

A decade in the making: A review of LINC to Work programming at Conestoga LINC

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Background

In 2013, as part of the response to the ongoing emphasis on employability training for newcomers to Canada, Conestoga LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) created a LINC to Work class. For over a decade, Conestoga LINC faculty have been instructing student-focused LINC to Work lessons on employment-related information, once a week for 3 hours in the morning from 9AM–12PM. The person who teaches the LINC to Work class is usually someone other than the main teacher who teaches the other 4 mornings each week. To aid the LINC to Work teachers, specific module banks were created with themes such as resume writing, interview skills, and job searching techniques to teach within the employment unit. The employment focused class has been one of the distinguishing features of the Conestoga LINC program and there was a lot of pride in being able to offer this to learners.

Each year, Conestoga LINC reviews their programming and identifies strengths and areas of improvement. It was during this Annual Program Reflection (APR) exercise in June 2023, that LINC to Work came under the microscope. There was an indication that the LINC to Work classes may be an area in need of review. Staff and faculty reported that students were not engaged or interested in LINC to Work classes. The faculty also reported that LINC to Work class attendance was lower compared to the other days of the week, as this class may be perceived as less important than the main class. After 10 years of offering this class, it made sense to evaluate the effectiveness of LINC to Work to ensure its validity. A small committee was formed to discuss how to go about this in a methodical way.

First, we developed questions about the LINC to Work model:

- What were/are the theoretical underpinnings, best practices, or research findings supporting our LINC to Work programming model?
- Are LINC to Work classes valued by Conestoga LINC learners?



- Is attendance lower in LINC to Work classes compared to the main classes?

Is there a need to conduct research on this topic?

These questions led the committee to delve further into discussion. They discussed benefits of LINC to Work classes as well as the objectives of the class which is to get as many newcomers working as soon as possible in Canada.

The LINC to Work program offers a range of benefits designed to support clients in their job search and professional development. It assists clients with resume writing and interview skills, teaches employment-related vocabulary and conversation strategies, and familiarizes them with Canadian work culture, values, and norms. Additionally, the program imparts transferable skills and educates clients on health and safety issues and practices, ensuring they are well-prepared for the Canadian workplace.

The challenges, however, continued to resurface starting with the perception that LINC to Work classes have poor attendance. Anecdotes of learners who did not attend classes because they felt they did not need a job in Canada were brought to the discussion. Another challenge, due to continuous intake, was that LINC classes may see new sets of students in their classes regularly. The difficulty in setting goals and getting assessments done in LINC to Work classes when faculty only see the students once a week was obvious.

In addition to listing the challenges, other suggestions were presented. For example, it was suggested that the name and focus of the course change, or that LINC to Work class be more than one day a week. It was also suggested that LINC to Work class be removed altogether. Ideas of citizenship classes or computer classes were brought forward as replacements for LINC to Work classes. Incorporating volunteer opportunities for the learners and including more guest speakers were other suggestions for innovative programming.

The most important question that should be explored became clear: *Should Conestoga LINC continue with LINC to Work classes?*

Research Begins

To come to an informed decision, the committee decided to conduct an action research project. Our process involved four stages: planning, acting, observing, and reflecting as illustrated by presenters Patricia Chandler et al. (2014).

Action research: Conestoga LINC's process

- Planning: We hosted a brainstorming session with a committee and discussed research process and guiding questions.



- Acting: We conducted 2 sets of data collection periods (before and after), including faculty and learner surveys, attendance data, and PD sessions.
- Observing: We set up an MS Teams chat to monitor progress and challenges.
- Reflecting: We compared 2023-2024 data and wrote a review.

We started the planning stage in June 2023. We identified potential issues from the Annual Program Review (Conestoga LINC Program Instructors, 2023) (See Appendix). We collected feedback from SATS (Student Appraisal of Teachers). We also collected the attendance data from February 2023 to May 2023 for all the LINC to Work classes in our program. Then, we created a student survey with opinion questions about LINC to Work. Results from the early 2023 attendance data were inconclusive; some classes saw better attendance for the LINC to Work classes than the regular classes while other classes experienced the opposite. Overall, there was no evidence to prove that LINC to Work classes across the program had a uniform or significant lack of attendance as reported in the Annual Program Review.

