



***NATIONAL ORGANIZATION OF IMMIGRANT
AND
VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN OF CANADA
(NOIVMWC)***

***A POSITION PAPER ON THE NEW LANGUAGE
TRAINING POLICY.***

OCTOBER 1992.

THE ISSUE

The Honorable Gregory Sorbara stated that "Language is the key that opens doors to the work place, to promotion and to participation in social and community activities." The importance of basic language skills are recognized as essential communicatory tools impacting on, for example, access to essential services and successful social integration. However, many Immigrant and visible minority women remain challenged by language barriers as a result of inadequate language training upon arrival and post arrival. This paper, in representing the views of immigrant and visible minority women, seeks to examine the inadequacy of the new Language Training Policy.¹ This policy was announced by the federal government on January 7th 1992 and although it directly influences the lives of immigrant women, it was formulated without regard to their views or the views of grassroot organizations, teachers and immigrants currently enrolled in language programs.

The New Language Training Policy, is comprised of two distinct programs:

¹ Minister of Supplies and Services Canada, New Immigrant Language Training Policy Cat No. IM-151/10/91. (Ottawa 1991).

1. Language Instruction For Newcomers to Canada (LINC)

To be offered to immigrants in their first year providing basic language courses. This program will account for approximately 80% of Employment and Immigration Canada's (EIC"S) training fund.

2. Labour Market Language Training (LMLT) This

program is to provide specialized or advanced training orientated to labour market needs. This program will account for approximately 20% of Employment and Immigration Canada's (EIC"S) training fund.²

BACKGROUND - The Organization.

The National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada (NOIVMWC) is a non-profit, non-partisan and non-sectarian organization. We are the united front for over 500 immigrant and visible minority women's groups in Canada. The purpose of our organization is to ensure equality for immigrant and visible minority women within a bilingual Canada and, to continue the advocacy work expressed at; the first National Conference on Immigrant Women (1981) Action Committee (1985-86) and the

² Ibid. p. 3.

National Conference on Immigrant and Visible Minority Women (1986). The objectives of the organization³ are as follows;

- To form a united national voice and liaise with other national women's groups for the betterment of the status of immigrant and visible minority women.
- To put in place strategies that will combat sexism, racism, poverty, isolation and violence.
- To act as an advocate on issues dealing with immigrant and visible minority women.
- To heighten public awareness on the status of immigrant and visible minority women.
- To work with all levels of government, public and private agencies to develop effective strategies.

³ National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada. Who Are We, P.3.

ANALYSIS:
PROBLEMS WITH THE NEW LANGUAGE TRAINING
POLICY.

1. ELIGIBILITY AND THE "NEWCOMER."

The Language Instruction For Newcomers to Canada (LINC) does not adequately define the term "newcomer" yet restricts language training to the first year of an immigrants stay in Canada. This period is however the most difficult for many immigrants as they face the challenges of new cultures, customs and values. The difficulties involved in integration are often compounded by financial problems and a limited understanding as to rights (including access to services such as language training). NOIVMWC maintains that restricting language training to an immigrants first year in Canada will result in a missed opportunity to those who need it most. Disqualification for refugee and immigrant women is far more serious since they often lack alternative socialization opportunities accessible to husbands and children through work or school.

2.SHIFT IN FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY.

Participants will receive assistance from Unemployment insurance (UI) while Social Assistance Recipients (SRA"S) will continue to receive benefits during the language training period. In effect, rather than increasing monetary commitment, the government has merely shifted financial responsibilities to UI funds which are provided by business and labour. Further, the policy has created a catch 22 situation whereby employment opportunities are limited due to

inadequate language proficiency, yet funding for such language training is inaccessible due to inadequate UI contributions.

3 ELIMINATION OF TRAINING ALLOWANCE.

The former National Training Act provided training and supplementary allowances for newcomers enabling them to attend language training classes full-time. In discontinuing this allowance financial burdens incurred by attendance are placed on immigrants which limits their ability to participate.

Further, the elimination of training allowances will have a negative impact on sponsorship. Most sponsorship groups do not view education as part of their responsibility and thus many refugees will be forced to seek immediate employment in low paying jobs requiring little knowledge of French or English.

4. INADEQUATE CHILD CARE FACILITIES.

The lack of funding for child care presents a major barrier for immigrant women who would otherwise participate in language and labour training.

