Autonomy and Agency in Curriculum Decision-Making: A Study of Instructors in a Canadian Adult Settlement ESL Program

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This study examines the views of five adult ESL instructors about their processes of curriculum implementation in a settlement language program about to adopt the Canadian Language Benchmarks. Its central research question is: How do these instructors assess the value of their own autonomy over curriculum decision-making? Drawing on theoretical definitions of autonomy and agency prominent in general education literature, autonomy has been defined here as the degree to which teachers have the desire to make curriculum decisions using personal initiative and intellectual engagement. Interview data related to the views held by the instructors regarding curriculum processes were then analyzed. The study reveals their concerns in regard to classroom activities, curriculum guidelines, linguistic elements, teaching materials, needs assessment, assessment of learner proficiency, professional development, relations with other staff, and settlement theme content. It makes the case for developing program supports for instructor autonomy and demonstrates the usefulness of this concept theoretically.

This study examines the views held by five adult ESL instructors about their processes of curriculum implementation in a Canadian settlement language program. The research was conducted just before the program adopted assessment procedures associated with the Canadian Language Benchmarks (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996). It was in fact one of the first programs to do so nationally. The insights gained through this study are, therefore, useful for other programs undergoing similar changes. To be successful, innovations such as the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) must take into account the skills and attitudes of the teaching staff responsible for implementing them. As Markee (1997) puts it, "educational change involves addressing the short and long term professionalization of teachers, on whom real, long-lasting change in the classroom always depends" (p. 4).

It is impossible to determine whether the instructors in this study are typical or representative given the limitations in available demographic data. This research, however, explores curriculum processes in a program that exhibits characteristics common to those in this context. It is, therefore, useful in the framing of future research. More important, the study is situated

within the concepts of teacher autonomy and agency and their bodies of knowledge in general education theory.

Theoretical Concepts of Teacher Autonomy and Agency

In general education theory, teacher *autonomy* is commonly used to describe the degree to which teachers make independent curriculum decisions, especially in the context of sweeping societal change and government policy initiatives. Most discussions that employ the term do so from a sociological vantage point (Apple, 1995; Apple & Jungck, 1990; Apple & Teitelbaum 1986; Egan, 1988; Fitzclarence & Kenway, 1993; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Hargreaves, 1994; Jones & Moore, 1993; Kliebard, 1988; Knight, Lingard, & Porter, 1993; Lundgren, 1988) or historically (Dale, 1989; Helsby & McCulloch, 1996; Lawn, 1996; Robertson, 1996). These theorists often raise concerns about whether teachers are losing their autonomy in the face of government rationalization and control of curriculum processes. However, little attention is given in the literature to how autonomy is defined from the perspective of individual teachers. Too often the term seems to describe a static entity that lacks internal dynamics.

On the other hand, the term *agency*, as developed by Paris (1993), describes relationships to curriculum processes in a manner that is highly dynamic and from the perspective of teachers. Drawing on theorists such as Arendt (1958) and Greene (1978), Paris uses *agency* when characterizing relationships of teachers to curriculum that are marked by "personal initiative and intellectual engagement":

> Teacher agency in curriculum matters involves initiating the creation or critique of curriculum, an awareness of alternatives to established curriculum practices, the autonomy to make informed choices, an investment of self, and on-going interaction with others. (p. 16)

Paris contrasts teacher agency to commonly held conceptions of teachers as consumers of curriculum, technical implementors of the ideas and products of experts. Teachers who conceptualize themselves as agents look on curriculum work as multifaceted, involving many aspects of such processes as curriculum development, curriculum implementation, and curriculum evaluation. Significantly, for the purposes of this study, the curriculum processes such teachers engage in is context-dependent, where teachers mutually construct curricula with learners.

The operational definition of autonomy that has been adopted for this study draws on Paris's (1993) use of this term as an important part of her conception of agency. Autonomy has been defined here as the degree to which teachers have the desire to make curriculum decisions using personal initiative and intellectual engagement. Although autonomous teachers might make use of the suggestions made by administrators or found in

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curriculum guidelines, they assume the principal responsibility for making curriculum implementation decisions in the classes they teach. It is important to note that this study did not focus on the ability of the instructors in question to act on this desire.