Here is a snapshot of the attendance for February 2023 across 3 LINC sites:

February				February				February			
Average				Average				Average			
Class	Regular classes	L2W classes	Difference	Class	Regular classes	L2W classes	Difference	Class	Regular classes	L2W classes	Difference
LIT	6	5	1	LIT	7	8	-1	LIT	6	6	0
CLB 1/2	11	10	1	CLB 1/2	11	8	3	CLB 1/2	11	11	0
CLB 3/4	13	5	8	CLB 3/4	10	12	-2	CLB 3/4	15	9	6
CLB 5/6	9	7	2	CLB 5/6	11	10	1	CLB 5/6	16	12	4
CLB 7/8	11	10	1	CLB 7/8	5	5	0	CLB 7/8	11	11	0
	50	37			44	43			59	49	
	Difference	13			Difference	1			Difference	10	

Attendance date for February 2023

As illustrated, attendance is an issue for select classes only. There was speculation around rationalizing this data, but this further indicated that this was an area that could benefit from further attention and support.

An initial survey was sent to all learners across sites. The four questions on the survey are listed below:

1. Do you like LINC to Work classes (Why or why not?)
2. How does LINC to Work help you?
3. How can LINC to Work be better?
4. What other topics do you want to learn instead of LINC to Work?

The initial survey results showed that learners in general liked the LINC to Work classes, and they listed its numerous benefits like improving interview performance, building confidence in speaking in employment-



related situations, and understanding the Canadian workplace culture better. In terms of areas needing improvement, learners mentioned that adding more field trips, volunteer opportunities and guest speakers would be appreciated. Although they indicated a likeness for LINC to Work classes, learners also mentioned the desire to have focused classes on computer skills, financial literacy, and some job specific courses.

With such positive results, there was a debate on whether it would be useful to continue to follow the Action Research Plan in September 2023. We decided to continue the project to see if we could address the negative perception and reports from staff. We also wanted to have a record of the reasons “for” or “against” a decision to continue or discontinue LINC to Work programming. We also felt that after a decade of LINC to Work programming, a comprehensive review was timely.

Research continues

In September 2023, Conestoga LINC held a PD (Professional Development) where we outlined the benefits of LINC to WORK classes and had the attendees brainstorm ways to improve the program. The three areas that we wanted to focus on when teaching employment to LINC learners center around *building community*, *maintaining relevance*, and *encouraging conversation*. LINC to Work teachers were challenged to maintain a sense of community with their classes because they only saw them once a week. The main classroom teachers were asked to play a role in encouraging their learners to attend LINC to Work class and to spiral information as they try to integrate the relevance of LINC to Work lessons with the regular class. Working together with the main classroom teacher to spiral as much as possible would be the key. Spiraling themes, grammar, and vocabulary to create a seamless week of programming would require some additional communication, but would result in a strong sense of unity, community, and connectedness throughout the semester.

Incorporating volunteer opportunities into LINC to Work classes was another great idea that came up during the PD session. This would take much more planning, but the transferrable skills would be worth the effort. Many may not be looking for jobs, but learning to volunteer in Ontario could boost their confidence and citizen-involvement in English-speaking environments. After receiving so many enthusiastic suggestions, the meeting ended with plans to discuss this further the following month and share observations and findings once the research was complete.

After the meeting, a Microsoft Teams chat for LINC to Work instructors was set up in September 2023 to provide additional encouragement and support throughout the semester. We asked teachers to report on attendance and share best practices on that channel. Teachers shared ideas, best practices, concerns, and comments.



Here are some of the LINC to Work teachers' reflections shared on Teams during the months of September and October 2023.

I had an enthusiastic class.

Some students have never worked before, but they expressed their interest in finding a job in Canada.

They completed a survey by the end of the class. The feedback was positive.

They were a very motivated group of students and willing to learn about the Canadian workforce.

