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# Teachers' Perceptions of a Language Policy: "Teaching LINC"

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*The boundaries of English language teaching are being expanded with recognition that the language classroom has cultural and political aspects. Policies that legislate the learning and teaching of additional languages are one relevant aspect of this context. However, little empirical work has been done on how language policies are realized in the classroom. In this article data from interviews with teachers in LINC classrooms are analyzed. Results suggest that teachers perceive the policy in ways that are determined by the local situations in which they teach. Results also suggest that there are important differences between what policies dictate and what teachers do in their classrooms.*

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A number of applied linguists have begun to redraw the boundaries of English language teaching, arguing that the language is taught, both domestically and internationally, in a social, economic, political, and cultural context that must be taken into account and studied if we are to understand second language learning and teaching (Auerbach, 1986, 1995; Pennycook, 1989, 1994, 1996; Phillipson, 1992; Tollefson, 1991, 1995). An aspect of this larger social and political context that is particularly relevant to the second language classroom is the development and implementation of language policies that address the learning and teaching of additional languages. Although the relationship between language policy and language education seems obvious, there has been, as Tollefson (1995) argues, a failure to explore that relationship. Ricento and Hornberger (1996) note that, "In the ELT literature, the practitioner is often an afterthought who implements what 'experts' in the government, board of education, or central school administration have already decided" (p. 417). At the same time, those involved with second language teaching and learning have been indifferent to this macro-level of the classroom. Auerbach (1995) states that, "although issues of power and politics are generally seen as inherent in language policy and planning on a macro level, classrooms themselves may be seen as self-contained, autonomous systems, insulated from external political concerns" (p. 9).

One of the first issues that needs to be addressed is how the classroom teacher understands and implements language policy. Although, as Ricento and Hornberger (1996) say, classroom practitioners are "at the heart of language policy" (p. 417), we know little about how teachers view and implement language policies.

The current situation in Canada offers an opportunity to investigate how a clearly articulated language policy is perceived, understood, and accommodated by classroom teachers.

### *The Policy*

Language policy is defined by Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996) as “decisions on rights and access to languages and on the roles and functions of particular languages and varieties of language in a given policy” (p. 434).

In 1991 Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC)<sup>1</sup> introduced a new policy, *Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada* (LINC). The provisions of the policy are laid out in two brief documents, *Innovations in Training* (EIC, 1991a) and *New Immigrant Language Training Policy* (EIC, 1991b), which specify that immigrants and refugees are entitled to “access to the best possible [language] training” (EIC, 1991a, n.p.) preferably within the first year of their arrival. This language instruction is to “provide immigrants with basic communication skills” or, stated another way, “a first level of language competency” (EIC, 1991b, p. 3) and will be offered in “an environment in which new developments in curricula, teacher orientation, and methodologies can flourish” (EIC, 1991a, n.p.).

LINC supersedes an earlier policy that designated immigrant language training monies primarily for programs to prepare new Canadians to enter the labor market. According to the LINC policy document, under the earlier provision only 28% of immigrants had access to such language training; the lack of accessibility to language training was seen as a major problem.

The new policy has two explicit goals—to make programming more accessible to the client population and to make language training more consistent with client needs. Accessibility is addressed thus: LINC is designed to “*make a range of more flexible options accessible to a greater number of immigrants, regardless of their labor market intentions*” (EIC, 1991b, p. 2, original italics). The stated goal is to have 45% of eligible immigrants and refugees into language training by 1995.

Accessibility is not stressed in policy documents nearly as much as the second objective, the meeting of individual language learner’s needs. The introductory section of the policy includes the following: “A key to developing the most effective training possible—and a key feature of the new policy—is a commitment to providing training better suited to the individual needs of clients” (EIC, 1991a, n.p.).

In the *New Immigrant Language Training Policy* (EIC, 1991b), meeting the individual needs of learners is mentioned nine times. The description of the policy framework states that the new policy will “provide immigrants with more *flexible* training options to fit their individual needs and circumstances” (p. 1) and that “training options will be matched to individual needs and will help participants achieve a first level of language competency” (p. 3).

Exactly what these individual needs might be is never addressed, but the ways in which they will be met is specified; experts are to develop appropriate assessment procedures, and stakeholders and experts will plan programs that are appropriate for local client groups. Although appropriateness and accessibility are stressed, it is equally clear that these mandates are to be realized in a program that provides only basic level language instruction. It is difficult to imagine how the needs of individual clients can be met when the policy allows instruction to only the “first level of language competency” (EIC, 1991b, p. 3).

