

# THE INTEGRATION ADVANTAGE



How the LINC programs at Bow Valley College and NorQuest College are increasing newcomer success.

## ABBREVIATED VERSION

Full version available at:  
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# The LINC programs at Bow Valley College and NorQuest College are succeeding.

This report explores the experiences of adult immigrants enrolled in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs at Bow Valley College and NorQuest College.

In their own words, newcomers tell of their journey and how these programs at post-secondary institutions do more than help them learn English. The programs also boost integration into Canada by increasing newcomers' confidence, promoting inclusion, and helping them to prepare for employment.



# The report reveals 4 key reasons why LINC students thrive in these post-secondary programs:

## **Integration success**

The learners used the many support services and campus activities at the colleges to advance their learning and integrate with the larger college community.

## **Employment**

The opportunity to be exposed to so many other career opportunities in the post-secondary institutions, as well as the career-oriented environment, gave them a clearer path to employment.

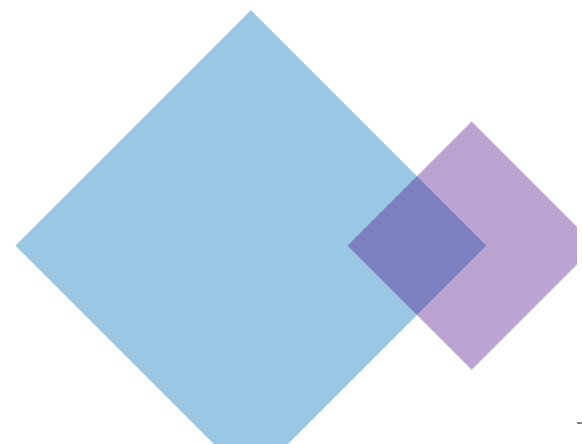
## **Top-level instruction**

The excellent instruction carried out by highly qualified teachers at the post-secondary level made learning English much easier.

## **Confidence**

They felt secure, supported and respected, gaining the confidence they need to succeed in their new home.

Canada is built on the successful integration of newcomers into society, and the LINC programs at Bow Valley College and NorQuest College are leading the way.







# Understanding LINC Learners' Experiences in College Settings

## **Bow Valley College**

Centre for Excellence in Immigrant  
and Intercultural Advancement

## **NorQuest College**

Faculty of Foundational, Career,  
and Intercultural Studies

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## Executive Summary

This report describes research that was undertaken at Bow Valley College (BVC) and NorQuest College (NQC) to understand the experiences and perceptions of adult immigrants enrolled in the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs. In particular, it focused on students' perceptions of a college learning environment, utilization of learner support services and campus activities, informal and formal engagement with the college community, and perceptions of their college experiences in relation to settlement and integration. The study was initiated through discussions between Bow Valley College and Citizenship and Immigration Canada and funded by CIC. Although a body of research has reported on the settlement and integration experiences of newcomers to Canada, little research has focused on language learning from the perspective of adult learners.

Data were gathered at both colleges during May and June 2015. A total of 372 students enrolled in CLB 4–7—more than 90%—responded to a questionnaire that measured their utilization of 20 learner support services and campus activities at BVC and 23 services and activities at NQC. Ten students from each college who reported high utilization rates participated in semistructured interviews that focused on previous education, initial experiences in Calgary/Edmonton, choice of college and satisfaction with choice, first

experiences at the college, services and activities that the participants utilized, classroom instruction on the Canadian way of life, goals and plans, cultural diversity in the classroom and Canada, and the college experience in relation to settlement.

The findings reported in Chapters 4 and 5 clearly indicate that, from the students' perspective, the LINC programs at BVC and NQC are highly effective in meeting their language learning and settlement needs. Based on the questionnaire data, the participants from BVC had used an average of 7.7 services (out of 20), and those from NQC had used an average of 12 services (out of 23). The range of services and activities provided at each college include some (e.g., library and computer assistance) relevant to all learners and others that are specialized and needed by a limited number of students (e.g., accessibility services). For this reason, utilization rates for individual services and activities range from, for example, 92 percent to 25 percent. Interviewees talked about the services they valued and these included, among others, resume preparation, information about college career programs, tutorial support, specialized library resources, the computer commons, and individualized career and educational planning. They also identified specific benefits of the services related to career planning, job searches, computer skills, living successfully in Canada, and planning for career education after LINC.

The interview data indicate that the participants were very satisfied with their choice of BVC or NQC, their relationships with their instructors, the quality of instruction, the inclusive social environment in the classroom and the college, and the educational and settlement support provided by the services and activities. In terms of settlement and integration, they said they were developing the English proficiency needed for life in Canada and the workplace; learning practical, day-to-day living skills; planning for further education and the workforce; meeting and learning from students from other cultures; understanding Canadian values, cultural norms, laws and government; and appreciating multiculturalism as a value and Canadian way of life. All interviewees recognized their settlement related learning was very important to their present and future life in Canada.

