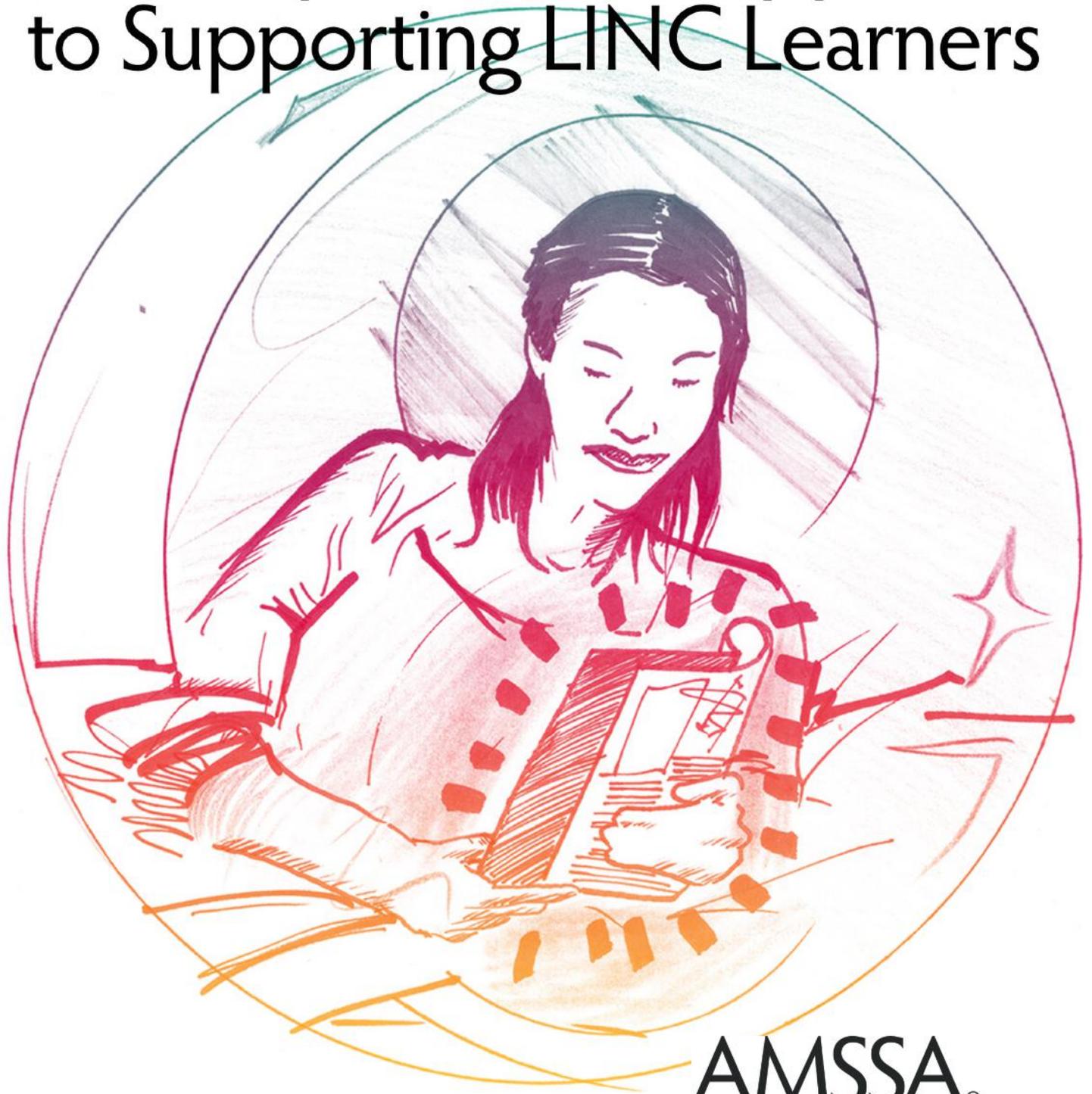


# A Principles-based Approach to Supporting LINC Learners



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The logo graphic consists of a blue circle to the left of the text, followed by a horizontal line of five smaller circles in yellow, green, red, blue, and grey.

# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
Intended Audience	4
Acknowledgements	4
Presentation	5
Using the Guide	5
Authors' Positionality	6
A Note on Pronoun Use	6
<b>Reflexivity</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Approaches &amp; Strategies for Instructors</b>	<b>8</b>
Approach: Maintain an attitude of lifelong learning despite increased pressures	8
Strategy: Sustain reflexivity as an ongoing individual practice	8
Strategy: Build a community of practice	9
<b>Approaches &amp; Strategies for Managers &amp; Coordinators</b>	<b>10</b>
Approach: Create an institutional culture of lifelong learning	10
Strategy: Make space for reflexive practices	10
Strategy: Support communities of practice for instructors and staff	10
<b>Awareness</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Approaches &amp; Strategies for Instructors</b>	<b>12</b>
Approach: Learn about learners' needs and strengths	12
Strategy: Balance language outcomes with other settlement outcomes	12
Strategy: Use resources for multi-level classrooms, EAL literacy & disability issues	13
Strategy: Engage in lifelong learning around equity and justice issues	13
<b>Approaches &amp; Strategies for Managers &amp; Coordinators</b>	<b>14</b>
Approach: Support opportunities to learn and share about learners	14
Strategy: Hold space for addressing broader settlement outcomes	14
Strategy: Support instructors & staff with a wide range of resources & responses	15

## **Empathic Communication 16**

### **Approaches & Strategies for Instructors 17**

Approach: Practice mindful communication 17

Strategy: Engage in active listening skills 17

Strategy: Know what to do if a situation escalates 17

Strategy: Be accountable for harm done 18

### **Approaches & Strategies for Managers & Coordinators 19**

Approach: Model active listening skills and acknowledge contributions 19

Strategy: Create connections for learners beyond the classroom 19

Strategy: Create guidelines and processes for dealing with difficult situations 19

## **References 20**

Resources for Reflexivity 20

Resources for Awareness 21

Resources for Empathic Communication 22

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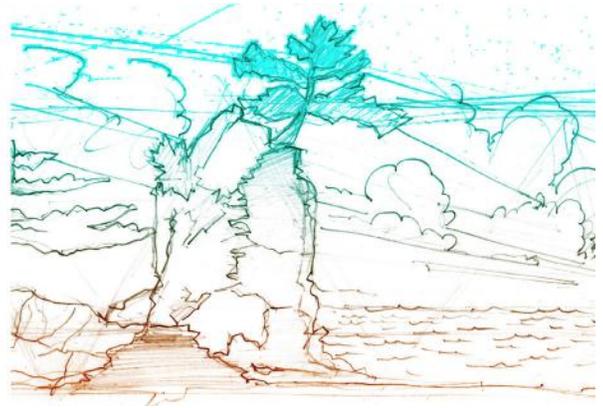
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# Introduction

This guide is meant to respond to Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) service providers' need for tools and supports to meet the objectives of IRCC funded language training. These supports are needed even more as newcomer language learners arrive with diverse backgrounds and identities, varying assets and complex needs.

## Intended Audience

This resource guide is intended for LINC program staff (instructors, lead instructors, managers, coordinators, and support staff) who provide settlement language training to learners from Literacy to Canadian Language Benchmark (CLB) 8.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to gratefully acknowledge IRCC for funding for this resource and thank Julie Ship and Farah Kotadia at AMSSA for their guidance, input and support.

Other individuals who assisted in the development of this guide include:

- Generous managers and instructors who took the time to share their concerns and experiences working with in LINC including: Bonita Eberl, Dionne Wilkinson, Indi Kaur, Ping Yang, Marie Irving, Anita Schuller, Caroline Pendleton, Paula Mannington, Janet They, Maureen Kelbert and Todd Kitzler.
- Caitlin Johnston from BC Women's Hospital and Marcela Fuller for helping the authors understand some of the issues more deeply
- Members of the Settlement Language Working Group (SLWG), Newcomer Language Advisory Body (NLAB) and other stakeholders for reviewing early drafts of the guide and providing thoughtful feedback: Teresa Burke, Ryan Drew, Kathy Hughes, Shantel Ivitz, Todd Kitzler, Betty Knight, Paula Mannington, Karen McNeil, Anita Schuller, Anne Senior and Janet They.

All of the people involved have engaged in these conversations with openness and thoughtfulness.

## Presentation

This guide contains three sections:

### Reflexivity

### Awareness

### Empathic Communication<sup>1</sup>

Each of the three principles offers a definition, reflection questions, a case study, approaches (a systematic way of doing something) and strategies (overall planning and methods).

Case studies offer snapshots of some of the complexities LINC programs are facing and act as prompts for collaborative discussion. Reflection questions guide individuals and teams to think about the principles, how they are currently being applied and how they can be further developed. Strategies and approaches are offered explicitly for instructors and managers & coordinators, though may also support other LINC staff including lead instructors, administrative staff and other program staff towards integrated, intentional ways of responding to program complexity.

