



Reading Instruction and Learners’ Needs in LINC Level 1-3 Classes

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Research Context

- According to 2006 census data (Statistics Canada, 2008), immigrants accounted for 1 in 5 Canadians; between 1999-2008, the number of Permanent Residents with less than 9 yrs of education doubled from 3,703 => 6,702
- From 2003-2008, the number of refugees increased by 6 % (CIC, 2009a)
- CIC (2009b) also found that immigration category influenced progress with lower level clients requiring more time to complete LINC Levels; lower LINC levels contain more refugee and family class immigrants; e.g. LINC L1: Fam=351 hrs, SW= 301 hrs, Ref=459 hrs; LINC L3: Fam=342 hrs, SW:297 hrs, Ref=425 hrs (national average)
- Infante (2000) correlated the number of years of education with first language literacy levels, finding: 7yrs of education = basic literacy skills 12+ yrs of education = strong literacy skills
- Burnaby (1989) identified individuals with low levels of education and first language literacy skills as ‘at-risk’
- Many learners with literacy needs are placed into mainstream LINC classes (Verma, 2004)
- 70 % of literacy classes are multi-level classes combining literacy and non-literacy clients (Jangles Productions, 2006)

Research Questions

- Does the reading instruction of these instructors reflect evidence-based practices?
- Why do some clients fail to progress through the LINC reading benchmark levels as expected?
- How do the previous educational and life experiences of LINC clients in LINC Level 1-3 classes relate to their experiences in the LINC program and contribute to progress that is slower than expected?
- How does the instructors’ understanding of the learners’ previous educational experiences provide insight into clients’ progress in the LINC program?

Methodology

•a qualitative case study approach (Creswell, 2007; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003) situated within a critical and constructivist framework

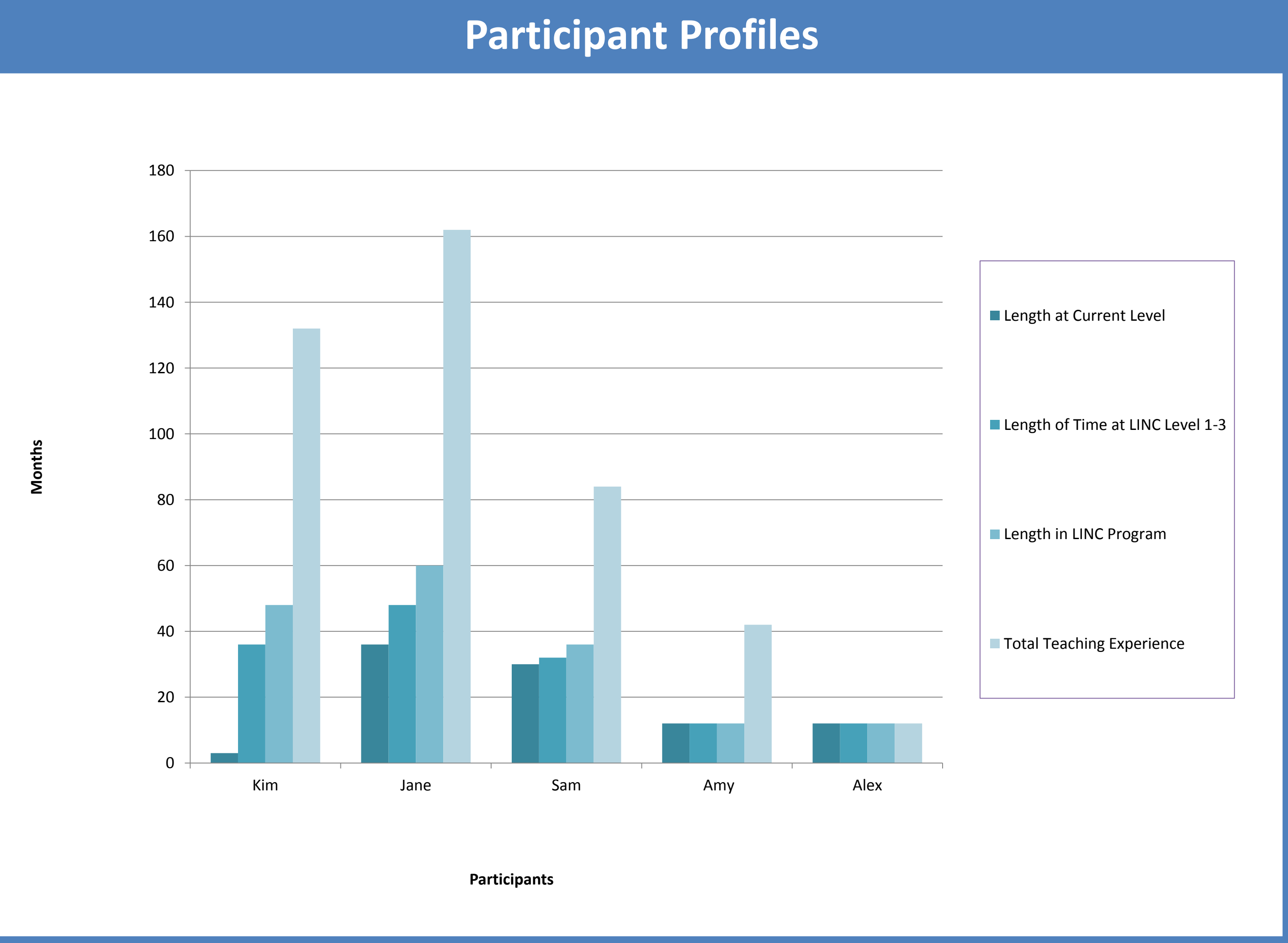
•5 participants, from 2 cities in Southwestern Ontario, were recruited from LINC Level 1-3 classes from 4 different LINC providers