Based on an analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data reported in the findings chapters, the researcher identified eight themes:

1. Given the range of LINC providers in Calgary and Edmonton, the students' primary reason for choosing to study at BVC and NQC was **the reputation of the colleges**, which largely reflects the input of family and friends.
2. The students expressed a **high degree of satisfaction** with their LINC program at the colleges when the researcher asked them directly and when they discussed various aspects of their student experience.
3. The students **utilized learner support services and campus activities** to advance their learning, meet immediate needs, plan for their future, and connect with the college community.
4. The students **unequivocally endorsed their instructors** as persons and as instructors.
5. Although measures of socioemotional climate were not a part of the study, the students' comments consistently reveal that **they felt secure, supported, and respected**. They believed that the LINC program and the colleges are committed to their long-term success in Canada.
6. Despite the many challenges that permanent residents and refugees have encountered and the challenges that lie ahead, the students were **motivated, optimistic, and confident about their future**.
7. According to the data from interviews with the students, most are involved in what can be considered a **second phase of the settlement process**.
8. The students are gaining an **understanding of the Canadian way of life** generally and of cultural diversity and multiculturalism more specifically.

The report makes seven recommendations:

1. Students' strong satisfaction with LINC coupled with their belief that it is effective in meeting their needs, as the findings demonstrate, clearly indicate that BVC and NQC should continue their current LINC program delivery models.
2. Students' positive experiences with learner support services and activities, as the findings demonstrate, clearly indicate that BVC and NQC should continue to provide a broad range of services and activities and enhance those services and activities where feasible.
3. As public postsecondary institutions, BVC and NQC should continue to maximize the benefits of Alberta's integrated postsecondary learning system for LINC learners.
4. Although the current LINC model combined with postsecondary supports creates a strong foundation for all newcomers, additional learning opportunities would benefit immigrants who wish to return to their professions in Canada.



5. BVC and NQC should continue to leverage the opportunities of a postsecondary environment to foster interaction among LINC learners and mainstream students.
6. BVC and NQC should build upon their effective career pathway programming and services to enhance career exploration opportunities for LINC learners at the CLB 4–7 levels.
7. Further research should be undertaken to understand learners' progression from LINC to postsecondary education and careers as well as additional dimensions of their settlement and integration experiences.

Appendices A and D provide important complements to the research findings. Appendix A is made up of student life stories based on second interviews conducted with five of the original 20 interviewees. These stories provide very individual and very personal stories about the students' experiences as newcomers and college students. Appendix D outlines the quality assurance processes utilized by BVC and NQC to ensure their programs and services are providing effective learning opportunities for students.

## Acknowledgments

As Principal Researcher, I want to thank numerous people who contributed in many ways to the completion of this study.

- ◆ Most importantly, I want to recognize the 441 LINC learners at Bow Valley College and NorQuest College who completed the questionnaire. A total of 26 students participated in the interviews, and five participated in a second life-story interview.
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# BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

## Background

Across Canada each year, more than 60,000 adult newcomers enroll in Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) programs that have been developed and funded by Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC). LINC programming is designed to help “newcomers integrate into Canada and their communities,” recognizing that “the ability to communicate effectively in either French or English is a key factor in the success of newcomers to Canada” (CIC, 2013, para. 2). The importance of language acquisition is underscored in data that suggest that almost 90% of immigrants do not have English or French as their first language (Wayland, 2006b).

CIC profiled LINC learners in all provinces and territories except British Columbia, Manitoba, and Quebec in an evaluation report completed in 2010. Fourteen percent of the learners were in Alberta (p. 2). Across Canada, 71.4% of the learners were female, 65.6% were between the ages of 25 and 44, 51.8% had been in Canada for less than two years, and 63% had completed postsecondary education (p. 52). The five largest source countries were China, India, Colombia, Iraq, and Sri Lanka (p. 53). The learners’ two top self-reported reasons for enrolling in LINC included to improve English for daily life (47.1%) and to get a job (33.6%; p. 55).

In Alberta, Bow Valley College (BVC) and NorQuest College (NQC) are the two primary providers of LINC programming in the province. This program takes numerous forms: full-time day study, part-time evening study, home study, and community-based programming. Both colleges offer seven levels of LINC. In 2013–2014, LINC students made up about 20% of the total credit enrolment at each college. School districts, community organizations, settlement agencies, and private-sector trainers also offer LINC programming. Current CIC policy gives learners an opportunity to choose a training provider.

English-language education for newcomers has been a core component of the program mandate of both BVC and NQC since they were founded as Alberta Vocational Centres in 1965. Today they are comprehensive community colleges that serve Calgary and region (BVC) and Edmonton and region (NQC). Their current program mandate includes English language learning (ELL)/English as a Second Language (ESL); academic upgrading; and certificate and diploma programs in health, human services, and business.