The ideas represented here respond to a broader range of language learners than has been identified in most English as an Additional Language training and delivery models. This includes, though is not limited to, those with physical disabilities, mental health challenges, learning and literacy barriers, and other typically marginalized learners. In responding to these needs, it is also our aim to supplement and support some of the core principles of PBLA including:

- Instruction is based on the needs and goals of learners*
- Learners are involved in decision-making*
- Individual learners are supported in a way forward (community, work, study)*
- Instructors and learners self-reflect on the teaching and learning process*
- Teaching and learning programs are continuously evaluated and adjusted*

## Using the Guide

This guide is meant to be used collaboratively by LINC program staff to explore the ways in which learners are being supported and to co-create responsive settlement language programs.

This resource is not a flow chart of linear solutions nor a “top 10 list” but instead, a framework for exploring values, perspectives and approaches to the work that settlement language providers do. By building reflection and collaboration into the workplace and developing practices, LINC team members can be more effective in responding to the complexities they are seeing in our classes. The authors recognize this may constitute a shift in how teams approach their work, and that this shift requires time, attention and intention.

---

<sup>1</sup> Towards a holistic approach to supporting LINC programming, the authors have identified three additional principles: Community Building, Cultural Humility, and Collaboration and Advocacy. These other three principles and their corresponding approaches and strategies are in development.

This guide is meant to be a 'working document' rather than a 'one size fits all' resource. The intention is that each LINC team who engages with the guide contents will adjust and adapt the ideas to make them appropriate and suitable for their specific context. This is a very intentional approach to acknowledge the depth and range of experience, knowledge and skill that already exists in each LINC team.



Other suggestions for engaging with this guide include:

- Teams focus on one principle at a time.
- Staff receive the case studies and reflection questions in advance of team discussions, as a regular part of professional development days or monthly meetings.
- Allow the exploration and discussions to unfold over time rather than at just a 'one-off' workshop.
- Plan ways to keep momentum to ensure reflection and learning continues over time.

### **Authors' Positionality**

Sara Yuen, Andrea Solnes and Dr. Anea Wilbur are members of CoAct, a community of practice for EAL instructors and managers. They aim to recognize the role of power and privilege in their work, and they, too, strive and struggle to create inclusive and supportive learning and working spaces.

### **A Note on Pronoun Use**

This document uses gender-inclusive pronouns including they/them/their and references the Provincial Health Services Authority's (2018) definition of gender inclusive pronouns: "The inclusive pronouns they/them can be used instead of the gender binary pronouns (she/her, he/him) in order to avoid making assumptions about an individual's gender or sexuality" (Gender Inclusive Pronouns).

# Reflexivity



Reflexivity—or self reflection, is the ability to examine our own feelings, reactions and motives, and how these factors influence our actions. It is fundamental to effectively managing classrooms and departments and is the basis for all principles in this guide. As Florez (2001) explains, “in reflective practice, practitioners engage in a continuous cycle of self-observation and self-evaluation in order to understand their own actions and the reactions they prompt in themselves and in learners (Brookfield, 1995; Thiel, 1999). The goal is not necessarily to address a specific problem or question defined at the outset...but to observe and refine practice in general on an ongoing basis” (p. 2).

## Reflection questions

*In what ways do you self reflect in your personal life?*

*What are some ways you are already reflecting on your practice as an educator/manager?*

## Case Study

Lilen teaches a LINC 3 class in a medium-sized organization with ten other instructors, a program assistant and a program manager. Lilen has been teaching LINC for several years, but is finding their job increasingly challenging as they balance the requirements of PBLA and responding to the diverse range of learners in their class, particularly in terms of age and learning backgrounds.\* They appreciate the support they get at the monthly team meetings, as every meeting begins with a roundtable open discussion where all staff can share concerns, ask questions and exchange ideas.

Lilen is currently trying to identify how they can support a situation in their class where some learners are reluctant to do group work with a senior student in the class. The situation has prompted Lilen to consider ideas around how society regards the aging, and the cultural attitudes toward aging that they grew up with. They are curious about how attitudes play out within different cultural contexts and will put this out for a discussion within the context of a LINC class at the next meeting. As with other experiences and challenges as an instructor, Lilen is using a journal to keep track of their thoughts about aging and the situation in their class.

\*See note on pro} our use (page 6).

# Reflexivity Approaches & Strategies

## Instructors

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### **Approach: Maintain an attitude of lifelong learning despite increased pressures**

LINC instructors have always been committed and engaged in ongoing development of their skills and knowledge. There are constraints and stressors that present challenges to finding the time and space to learn more and do more at work. In LINC classrooms, instructors are asked to support learners with diverse needs.

