

The Demise of "LINC" —

A once-influential agency is now a paper skeleton

by Tom Dillon

The Learning Institute of North Carolina was known in this state and outside the state as a catalyst for educational innovation and experimentation.

For years, educators came to the Quail Roost Conference Center near Durham for conferences sponsored by the Learning Institute of North Carolina (LINC). In the bucolic setting of the center, they discussed such subjects as school desegregation, new methods of teaching reading, and open classrooms.

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Earlier this year, responsibility for operating Quail Roost passed from LINC to the center's owner, the University of North Carolina. That event, little noted by persons inside or outside state government, symbolized the demise of what was once an influential North Carolina institution.

Over a period of 15 years, the institute, a non-profit corporation, attracted to this state millions of dollars in federal and foundation money for educational research and experimentation. Started during the term of Gov. Terry Sanford in 1964, it became a model for what Harold Howe, the first LINC director and later U.S. Commissioner of Education, has called "private initiative about public business."

The Learning Institute developed projects ranging from the North Carolina Advancement School, a school for underachieving children, to Carolina Boys' Camp, a camp for emotionally disturbed children, to an adult literacy effort that is — under other sponsorship — just now getting under way.

Seven years ago, at the height of its influence, it had a staff of 80 persons and a budget of well over \$1 million. Today, the agency is little more than a shell. It has no staff, no money, a board of directors which has not met in two years, and a part-time executive director whose main job is treasurer for Gov. James B. Hunt's fledgling re-election effort. Its files have been placed in the offices of the new North Carolina School of Science and Mathematics in Durham and in the state archives.

Officials of the Hunt Administration envision a possible role for a revived Learning Institute —

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as an evaluator of the science and math school, which will admit its first class next year. "The science and math school board will probably take a good hard look at LINC and see if we can't revitalize it," says Dr. Quentin W. Lindsey, the governor's science advisor.

But Lindsey cautioned that any discussion of a role for the agency in the Hunt Administration is extremely tentative. LINC, he said, "is in a kind of a limbo state until we find a purpose it can serve."

The administration recommended that the 1979 General Assembly appropriate \$120,000 for the Learning Institute. Significantly, the legislature declined, on the basis of a recommendation from its Fiscal Research Division, to make the appropriation. (The Fiscal Research Division noted that the inactive agency did not spend its 1978-79 appropriation.)



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Lindsey observed that Hunt, who is the chairman of the LINC board of directors, called together a LINC Task Force last year to evaluate

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the agency and chart new directions. That group recommended a "more broadly stated, multi-disciplinary mission," not based so much on research, as in the past, but more on policy and program development. But Lindsey said that task force produced "no feeling that here is a burning set of issues that should be addressed." One member said the group met only twice and failed to develop "any sort of consensus." John Talton, the Learning Institute caretaker and treasurer of the new Jim Hunt Committee, said: "The recommendations are still tentative. We never had a meeting to finalize them."

The dissolution of the institute itself is a story of conflicting educational goals and differences about ways of reaching them, with a bit of politics thrown in on the side. When the institute was formed, North Carolina had experienced little innovativeness or experimentation in public education; indeed, there was no research arm at all in the Department of Public Instruction. The institute was conceived as a partly private, partly public effort to stimulate new ways. "It was neatly conceived," said John R. B. Hawes, the last full-time director, "close to but outside the structure of the educational establishment." Sanford himself looked on it as an example of "creative tension," an outside but semi-official agency studying public education.

Today, say Sanford and some others, the state is more open to new ideas in education. Research is being done in several universities and by the Department of Public Instruction, as well as by some newer private groups. "Everything it (LINC) did, somebody else can do," Talton said. But most of the persons interviewed for this article think there is still a place for private agencies such as the Learning Institute in public education. "We need a neutral territory where new ideas can be nurtured and spun off," said one state foundation official. Said Talton, "In my opinion, there are a lot of things that private groups can do better than the state."

Sanford had predicted from the beginning that the Learning Institute would engender controversy. "Almost certainly," he said in 1964, "it is going to put the spotlight on community faults outside the schools themselves." The statement was not long in being borne out. The Advancement School in Winston-Salem became the first fully integrated school in the state, and

within a year of LINC's organization desegregation workshops were being held at the school. That was at a time when many schools were only just beginning to desegregate. Institute leaders, while maintaining generally good relationships with the public school teachers with whom LINC worked, could anger administrators. In 1971, the handbook of LINC's Project Change, an attempted revision of English and social studies teaching, said, "An optimistic approach to the problems in North Carolina is to say we're so far behind now that we don't have to worry about being on new ground if we try classroom innovation."