## Purpose

Acquisition of one of Canada's official languages is a central component of newcomers' successful settlement and integration into Canadian society (CIC, 2010). The settlement process for immigrants refers to their initial challenges of securing housing, finding a job, undertaking language training, enrolling children in school, making friends, meeting family needs, and obtaining information about services and community resources. Integration refers to a long-term process of achieving proficiency in one official language, developing a career path that reflects previous experience and education, establishing social and cultural connections within an ethnocultural community and the larger society, accessing needed programs and services, and participating in Canadian institutions. Within a pluralistic society, integration is a two-way process, with both newcomers and the receiving society engaged in a process of mutual adaptation (CIC, 2001). As immigrants become integrated, they create social capital for themselves and their communities. Social capital is defined "as the resources available to individuals and groups through their social connections to [individuals] and communities" (Morrow-Howell & Gehlert, 2012, p. 207). Research has demonstrated that "communities endowed with a rich stock of social networks and civic associations will be in a stronger position to confront vulnerability, . . . resolve disputes, . . . and/or take advantage of new opportunities" (Woolcock, n.d., p. 3).

Although researchers have conducted numerous studies (e.g., Anisef, Sweet, & Adamuti-Trache, 2008; Couton, 2014; Kilbride & D'Arcangelo, 2002) on aspects of immigrants' settlement and integration in Canada, a limited number of researchers have investigated settlement and integration from the perspective of immigrants. More specifically, in the context of this study, there are few, if any, studies of adult immigrants' English language learning experiences that directly reflect their voices. The purpose of this research was

to develop an understanding of the experiences and perceptions of LINC learners in colleges, with particular attention to their

- ◆ perceptions of a college learning environment,
- ◆ utilization of learner support services and campus activities,
- ◆ informal and formal engagement with the college community, and
- ◆ perceptions of their college experiences in relation to settlement and integration.

## Research Questions

The following questions guided the research:

1. What are LINC learners' perceptions of their college experiences in relation to the reasons they chose to study English at a college?
2. How do LINC learners experience the learner support services and the campus activities provided by colleges? What are their perceptions of those experiences (e.g., counselling, admissions and registration, financial aid, career services, accessibility services, library, tutoring)?
3. How do LINC learners experience student life on campus outside the classroom? What are their perceptions of those experiences (e.g., interactions with other students, volunteer and student leadership activities, job fairs, and social activities)?
4. From the perspective of learners, how have their college experiences facilitated their settlement in and integration into Canada?



# DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION

This study has investigated LINC learners' experiences and perceptions as students at BVC and NQC, with a particular focus on their choice of training provider, utilization of learner support services and campus activities, and college experiences in relation to their lives as newcomers in Canada. The quantitative data in Chapters 4 and 5 present a demographic profile of more than 90% of LINC 4–7 learners at each college, students' rates of utilization of services and activities, and utilization rates for individual services and activities. The qualitative data in each chapter create an in-depth portrait of students' experiences and perceptions.

This chapter explores the meaning that can be drawn from the findings chapters. First, eight themes emerged from the data. The discussion of the themes remains as true to the students' voices as possible while the researcher minimized his interpretations. These themes arose from the researcher's consideration of the research questions and immersion in the data as researcher, coder, data analyst, and author of the findings

chapters. Second, the researcher explores a number of recommendations for LINC programming that reflect his interpretations of the data. Wherever possible, he relates the themes and recommendations to the literature. Third, a short conclusion is presented.

The findings, discussion, and recommendations are drawn from interviews with 10 participants from each college whom the researcher selected according to purposeful sampling. Although the findings and discussion lead to rich and in-depth understandings of the students' experiences and perceptions, they cannot necessarily be generalized to other settings. Readers must first make a judgment based on similarity of institutions, programs, and students before transferring these understandings to another setting (Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000).

*For detailed findings, please see full report at [centre.bowvalleycollege.ca/CIC-LINC-report](http://centre.bowvalleycollege.ca/CIC-LINC-report)*

## Discussion

### 1. Given the range of LINC providers in Calgary and Edmonton, the students' primary reason for choosing to study at BVC and NQC was the reputation of the colleges, which largely reflects the input of family and friends.

CIC has given newcomers the opportunity to choose their LINC language provider since 2014. Nineteen of the 20 interviewees cited reputation as a major or sole reason for choosing BVC or NQC. Almost all had learned about the colleges through family and friends, many of whom had studied at the colleges. When they spoke about the colleges' reputations, they mentioned quality of instruction, learner support services, learner success, facilities, and pathways to postsecondary programs at their colleges or other postsecondary institutions.

### 2. The students expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their LINC program at the colleges when the researcher asked them directly and when they discussed various aspects of their student experience.

LINC programming and the college experience in the eyes of the students were fostering their language development, facilitating their understanding of life in Canada, assisting them in planning educational and career pathways, and laying the groundwork for future labor-market success through preparation for career programs.

The students were future and goal oriented and recognized the role of college staff in areas such as career services, settlement services, and student navigation in helping them to meet their current needs and plan for their educational and career futures. They were confident that their progress in English would lead them to their goals, and, in addition, they recognized that classroom instruction on specific aspects of settlement and integration was relevant to their futures.