There are challenges that go beyond the English language instruction and teachers may not have adequate training or resources to address these challenges. Instructors can examine their beliefs about lifelong learning and to see where the opportunity exists for learning and skills development in their specific contexts.

It is important to approach our work (both as novice or experienced instructors) with a growth mindset to better meet complexities of working within LINC.

### **Strategy: Sustain reflexivity as an ongoing individual practice**

Instructor and support staff need concrete tools and activities that can help them reflect on the work that they do, their overall purpose and roles, and how these may change over time. By examining one's beliefs about teaching and learning, and how one's "teacher role identity" (Farrell, 2018, p.4) has developed and shifted over time, opportunities for learning and skills development become evident. Do our current actions and practice match our stated beliefs? How open am I to learn, investigate, challenge and grow?

Journaling is used by many instructors to examine critical incidents, explore best practices, and set skills development goals. An instructor can use journaling effectively for ongoing 'narrative reflective practice', which is described by Farrell (2013) as a process of describing, interpreting and analyzing specific and memorable classroom events or moments.

### Notes

## Reflexivity Approaches & Strategies

Self-assessment tools for instructors, such as the PBLA Practice Review Framework Classroom Practice Standards Teacher Self-Assessment ( [PBLA-practice-review-framework](#) ), can be useful as a way to examine current teaching and learning and lead the way to creating clear action plans and goals.

There are also other self-assessment tools that can spark reflection and investigation into other areas that affect our interactions with learners. For example, the Project Implicit 'implicit bias' test ( <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/> ) is an interesting starting point to recognize our own personal histories, assumptions and biases when working with learners and each other. Acknowledging and understanding our values and assumptions is a process and takes time. Finding small ways to build reflection into your work life can, over time, lead to a more effective teaching practice.

### **Strategy: Build a community of practice**

Reflexivity is an ongoing process of exploration and creating a structure or mechanism for reflection to take place over one's professional career is essential. Instructors and staff who prefer collaborative and social opportunities for reflection can consider joining - or creating - a community of practice (CoP). A CoP could be formalized within a LINC program, with manager or coordinator support, or done informally amongst instructors.

In a CoP, instructors can, for example, address and share ways that they're responding effectively to the broad range of skills within any given class. [Tutela](#) allows users to join and create groups as well as add contacts to a Personal Learning Network. Outside of your organizations, this can be a useful resource to building and participating in communities of practice.

Notes

# Reflexivity Approaches & Strategies

## Managers & Coordinators

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### Approach: Create an institutional culture of lifelong learning

When all members of a teaching team are supported in lifelong learning opportunities, a culture “oriented towards growth and improvement” (Aguilar, 2011, p. 3) is created. Some questions to consider are:

- What is required for me to be able to spend time in classrooms observing-to-learn, in addition to the time I spend observing-to-evaluate?
- What does it take to provide instructors with PD time to do peer observations?  
Are there ways to promote a model of mentorship not just between PBLA leads and instructors and LINC coordinators and instructors but horizontally among all staff members?

### Strategy: Make space for reflexive practices

Instructors and staff need support from program managers and coordinators to make time to engage in reflexive activities. Managers can build time into regular meetings for staff to come together to share problems and concerns, post or send monthly updates with reflective questions or tasks for follow up at staff meetings. For create bulletin boards in staff office space that encourage thought-provoking discussion and/or reflection.

#### Notes

Managers and coordinators consider their role as facilitators or coaches for all instructors and support staff. As Aguilar (2013) explains, “a coaching stance views teacher, principals, and all the adults who work in schools as capable of changing practices.” (p. 5) Leaders can support their teams by asking questions based in curiosity and exploration. Here are some resources that contain useful starting points for reflection and discussion:

- Connecticut State Department of Education (2017). [The Coaching and Self-Reflection Tool for Competency in Teaching English Language Learners](#).
- College Committee on Disability Issues (2008). [LD Resource Guide: Accommodations, Learning Strategies, Assistive Technology, and Universal Design for Instruction](#)

### Strategy: Support communities of practice for instructors and staff

Managers and coordinators can play a key role in supporting ongoing and continuous reflective practice in the workplace by setting up the framework for instructional communities of practice, coaching teams, or mentorship models. Alternatively, managers and coordinators can facilitate making connections to existing communities of practice such as the [#CDNeltchat](#) (formerly known as [#LINCchat](#)) on Twitter or to other schools and institutions who may be interested in collaborating to form a multi-organizational CoP.