Changing Perceptions of the Instructor's Role in SLE

Two historical contexts are important in this study. The first is in relation to the perceived roles of instructors in curriculum development. Despite the influence of Palmer (1922) and later advocates of professionalism such as Strevens (1977), most second language education (SLE) theory this century has been seemingly obsessed with methods. As Stern (1983) illustrated in his survey of language teaching theories, most 20th-century ESL theoretical approaches have admonished the instructor to adopt a single pedagogical methodology. It has only been since the relatively recent break with the "methods approach" that language teaching theorists have been able to discard simple formulas (Stern, 1983). This approach, as Pennycook (1989) pointed out, helped maintain inequalities between SLE theorists and practitioners. The strict distinction between instructors and experts (such as curriculum designers) blurred when the methods approach fell out of favor in the early 1980s.

The communicative approach has become the most commonly accepted methodology for settlement language programs since the 1980s. This approach emphasizes the communicative aspect of teaching language, concentrating on function rather than form. As Allen and Widdowson (1979) state, the approach involves, "the learning of rules of use as well as rules of grammar" (p. 141). Instructors are quite commonly directed to use this approach in curriculum and policy documents at both national and local levels. The CLB (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1996) is an example of this kind of document.

An important implication of the communicative approach has been to increase the responsibilities instructors have for curriculum development and implementation. For example, instructor-conducted needs assessments have become a hallmark of how the communicative approach has been applied in ESL programs in Canada. Of course, this shows the influence of Tyler's (1949) emphasis on developing specific goals and objectives for particular educational situations. Curriculum guidelines for ESL programs in Canada often explicitly describe needs assessments as the foundation on which instructors write curricula. Such curriculum guidelines specify expected attainment levels for ESL learners. Instructors implementing such curricula are expected to plan, develop, and provide the actual curriculum in practice so that students meet these proficiency levels (Cumming, 1995).

Recent Changes in Canadian ESL

The second important historical context for this study is in relation to Canadian ESL curriculum development. In the 1990s various major initiatives in ESL curriculum development have emerged associated with national language training programs in the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. These national initiatives have formed important aspects of the economic strategies adopted by these countries. The Canadian 1991-1995 Federal Immigration Plan marked a major shift in immigration policy, arguing that increased immigration was required for economic growth into the new century and that the skills of immigrants were important resources to be utilized. These skills could only be effectively put to use for the nation through the development of more efficient and effective language training (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1991, 1994).

In 1991 the federal government initiated a consultation process that documented the desire for consistency and national standards for Canadian ESL programs (Citizenship and Immigration Canada Advisory Council, 1991). Accordingly, the National Working Group on Language Benchmarks was set up in 1992 to usher in these new standards through a comprehensive proficiency assessment process (Pierce & Stewart, 1997). The development of assessment procedures also occurred in Australia, New Zealand, and the UK:

> figuring prominently among the key indicators used for system-level monitoring and reporting in many education and training contexts are statements of program outcomes which describe expectations of learner performance standards at different levels of achievement. (Brindley, 1995, p. 1)

These performance standards have a number of advantages and disadvantages. National standards ensure that learners focus on language as a tool for communication; assessment is closely linked to instruction; teachers are able to make informed judgments about students' needs; better communication between stakeholders can take place; and there is an objective basis for determining program needs (Brindley, 1991). However, the potential problems associated with these standards are threefold. "When assessment takes the form of constant observation and monitoring in relation to standards, it can become a form of surveillance" (Hargreaves, 1989 in Brindley, 1995, p. 8). A second problem is that individual and contextual differences are submerged in such national documents that treat different educational contexts and learner groups in a common manner (Moore, 1996 in Brindley, 1995, p. 9). The third set of problems arise that are associated with test reliability, validity, and logistics.