These findings parallel CIC's (2010) evaluation of LINC. Ninety-one percent of the LINC students surveyed rated instruction as good or excellent, and 92% rated instruction about Canada as good or excellent. Although it is not always possible to compare quantitative and qualitative findings, the CIC survey respondents gave "reaching learner goals" a "very helpful" rating (77%) that is lower than the comments from the BVC and NQC students would suggest (p. 57).

The students reported very positive experiences in interacting with students from other countries. They described friendships that they had made, some talked about learning about other cultures, and several talked about learning personally meaningful ideas from the other cultures. Several made a conscious choice to interact with students from other countries so that they would have more opportunity to use English.

### 3. The students effectively utilized learner support services and campus activities to advance their learning, meet immediate needs, plan for their future, and connect with the college community.

The students' utilization of services and participation in activities ranged from a high of 92.3% to a low of 17.3%. At BVC, 62% of the students utilized 6 or more of the 20 services and activities. At NQC, 87% of the students utilized 6 or more of the 23 services and activities. Participants talked about each of the services and activities they had used, and offered comments about the benefits each one provided. Comparisons between colleges are not meaningful because the services and activities vary in nature, organization, and delivery.

The interviewer asked the interviewees about their utilization of each service and activity. Tables 4.5 and 5.5 present the data. Almost all of the students indicated satisfaction with each service or activity. The libraries and services related to settlement and



educational planning received the most positive endorsements at both colleges. Two participants who were professionals in their home countries stated that they would appreciate more assistance with re-establishing their careers in Canada.

There are no established frameworks to guide the interpretation of the utilization rates reported in Tables 4.2 and 5.2. Not all students need some of the services—accessibility and health services. In all likelihood, some students recognized that they do not need a particular service—for example, transfer credit fair—at this point in their language education but would use it at a future time. Some students indicated that time constraints limited their utilization of services. Several services are part of the ELL programs at BVC, and students are more likely to have direct contact with them. As a general pattern, utilization is highest of the services and activities that are core to students' current LINC program and planning for future education and careers. Some services at NQC are offered at the downtown campus only. The students at both colleges are not members of the Students' Associations because CIC policy does not permit association fees to be charged to LINC students. Although they may participate in the associations' activities, their lack of membership status might reduce their involvement.

Lum and Grabke (2012) surveyed 426 "recent immigrant adult students" (p. 3) enrolled at five Ontario community colleges and universities and reported the utilization rates for 22 common services. They observed that "only the libraries have any measure of consistent use. . . . Tutoring, counseling and mentoring all ranked considerably lower, which might seem counterintuitive, given the challenges [that the survey respondents] identified" (p. 31). Again ready comparison is not possible because of variations in services; however, there appears to be a general pattern of lower utilization at the Ontario institutions than at BVC and NQC.

CIC's (2010) program evaluation of LINC revealed that the provision of services to learners varies significantly from provider to provider. Less than 70% provided settlement services, personal counselling, career counselling, and help with finding a job. Thirty-eight percent of the trainers offered accessibility services. The evaluation points out that providers do not necessarily offer these services to every class (p. 10).

#### **4. The students unequivocally endorsed their instructors as persons and as instructors.**

Although the researcher has partially addressed this theme in the others, it is important to recognize the students' endorsement of their instructors at both the interpersonal level and the pedagogical level. They described the instructors as highly professional, sincere, helpful, flexible, and willing to help with individual learning and personal needs. Students spoke about instructors using novel and varied teaching strategies, a systematic approach to instruction, and effective classroom organization and time management. In addition, they said instructors gave them choices in their learning and guided them in learning how to learn.



Several students compared LINC instructors with instructors in their home countries. By way of contrast, the students welcomed BVC and NQC instructors' inclusiveness, approachability, focus on individualization, informality balanced with professionalism, and dedication to instructional effectiveness.

Janis (2012) interviewed six adult ESL learners at a community college and found that "teachers were regarded with positive accolades and were assumed to have immense benefits for my participants' learning experience" (p. 31). Ross-Gordon and Brown-Haywood (2000) supported this finding in their study of adult African-American students enrolled at a university. They found that the participants valued teaching effectiveness, relationships with their teachers, and faculty members' sensitivity to individual differences. In Lum and Grabke's (2012) study in Ontario, which was introduced earlier, they indicated that the "participants reported that their experiences in the classroom and with their professors varied in quality" (p. 34).

**5. Although measures of socioemotional climate were not a part of the study, the students' comments consistently suggested that they felt secure, supported, and respected. They believed that the LINC program and the colleges are committed to their long-term success in Canada.**

Some students described nervousness or confusion during their first week in the program, but those feelings were quickly replaced with feelings of comfort. They said that their instructors made them feel welcome, comfortable, and confident. They often described the instructors as "friendly," and the instructors utilized various instructional approaches to welcome new students and build a classroom

community. They also consciously facilitated a classroom environment of mutual respect, with particular emphasis on cultural diversity. The availability of settlement-related services and the professional abilities of the services' staff helped students with both their immediate needs and their long-term planning. The students considered their peers welcoming.