•I, as the researcher, had the dual role of participant/researcher

•data was collected in the form of :

- demographic questionnaires
- 2 semi-structured interviews (60-90 mins)
- teaching artefacts (teaching plans)
- field study notes

•reliability and validity were maintained through triangulation of data and the process of member checking in data analysis.



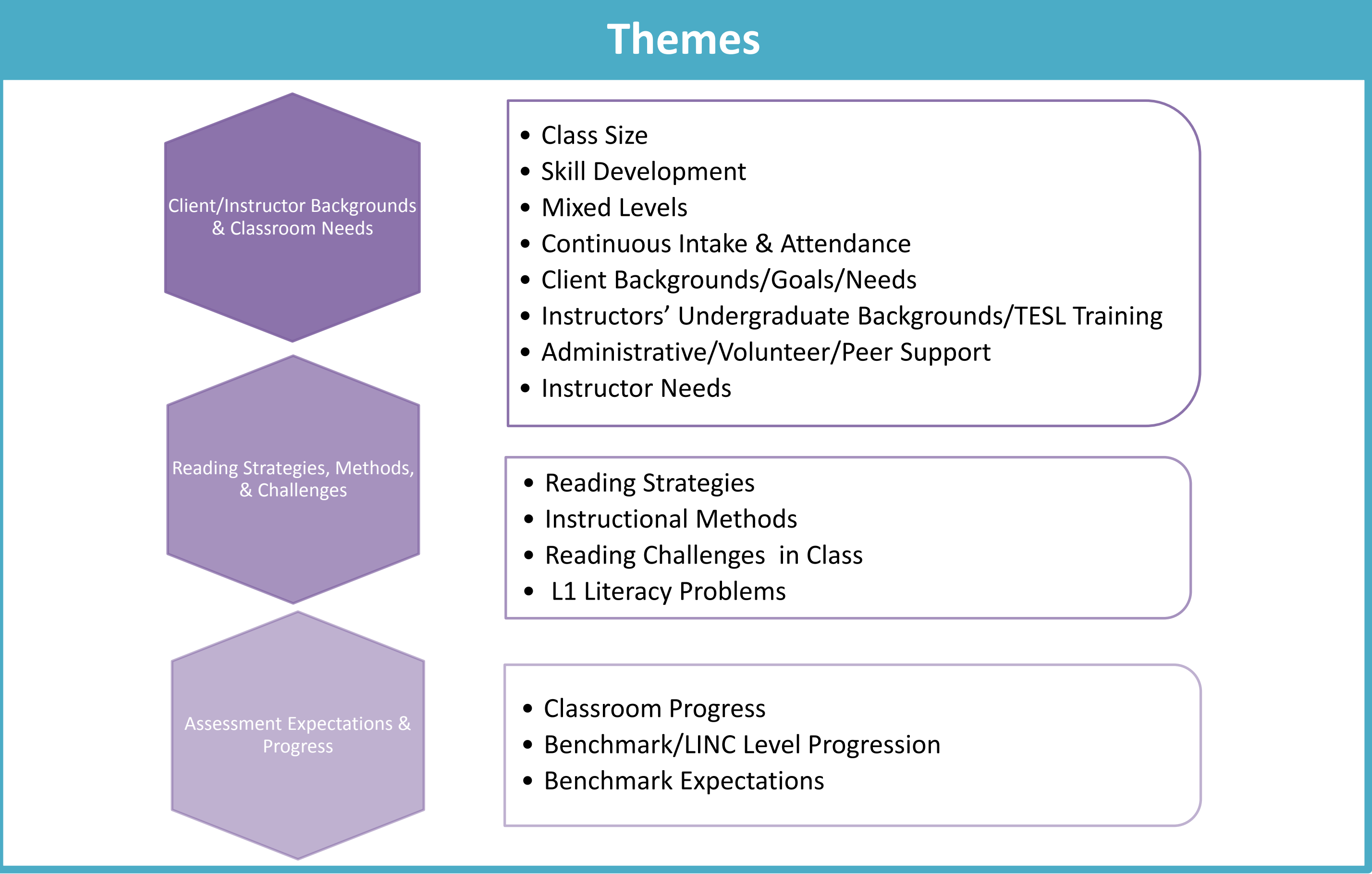
Instructors’ Voices

“If I’m doing a story, I would have to have a teacher’s aide sit with them, read with them, or if I’m doing some kind of vocabulary, I will have special papers for them which will have pictures on them. You know, like difficult words and all that stuff because they can’t understand many things.” (Sam, Second interview)

“There’s some sort of community spirit within the women here that are supportive of each other, so that if someone’s from the same cultural group or they make a friendship with another person in the class, that they do find ways to kind of—somehow there’s some kind of information transfer between the clients within my class than can somehow override the gaps that I might not even see.” (Jane, First interview)

“I need to find a way to kind of overcome the skill level differences between the students and their writing abilities. So, yeah, I think that’s the area that needs the most work for me and for them. That’s the anchor right there. And if I could get them to read and write better, it would help their speaking, I’m sure. Because then, they could see their words and see—I’m sure it would help them to internalize language.” (Alex, First interview)

“I think sometimes you do notice different strategies, different approaches. There are the students who use a dictionary quite frequently, and then, there are some who don’t as much. There are some students who underline the words and will ask me and some students who won’t. So yeah, I mean, there’s quite a difference in what they’re used to, I guess, their personalities, how they approach it.” (Amy, Second interview)



Discussion

Theoretical principles

-adult education principles using the clients’ experience to frame instruction are consistent with instructors’ approaches (Brookfield, 1995; Giroux, 1997; Merriam et al., 2007; Pratt, 1998); some instructors went to greater lengths to incorporate clients’ experiences and utilize a plurality of methods and materials