### *Who Does What*

Control and responsibility for implementation of the policy are spread across federal, provincial, and local domains. Two major areas of responsibility are outlined in the policy: assessment of language proficiency, and program planning and development.

### *Federal Responsibility*

Employment and Immigration Canada (EIC), the federal ministry responsible for the policy, is to develop assessment procedures for clients and oversee what is termed “course content.” As well, the federal government is to ensure “standards for assessing training needs and measuring language competency” (EIC, 1991b, p. 5). Once developed, the assessment instrument is to be available nationally and used to direct individuals into programs that best suit their needs. The existence of national testing procedures is also to ensure consistency of programs throughout Canada.

At the time of this research the assessment instrument, the A-LINC test, was administered in Ontario by assessors either at assessment centers or on-site in language training programs. In principle everyone had to be assessed before being allowed to enroll in a program.

The second area of federal responsibility, course content, involves, according to the policy documents, ensuring that learners in LINC programs receive instruction in basic level English and are given orientation to Canadian values, rights, and responsibilities.

### *Provincial Responsibility*

According to the policy statement, provinces are responsible for the “professional aspects of training,” which include setting standards for “certification for language teachers, language training curriculum and the licensing of training suppliers” (EIC, 1991b, p. 5).

### *Local Responsibility*

Municipal and regional government as well as local community organizations are given responsibility for setting up and administering programs. According to the policy statement,

Partnerships will be strengthened with provincial governments, municipalities, school boards, public and private training institutions, groups representing the interests of immigrant learners, mainstream organizations providing service to newcomers, academics and teachers with expertise in second language instruction techniques. (EIC, 1991b, p. 5)

These groups are responsible for "developing local client priorities and designing a training strategy appropriate for their community" (p. 5). Possibilities include "full-time, part-time, classroom-based, workplace-based or neighbourhood-based training" (p. 5); suppliers of services would include "school boards, provinces, voluntary groups, commercial training institutes, and universities" (p. 5). Thus local government, school boards, and community groups are responsible for setting up, staffing, and administering programs; this gives a great deal of control to local groups.

### *From the Perspective of Teachers and Learners*

The policy documents lay out a comprehensive implementation plan. From the point of view of the learners and teachers, the system should work in the following way. An individual eligible for LINC language instruction (a refugee or landed immigrant in Canada for less than a year) would first be assessed on a nationally available test that would provide a measure of "standard language proficiency." This score would then be used to determine which of the locally available language training programs would best fit his or her needs. Because the local community would have been involved in planning the training options available, there would be a number of programs specifically tailored to the needs of both the community and the client. The best option for the particular individual would be selected. The course itself would satisfy three criteria of content and approach: the course would teach basic communicative English, instill an understanding of the values and responsibilities of Canadian life, and be consistent with current ideas of language teaching.

The teacher, who would meet provincial certification requirements and have access to a high level of professional development, would receive an assessment profile on which to base his or her evaluation of the learner or client and a provincial curriculum that would help him or her determine the content and organization of his or her class so that it would meet the needs of the learners placed in his or her program.

## *The Teachers and LINC*

Ricento and Hornberger (1996) note that “As [policy] moves from one layer to the next, the legislation, judicial decree, or policy guideline is interpreted and modified” (p. 409).

This suggests that the actual realization of the policy in the classroom may differ from what the policy mandates. What is the reality of LINC for teachers? How do they understand and evaluate the policy, and how does it affect their teaching?

For this research six teachers in the Ottawa area were interviewed as part of a larger study of how teachers address areas of their teaching that they see as problematic.<sup>2</sup> All six were either teaching or had recently taught a class that was designated as LINC; they were all employed by one of the school boards in the Ottawa area. I interviewed each teacher for one and a half to two hours; the interviews were taped and later transcribed. I also observed and/or taught four of the classes in order to get a sense of the learners and the teaching situation. When I taught, the classroom teacher prepared materials for me to use. This brief experience in the classroom gave me some understanding of classroom procedures and dynamics.

During the interview, teachers were asked to discuss what classroom situations they found difficult to accommodate and how they had addressed these areas of difficulty. The interviews were semistructured (see Appendix A). Teachers were free to discuss any aspects of their classroom that they felt were interesting or important; LINC was not the focus of the interview.