# Awareness

Understanding the intersecting identities, educational background, work and family histories of our learners as well as their current needs, goals, strengths and challenges helps to support them with the language skills, information and resources that are most important and relevant to their lives. Some of this information comes easily at registration and in the context of day-to-day lessons. A deeper awareness and appreciation of learners comes through intentional and ongoing conversations, as groups or individually, so that learners are supported in how and what they learn and reflect on their progress and goals. While gaining a better understanding of learners enhances instructors' ability to support them, it is also essential to respect the boundaries, privacy and the rights of learners to decide what information to share, and when.

## Reflection questions

*What are some things that are helpful to know about your learners at the start of your relationship, and what things can be shared later on?*

*What practices, resources and supports do you know of that can help you support learners in their unique needs, strengths, challenges and goals?*

## Case Study

Fatimah is a 30-year-old woman from Eritrea with no formal education. She has very high speaking skills and enthusiastically works with the other learners. She is often late, however, and occasionally misses classes. The program assistant who is responsible for calling Fatimah when she is absent has told the instructor that Fatimah reports having nightmares, headaches, and sometimes finds it difficult to get to class.

She has not successfully completed any of the reading and writing assessments given to her, and she is reluctant to talk about this. She may have a learning disability and the instructor plans to have a conversation with her during an upcoming progress conferencing session to find out more about her learning background. During class discussions, the instructor pays attention to the type of interests and experiences Fatimah is comfortable talking about and tries to make the content of the writing assessments relevant to this.

Fatimah may benefit from one-to-one support in scaffolding activities for reading and writing tasks. The instructor hasn't had time to find someone who can help her and asks the lead teacher and manager if they are able to help find a suitable volunteer for the class.

# Awareness Approaches & Strategies

## Instructors

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### Approach: Learn about learners' needs and strengths

Instructors recognize that all adult learners come with life experience and skills. Ensuring that learners have genuine opportunities to share their strengths beyond language ability builds trust and confidence and creates more learning opportunities for others.

Instructors also know that learners come to our classes with a variety of challenges including literacy issues, disabilities or mental health concerns that impact their learning in the LINC classroom. They are likely experiencing some level of stress even through the process of immigration.

PBLA practices provide many opportunities to learn more about individuals in your class. Use the About Me section of their Language Companion to gather as much baseline information as you can, and develop opportunities to supplement your understanding as described in the PBLA Practices Guidelines

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Action Plans and Skills Self-Assessments of their existing life and work skills and aptitudes can provide you with information about interests, preferred ways of learning, ability to work in groups, leadership skills and organizational aptitude.\* While the autobiography is no longer a required element of the 2019 PBLA Practice Guidelines, other personal writing tasks will help you learn about students. Use monthly Needs Assessments and learner-instructor conferencing to stay aware of emerging needs and barriers.

Also try to be aware of the day to day stresses that learners may be facing. Your informal interactions with individuals before and after class as well as warm up activities for the whole class provide these opportunities. More open-ended class discussions to introduce or follow-up a theme or module you are working on in class can also be guided in a way that allows learners to share what is going on for them.

### Strategy: Balance language outcomes with other settlement outcomes

Instructors and learners need to be aware of all settlement outcomes, including increasing knowledge of life in Canada and increasing participation in community and social networks, when measuring progress. (See IRCC Settlement logic model here: <http://www.rif-sk.ca/uploads/media/5bb4e0649ee31/ircc-settlement-logic-model-en.pdf?v1>) In order to achieve these outcomes, some flexibility is important; understand administrative requirements and PBLA practices but also recognize there are places you can make accommodations.

For example:

- Consider waiving or altering (number or format) standard assessment practices for a learner who is suffering from trauma or has an impairment.
- Create more skill-using (versus skill-testing) activities that may be less stressful and are clearly connected to the life and work goals of the learner.
- Give additional support or scaffolding on tasks and offer action-oriented feedback which helps the learners move forward in their community, work and study goals.
- Highlight learners' successes using their portfolios to document their progress and abilities as they relate to settlement outcomes. This is important for learners who are frustrated or discouraged at not completing a CLB level within a designated reporting period.
- Emphasize assessments as ongoing indications of ability (assessment for learning), rather than "tests" in the traditional sense that often produce anxiety.

### **Strategy: Use resources for multi-level classrooms, EAL literacy & disability issues**

Resources, strategies and approaches that address differentiated learning, multi-level classrooms and EAL literacy learners are useful in responding to learners with diverse learning contexts. You can provide differentiated activities (for example, use the same text but differentiate the activity according to level or ability) to ensure you are also accommodating those learners who are ready to take on more. From CCLB's Practice Guidelines, see Integrating CLB Assessment into Your ESL Classroom. (2016) Chapter 5: Adapting Assessment for Multi-level Classrooms for a detailed process for creating classroom profiles and modifying assessments.