-instructors mentioned issues with assessment, including: over-emphasis on summative assessment, ineffectiveness of assessment tools, subjectivity of instructors’ interpretations, correspondence between the CLBs and LINC Levels; Brookfield (2005) cautioned against idealizing a single framework as a perfect model; Freire (1985) stated that assessment should evaluate experience rather than inspect learning

-collaboration was seen as a necessary part of instruction to respond to challenges of: class size, diverse needs, monitoring/managing instruction, planning and facilitating instruction, creating a ‘Zone of Proximal Development’ (Vygotsky, 1978) where individuals were able to operate slightly beyond their current ability

Backgrounds, needs, and goals of LINC clients

-many instructors wanted more information about their clients for instructional planning; TESOL (2000) identified key factors: languages spoken, country of origin, language of previous schooling, written literacy levels in all languages, and external factors (war, famine, natural disasters)

-progress is highly variable; certain clients, refugees, required 70-80 more hours to progress to the next benchmark (CIC, 2009b)

-some instructors saw clients with a range of proficiencies across the four skills as a potential flag for literacy problems; Burnaby (1989, 1991) and Klassen & Burnaby (1993) stated that a range of listening and speaking proficiencies doesn’t indicate full literacy skills

-a connection exists between the number of years of previous education and literacy skills (UNESCO-ECLAC, 2010); less than 12 yrs of education indicated likely literacy problems

-mixed level classes were more common among the instructors (80 %) than was reported by Jangles Productions (2006) (70 %); Condelli, Wrigley, & Yoon (2008); Millar (2007); Verma (2004) stated that clients with literacy needs should be separated from mainstream LINC clients

-instructors spoke about identifying/communicating goals; Gillette (1994) found that intrinsic motivation coloured all parts of language learning

-some instructors were unable to look beyond a Western model of education which created an instructional barrier

Evidence-based reading instruction

-instructors described challenges in reading that included: poor L1 language skills, inexperience with text, lack of motivation to read, and large class sizes; Grabe & Stoller (2002) found educational background was important in determining reading proficiency; Grabe & Stoller, Robson (1982), & Strucker (2002) agreed that it is vital to establish L1 literacy first

-instructors’ reading strategies were largely congruent with Kruidenier’s findings (2002); major components of reading: phonemic awareness and decoding, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension; instructors cited a lack of time for each component; one instructor indicated a reliance on contextual cues as a reading strategy, a proven characteristic of poor readers (Catts & Kamhi, 2005)

-NRP (2000) & McShane (2005) defined five features of effective reading instruction: explicit instruction/explanation of purpose, strategy instruction, support leading to self-direction, intensive instruction, and segmenting instruction which were not always reflected in the instructors’ responses

-collaboration extends learners’ abilities (Joe, 1998, Krashen & Terrell, 1983, Vygotsky, 1978); this was evident with all instructors; however, large, mixed-level classes or clients with literacy needs made collaboration challenging

Implications

- Access to client information primarily occurred outside of classes during uncompensated time making the change toward a client profile or case management system impractical in spite of the potential benefits. Information currently available to instructors needs to be expanded to include information about goal setting.
- New tools/methods for assessing clients need to be developed. TESL training /ongoing training/PD should be expanded to include different client profiles. Expectations regarding progress between benchmarks and LINC levels should reflect the variable rate of progress between different clients, particularly in reading.
- Instructors required more support in their classroom and used a patchwork of collaborative methods to meet the diverse needs of students. They struggled to meet the needs of their clients on a daily basis. Instructors need a voice to express their needs to LINC administrators, assessors, TESL Ontario, and CIC.
- Clients with literacy needs should be carefully screened and placed into appropriate literacy level classes as having clients with literacy needs in a mainstream class causes stress on both the clients and instructors. Although there are four phases of literacy, only three phases were in practice and that occurred at only one of the instructor’s institutions. All four phases should be implemented to facilitate better placement of clients with literacy needs.
- The descriptions of the instructors demonstrated a real need for PD around evidence-based reading practices.

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