Despite the occasional controversies, the institute and its programs garnered for North Carolina a reputation as a leader in educational change. And that meant money for LINC projects. Between 1964 and 1972, according to agency records, the Learning Institute received \$1,405,000 in basic support from the State Board of Education, the University of North Carolina,

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Duke University and the North Carolina Fund, a private antipoverty agency. With that money, it developed programs and ideas that attracted a total of \$12,378,190 in education money to the state. Slightly less than three-fourths of that total was federal money. The rest came from foundations.

Over the years, said Hawes, the Learning Institute directors attempted to downplay the "adversary" image that developed. In 1969, LINC's third director, Dr. Richard S. Ray, titled his annual report to the board of directors, "To Build a Bridge." Others say that the agency began to work more closely with the state educational establishment when Dr. A. Craig Phillips became superintendent of public instruction in 1968. Phillips was known to favor new directions in education, and worked closely with Ray on kindergarten programs. Hawes called the atmosphere one more of advocacy than opposition.

In 1973, however, Ray was indicted in a conflict of interest investigation involving an outside consulting company operated by Ray and Dr. Hugh Peck, another staffer. The charges, which were eventually thrown out of court, damaged the agency. "They were held over his (Ray's) head for a year or more," said one former state official sympathetic to the institute "and that finally took the nerve out of LINC." The incident

also affected the institute's ability to get money from the legislature. In the midst of the controversy, the 1973 state allocation was dropped.

When Hawes became LINC director in 1973, he said, the agency was in debt, and he spent much of his four years in the post trying to get the agency solvent again. Among other things, LINC conducted the 1975 Governor's Conference on Reading and sponsored a child advocacy group called The Children's 100. It continued the operation of Carolina Boys' Camp and began to work on a study of early adolescence and an adult tutoring program. The approach to spending money was conservative, said one official, because of the tight finances. But the board of directors was looking for new directions in which to move.

It was after Hunt became governor, in 1977, that the LINC operation began to wind down. Hunt had his own ideas about education, and he apparently had little interest in either LINC or Hawes. "I began to get feedback that the governor's aides weren't sure what they wanted to do with me," commented Hawes. Finally, after a meeting of the LINC executive committee in August, 1977, Hawes said, Hunt told him that the direction of the agency would be changed and that he (Hunt) wanted a change in leadership. Hawes resigned from LINC the next month effective at the end of the year.

There are differing stories on why LINC lost favor. Lindsey says one of the problems with the Learning Institute was that it "had become pre-occupied with self-justification," and had no clear mission. Hawes says that the institute was put in the position of having to justify itself by frequent legislative attacks on its appropriation. But equally important, Hawes said, was an incident that took place in September, 1975, just before that year's Governor's Conference on Reading.

Hawes said Hunt, at that time mulling over a campaign for governor, had asked to speak at the conference but had been turned down. "We had said, 'Let's not have speakers who would be at an unfair advantage over others,'" Hawes said. "I had no choice but to write him and say he couldn't speak." Hawes says he is convinced that the incident colored Hunt's later attitude toward LINC and Hawes. Hunt spokesmen deny it. "There is no hostility or ill will toward LINC," said Betty Owen, the governor's education assistant. "There's no question but that LINC served as a valuable resource to state government."

At any rate, by late 1977, the Learning Institute staff was being encouraged not to seek new projects, and staff members who had chances at outside jobs were being urged to take them. Some projects, notably an attempt to work with the state's bankers on an adult literary tutoring program, were being transferred to other

agencies. The LINC appropriation for 1978-79 was approved by the General Assembly, and in July the state Department of Administration and the task force (some called it only an *ad hoc* committee) designed to seek new directions for LINC issued a report. But nothing was to be done with the report.

