbia undertook a research study to capture the 'Promising Practices' of ECE programs for immigrant and refugee children. Visit [ANCIE](#) for the complete report.

- **Early Years Refugee Pilot Project.** In 2009, the British Columbia government invested \$7.2 million into "The Early Years Refugee Pilot Project." The project focused on helping young refugee children and their families by providing "a safe and comfortable place where the needs of the children can be assessed, and where their parents and caregivers can share experiences and learn about early childhood development and learning." The purpose of the program was to support healthy childhood development and learning by helping transition refugee children into the mainstream educational system.

## Resources

For more information about ECE for newcomer children visit AMSSA's Newcomer Children Information Exchange (ANCIE) at [www.amssa.org/ancie](http://www.amssa.org/ancie). The following publications on ANCIE may be of particular interest:

- [Compendium of Newcomer Children's Services](#)
- [Mothercraft](#) provides research, information, training and assessments for parents, early childhood educators and other professionals working in the early child development field.

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## AMSSA's Newcomer Children's Champion Program

For more information about AMSSA's Newcomer Children's Champion Program or to subscribe to the ANCIE Bulletin, please visit [www.amssa.org/ancie](http://www.amssa.org/ancie) or contact Rishima Bahadoorsingh at [newcomerchildren@amssa.org](mailto:newcomerchildren@amssa.org).

AMSSA is a province-wide association that strengthens its 75+ member agencies, who serve immigrants and build culturally inclusive communities, with the knowledge, resources and support they need to fulfill their mandates. For more information, please visit [www.amssa.org](http://www.amssa.org).

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