5. INADEQUATE FUNDING.

Only 20% of all training funds are to be allocated to the Labour Market Language Training program. NOIVMWC considers this inadequate in meeting the objectives of the program - to provide specialized or advanced training orientated toward labour market needs. Thus, it is feared that a large number of immigrant women will not receive training essential for job market success.

6. RESTICTION TO SKILLS IN DEMAND.

Funds under the LMLT are available to individuals whose existing skills are in demand in the labour market. This policy discriminates against highly qualified immigrant women whose skills are not in demand in the current labour market or whose skills may be made more compatible with retraining.

7. CORRELATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT EQUITY.

Satisfactory language training affects the entire future of immigrant, refugee and visible minority women who cannot access employment equity without sufficient language proficiency. NOIVMWC commits itself to work for equality of opportunity in employment in both public and private sectors.

This was expressed at NOIVMWC's Second Biennial General Meeting 1990;

"we have to eliminate from our minds that when we talk about employment equity, we are not talking about unqualified people. The requirement rather is to try to get employers to make an effort to seek women like ourselves who are qualified. The whole point is that a lot of highly qualified women have been excluded because of racism."⁴

⁴ National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, New Voice Of The Decade, Ottawa, 1990.

8. ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Assessment responsibility has been transferred from the Canadian Employment Centers (CEC's) to the Canadian Immigration Centers (CIC's). Since there are fewer CIC's, there is an increased potential for planning, access and communication difficulties. These difficulties include; increased travel costs due to greater geographic distances of CIC's, intimidating testing procedures as a result of a formal institutional setting and inadequate day care provisions. Despite these problems, individuals are not permitted access to the LINC program without a referral from an assessment center.

9. ASSESSMENT TOOLS.

According to many educators and language training providers (eg, TESL), the assessment tools are inefficient and culturally biased. The placement tests highlight this point whereby an assessment interview called the A-LINC tool is used to determine linguistic capability. Immigrants are to discuss pictures with assessors which depict Canadian situations. To discuss situations inconsistent with personal experiences poses an undeniable cultural bias mitigating against advancement.

A further problem concerns the abilities of assessors in determining accurately the cultural and psychological needs of their clients. The whole process will be rendered ineffective if the selection and evaluation of assessors is conducted arbitrarily.

10. DURATION OF TRAINING.

The new policy provides for a maximum length of language training of approximately 20 weeks. This maximum period is limited further by being applicable only to trainees deemed beginners (level 1). It is estimated that many trainees will therefore receive less than 20 weeks. NOIVMWC suggests that this period constitutes an insufficient length of time to learn a language

RECOMMENDATIONS.

1. That the federal government recognize refugee, immigrant and visible minority women in Canada should have universal access to language training as a basic right.
2. That the federal government establish a forum to promote communication between the various government agencies, community groups and educational institutions in order to provide greater community input, allowing language policy to better reflect the needs of immigrant women.
3. That the government should clearly define what is meant by a "newcomer."
4. That the government extend the eligibility criteria beyond a year to allow for adjustment to customs and culture.

5. That the government provide programs to address social, psychological and financial pressures, which create barriers to language training.
6. That language training be provided for immigrant and visible minority women who have become citizens, but who have not yet acquired adequate language skills.
7. That the federal government provide adequate child care and transportation funding.
8. That universal standards be established governing;
 - The quality and capacity of teaching staff.
 - The quality and relevance of course programs.
 - Quality of working conditions.
 - Resources for both teachers and students.
9. That assessment tools be developed by consulting teachers and organizations representing refugees and immigrants.
10. That a race-sensitive curriculum be implemented, involving training and development for teachers and assessors.

CONCLUSION.

Immigrant and visible minority women are being asked to function in our society without a voice. The implementation of this policy not

only perpetuates existing barriers such as inadequate funding but further restricts women's access to language training by tightening eligibility criteria's. It should be understood that language barriers are not just a problem for immigrant and visible minority women but for Canada as a whole. How can the country benefit from the specific experiences, skills and potentials of immigrant and visible minority women with a language policy which is at best exclusionary and at worst racially and culturally discriminatory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Minister of Supplies and Services Canada, New Immigrant Language Training Policy Cat No. IM-151/10/91. (Ottawa 1991).

National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada. Who Are We, P.3.

National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women of Canada, New Voice Of The Decade, Ottawa, 1990.