### *What LINC Was*

LINC was mentioned by the teachers again and again. They described themselves as “teaching LINC” and referred to “LINC classes” and “LINC students.” Teaching LINC meant teaching in a classroom funded by the federal government and designated for new Canadians who met the criteria set out in the policy. But teaching LINC meant more. The teachers mentioned three characteristics of their classrooms that they associated with LINC. These were

- continuous intake
- multilevel classes
- off-site locations

These three factors were brought up and discussed by all six teachers. Each associated teaching LINC with these factors and believed that they were either included in or a direct consequence of the policy. Teachers also saw these factors as areas of difficulty in their teaching.

Equally important were the parts of the LINC policy that the teachers did *not* discuss without prompting—the assessment procedures and the curriculum.

### *Continuous Intake*

Continuous intake was defined as the practice of letting new students enroll at any point during a term. All the teachers mentioned this practice and deemed it a problem with teaching LINC classes. There was some confusion about why continuous intake was necessary. Two of the teachers stated that it was because the LINC policy emphasized program accessibility and that it was therefore essential that programs be available to learners who wanted to enroll. Three of the teachers believed that continuous intake was in fact a consequence of providers having contracted for classes of a certain size. According to these teachers, the community organizations that received LINC contracts proposed a certain class size that the teachers were then required to maintain. One of the teachers, Lisa, said, "It's all because of funding ... money ... they have to keep the numbers up. As long as they keep the numbers up, they'll get contracts. So you're caught between a rock and a hard place."

If attendance dropped, new students had to be found to keep the enrollment at the agreed level. Teachers also believed that programs with fewer than the minimum number of students could be canceled at any time.

Thus student attendance and continuous intake were linked issues. One of the teachers reported that she had a stable student population and did not worry about attendance. For four others these were issues of importance and concern. Teachers were required to keep detailed attendance records that, as one teacher said, did not "take into account the complexities of students' lives." Learners missed classes for a variety of legitimate reasons such as illness, problems with children's school and with housing, and lack of familiarity with Canadian weather. Attendance records did not allow teachers to evaluate the legitimacy of student absences. So although the teachers felt they should maintain accurate records, they felt threatened when attendance figures were low. The four teachers said they had at some time in the past year worried that their programs would be canceled.

It was also difficult for teachers to determine who was and who was not enrolled. As one teacher, Diane, said, "With continuous intake, there's uncertainty about who's in and who's out." Students did not always inform teachers when they left classes, nor did teachers always get unequivocal answers when they asked. Sharon reported on a mother and daughter who were away from class while looking for an apartment. Their places were held for nearly two weeks, although they were allowed only five days of absence. Finally the supervisor determined that neither intended to return to class; she had to find two new students to satisfy enrollment quotas.

Attendance issues were difficult and time-consuming. In the first place teachers had to make decisions about when to register new students. Then they had to integrate new learners into the class. According to Karen,

Last year the last person enrolled in my class two weeks before the end of the term. You keep going back, rifling through materials, trying to bring students up to the level. They do this because they have to keep the numbers up. Numbers, attendance is a big issue.

Admitting new students into their classes in order to maintain enrollments was, the teachers believed, an imposed requirement that compromised their teaching. Teachers agreed that allowing new students into the programs throughout the term disadvantaged continuing students who then had to tolerate having their classroom routines disrupted and having the teacher work to integrate new arrivals. Teachers were faced with having to plan classes that allowed continuing students to progress while new students were integrated—the constant process of “bringing [new students] up to the level.” Continuity of instruction was lost, as was group cohesiveness.

### *Multilevel Classes*

According to the teachers, LINC classes are multilevel classes, where students arrive with different educational backgrounds and experiences, are at different levels, and have different goals and expectations. One teacher described a new student coming into her already multilevel class: “If she can kind of bear with us on the days when I can’t do too much with her ... and there’s another lady from Somalia who can kind of help her along, but she’s been sick and her baby’s been sick so ... ah, life in LINC!”

The struggle to teach multilevel groups was a constantly repeated concern. Teachers commented on how the designated labels on their classes meant nothing. So-called LINC 1 classes had people in them who were preliterate; LINC 2 classes had lower-level learners who found the location of the class convenient and did not want to move to a more appropriate program.<sup>3</sup>

Multilevel classes placed a heavy burden on the teachers, who found it difficult to plan for and teach students at the various levels. Sharon and Karen both described planning for multilevel groups by having everyone in the class work on the same topic (health, clothing, etc.) with different materials. Sharon described the process thus:

I develop different worksheets ... for example, if one group can label types of clothing while another group will have only one word to work on. It takes a lot of time. You’re doing a lot of cutting and pasting. So I’ve learned to do a lot of review, slow myself down. If it’s a quarter after, we won’t start something new.