In addition to the problems pointed out by Brindley (1995) above, there are a number related to the degree of professional skills that instructors

possess going into curriculum innovation. Setting curriculum responsibilities for instructors in policy and curriculum documents is far from simple or clear-cut. In regard to assessment, for example, these new national standards expect ESL educators to have skills that they might well lack. Instructors are also expected to make these assessments in a nationally mandated curriculum framework that they may not understand or feel is appropriate to their situation. In this regard, the experiences of Canadian ESL instructors are quite disparate. Many rely on their own holistic judgments in terms of student assessment with little oversight. Others work in institutions with standardized testing procedures that they had little to do with. Still others, including those who work in the federally funded Language Instruction to Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program, have little control over initial placement assessment, but assume responsibility over subsequent evaluations of learner progress. As shown by a number of consultation reports, articles and submissions (Baril, 1993; Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 1993; Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants, 1993; Teachers of English as a Second Language Toronto, 1993), some instructors feel empowered by the prospect of national standards because they welcome new responsibilities in the areas of assessment and curriculum development. They feel supported by, and like, new curriculum documents. Others feel that they have been deskilled because they now have to adhere to curriculum and assessment processes that they feel are straitjackets. With such controversy in the field, this study's subject of inquiry is appropriate and timely.

Research Methods

A case study approach was chosen for this study because it provides the best basis for exploration. No previous research or theories offer a basis to design research on this topic in this specific context, so the approach adopted was necessarily exploratory, descriptive, and preliminary. Various quantitative approaches were considered but rejected because of the difficulty in determining research categories and descriptions that would be valid and appropriate to the context under study. There was little demographic information on which to base categories. Of the various qualitative methods considered, the case study approach provides the most flexibility. This was confirmed during a pilot study that was conducted with two instructors working in a program similar to that chosen for the main research. The pilot established the need for open-ended questions and a conversational tone. The pilot also helped in the formulation of coding categories.

In order to maximize the usefulness of this study for future inquiry, it was important that the instructors at least share common characteristics with most adult ESL practitioners in Ontario, although no basis existed for choosing a typical or representative case site. According to a recently completed survey (Sanaoui, 1997), school board continuing education instructors, such

as those under study here, make up the largest category of ESL practitioners in Ontario. The instructors who were chosen were within the norms described by the survey in terms of training, experience, and salary level.

In addition, the instructors at the site worked in conditions common in continuing education programs. A coordinator on site was responsible for supervising and evaluating the teaching staff, conducting registration and intake, writing reports, and maintaining statistics. The program had continuous enrollment and voluntary attendance. Clients left and entered the program at any time during the term. There was also a minimum expectation for student enrollment. All the instructors were female, worked under contract, and had bachelor's degrees and TESL certificates. Of the five who participated, two had master's degrees, one directly related to SLE. Several had their Ontario teaching certificates. All but one had five or more years of adult ESL teaching experience. In referring to them, pseudonyms are used to preserve confidentiality (see Table 1).

In the program where they were employed, these instructors were expected to develop their own curricula based on the needs of their learners and a general curriculum guideline with which they had been provided. They were also responsible for all learner assessment after a client was placed in their classes. Except in a few cases, when outside agencies such as welfare or employment insurance requested them, the teaching staff at this site had few record-keeping responsibilities apart from submitting monthly attendance reports to their coordinator. Professional development opportunities were voluntary, and the instructors received additional payment for attending them.

Data collection was through classroom observations, a personal profile survey of the instructions, an examination of curriculum documents, and a set of semistructured interviews. Because this study was about the attitudes the instructors held, the interviews were the principal source of data. Each instructor was interviewed twice for approximately one hour at a time. For the first set, instructors were asked about their background and their general attitudes toward curriculum development. The second set of interviews looked at these curriculum issues in the concrete context of classroom observations. The second set of interviews also focused on gathering opinions about how much control each instructor wanted over various aspects of the curriculum process. The questions for each set of interviews are included in Appendixes A and B.

The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed into 214 single-spaced pages. After much consideration, turns were chosen (i.e., each speaker's verbal turn in the stretch of talk) as the unit of discourse segmentation for analysis. Smaller discourse units were too difficult to define clearly or code reliably in the transcripts. All the transcripts were segmented into each speaker's turns in the interview conversations.