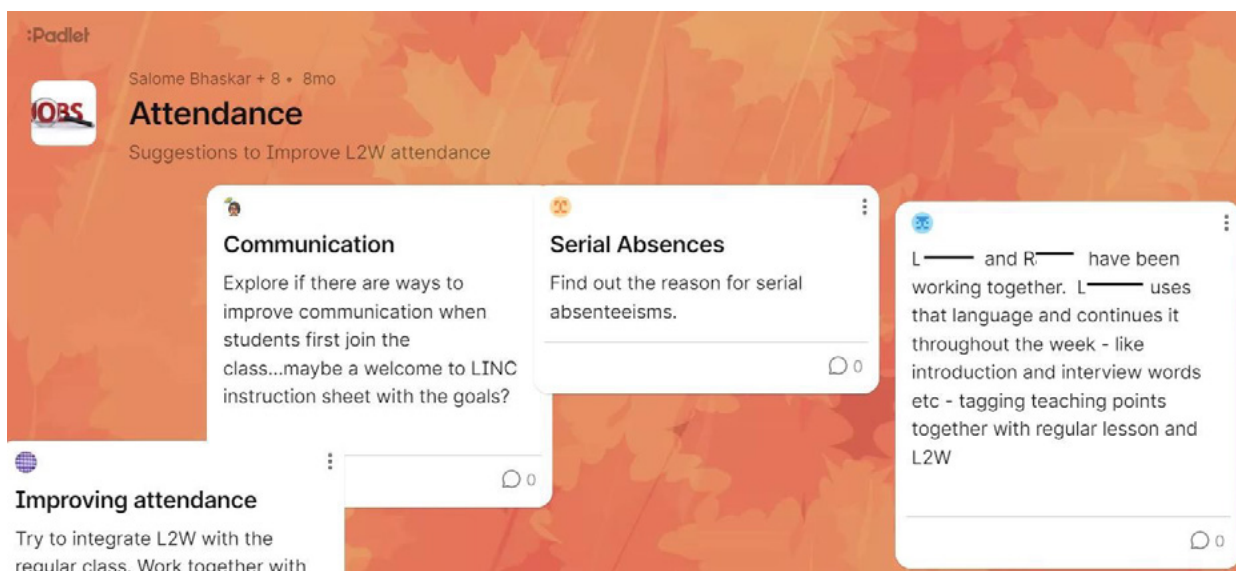
The students were engaged and eager to learn about job searching.

They all seem engaged, though there are a couple of them who have said they have no interest/intention of ever having a job interview in Canada.

Attendance is getting better, which is good!

During the faculty meeting in October, teachers were asked to provide feedback in a Padlet© on how to or how they are currently improving L2W attendance. Again, a key theme was the importance of cooperation between the main teacher and the LINC to Work teacher. One

respondent wrote: "A teacher wishes a great LINC TO WORK class the day before and asks the learners about what they did in LINC TO Work when she sees them again. She reinforces the usefulness of the language skills they are learning in the LINC TO Work class and talk how they can be used in many aspects of daily life as well." Other suggestions included providing "a welcome to LINC to Work class instruction sheet with the goals" and sending "an email a day or two before class to remind the students of the LINC TO WORK class schedule."



Sample of Padlet Activity during PD.

LINC to Work teachers who experienced low attendance were encouraged to communicate with their main classroom teachers and expand the scope of their lessons to include functional language. Teaching functional workplace English like giving instructions, asking for help, making small talk etc., is a good option for LINC to Work classes as these skills are not only important for work, but useful in our everyday lives. Teachers could find materials from the module bank, Elli.com©, Live Worksheets©, Lingua House©, and other materials in the resource area of the LINC center. This was a suggestion to ensure that they were meeting the needs of their learners and providing relevant lessons according to the LINC values of student-centered learning and needs-based programming as expressed by each class.

Observations

Backed with support from colleagues, administration and leadership, we were pleased to observe and learn the following through the Teams chat by the end of 2023.