<https://iclba.language.ca/chapter-5-adapting-assessment-for-multi-level-classrooms/>

If you are working with learners with literacy needs, see ESL for ALL: Adult Literacy Learner (2015)

[https://listn.tutela.ca/wp-content/uploads/ESL\\_Literacy\\_Jan\\_8\\_2015\\_e-version.pdf](https://listn.tutela.ca/wp-content/uploads/ESL_Literacy_Jan_8_2015_e-version.pdf)

or A Practical Guide to Teaching ESL Literacy

[https://globalaccess.bowvalleycollege.ca/sites/default/files/ESL-Literacy-Book-August-24-2018-Digital\\_0.pdf](https://globalaccess.bowvalleycollege.ca/sites/default/files/ESL-Literacy-Book-August-24-2018-Digital_0.pdf)

for an in-depth look at strategies and approaches that can be applied to different learner contexts.

Take time to have conversations with your manager about ways that you can support learners with barriers.

This resource provides some ideas for accommodations, technology and universal design principles:

[http://www.disabilityissues.ca/english/Link\\_docs/LDResour.pdf](http://www.disabilityissues.ca/english/Link_docs/LDResour.pdf)

### **Strategy: Engage in lifelong learning around equity and justice issues**

Participate in ongoing professional development activities that will expand your knowledge base in relation to race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ability, religion, and other areas of inequity. Respectful language and practices tend to change over time and space, and a commitment to this ongoing work will help ensure your classroom is a safe-enough learning space for diverse students.

The Province of BC has released (2018) Guidelines on Using Inclusive Language in the Workplace:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/careers/all-employees/working-with-others/words-matter.pdf>

Notes

# Awareness Approaches & Strategies

## Managers & Coordinators

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### **Approach: Support opportunities to learn and share about learners**

Managers and Coordinators develop clear policy and procedures for how program staff can store and share intake information, and how team members can share information about learners on an on-going basis. Contract agreements, LINC Guidelines and organizational policies/procedures need to be considered. For example, in some institutions, the legal concept of “duty to inquire”<sup>2</sup> may be applicable in situations where a disability is suspected but has not been communicated.

As LINC programming adapts to a more diverse range of learners, changes and accommodations are being made such as those at LINC Assessment Centres. By developing processes where program staff can have access to and share information about individual learners (such as visual and hearing impairments and “Bridge Literacy” designations as indicated by the Assessment Centre) they are better equipped in class building and lesson planning.

While acknowledging that responding to the needs and challenges of a diverse range of learners is very challenging, help instructors see how PBLA, grounded in learner-based practices, directly supports that context. Encourage instructors to conduct monthly Needs Assessments as a meaningful and effective way to dig into the most relevant contexts of learners’ lives, and support ideas that make use of feedback processes as a way to understand and respond to the challenges of individual learners.

For more ideas and support you may consult Tutela’s LINC Implementation Forum also known as “PBLA Administrators Group”. You may also want to spend time on the courses in the CCLB E-learning Portal such as ‘Meeting the Needs of ESL Literacy Learners: Needs Assessment, Goal-setting and Learning Reflections’ and direct staff to those resources as well: <https://learning.language.ca/course/index.php?categoryid=1>.

### **Strategy: Hold space for addressing broader settlement outcomes**

As the diversity and complexity of language learners increases, so does the need for creative, flexible LINC programs. Many instructors may be frustrated that PBLA and administrative requirements of LINC do not support the realities of their classrooms. Further, they may see their role as primarily language instructors.

To ensure that instructors understand the broader mandate of the LINC program, make the IRCC settlement logic model ( <http://www.rif-sk.ca/uploads/media/5bb4e0649ee31/ircc-settlement-logic-model-en.pdf?v> ) accessible and highlight the importance of and opportunities for community connections and building social networks. Support opportunities for instructors to develop and share ways for learners with limited language progress to demonstrate their understanding of information about Canada and make connections outside of the language-learning environment.

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<sup>2</sup> For an explanation and examples of the “duty to inquire” in educational contexts, see section 8.6.1 of the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s. [Policy for the accessible education for students with disabilities](#).

### Strategy: Support instructors & staff with a wide range of resources & responses

Managers and Coordinators acknowledge that the challenges instructors are facing in the classroom are unique and trust their ability to know what they most need in order to support their learners and take care of themselves. Use meeting time and your informal interactions with instructors to listen to them about what they need; steer conversation, where possible, from griping to finding solutions together. In an environment of limited time and resources, working collaboratively - within your program, across LINC programs, and with organizations outside of the settlement sector – is key to sustainable programming and growth.