Table 1
Summary of Instructor Profiles

	Apostrophe	Hamnet	Ingrid	Janet	Kwacha
Settlement ESL Experience	10 years	1 year	5 years	7 years	6 years
Level Teaching During Study	Level 3	Computeracy	Level 4	Level 4	Literacy
Other Teaching Experiences	Training Travel Counselors	Practicum With BEd	University Level ESL/EFL	Arts and Crafts	Credit EFL High School
Non-Teaching Experience	Parenting	SLE Research	SLE Research/ Parenting	Customer Rep/ Parenting	Parenting
TESL Certificate	through Board of Education	Minor as part of BA	MA in TESOL	through Board of Education	ESL Part 1
University Degrees	BA and MA in Cdn. History	BA in English BEd	BA in English MA in TESOL	BA in French Post-Graduate Linguistics	BA in English BEd
First Language	English	Spanish English	Polish	English	English
Second or Other Languages	Some French	Some Tagalog	English Some Russian	French Some Ukrainian Some Italian Some Latin	Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Gujarati, Swahili

Determining the coding categories was a process that began with the consultation of two theoretical works that were influential in this context. The first was Stern's (1983) language curriculum model, which contained specifications for four syllabi: language, culture, communicative activities, and general language education. The second was Canale and Swain's (1980) language competence model, which defines language competence in four ways: linguistic, sociocultural, strategic, and discoursal. These theoretical frameworks were then compared with three curriculum guidelines commonly in use in similar settlement ESL programs in Ontario: the Board of Education for the City of Toronto's (1994) *Adult ESL Curriculum Guidelines;* the Peel Region Board of Education's (1979) *Green Book;* and Citizenship and Immigration Canada's (1997) *Ontario LINC Curriculum Guidelines.* These documents cite the theoretical works above as influences. The categories were further modified after the pilot study, which indicated the value of adding those pertaining to professional development and collegiality. Finally, one of the categories was eliminated during the data collection once it became clear that it was redundant. The resulting nine coding categories were: classroom activities, curriculum guidelines, linguistic elements, teaching materials,

needs assessment, assessment of learner proficiency, professional development, relations with other staff, and settlement theme content.

The data were coded in two passes. In the first, references related to the above coding categories were marked. The data were multiple-coded; that is, turns were marked with several codes if this seemed logically appropriate. This was the case with most marked turns. Few had more than four, although several had references to seven. At the start of coding, the researcher performed an interrater reliability check with a doctoral student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education using 20% of the data. Each independently coded this sample and agreed 90.8% of the time.

Once the marked turns had been sorted from the rest of the data, a second coding of the interview transcripts was conducted. This consisted of coding the turns marked in the first pass according to whether they contained opinions about who should make curriculum implementation decisions. Turns were marked positive if the instructor indicated a desire for autonomy regarding the category in question. They were marked negative if the instructor indicated a desire for someone else to make decisions regarding this category. There was a total of 262 references to these codes about autonomy across all the marked turns about curriculum topics.

Summary of Findings

The findings from the analyses of the interview data may be summarized as follows:
- The clear tendency was for the instructors to express the desire for autonomy in most of the coded categories.
- All the instructors wanted autonomy over the selection of materials and activities.
- A full range of opinions regarding autonomy was expressed about all the other coded categories: assessment of learner proficiency, curriculum guidelines, linguistic elements, needs assessment, professional development, relations with other staff, and themes. Most wanted autonomy in these categories. Some clearly did not.

The five instructors who participated in this study generally wanted and experienced relatively high levels of autonomous control over the curriculum decisions pertinent to their classes. In the interviews the total number of coded turns that were positive in respect to autonomy outnumbered those that were negative by a ratio of almost 4:1. However, the desire for autonomy was far from uniform.

In the discussion below, the coding categories are dealt with in the following order: classroom activities, curriculum guidelines, linguistic elements, teaching materials, needs assessment, assessment of learner proficiency, professional development, relations with other staff, and settlement theme content.

Classroom activities. All the instructors felt that they should have control over choosing classroom activities. In the coding scheme, the code *activities* was defined as being how the instructors organized and presented learning opportunities. This category was second only to *choosing materials* in terms of its ratio of positive to negative marked turns: 13.5:1. Some of the more strongly worded remarks in favor of autonomous control were also in reference to this aspect. Apostrophe repeatedly emphasized how jealously she guarded her control over choosing classroom activities. Hamnet went further than most of her colleagues in saying that she wanted control over the type of teaching methodology. Ingrid and Janet expressed their desire for autonomy in this area although this meant a lot more work on their part. Kwacha was not as concerned in this regard, but she still resisted any notion of an imposed set of activities.