- *L2W classes were going on without any major dips in attendance.*
- *Learners needed to hear that they are learning useful English in this class, irrespective of their career goals.*
- *Having assessments from this class as PBLA artifacts is a key factor for taking this class seriously.*
- *The involvement and interest shown for this class by the classroom teacher is an important boost for the learners.*
- *LINC to Work teacher feedback may indicate a shift in their overall perspective of the LINC to Work class to become more positive.*

Best practices identified

Moreover, LINC to Work teachers continued to send feedback about best practices and attendance information also via Teams. Here are some samples:

- *Varying activities has made the class interesting. I introduce more pictures, simulations, conversations, and dialogues.*
- *Introducing the various outcomes that we learn related to the jobs into other aspects of on customer life, involved all the learners and they all participated.*
- *Attendance in my online CLB (Canadian Language Benchmark) 5/6 class has also been consistent with 16 or 17 out of 20 students attending every week. The students are currently learning how*



to make direct and indirect request at work by applying modals of request and polite expressions to soften their requests to co-workers and supervisors. Students were given different scenarios and in the breakout rooms, they worked in small groups and practiced making requests with their classmates. They shared their dialogues with the rest of the class, and I provided feedback to the diverse groups. Students are enjoying this module and are actively participating in the class activities. A few students shared with me that they like the topic because they could use the expressions and modals of requests in different contexts beside making requests at work. Next week, the students will learn how to apply rising and falling intonations when making requests and how to politely refuse a request at work.

- Attendance was consistently good. There were only two absentees last week. Learners studied about taking inventory in a restaurant. The class conducted an inventory of the computer lab in groups and compared the results. It was a very engaging and interactive activity. Learners enjoyed it. The idea that all the workplace skills are real life skills for everyone, was emphasized.
- My 7/8 LINC to Work class has been great. Usually only 1 or 2 missing each week. There are 14 students on the list and consistently 12-13 come every Friday. We learned about describing skills (hard and soft) and then moved into resume writing in Canada. After completing resume writing, the students expressed interest on continuing with the next step of writing a cover letter. Only 1 student in this class had ever written a cover letter before, so this was a great topic to talk about. We began cover letters last week and students have been very engaged and active in these lessons. My class is Hyflex and now there are more in-person learners than online! It has been going very well for me.
- My CLB 1/2 LINC to Work class is doing very well. Attendance has been consistent most weeks; 18 out of 21 students attended class this past Monday. We have completed the module «Starting work in Canada» and students have chosen a new one already: «Understanding Job Ads». Students were able to upload their artifacts to their e-portfolios and have completed H5P's activities on Avenue.
- Attendance has stayed the same over the last few weeks. 15-16 out of 20 students attend 3/4 in-person classes.

Closing the loop

To wrap up the research, we repeated the 2023 data-collection process of the Action Plan in 2024. These surveys were done the same way as last year to compare them directly. We received and analyzed the results



to make an informed and well-documented decision as to whether we recommend the continuance of LINC to Work programming.

- We sent the same survey questions from the 2023 survey to our learners. The questions are below:
- Do you like LINC to Work classes? Why or why not?
- How does LINC to Work help you?
- How can LINC to Work be better?
- What other topics do you want to learn instead of LINC to Work?

We sent surveys to our faculty. The questions were inspired by the Annual Program Reflection questions in 2023.

- What is the goal of LINC2Work classes?
- Are we meeting the goals?
- What best practices did you try after our initial discussions on renewing L2W? (Classroom teacher’s involvement/ individual attention to learners’ needs/ introducing various activities or lessons)
- What were the results after following the best practices? Explain what you did and the results.

We collected attendance data for the same period as we did in 2023.