**6. Despite the many challenges that permanent residents and refugees have encountered and the challenges that lie ahead, the students were motivated, optimistic, and confident about their future.**

All participants had left behind family and friends and immigrated to a country with a language new to them and a culture somewhat or substantially different from the culture of their home countries. All faced the challenges of mastering English and establishing themselves in the Canadian labor market. Nine of the 20 participants are refugees, or they had experienced some dislocation in their home countries. Many expressed confidence that Canada would be a good home for them and their families because of the educational opportunities, job opportunities, various supports for newcomers, and social stability and peace. Similarly,





many welcomed living in an inclusive society with increased personal freedom and choice. Two participants talked about the personal stress and anxiety that resulted from the challenges of finding a professional career opportunity in one case and the loss of profession, family ties, and professional identity in the other case.

The findings from several research studies suggest that the participants' satisfaction with life in Canada is common among immigrants. Drawing on data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, Houle and Schellenberg (2010) stated that "four years after landing, about three-quarters . . . [of the participants] were satisfied, or very satisfied, with life in Canada, and a comparable portion said their expectations had been met or exceeded" (p. 29). Drawing on the same data, Schellenberg and Maheux (2008) summarized what immigrants like about Canada into four categories: "social environment, opportunity, safety and security, and climate and physical environment" (Table 2). Some specific items within those four categories include "people's attitudes, cultural diversity, educational opportunities for self and family, employment opportunities, safety for self and family, peace, political stability." More recent data from the National Settlement Outcomes Survey point to "strong successes" with "satisfaction with life in Canada and attachment to Canada, language outcomes (for those in the labour force), meeting life essentials/basic needs, understanding rights and responsibilities" (Kumar & Wong, 2013, p. 7).

The participants' experiences as LINC students have contributed to their confidence and optimism despite the challenges. They saw themselves becoming proficient in English. They were very satisfied with the quality of their LINC experience. They learned student-

success strategies. They worked with college staff to identify career goals and appropriate educational pathways. They made friends with fellow LINC students from other cultures. They were learning about the Canadian way of life.

### **7. According to the data from interviews with the students, most are involved in what can be considered a second phase of the settlement process.**

Sixteen of the participants had lived in Canada from one to three years. Upon arrival, agencies such as Calgary Catholic Immigration Services in Calgary and Catholic Social Services in Edmonton, as well as family and friends, supported their initial settlement needs. They found housing and medical care and learned their way around the city. Their children were established in school and daycare, and they had made friends in their ethnic communities and neighborhoods. Some had worked at short-term or part-time jobs, but at job levels lower than their eventual goals. Six of the 20 had spouses who were established in careers or in university education.

The 16 participants are now focused on language acquisition for life and work in Canada and further study. Three hoped to return to their home-country professions once they acquired English proficiency. Eleven planned to undertake a postsecondary career program at their college or another institution in their city. Two of the 11 had chosen career programs at a lower level than their home-country professions. One of the 16 will retire or work as an assistant in her field, and a second person plans to work after this LINC term.

The participants' plans for further language training and career education reflect common patterns among Canada's immigrants. Adamuti-Trache and Sweet (2010), drawing on data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada, reported that:

***At time of arrival, approximately two-thirds of new immigrants had plans to take education or training, and 67% of intendees had actually started education within six months of arrival. Of those who participated, some 20% were enrolled in education leading to a degree or diploma, approximately 10% in job-related training, and over 70% in language courses (p. 4).***

In addition to language acquisition and planning for educational and career pathways, the students talked about learning general life skills such as goal setting and learning about the Canadian way of life, which can be broken down into two components. The first is the cultural norms relevant to their day-to-day life and success in the labor market; the second can be described as more institutional, including Canadian government and history.

The National Settlement Outcomes Survey (Kumar & Wong, 2013) identified the following settlement outcomes:

- ◆ Understand life in Canada
- ◆ Know how to access public services and community resources
- ◆ Have the official language skills to function in Canadian society and the labour market
- ◆ Have knowledge of the Canadian work environment and are aware of local labour markets
- ◆ Have the skills to become employed in their chosen occupation
- ◆ Are connected to social and economic networks, as well as the broader community (p. 2).

The interview data give some indication of the participants' development in relation to these outcomes. Through LINC, they were learning about life in Canada, including public services and resources. All have developed the essential skills to manage shopping, housing, transportation, and schooling for their children as well as to acquire health services. Their coursework on topics such as financial management supported these experiences. They were developing language skills and an understanding of Canadian workplace culture. They all had plans for their future occupations. Almost all identified friendship networks within their ethnic communities and neighborhoods. Two attended Christian churches, and one attended his mosque. Two have done volunteer work. Nine have some Canadian work experience. At the same time, the participants' processes of becoming established in the labour market and participating in the political, cultural, and organizational life of the larger community are very much in progress.