Curriculum guidelines. When discussing curriculum guidelines it was clear that all the instructors accepted them as necessary and potentially supportive. The code *curriculum guidelines* referred to any document meant to provide guidance on curriculum content. All the instructors were concerned lest the guideline become a straitjacket, however. Positive marked turns outnumbered negative ones by a ratio of 4.7:1. The instructors clearly expressed the desire for a flexible document that allowed them to build specific curricula for particular groups of learners. Although Apostrophe felt it was important that a guideline establish clear entrance and exit criteria for each level, she reserved the right to go beyond what a guideline might specify if her learners needed it. Hamnet stated that although she welcomed the kinds of suggestions a guideline might make, she wanted to be able to skip anything that did not apply to her class. Ingrid used the guideline as her starting point, but she also emphasized that a guideline that was carved in stone would hinder her ability to meet her learners' needs. Janet had perhaps the most independent attitude toward guidelines, using them chiefly as reference points for her own curriculum work. Because the particular guideline in use in this program had little to say about literacy, Kwacha had little choice but to develop her own curriculum. Even so, she spoke positively about other curriculum guidelines in terms of the choices and options they presented.

Linguistic elements. In their discussions about linguistic elements, the instructors expressed similar opinions to those about guidelines. The code *linguistic elements* referred to instructional content related to language. Positive turns outnumbered negative ones by a ratio of 5.6:1. None of the instructors had any problems being told what linguistic elements to cover in class as long as they had the freedom to augment or modify them. Apostrophe used the grammar list in their curriculum guideline as a checklist, but she regularly covered elements specified for other levels when she felt it was necessary. Hamnet felt that she had little choice in this regard given the different levels of English proficiency in the computeracy class. Ingrid was the instructor

who most closely followed the guidelines as far as this aspect of her curriculum decision-making was concerned. She still felt, however, that each class was different and required a slightly different approach toward grammar. Janet described her attitude as similar to Apostrophe's. Kwacha saw choosing linguistic elements as a matter of finding a compromise between what a guideline might abstractly prescribe and what the learners actually needed.

Teaching materials. Choosing materials was another of the coded categories in which all the instructors wanted autonomous control. The code *materials* referred to instructional support or material used to enhance learning opportunities. It had the highest ratio of positive to negative turns: 14:1. All the instructors noted that they welcomed suggestions, but felt that only they could ensure that the materials in use matched the needs of the learners. Apostrophe and Janet extended this further, saying that they were used to making their own material and rarely used commercial texts. Although they did note a few exceptions, by and large they were critical of most commercially produced material. None of the instructors supported the notion of a core or course text for a class or program. Hamnet noted that she had to select carefully a variety of materials for her class given the multilevel aspect of the English component. Ingrid noted that it was a lot of work to produce one's own material, but that it was important to do so. Kwacha echoed this, emphasizing the difficulty she had finding good materials for her literacy class.

Needs assessment. There was an interesting range of opinions among the instructors regarding needs assessment. The code *needs assessment* referred to either initial or ongoing identification and evaluation of learner settlement needs. Although the overall number of positive turns outnumbered negative ones by a ratio of 3.1:1, one of the instructors felt that she would prefer that someone else take responsibility for this task. Apostrophe noted that in an ideal situation, learners should be assessed before they entered the classroom, both in terms of settlement needs and English language proficiency. Hamnet agreed with this, having in mind a process in which learners are asked to fill out questionnaires when they initially register. Ingrid felt that she would welcome a tool that would help her conduct the needs assessment, but that it should remain an integral part of her work. Kwacha felt that the lack of formal education experienced by her learners meant that she had to conduct needs assessments herself. Janet was not as worried about this point, but still felt that it should remain as part of an instructor's responsibilities.