- The Learners’ survey showed once again that most learners liked the LINC to Work class. They listed the various uses/benefits of the class and provided additional feedback for the LINC to Work classes. Here are some sample responses:

Learner feedback on L2W benefits	Learner feedback on L2W and additional topics
<p><i>It helps me to be more communicative in different fields.</i></p> <p><i>It helps us with work safety environment.</i></p> <p><i>It helps to found better job.</i></p> <p><i>LINC to work helped me how to put my foot in the door.</i></p> <p><i>We learned new words about work and learned about the labor market in Canada.</i></p>	<p><i>Organize job fairs, networking events and workshops.</i></p> <p><i>It would be better if we had the chance to meet with the HR or recruitment manager or others to gain a better understanding.</i></p> <p><i>How to work on a computer</i></p> <p><i>Add some lessons about financial matters.</i></p> <p><i>I hope to learn English that I can actually use in life. How to deal with life’s unexpected situations.</i></p> <p><i>For</i></p> <p><i>example, how to handle a traffic violation or accident.</i></p>



The faculty survey showed that teachers in general are happy about the L2W classes and with varying degrees of motivation and encouragement, students understood the importance of attending this class. Faculty responses have improved since the last survey; however, there is still some concern for the small percentage of learners who have jobs and still do not attend these LINC to Work classes.

The attendance data showed that there is a small difference in attendance between the L2W classes and the regular classes in 2024 when compared to 2023. In February 2023, the differences in attendance with regards to the average number of absences among the 3 centers was 24. In the same month a year later, that number decreased to 14. Although it is known that there are many factors affecting the attendance, this is still considered a great improvement and may be attributed to some degree to the work being done with LINC to Work classes.

February				February				February			
Average				Average				Average			
Class	Regular classes	L2W classes	Difference	Class	Regular classes	L2W classes	Difference	Class	Regular classes	L2W classes	Difference
AM Lit	6	6	0	Lit AM	6	6	0	Literacy - AM	7	7	0
AM 1/2	12	12	0	AM 1/2 in-person	17	13	4	CLB 1/2 - AM	14	17	-3
AM 3/4	13	14	-1	AM 1/2 online	18	14	4	CLB 3/4 - AM	14	14	0
AM 5/6	14	15	-1	AM 3/4 in-person	15	14	1	CLB 5/6 - AM	15	9	6
AM 7/8	14	12	2	AM 3/4 online	16	14	2	CLB 7/8 - AM	15	11	4
	59	59		AM 5/6 inperson AM	12	11	1		65	58	
	Difference	0		5/6 Online AM	14	17	-3		Difference	7	
				5/6 Online AM	11	9	2				
				5/6 Online AM	12	11	1				
				7/8 inperson AM	11	9	2				
					132	118					
					Difference	14					

Attendance data for February 2024

Conclusion

In conclusion, we discovered that there were 3 main keys to re-energizing our LINC to Work classes:

- Provide support for LINC to Work faculty. The best practices shared by teachers on TEAMS serve as valuable encouragement to the LINC to Work instructors. This sense of camaraderie should enforce the importance of teaching employability skills to language learners.
- Request that main teachers collaborate with LINC to Work teachers when possible and that they encourage their learners to attend LINC to Work classes.
- Allow a broader range of material to be taught to address the needs of the class, thus demonstrating that skills and language related to employability are transferrable to other aspects of life.

With a focus on getting our learners working, we decided that there is a strong reason to keep the name



as *LINC to Work*. More work can be done to conduct a comprehensive literature review to benefit those supporting LINC to Work faculty to a greater extent, but all in all, we are happy to report that LINC to Work will continue to enhance the learning experience for our students. Our Action Research Plan has not only informed but strengthened our position in this decision.

References

- ATESL. (n.d.). *Skills and language for work*. ATESL Best Practices for Adult EAL and LINC Programming in Alberta [pdf summary]. ATESL. [ATESL Best Practices Skills and Language for Work.pdf](#)
- Chandler, P., Coffey, D., Collins, S., Cook, K., & Cooke, L. (2014). *EDP125 Action Research Assignment 2*. Slide Serve. <https://slideplayer.com/slide/8737787/>



Appendix

Annual Program Review – June 2023

Goal of L2W classes?