Karen described the process of planning her class thus:

When I sat down to plan, I had those two students [professionals] in mind, I had ... I'd call it the bulk or middle core, and then I had my literacy students. And I'd try to figure out what to do. It took a lot of time.

Anne described her class as multilevel, but the difference among her students was one of motivation rather than language proficiency. About half the learners in her class were older immigrants who had come to Canada to live with their adult children, whereas the others were recently arrived, younger refugees. According to Anne, the older immigrants were "not interested in the same ways as those who have to survive"; the difference in motivation caused "a bit of a conflict." She worked to find materials that would interest both groups and tried to manage class dynamics so that the younger, more motivated group would not be exasperated with the less focused learners.

Another issue related to multilevel classes was the use of volunteers. Five teachers had volunteers in their classes at least once a week; three of these teachers had two volunteers who came on different days. On the one hand teachers saw volunteers as absolutely necessary because they could work with small groups of learners who needed the undivided attention of a teacher. On the other hand volunteers presented real problems. They usually came only once a week, so they disrupted established class routines. They were largely untrained, often using the experience to help them decide if they were interested in teaching ESL. Their lack of training meant that the teacher had to prepare materials and discuss how to use them. Sometimes volunteers failed to show up, which meant a quick rearrangement of a class plan for the teacher. On occasion a volunteer taught in ways that were not consistent with the teacher's practices. One teacher described listening to a volunteer explain to a group of women how the moon rotated around the sun. She remained silent although she was fairly certain the volunteer was speaking at a level and speed that made her incomprehensible to the learners.

Lisa, who had a LINC 1 class with several literacy students, said:

I couldn't do without my volunteer, though at times I feel having her in the classroom is more trouble than help. But at least the literacy group has one morning a week when they have a teacher all to themselves.

Teachers saw these multilevel groups as characteristic of LINC classes. Such heterogeneous groups were in part a consequence of the practice of continuous intake. Students were enrolled not on the basis of the appropriateness of the program, but because they appeared at the classroom in which there was room for them; or because they were recruited when enrollment dropped. In neither case was their admission determined by their level of



achievement on the language assessment. Thus teachers had little control over the level or levels in their class.

Carol, when discussing the class she had taught the year before, described the difficulty thus: "I had everything up to LINC 3. I really felt pressured by the top group so I couldn't do justice to the literacy people ... but then they weren't supposed to be there anyway."

One teacher had a different idea about why classes were multilevel. She argued that because most centers had one or at most two classes, it was impossible to group learners effectively. If there was only one class, everyone was in the same level; even with two groups, teachers had little choice in placing learners. As far as this teacher was concerned, multilevel classes were a consequence of community groups being given contracts for LINC classes. This meant that small, isolated centers were spread throughout the city, ensuring that learners had easy access to classes. This was obviously a positive consequence of the policy implementation. There was, however, no guarantee that a class that was easily reached was particularly appropriate for the individual learner. Karen cited a student who refused to leave a class that was far below the required level. He liked the location, referring to it as "my school." Two teachers and a supervisor had tried without success to persuade him to find a more suitable program. As Karen said, "What can you do?" He liked where he was and intended to stay.

Either explanation for multilevel classes, continuous enrollment, or off-site locations points out that a central tenet of the LINC policy, that learners should attend programs that were tailored to their specific needs, was not being honored. Learners chose programs because they were conveniently located and not because they "provided training better suited to [their] individual needs" (EIC, 1991a, n.p.).

### *Off-Site Locations*

A third area of concern to teachers was the off-site locations where LINC classes met. Off-site classes are defined as those located away from schools or education centers and in places such as community centers and shopping centers. Teachers interviewed had taught in or were teaching in the bedroom of an apartment in a subsidized housing complex, a former fire station that was a community center, the basement of a primary school, a portable classroom on the grounds of a school, and the activity room of a large apartment building. In each case they were either teaching the only class or one of two classes at the site.