The scholarly literature on Canadian immigration emphasizes newcomers' development of social capital, which is defined as "the resources available to individuals and groups through their social connections to [individuals] and communities" (Morrow-Howell & Gehlert, 2012, p. 207). Data from the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada indicate that 87% of the respondents indicated that they had relatives and friends "in Canada at the time of arrival, and this fact is reflected in their decision to choose to immigrate to Canada, their choice of place of residence in Canada, and their sources of settlement assistance" (Kunz, 2005, p. 54). Newcomers turn to friends and family when they need assistance to "access health services, find housing, further education, [and] find a job" (p. 55). Nineteen of the 20 participants talked about friends and family who had influenced their choice to attend BVC or NQC. Although housing was not a particular focus of the interviews, some



participants mentioned that friends had helped them to find housing. A number of interviewees spoke of college personnel who had assisted them with finding daycare placements, understanding government correspondence, and identifying and accessing services in the community. Most important, 19 participants had developed educational and career pathways with the support of college advisors.

#### **8. The students are gaining an understanding of the Canadian way of life generally and of cultural diversity and multiculturalism more specifically.**

The students talked about learning Canadian cultural norms with regard to, for example, greetings, eye contact, and punctuality, as well as functional areas such as interviewing, medical appointments, and school visits.

They reported being comfortable with diversity and welcoming the opportunity to learn about other cultures from their peers. They reported that their instructors emphasized mutual respect and perspectives that are best labeled cultural relativism. Several students said they were encouraged to understand cultural differences in the context of the culture rather than from their own cultural perspective. Several mentioned moving from discomfort to comfort with a particular behavior or practice once they saw it in that light.

Cultural diversity is particularly significant because some students came from culturally homogenous societies and some came from countries characterized by ethnic and religious conflict. Most were encountering widespread diversity for the first time in their classrooms and on campus. This topic is also important for newcomers in a society with a constitutional commitment to multiculturalism and equality.

In addition, the students' appreciation for cultural diversity reflects the colleges' commitment to intercultural competency as a core element of their college-wide learning outcomes. BVC's citizenship and intercultural competence outcome is defined as "the ability to examine assumptions and connections among beliefs, decisions, actions, and consequences from a variety of perspectives" (2015, p. 38) and NQC's inclusive culture outcome states that "Learners will appreciate the rich and diverse manner in which individuals from various backgrounds enhance our overall culture and environment" (n.d., n.p.).



## Recommendations

The eight themes presented above capture the central ideas that emerged from the research data. This section turns to recommendations drawn from this research relevant to the design and delivery of LINC programming at BVC and NQC. They constitute an interpretation of the data.

### **1. Students' strong satisfaction with LINC coupled with their belief that it is effective in meeting their needs, as the findings demonstrate, clearly indicate that BVC and NQC should continue their current LINC program delivery models.**

The researcher asked the interviewees about their reasons for choosing to study LINC at BVC or NQC and then asked them about their satisfaction in relation to their choice. The students reported making their choice on the basis of the college's reputation reflecting information they had received from family and friends. All interviewees reported a high level of satisfaction with their program and their college. Their individual comments can be summarized by the following indicators of program effectiveness: quality of instruction, development of English competency, relevance and accessibility of services, inclusiveness and welcoming campus climate, orientation to life in Canada, and assistance with long-term career and educational planning.

Several students had attended or their family members had attended LINC programs that other providers offered and volunteered comparisons with those programs when they talked about their satisfaction with their college. They valued the quality of instruction, the more academic orientation of the college environment, the emphasis on educational and career pathways, and the availability of computer and language labs.

### **2. Students' positive experiences with learner support services and activities, as the findings demonstrate, clearly indicate that BVC and NQC should continue to provide a broad range of services and activities and enhance those services and activities where feasible.**

Each college provides 20 or more services and activities. The services are designed to support students' learning (e.g., Computer Commons), educational and career pathways (e.g., Career Services), settlement and integration (e.g., Settlement Advisor), and well-being (e.g., Counseling Services). The activities offer students opportunities for further involvement in the life of the college and the community. The interaction of LINC programming with college-wide services and activities creates an integrated learning system for students.



Many of the services and activities identified are offered to all students at the colleges. Additionally, specializations have been added to the service to effectively meet the needs of English-language learners. For example, library staff at both colleges assist LINC learners with selecting materials appropriate to their language level. Some of the services and activities (e.g., learning success officers at BVC and Coping in Canada workshops at NQC) are specifically designed to assist LINC learners with education and career planning and settlement challenges. These value-added services have a strong impact on the overall student experience at the colleges.

Survey data presented in the findings indicate high utilization of services such as the library, career and educational planning, computer commons, tutoring, and settlement advisors. The questionnaire data measured utilization rates, and the interview data provided learners' perceptions of the significance of the services and activities. They indicated that the services and activities helped them with, for example, personal and family issues, financial challenges, career choice, and language development. All of the services and activities directly support CIC's settlement outcomes.