Some specific ways to support instructors might include:

- Provide PD opportunities so that staff can broaden their skills and understanding around responding to the needs of learners with disabilities, mental health challenges and other learning barriers as well as other learners who face systemic discrimination and oppression.
- Use BC ~~SO~~ ~~Ó~~ Guidelines 2018 and PBLA Practice Guidelines to be aware of ways that LINC schools & ~~á~~ exercise flexibility in response to individual situations, <https://www.amssa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/BC-LINC-Guidelines-2018.pdf> For example, the section on “Attendance Guidelines” (AMSSA, p.12, 2018) or Multilevel Assessment ( <https://pblaepg.language.ca/part-d-emerging-topics/multilevel-assessment/> )
- Support instructors in knowing how to adapt curriculum to accommodate diverse learners (Lund & Lee, 2015, p. 5); look at how curriculum and assessments can be modified for specific types of learners; create tools (like the instructor self-assessments in the PBLA Practice Review framework) to guide this.  
  
This disability Support Projects from NorQuest College may be helpful. <https://www.norquest.ca/resources-services/resources/educational-resources-for-educators/disability-support-projects.aspx>
- Support instructors in placing volunteers in multi-level classrooms and to work with learners who benefit from one-on-one instruction.
- Consider how physical space and class composition can be modified to support the instructors who are facing the most challenges. Help instructors understand the challenges their colleagues are facing and develop a “team approach” around making changes based on the big picture.

The Handbook on Accessible Urban Space: A Facilitated Discussion on Inclusive Communities – SPARC BC and the resources within may be helpful. <https://www.sparc.bc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/accessible-urban-space.pdf>

Look for opportunities to connect your LINC program with other programs and partners. Larger providers might buddy up with smaller providers, for example, to share resources and learn together. Connecting to mental health supports, housing, youth, and employment agencies can build stronger programs and help reduce some of the stresses and challenges newcomers are facing.



# Empathic Communication

Empathy is an essential component to effective teaching. As Brené Brown says, empathy “fuels connection...In order to connect with you, I have to connect with something in myself that knows that feeling. [There are] four qualities of empathy: perspective taking...staying out of judgement...recognizing emotion in other people, and then communicating that” (RSA, 2013, 6:35).

There are significant challenges in maintaining a genuinely empathic approach to learners while delivering a language program such as LINC. The specific funder requirements with regard to attendance, punctuality and PBLA practices can impact how instructors and support staff work with students. It is our hope that LINC program staff, both within and outside of organizations, can work together to develop ways to balance these requirements with the art of connecting with learners, staying out of judgment, and communicating from an empathetic perspective. This can be about recognizing when you need to respond differently in the moment and finding work-arounds to support social and emotional needs. It also involves recognizing when supports, services and programs outside of LINC are needed.

## Reflection questions

*What does empathy look like in your instructional practice?*

*How do you communicate empathetically?*

*How do you engage your team in supporting learners' social and emotional well-being?*

## Case Study

Adan often emits negative energy in class and has regular outbursts. One day he stays after class to speak with the instructor. He says he hates the class and hates living in Canada. The instructor has some work to get to, but senses Adan's angst, remains calm and spends some time listening to him. After he has finished speaking, the instructor asks him if there is anything they can do to support him. Adan says that it was helpful to have someone listen to him and wishes he had a friend here. The instructor asks him if it would be okay to ask a settlement counsellor for more information about informal social groups that might help him meet people. He says okay.

The instructor was emotionally challenged by Adan's negativity and takes some time at the end of the next class to speak to him. The instructor provides him with information about the community kitchen details provided by the counsellor and asks him if he would like help registering.

# Empathic Approaches & Strategies

## Instructors

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### Approach: Practice mindful communication

Listening with empathy requires attention, time and continued practice. When learners share information with us that is difficult to hear, it's important to first gain awareness of our thoughts and emotions before we respond. Taking the time to pause, consider the needs of the other person, and filter our thoughts and words ensures that our response builds connection, trust and understanding.

### Strategy: Engage in active listening skills

When we listen with empathy, we do not need to problem solve or fix the situation. Instead, as noted above, the key is to focus on understanding what the person is feeling and what the person may need or want out of the situation. Paraphrasing and asking clarifying questions are ways to show that you are listening and trying to understand what the person is expressing without offering unwanted advice or rushing into identifying solutions or next steps. Asking the learner for their permission for you to seek additional support from a manager, settlement counsellor or other support staff also allows the learner to stay in control of the conversation and make decisions about what, if anything, should happen next. Some useful phrases and questions include:

“So, it sounds like you...is that/am I correct?”  
“Can you tell me more?”  
“What would you like to happen next?”  
“How can I/we help you?”  
“I'd like to....Is it okay if I...?”