Programs were located in such sites because the LINC contracts were held by community and immigrant groups who agreed to locate small programs in community-based sites. These programs were meant to be accessible to local populations of learners, but teachers saw serious disadvantages in these off-site locations, which tended to lack the resources (teaching mate-

rials, textbooks, resource books) and facilities (adequate classroom space, tables for small-group work, chalkboards, photocopiers) that teachers felt would be of advantage to their teaching. In some locations teachers had to pack up all their materials at the end of class because the room was used by other groups. One reported that her classroom was so small (the bedroom of an apartment) that once students were seated, they could not move during the class; she had to stand at the head of the one large table. Thus she could do no small-group work, nor could she have more than one activity going on in her class at a time. She was forced against her own beliefs to rely on teacher-fronted activities.

Another teacher, who at the time of the interview was teaching in a former school, now designated as an education center for adult classes, felt she was "in heaven" because she had a classroom with chalkboards, cupboards, tables, and chairs that could be moved. During the previous two years she had taught a multilevel class in a small room on the ground floor of a high-rise apartment house where there was "too little space, too much noise."

Access to teaching materials was also a problem at these sites. When planning their classes, teachers had to take into account that the resource center (which contained textbooks, teacher-developed materials, photographs) and the photocopier were in an education center located, in most cases, at some distance from their classrooms. Four teachers reported that they often went to this center, which was for them a considerable journey, before or after their classes. One teacher preferred to use materials that she had written herself so that she could print multiple copies from her computer. Another often paid for photocopies at a copy center near her classroom. They found this lack of resources and facilities onerous and irritating, particularly as they were paid only for contact hours. Teachers had to plan their classes with these constraints on space, resources, and time.

A further consequence of these off-site programs was that teachers felt isolated. Most had little or no contact with other teachers except when they went to the resource center where, as one teacher remarked, the conversation tended to focus on who got the photocopier next, or when they attended the occasional professional development day or conference. Their programs were rarely visited by supervisors from the school board, and the supervisory staff at the community centers normally had no expertise and often little interest in teaching English.

The isolation the teachers experienced was a concern, particularly for the novices among them. As one said, "Teaching LINC is lonely. It's just you and your students. You never get to talk to anyone about your teaching."

For teachers, then, teaching LINC meant a complicated set of circumstances and constraints. Teachers were conscious of balancing a number of factors, including making judgments about who was in the class and when new

learners should be allowed in, about how to overcome the limitations of facilities and resources, how to meet the needs of a multilevel class and newly arrived students. LINC, in short, meant that teachers were faced with a number of circumstances that they defined as LINC and that imposed constraints on how and what they taught.

### *What LINC Was Not*

The two provisions of the policy expected to be the most apparent and important to teachers—the assessment procedures and the curriculum—were rarely mentioned by them in the interview. At the end of the interview teachers were asked to discuss their ideas on A-LINC and on the curriculum.

### *Assessment*

A-LINC,<sup>4</sup> the assessment instrument then in use, was mentioned in passing by all the teachers in the early part of the interviews. References included “the assessors arrived on one of the worst days of my teaching life” and “I don’t know how she [a learner] ever placed at LINC 2.” When asked at the end of the interview to discuss A-LINC, teachers were unanimous in their belief that neither the instrument nor the administration of the instrument was working. In the first place the procedure that should have ensured that any client enrolling in a LINC class had a assessment score was not reliable. Teachers reported that students were on occasion tested after they enrolled in the program. According to Lisa, at the beginning of the year there had been so many students that “they couldn’t assess everyone, so they let them enroll and they’ll test them later.” Assessment had been an even less pressing concern in a class taught by another teacher; some students in her class were tested at the end of the year. “The assessor came in at the end of last year to see people who had never been assessed and did not have a LINC card.”

The teachers saw the assessment procedure as a bureaucratic requirement that provided students with documentation that might be required for enrollment. But as Carol’s statement shows, the LINC card was not always needed. The assessment process was not working to direct students toward programs that best suited their needs.

The teachers felt that the test was not particularly reliable and did not provide useful information. Students often appeared to be at a different level than their test scores indicated; none of the teachers used the assessment reports as reliable indicators of students’ proficiency. As one teacher said,

A-LINC is expensive and not very effective ... and they’re understaffed. I’m not sure we get much benefit from it. It’s supposed to help people to find programs ... and help us understand what our students know and what they need. But it doesn’t work that way.

Teachers did not find that the test functioned in the ways proposed in the policy.