A number of enhancements might be possible including partnerships with Students' Associations, student clubs, community agencies, and community organizations. These partnerships could enhance several services, identified below, among others. Although LINC students are not members of the students' associations because of CIC funding guidelines, greater involvement with activities sponsored by the associations would support learners' language development and cultural orientation. Newcomers could benefit from a variety of health

education workshops sponsored by health services at the colleges or community agencies. Service clubs and professional organizations might be willing to host social or career-related events for students. The particular needs of immigrant professionals are addressed in a subsequent recommendation.

### **3. As public postsecondary institutions, BVC and NQC should continue to maximize the benefits of Alberta's integrated postsecondary learning system for LINC learners.**

Postsecondary institutions offer numerous pathways to successful community and labour force participation for newcomers. LINC students at BVC and NQC can progress to more advanced ESL programs, occupation specific language training, academic upgrading, and one- and two-year career programs at their colleges. In addition, learners have access to a broad range of postsecondary programs at all credential levels at Alberta's colleges, polytechnics, and universities. When newcomers choose to take LINC at BVC or NQC, they can access readily available information and supports as they plan their post-LINC steps to workforce integration. Counsellors and career planners at the colleges advise learners of the full spectrum of opportunities that are available to them in their cities and the province.

Sixteen interviewees had developed educational and a career paths beyond LINC with the assistance of college staff. They spoke of further English study after LINC, academic upgrading if needed, a postsecondary program, and then career entry. Two students without fully developed plans said they planned to return to their home-country professions, a third intended to work before further English study, and the fourth planned to work as an assistant rather than as a professional in her field.



This planning process supports the settlement and integration processes as CIC (2010) has defined them, and it is also consistent with the policy position of Alberta Advanced Education and Technology (2007; now Alberta Innovation and Advanced Education) that “the system must work to ensure that pathways are clearly understood by the learner, [and] there are opportunities for progression from certificate to diploma to degree programs” (p. 14).

The postsecondary system is one pathway to the labour market for newcomers with its diverse program and service offerings. Alberta Human Services offers a second pathway with funding support, labour market services, and vocational training programs. The colleges, reflecting their access mandate, offer employment-focused programs and services funded by the ministry. In addition, the ministry funds employment, training, and career services for newcomers. Alberta Works funding gives students access to further language training including occupation specific language training as well as career programming. While students are enrolled in LINC, they are able to access support services to determine their eligibility for and plan the next steps required for workforce integration.

BVC and NQC, as members of a learning community that works to meet the priorities of the federal government and the provincial government, are uniquely positioned to foster dialogue among postsecondary institutions as well as Alberta Human Services, CIC, professional organizations, and community agencies regarding the best mix of services needed to support LINC learners’ progression from language training to career preparation and workforce integration.

#### **4. Although the current LINC model combined with postsecondary supports creates a strong foundation for all newcomers, additional learning opportunities would benefit immigrants who wish to return to their professions in Canada.**

Internationally educated professionals face a major challenge in obtaining employment commensurate with their prior education and experience. BVC and NQC provide LINC students with services that assist them in identifying pathways to their professions. Nevertheless, additional supports are needed. Six of the participants had been professionals in their home countries. Three wanted to return to their professions in Canada. One of the three is an engineer who will pursue the Alberta engineering association’s process for the licensure of internationally educated engineers. The other two are in professions without a clearly defined entry path. The fifth person expressed no interest in returning to her profession in Canada because of the time required to become a professor in Canada. She plans to take a one-year career program. The sixth person expressed an interest in working as an assistant in her field.

Research has shown that internationally educated professionals face significant difficulties in becoming licensed in Canada (Wayland, 2006a, 2006b). The barriers include a lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experience, a lack of relevant Canadian experience, limited or no opportunities to obtain Canadian prelicensure practical experience, a lack of opportunities to learn English as the profession requires, and interprovincial variations in the licensure processes. Programs such as BVC’s Corporate Readiness Training Program assist newcomers with preparing for several regulated professions and several unregulated professions and occupations. The LINC Volunteer course at NQC provides students with hands-on experience in the Canadian workforce.

Newcomers who are unable to re-enter their profession in a timely manner would benefit from the development of a new career path. Employment and Social Development Canada (2015) has advanced the concept of alternative careers for newcomers “who are unsuccessful in the licensing process” (p. 17). The panel recommends that licensing bodies be mandated to advise newcomers of “a related career that best fits their skills and experience, or refer them to an appropriate organization for this service” (p. 17).

As an example of newcomers who pursued alternative careers, Türegün (2013) studied 158 immigrants in Ontario who had not been able to enter their original professions and who, through a variety of processes, launched new careers as settlement workers, which gave them an opportunity to draw upon their postsecondary education and previous professional experience.

