



Start Strong: A Teacher's Guide to Welcoming Newcomer Students



YOU'VE GOT THIS!

Welcoming a newcomer can feel overwhelming at first, but it can also be one of the most rewarding experiences in your classroom. Research shows that the support you provide during these first crucial weeks can lay the foundation for long-term success. This guide offers evidence-based strategies to help both you and your students thrive together.

UNDERSTANDING THE NEWCOMER EXPERIENCE

- **Silent Period:** Many newcomers go through a natural "silent period" lasting weeks or months. This doesn't mean they're not learning! They're absorbing language before they feel ready to speak.
- **Adjustment Timeline:** Research shows newcomers typically experience excitement, followed by culture shock, gradual adjustment, and adaptation. Patience is key.
- **Brain Science:** When students feel safe and welcomed, their brains are better able to learn. Stress inhibits language acquisition, so establishing trust comes first.

COMMUNICATION BRIDGES

- **Key Phrases:** Learn 5-10 phrases in your student's language (greetings, bathroom, help, great job, thank you). Pronunciation doesn't need to be perfect!
- **Non-Verbal Cues:** Establish consistent, culturally sensitive gestures for common instructions (such as pointing to the eyes for "look") and checks for understanding (such as showing one to five fingers to indicate confidence level).
- **Picture Communication:** Keep emotion cards, basic needs cards, and subject-specific visuals handy. Digital translation tools (such as Google translate) can help bridge gaps.

FIRST MONTH WINS

- **Visual Schedules:** Create picture-based daily routines that help your student understand "what comes next" without language.
- **Buddy System:** Pair your newcomer with a compassionate, responsible peer (or rotate buddies). Model specific helping behaviors for buddies.
- **Welcome Kit:** Prepare basic school supplies, a picture dictionary, and a personalized welcome sign in their language.
- **Label the Environment:** Post bilingual labels on classroom objects and important areas (restrooms, office, nurse).

ACADEMIC SUPPORT STRATEGIES

- **Scaffold, Don't Simplify:** Maintain grade-level content while providing extra support through visuals, sentence frames, and demonstrations.
- **Show, Don't Just Tell:** Use models, demonstrations, videos, and realia (real objects) to make learning concrete.
- **Build on Strengths:** Identify what your student knows and can do. Math and art often transcend language barriers.
- **Celebrate Progress:** Recognize all forms of participation and learning, not just verbal responses.