### *Curriculum*

One of the most visible achievements of the LINC policy in Ontario was the development of the LINC Curricula that, at the time of the interviews, existed as a draft document. The *Draft LINC Curriculum Guidelines* (EIC, 1993a) were designed to meet the needs of students "in a variety of community and institutional settings" and to specify content, method, and approach for LINC classes. A letter sent by EIC with the draft curriculum states that although providers of LINC classes "are not bound to use only these themes, nor are they bound to use all of these themes" (p. 2), they "will be required to ensure that exit competencies of their LINC programs are equivalent to the global outcomes in the Draft Curriculum Guidelines" (p. 2).

The document outlines 12 themes, including family life, transportation, and Canadian society, for three different levels with tasks, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation points that can be taught. There is a LINC literacy curriculum as well.<sup>5</sup>

Like all curriculum documents of this type, the LINC curriculum appears to have great authority, coming as it does from an external source and seemingly comprehensive in its coverage. In the sense that it was both sanctioned and authoritative, it could be, and perhaps was expected to be, used by teachers to structure their daily classes. The curriculum, for all its weight and authority, was of little importance to the teachers. In the first place they did not feel that they were being forced or even strongly advised to use it. Although all the teachers had seen the document, only one of the six mentioned the *Draft Guidelines* before being asked about it. Five teachers had copies in their classrooms. When asked why it was there, three suggested that it was expedient to have a copy if someone from either the school board or EIC visited, but that they were never asked if they used it. None of the teachers saw the curriculum as guiding their teaching on a day-to-day level.

When asked if and how they used the curriculum, they gave one of two answers. Three teachers said they had looked at it ("flipped through it" was the term one used) to get ideas of themes and topics. None had consulted the information about the structures, vocabulary, or pronunciation points listed. They simply wanted ideas on topics to cover, or they were checking to see if their ideas were consistent with the themes laid out in the guidelines. For these teachers the document was too detailed and long to be useful. As one teacher said. "I don't need the stuff on structures and vocabulary ... I know what my students can do. I just want ideas—you know—have I covered a topic like health." Another said that it was an "interesting catalogue of ideas and suggestions."

The second set of responses was more interesting. Three of the teachers (one of whom had “flipped through” the curriculum) used the guidelines in another way—as a means of orienting themselves to LINC and to the world outside their classrooms. One teacher described how isolated she felt in her program; she was a novice teacher who had almost no contact with other teachers. She was chronically uncertain about the level of her students, whether they were advancing, and whether she was teaching them anything. She referred to the curriculum “only once in a while [to see if she was] on the right track.” She read the exit criteria for the levels to see if her LINC 2 students were in fact LINC 2.

Another teacher, the most experienced of the six, talked at length about the curriculum and the test.

It [the curriculum] was primarily to see ... to get my bearings ... because it's the old problem ... when is a LINC 1 person really a LINC 1 person. When you've got this horrendous range of skills ... in skill areas in any given group ... and I do it to get my bearing in terms of what's expected, in term of sociocultural awareness, kind of stuff.

What I did last year, at the end of the year I had [the assessor] reassess some of the people. Mostly people who'd been assessed as LINC 1, and I wanted to know at the end of the year if they'd be assessed as LINC 2, and sure enough they were, but I had no sense of that because I had LINC 2 students...a huge range of people all jumbling up in your head.

For these teachers the curriculum served to orient them toward a larger context, out of the closed system of their classrooms, and served to overcome to some degree the difficult aspects of teaching LINC, the multilevel classes in off-site locations.

### *Conclusion*

It is important that we begin to understand the relationship between language policy and the language classroom. Clearly this research has addressed only one of the many issues about the ways in which language policy is understood and realized in the classroom; many questions remain unanswered. It is important as well to keep in mind that this research was carried out with a small group of teachers in one setting. Given that the LINC policy allows great latitude in how the policy will be realized locally, the findings must be understood to explicate only one setting. However, the results do give a perspective on how policies influence—or do not influence—teachers and their classrooms.

Investigation of how LINC was perceived and accommodated by teachers is a particularly interesting case because the policy was so well articulated and documented. It was supported with an assessment procedure and a curriculum, as well as policy documents. All of these would be expected to

have a direct effect on the teachers' classroom practices as well as their beliefs about what and how they should teach.

This was not the case. Teachers did not see either the assessment procedure or the curriculum as having much influence on how they taught. The teachers did not refer to the curriculum when deciding on what their students needed. They relied much more on their own experience, their preferences, and the preferences of their students.