Assessment of learner proficiency. Of all the code categories, assessment of learner proficiency had the lowest positive to negative ratio: 1.3:1. The code *proficiency assessment* referred to the evaluation or testing of a learner's English language skills, abilities, or achievement. It is quite distinct from

settlement needs assessment. Most of the instructors in fact said that instructors should be relieved of much of the responsibility for testing and assessing English proficiency. They seemed to defer to testing experts and common standards. They also pointed out limitations of time in their own work schedules. Apostrophe clearly saw the difference between the two kinds of assessment, but she was even more in favor than the others of having someone else take on this responsibility. Neither Hamnet nor Ingrid had strong opinions regarding this issue. Ingrid noted that some previous testing experiments she had conducted had been time-consuming. Janet mentioned the Canadian Language Benchmarks in her discussion, expressing the opinion that this task should be left to someone specifically trained to test in reference to the benchmarks. Kwacha was in the minority on this topic, wanting complete control over the proficiency assessment process. This was because her learners were not used to formal testing or assessment. However, she did state that initial language assessment should be done by the coordinator of the program before the learner entered the classroom. She also said that it might be better for instructors working at other proficiency levels to surrender this responsibility.

Professional development. Professional development was a coding category that was not mentioned often during the interviews. The code *professional development* referred to career improvement or training opportunities. Turns marked positive in terms of teacher autonomy outnumbered those marked negative by a ratio of 3:1. In general, all the instructors felt that they needed more professional development opportunities and the ability to decide how to make use of them. They said that professional development was important. Although this category did capture some interesting remarks that might not have surfaced otherwise, the interviews did not shed much light on the topic of professional development.

Relations with other staff. In regard to their relations with other staff members, all the instructors remarked that it was important to keep in close contact with their colleagues and that they tried to do this. The code *relations to other staff* referred to discussions and interactions with other staff members or colleagues. Turns marked positive in terms of teacher autonomy outnumbered those marked negative by a ratio of 2.6:1. Hamnet had some interesting comments about a private provider she recently had worked for and how the profit motive there had been constraining and thus detrimental to staff relations and in turn the students' learning. Janet expressed an interest in taking on more responsibility in regard to dealing with relevant outside agencies. Ingrid gave a well-thought-out argument for why instructors should be responsible for conducting program evaluation.

Settlement theme content. Most of the instructors wanted responsibility over thematic content. The code *settlement theme* content referred to sociocultural course content such as transportation or housing. The ratio of positive

to negative turns in this category was 2.8:1. Apostrophe felt strongly about this issue, saying that if she were required to teach a particular theme, she should be supplied with the materials. In a sense Hamnet's course concentrated on one theme: fundamental computer skills (called "computeracy" in the course documents). Commonly taught settlement themes such as housing or shopping formed little of what Hamnet covered. Ingrid felt that instructors had to control the choice of thematic content if classes were to be learner-centered. Janet expressed much the same opinion. Kwacha was the only instructor who expressed a need for more guidance in this area.

Discussion and Implications

ESL instructors working for Canadian settlement language programs serve a diverse clientele. Continuous enrollment, a common feature of these programs, means that often the instructors do not know exactly which or how many learners they will face at the beginning of a lesson. Every learner has different motivations, abilities, and skills. They gain English language proficiency at different rates for reasons that are not easy to pinpoint. There is also a wide diversity of the types of programs in which ESL instruction is offered. All these factors affect instruction and curriculum planning.

Canadian ESL instructors also work in a wide variety of circumstances. Classes might be held in comfortable surroundings with a wealth of resources and supports and plenty of opportunities for interaction with colleagues; or they might be held in cramped quarters that are completely isolated, with only the resources that the instructor can carry in his or her briefcase.

This diversity places a high degree of curriculum responsibility on an ESL instructor working in this context. Curricula must be individualized and designed for specific purposes. Individual instructor decision-making in curriculum implementation, therefore, becomes key. In this study it was clear that the instructors wanted autonomy over most aspects of the curriculum implementation process. There were important nuances, however. All the instructors wanted autonomy over classroom materials and activities. For the most part, these instructors felt strongly about this point. In regard to the other seven coded categories, there was a greater range of opinions. Overall, the instructors still wanted autonomy regarding assessment of learner proficiency, needs assessment, curriculum guidelines, linguistic elements, professional development, relations with other staff, and settlement theme content. The desire for autonomy in these aspects of curriculum development was not uniform across the coded categories or between instructors.