The four participants in this study without a clearly defined entry path to a professional career and others like them could benefit from individualized coaching, which would help them to plan for alternative careers in Canada that would utilize their previous learning and experience.

#### **5. BVC and NQC should continue to leverage the opportunities of a postsecondary environment to foster interaction among LINC learners and mainstream students.**

The interviewees spoke about their interactions with their fellow LINC students and welcomed opportunities to use English as a common language and learn about their cultures. Some of the services and activities (e.g., intercultural centre, job fairs) offer LINC learners opportunities to interact with mainstream students.

As comprehensive institutions with a broad program mandate and a large and diverse student population, BVC and NQC offer numerous opportunities for LINC students to develop social connections, advance their English skills, and learn about Canadian culture through interactions with other college students. The colleges can maximize this potential by developing structured activities that bring together LINC learners and college students from other program areas. Some possible activities include coffee club conversations or more structured weekly activities that have a topical focus and combine language development and cultural orientation. Overall, these types of activities will further develop and enhance the inclusive culture that students from both colleges reported.

The design and sponsorship of such activities could draw on the language development expertise of the LINC faculty and the expertise of the intercultural centres at both colleges. Volunteer students who have been screened and trained could serve as facilitators.

The mainstream students who participate can reap significant benefits. As facilitators they will receive valuable training and experience in facilitation. Participating mainstream students along with LINC students will develop cross-cultural understanding that will be an important resource for their citizenship and careers.

**6. BVC and NQC should build upon their effective career pathway programming and services to enhance career exploration opportunities for LINC learners.**

Both colleges offer LINC learners extensive career development services. These include resume preparation, training in interview skills, job search processes, job fairs, guest speakers, orientation to Canadian workplace culture, and planning for educational pathways in relation to career goals. These services are readily available to students; most are offered in class or small group settings. As a result, 16 of the 20 interviewees had developed educational and career pathways.

Although LINC students have utilized the existing services and developed career goals, they are selecting careers with only limited direct information about and exposure to careers in the Canadian environment and to Canadian workplace culture. To meet their needs, additional services would have to be targeted to individuals or small groups. These services should be offered outside of the LINC instructional day and be appropriate to the language level of the learners.

The initial approach to enhancing these services should include the identification of existing services from and possible partnerships with CIC, Alberta Human Services, and community agencies. Working from this initial process, the partners could develop innovative strategies to support newcomers' labour market integration beginning with pre-arrival information.

**7. Further research should be undertaken to understand learners' progression from LINC to postsecondary education and careers as well as additional dimensions of their settlement and integration experiences.**

The students who participated in this study face one or two major transitions before they become established in the workforce. Some will transition directly from English-language training to the workforce. Most plan to transition to a postsecondary program and then enter the workforce.

The overall purpose of further research should be to understand students' LINC and college experiences in relation to their subsequent settlement and integration transitions. As a first step, periodic follow-up research could be conducted with the 20 students who participated in this study. A larger longitudinal study could involve gathering baseline data from all participating LINC students at BVC and NQC with subsequent data collection for upwards of four years.

This study suggests further research related to cultural diversity and Canadian multiculturalism is required. Data reported in the findings chapters indicate that the LINC program at both colleges provided learners with substantial intercultural education and that the learners had internalized attitudes and values related to multiculturalism. Further research could explore learners' understanding of and experiences with cultural diversity in relation to their LINC program as they enter the workforce and become more engaged in the larger society.



## Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences and perceptions of LINC learners at BVC and NQC with particular focus on choice of college, life as a student, utilization of learner support services and campus activities, and settlement and integration. LINC learners at both colleges reported have chosen their college based on its reputation as conveyed by family and friends. All expressed very positive satisfaction with their choice of college and cited reasons that included quality of instruction and the services provided. The participants from BVC had used an average of 7.7 services (out of 20), and those from NQC had used an average of 12 services (out of 23). Interviewees talked about the services they valued and these included, among others, resume preparation, information about college career programs, tutorial support, specialized library resources, the computer commons, and individualized career and educational planning. They said that their college experience of developing English proficiency, planning for education and careers, and learning about daily life in Calgary/ Edmonton had assisted them as newcomers. The students articulated what they had learned in class about the Canadian way of life. Their responses included cultural norms, functional interactions such as school visits, and legal obligations. The interviewees spoke very positively

about cultural diversity in their classrooms and reported having learned about other cultures. Their comments on diversity reflected classroom instruction on mutual respect and multiculturalism.

This study demonstrates the value of listening to the voice of learners and newcomers. Doing so can help ESL researchers and educators understand lived experiences that are not our own. We can learn about the personal transition that each individual undertakes as a part of the settlement process. We can understand how they perceive our postsecondary institutions and our society. We can appreciate their needs, priorities, and goals. When required, we can adapt programming and services to better respond to this learner population. In this case, the process of gaining an understanding validates both the worth of the LINC program for newcomers and the particular model of LINC that BVC and NQC deliver.