One teacher reported:

I did a complete unit on health. It was great because some of the people in the class had had lots of experience with the health care system and they talked a lot. We spent weeks. I moved really slowly. Then when we finished, I asked what they wanted to do next ... and they said, "Again, teacher." So we did health again.

But these teachers, although not constrained by the curriculum or assessment procedures, did have to reconcile as best they could their ideas of how and what to teach with the teaching conditions that they associated with LINC: continuous intake, multilevel classes, and off-site locations.

Why did classrooms have these characteristics? The LINC policy emphasized that language programs should be both appropriate—designed to meet student needs—and accessible. In dealing with the three characteristics of their classes that they saw as "being LINC," the teachers were faced with the implementation of the requirement that LINC classes be accessible. They were also dealing with a local interpretation of the policy. In the city where these teachers were working, that stipulation had been interpreted to favor the granting of LINC contracts to community and local immigrant groups, which were community-based and which could set up small programs in off-site locations for local populations of learners.

This decision had a number of consequences. First the sites, although convenient for learners, were often not ideal classrooms; the facilities were often inadequate and resources were not available. As well, the programs were often small, which meant that the one or two available classes were multilevel. Finally contract requirements about the minimum number of students that had to be enrolled placed teachers in the position of managing attendance problems and enrolling new learners whenever the enrollment fell below the agreed number. These new learners had to be integrated into existing classes, a process that posed additional problems for teachers.

All this meant that teachers were most affected by what was in fact a relatively minor aspect of the policy—what one EIC employee referred to as "really only a contractual issue." The preference for small, community-based programs provoked a series of consequences that had great impact on how the teachers thought about their classes.

Language policies are most commonly developed and implemented by individuals far removed from the classroom; at the classroom level, language policy is realized in different ways depending on teachers' perceptions and understanding of the policy and the local conditions of implementation. The classes described in this article and the teachers' perceptions of these classes are particular to Ottawa; teachers in other cities may have different experiences teaching LINC. In this particular case, teachers were forced to accommodate consequences of the policy—continuous intake, multilevel classes, and off-site locations—which, although seen as of minor importance to policy developers and implementors, took on major importance at the classroom level.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>There have been a number of changes since the data for this research were collected. Employment and Immigration Canada no longer exists and its responsibilities have been split between two ministries, Citizenship and Immigration and Human Resources. The documentation supporting the policy has increased as well, for example, *Canadian language benchmarks: Working document* (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996).

<sup>2</sup>The names of the teachers have been changed.

<sup>3</sup>Students were characterized as LINC 1, 2, 3, or 4. According to the document *Language Instruction for newcomers to Canada (LINC): Guide for applicants* (EIC, 1993b), "Level 1 learners may speak a little, but usually not at all ... Understanding is limited and may range from no apparent comprehension, to comprehending short phrases or key words" (p. 15).

Level 3 learners, the highest level for which most programs offered instruction, were described in this way: "[their] listening ability is often better than speech production, with the ability to understand basic instruction/question, often by picking up key content words.... [They] can read basic information presented in simple sentences" (p. 15).

<sup>4</sup>There is now a new assessment instrument—*Canadian Language Benchmarks Assessment* (CIC, 1996).

<sup>5</sup>None of the teachers had a LINC literacy class, although three said they had some learners who should have been in Pre-LINC classes. All had seen the curriculum that had been developed. Three of the teachers said they liked the literacy curriculum and would find it more useful than the one that had been written for the levels they were teaching.

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## *Appendix A: Interview Schedule*

1. Where are you teaching? Number of hours? Institution(s) responsible for your program? Funding source(s)?  
How long has the program been in existence?  
How long have you taught there?  
Where else have you taught?
2. Describe the learners in your class.
  - a. countries of origin
  - b. gender
  - c. number
  - d. levels of education/language proficiency
3. Describe your classroom
  - a. size, layout, resources, facilities
4. What aspect of your class(es) do you find most important?  
What things do you think about when you're planning your classes?
5. How do you accommodate these issues?
6. What needs do the learners in your class have? How do you know?
7. Do all of your students have ALINC scores when they enroll?  
Is the information for ALINC helpful to you?  
How do you use it?
8. Have you seen the LINC curricula?  
Do you use them?  
If yes, how?

Note: Questions 7 and 8 were asked only after discussion of the classes was completed.