- It depends on the learners' goals. Certain groups aren't interested in L2W, and attendance could be better. In my opinion, 5/6 and 7/8 would benefit from more L2W classes.
- For higher level learners who are nearing completion of the program and planning to work in Canada, definitely!
- For some lower-level learners who have no plans to work in Canada because they are not quite there yet in how to organize and plan for their future, maybe not so much.
- In the past, I have had lower-level students ask for a 3-hours computer class, instead of L2W. Or, how about a Citizenship Class!
- L2W seems to generate an attendance issue that is concerning. Also, only morning classes get it. I polled my 5/6 students last week and they want more L2W. Also, several wanted more computer skills training (the YMCA programs do not offer childcare). Can L2W be threaded through all classes?
- I believe the goal is to prepare students for the workforce, but I don't know if it is meeting that purpose. I think at Stage 1, LINC to Work might not be the most effective use of time. In Stage 1, students don't have the language to find jobs in their field or much above entry level positions or factory positions. I've noticed that many students aren't planning on getting jobs (housewives, etc.) I also think the way it is set up isn't helpful. Once a week (with a different teacher) is a bit of a jarring breakup to a week and you need to spend so much time reviewing from the previous week. I know many students who consistently don't come on LINC to Workdays because it just doesn't feel useful to them.
- I think we have to ask ourselves as a program if learning English for work is what students want. I think if they did, they would choose it in the needs assessment. I rarely have students choose the employment theme.
- L2W has always been a difficult class because some learners enjoy it and find it very useful. Others choose not to come to class because it isn't useful for them. Attendance tends to be low on L2W days. I feel as though we need to rethink how it is done.
- I don't think the students are ready to work in the near future, most of them are stay-at-home-moms with young children and they are not getting to practice their English outside of class time, so their level is remaining quite low
- Preparing learners for work in Canada. Yes. Less because students are always requesting learning computer skills. Volunteering should be a major component of LINC to Work, with guest speakers, and local opportunities for them.
- The goal of L2W classes is meant to help students find jobs and learn about working life in Canada. I think this is essential. I have known many students who haven't wanted it, and skipped that day, but I have known many more who felt it was the most important class. Many students even in the lower levels want and need to find work in Canada. It's not easy, but L2W helps them find it. I think it's important.

- The goal is to help students communicate effectively in the workplace. However, more of our students are already working, or have no interest in working. Some students who have steady employment may not attend L2W classes because they may not understand the goal of the class. Can it be called something else? LINC for the Workplace or LINC Workplace Communication? This might help boost student interest.
- It is a big challenge to meet goals when you only have class once a week. You don't get the same students that attend classes, so you spend a lot of time reviewing and repeating the same materials again and again. Students do not enjoy L2W, and it is very difficult to comprehend in the lower levels. Many students do not attend L2W classes because they do not care for the subject matter.
- I think it is enough.
- In my opinion, LINC to Work classes are less efficient compared to teaching an employment module in a regular class. It's not easy to teach a class once a week: a lot of time is taken to review as students forget what was done the week before; it's harder to prepare students for assessments. Additionally, some students miss L2W classes each week because they are not interested in working at this point. I'd prefer to let students choose employment modules instead of teaching them L2W once a week.
- The goal of L2W classes is to teach learners how to look for jobs, write resumes, prepare for interviews and learn workplace related vocabulary so they can be successful in their new jobs. I believe we are meeting those goals. The afternoon students would benefit from having an L2W class.
- I think that LINC2Work classes are important. However, I think they would be more effective taught as a module rather than once a week. Students see it as a day off, and in the lower levels it is impossible to get anything done as a teacher because you constantly have to review since it's only once a week. I have taught LINC2Work as a module and it was overall WAY more effective. Students were able to work streamlined on the material rather than stopping and only doing it once a week. Trying to fill the gap with absences and review made it impossible to really move forward with the class once a week. However, I think the material is VERY important for the students.





Author Bio

My name is Salome Bhaskar, a professor, and Site Coordinator for the LINC Program at Conestoga College. I hold a Master's in English Literature, an M.Phil., and a B.Ed. Previously, I was a Lecturer at Nirmala College in India. After moving to Canada, I earned my TESL Certification and taught at Thames Valley District School. Since 2008, I have been dedicated to enhancing education at Conestoga College fostering student success and growth.