Autonomy, especially when it is incorporated in agency, is a fundamental attribute for adult ESL instructors who work in Canadian settlement language programs. These instructors must be able to make curriculum implementation decisions with a fair degree of latitude, especially when the programs in which they work emphasize needs assessment and the multi-

tude of options inherent in the communicative approach. They cannot afford simply to exercise technical expertise. In order to ensure quality of ESL instruction, policy-makers, program administrators, and curriculum developers must support measures that enhance instructor autonomy.

The research in this article suggests that ESL instructors need curriculum support in a variety of areas to enhance their autonomy. Most of the participants in this study wanted curriculum guidelines that gave them sets of options and suggestions from which to choose, especially in terms of linguistic and thematic content. Although most greatly valued their freedom to choose activities and materials for the classroom, they often expressed frustration regarding lack of time to prepare materials and activities. Some of the instructors expressed the same frustration over their lack of time to perform assessment, either in terms of learner needs or English proficiency. In this regard, support might come in two ways: either by having someone else do assessment, particularly in the case of English proficiency, or by greatly enhancing their abilities to perform these tasks through professional development.

All the instructors said that they needed more professional development opportunities and the chance to interact with their colleagues. Professional development is one of the more obvious ways autonomy can be enhanced. Enhancing the chances that instructors have to interact is not as obvious, but it is just as important. When instructors interact as autonomous professionals, they exchange ideas, seek advice, and help build up each other's morale. This in turn strengthens the programs in which they work and helps the students they teach.

SLE curriculum theory and research should, therefore, develop from its present concentration on system-based approaches (Johnson, 1989; Clark, 1987; Markee, 1997) and explore questions related to individual agency and autonomy. Although the concentration on system-based approaches have been valuable, it cannot come to grips with a number of questions related to daily practice. How do individual instructors work with colleagues in terms of curriculum development and implementation? Are there aspects of curriculum processes that instructors feel more strongly about than others? What is the reaction of individual instructors to large-scale curriculum innovation?

The implications for ESL curriculum practice are also important. In view of the importance of teacher autonomy to the curriculum development process, it is imperative that ways of enhancing it be explored. What other supports are needed to enhance instructor autonomy? Is systematic professional development the best way to enhance autonomy? How can collegiality be strengthened? How do working conditions affect autonomy?

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Appendix A
First Interview Question and Prompts

The first interview was spent talking about the steps that the instructors take in developing their curricula and the decisions that they made. This started with an open-ended question: What steps do you undertake in developing the curriculum you use at the LINC Centre?

This was followed with prompts used to obtain information not forthcoming from this open-ended question. Examples of these were:

What does the curriculum you use contain?
What curriculum documents are your lesson plans based on?
What curriculum documents have you found most useful?
What is the first step you take in drawing up your curriculum?
Do you do a needs assessment?
How do you do a needs assessment?
What materials do you use?
How are the materials chosen?
Do you share materials or curriculum ideas with the other instructors who work here?
How do you assess learner progress?
How do assess the success of the program?
How are the linguistic elements chosen?
How are the sociocultural elements chosen?
How are the strategic elements chosen?

Appendix B
Second Interview Question and Prompts

The first part of the second set of interviews was spent talking about the lessons that were observed. The interview started with an open-ended question: How did you organize the lessons that I saw you teach?

This was followed with prompts used to obtain information not forthcoming from the open-ended question. Examples of these were:

Why did you use (material) when you taught (theme) the other day?
Why did you cover (theme) the other day?
Why did you cover (linguistic element) the other day?
Why did you include (strategic or sociocultural element) in your lesson the other day?
How did you decide to (other decisions identified by the instructor during the initial interview) the other day?

The second part of the second set of interviews was spent talking about the responsibilities and decisions the instructors have regarding curriculum development. This discussion started with an open-ended question: How do you feel about the amount of autonomy you have in making decisions related to curriculum development?

This was followed with prompts used to obtain information not forthcoming from the open-ended question. Examples of these were:

Who do you think should be responsible for (each of the decisions related to curriculum development identified by the instructor earlier)?
To what degree do you want to be told what to teach?
What assistance do you need to help you develop curricula?
Would you rather develop your own curriculum or use one written by someone else?