What does the future hold for LINC? One former staff member, sympathetic to the Institute, told the Center she thought that the LINC staff, toward the end, was not effective in "articulating what the role of LINC should be." She added, "When someone articulates this, it will come back." Both Hawes and Ray, the former LINC directors, say they think such an agency is still needed. Ray, who essentially forged the Learning



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Institute's advocacy role, said he thinks the agency was not as successful in changing the public temperament for changes in education as he would have liked. "But there's no question that there ought to be a LINC," he said. He said he would support Hunt Administration efforts to recreate the agency, though he said it should not deal just with the science and math school.

John Ehle, the novelist who was Sanford's idea man in 1964 when LINC was established, said the

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per capita of any region in the state. A Greenville newspaper in a rural eastern region, which would be more favored by Balanced Growth Policy, warned its readers to "beware" of the "biased" report and of its possible political effects.

Administration Response

While local government officials have expressed mixed reactions toward *Making North Carolina Prosper* (the report has been used by local officials in recent regional hearings on the Balanced Growth Policy), state government officials have been quite negative. Secretary of Administration Joseph Grimsley denied, in an eight-page written response, that the intent of the Balanced Growth Policy is to shift growth among the regions. He said the goal was rather to "encourage economic progress and job opportunities throughout the state." As to the Center's warning that the governmental attempt to disperse growth in a more even or "balanced" way would harm the economy by reducing growth in high-wage regions, Grimsley replied, "The argument that dispersal lowers income is valid only if we assume that adding lower wage jobs in North Carolina somehow decreases the number of high-wage jobs we can get." Despite the denial that the state intends to shift growth, Grimsley declined to abandon the "regional balance targets" which would serve as goals for growth and as guideposts for public investments in each of the state's 18 regions.

Grimsley called the Center's assessment of local participation in the policy's formation "the greatest failure of the Center's report." While the report regarded the Administration's Local Government Advocacy Council as window-dressing serving to legitimize the policy, Grimsley said the local officials on the council "have a central role in designing the . . . policy." On the recommendation for mandatory multicounty development planning, Grimsley said local governments already do a variety of regional planning projects voluntarily. "To require multicounty economic development planning by counties seems unwarranted in light of these efforts," he added.

On recommendations for alleviating the policy's vagueness, Grimsley said *An Urban Policy for North Carolina* "has not been formally adopted for recommendations or implementation" by the Administration and that no action would be taken on it until it had been studied further by Secretary Howard Lee of the Department of Natural Resources and Community Development and by a subcommittee of the Local Government Advocacy Council. On the recommendation for research task forces on development problems, Grimsley said growth problems are already "being addressed in

many ways by our public and private universities." Grimsley specifically mentioned a so-called "Center for Urban Affairs at UNC-CH" which was "working with Secretary Howard Lee on identifying urban problems." This is an apparent reference to the Center for Urban and Regional Studies, whose director, Jonathan Howes, headed an advisory group that helped write *An Urban Policy for North Carolina*. Ironically, this is the "shelved" document mentioned above. The advisory group Howes headed has been dismissed. □

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dissolution of the agency may have made it more difficult for North Carolina to get national foundation money for education. The last time he approached a large foundation on behalf of a university, he said, he found foundation officials unreceptive and curious about what had happened to the Learning Institute. "One person at Carnegie told me, 'LINC was at one time the only organization that knew what was going on in the schools and had a way of getting into it.'" he said. He and some others noted the development in the last five years of LINC-type agencies in other states.

Ray said a re-established LINC should have some changes in its board structure to stimulate board involvement in the program. "Any time you've got people like the governor and Terry Sanford on your board, it's hard to get them together for a meeting," he said. But Sanford said LINC, as it has been organized, needs the governor for a "champion." "Its great value was to the governor, and to the extent he used it, it would be good," Sanford said. Of Hunt, he said, "I think he has just had a hard time trying to find a mission for it. We have more new ideas now than we've had in a long time."

Sanford suggested that a recreated LINC might be able to evaluate the state's new reading program. If the program has a flaw, he said, it is that the Department of Public Instruction will have a hard time evaluating its own program. But that suggestion, like others, remains to be dealt with at some future time. As it stands now, the agency is deactivated — one administration staff person described it as "phased out" — the state has gone on to new directions in education, and many of the people who worked with education in the LINC era say they are puzzled. Said one former LINC official, "It's odd that this governor, above all, with his interest in children, hasn't yet got a handle on the one agency that had a handle on children's programs in this state." □