If the above suggestions do not fit with your communication style, create your own list of phrases and questions that you use to create connection when speaking with others.

If translation and interpretation is required for these conversations, ask and wait for support from staff and managers. Accurate and updated resource and referral information is important, so work together as a team to ensure your information is current and accessible to all who require it.

### Strategy: Know what to do if a situation escalates

When situations are more of a critical incident than a conversation, it's important to give people - including yourself - space to feel safe yet heard. This may mean that you end a conversation that is escalating and come back to it when you have additional support or more time to attend to the issue. A team discussion and guidance from management can give you more clarity and confidence for addressing challenging situations.

Using positive language and active listening skills to set limits on what is being done and said in the moment means that you are maintaining a safe classroom space in a respectful manner. This allows attending to the learners' needs when there is the time and resources to properly do so. Some useful phrases and questions include:

“This needs more time and attention. Are you able to discuss this with me after class?”  
“Would you like a glass of water?”  
“Let's take an early break.”

## Empathic Approaches & Strategies

Occasionally you may have a student in your classroom who exhibits challenging behaviors. Here are a few suggestions for working with the student:

- make eye contact with the student
- remind the class of classroom agreements
- move toward the student
- be silent and wait for the disruption to end
- acknowledge the input; you might want to say, “we have heard your idea,” “thank you for sharing that information with me,” or “how about we talk about this later?”
- move the learners around if you think that might help
- call for a break or try a breathing exercise

For more serious problems, or if the disruption or challenge persists, conflict resolution skills can be helpful. These include:

- speak with the student privately
- confront the behavior, not the student
- speak for yourself only, not the class
- seek to understand the reason for the disruption (this is important particularly for learners with trauma - their outburst may have nothing to do with you)
- ask the student to recommend a solution if they have the language to do so; “What would you like to see happen next?”
- review your classroom agreement if necessary
- try to get agreement with the student
- explain any consequences of the continued disruptions
- ask your manager or coordinator for support

### **Strategy: Be accountable for harm done**

Part of being human is being imperfect. As instructors, we all make mistakes, and sometimes these mistakes do harm to students or colleagues. Be mindful of how you are accountable in these situations. Apologize for mistakes, affirm the importance of creating safe-enough spaces to learn and work, and commit to doing better in future.

Notes

## Managers & Coordinators

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### **Approach: Model active listening skills and acknowledge contributions**

Empathy requires energy, time and effort, and staff and instructors often feel on the verge of burning out. Managers and coordinators play an important role in reducing current work stressors by recognizing the hard work that language instructors and staff do to support learners beyond language and settlement. It is also important to create the time and space for instructors and staff to share challenges and express concerns and actively listen/respond to what is expressed.

### **Strategy: Create connections for learners beyond the classroom**

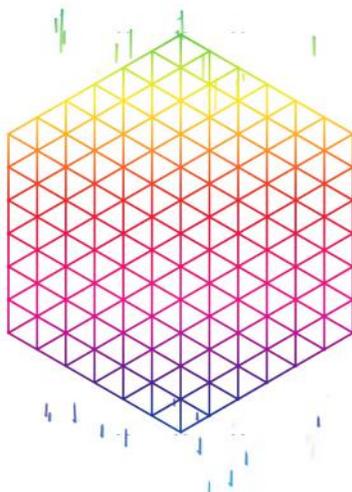
LINC, for some learners, is the only option for language-learning, but it's not always the right fit. Managers can support these learners and their instructors by recognizing this and building support for learners outside the classroom. For example, managers can help support staff to have conversations with learners who are experiencing challenges with their LINC studies, and provide all staff with consolidated resource and referral information for settlement and other services outside of the organization.

Coordinators may help source learning materials, assistive technology and programs for specialized learners. <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/services-for-people-with-disabilities/supports-services>

### **Strategy: Create guidelines and processes for dealing with difficult situations**

Some situations and conversations can be difficult and uncomfortable to navigate in the moment. Managers can create processes and/or guidelines to help instructors and staff be empathic, draw boundaries with the learners and take appropriate action. These processes provide staff with the confidence that they are supported and staying within their professional boundaries and skill sets.

Consider creating a flow chart for challenging scenarios that instructors and staff have to deal with on a regular basis and ensure that staff know who to go to for more support with different situations, and what steps should be taken when a situation escalates.



# References & Resources for Further Exploration

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