



Canadian Languages Association (CLA) / L'Association canadienne des langues (ACL)

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Canadian Languages Association

Overview

Background

The Canadian Languages Association (CLA) / L'Association canadienne des langues (ACL) is a national umbrella organization established in 1990 at national language education conference in Edmonton, Alberta.

The CLA is committed to working in cooperation with language and cultural associations, educational institutions, government departments and ministries, business groups, and community stakeholders at the local, provincial, and federal levels to promote the value of international/heritage languages education for all Canadians.

Objectives:

1. To raise awareness of the value and benefits of language learning for all Canadians.
2. To recognize Canada's ethnocultural communities and their historical and ongoing contributions to language education.
3. To promote the development of programs in international/heritage languages and other related areas for the creation of positive educational outcomes for learners.
4. To strengthen communication and cooperation among providers and supporters of international/heritage languages organizations across Canada.
5. To coordinate and participate in the sharing of information and resources pertinent to language education.

6. To enable the teaching of international/heritage languages within educational systems.
7. To enhance teaching skills and resource development for language classrooms.
8. To support the efforts of educators in international/heritage languages programs.

International/heritage languages, together with multiculturalism are part of an inseparable family. The teaching of languages reinforces our Canadian multicultural identity and strengthens our country's unique way of life. The result is social cohesion, which includes anti-racism, peace-building, civic participation and cross-cultural understanding. Further, international/heritage languages are essential to Canada's relationships with the global community in the areas of international relations and cooperation, international trade and international development.

In short, Canadians possessing skills in more than our official languages are an invaluable human, social, cultural and economic resource for our communities and for our country.

Organization Profile

The Canadian Languages Association was founded by the following nine organizations:

The Canadian Languages Association (CLA / L'Association canadienne des langues (ACL) is a national organization whose objectives include: to promote the development and enhancement of international/heritage languages across Canada; to strengthen the framework for communication and coordination among international/heritage language organizations, and to promote the teaching of international/heritage languages within the mainstream/public educational systems across Canada.

CLA is committed to working in cooperation with all language and cultural associations, educational institutions, government departments/ministries, business groups, and community stakeholders at both the provincial and federal levels to promote the value and importance of heritage/international languages for all Canadians.

Funding History for International / Heritage Language Education and the CLA

Up until 1990, the Government of Canada provided direct support for community-based language and cultural programs through per-capita grants. This support greatly assisted community-based schools to subsidize the cost of classroom rental, teaching and instructional resource expenses.

Once the federal government ceased national funding to individual, community-based language programs, various provincial governments recognized the need to take responsibility and initiate some form of financial support. This provincial support varied widely across the country and continues to be uneven today.

In the mid-1990's, Canadian Heritage provided the CLA with one-time seed money to establish themselves as a national organization to provide support to provincial and local initiatives across Canada.

In 1995, the Department of Canadian Heritage established one-time support for the Canadian Languages Network (CLN), an innovative project that introduced computer-based language resources and internet support for linguistic and cultural communities across Canada to share language and cultural teaching resources and information. This project ran successfully until it ended in 1997. It was administered by the Saskatchewan Organization for Heritage Languages, but also indirectly supported by the CLA through participation in the Management Committee (which oversaw the practical side of the CLN).

At present, there is no dedicated support mechanism from the federal government for the CLA and community-based language and cultural programs across Canada.

CLA Accomplishments and Future Goals

The CLA has worked to bring together the various organizations from the different provinces on a networking and consensus-building level and successfully provide a contact point beyond provincial organizations that assisted instructors, administrators as well as learners/individuals with an interest in second language acquisition/retention.

The CLA had been particularly innovative and supportive in the areas of Internet-based heritage language resource identification and acquisition as well as heritage language instructor training/skill development and curriculum development. In addition, the CLN initiative provided an opportunity to enhance the objective of increasing public awareness around cultural diversity and clearly demonstrates that heritage/international language education provides a unique opportunity for students/learners/instructors to value Canada's multicultural identity through second language acquisition and retention.

With these accomplishments in mind, the following are some short and medium term goals for the CLA:

Short term:

- Raise awareness of language education, benefits and opportunities.

- Provide an overview of the state of language learning in Canada beyond English, French and aboriginal languages.
- Set an agenda for continued networking and development.

Medium / Long term:

- Develop a national agenda that sees Canadians promoting and supporting the instruction of all languages.
- Development of a business model, establishing the links between international language education and the new global economy.
- Recognition of international language programs within the public education system.
- Monitoring provincial policies and curricula that support languages as a key component of inclusive systems.

Ongoing Role of the CLA

Multiculturalism and multilingualism are the strength and heart of our Canadian society, and community-based languages education plays such an important role in intercultural understanding. Multiculturalism and multilingualism also promote peace, cooperation and respect for one another locally, nationally and internationally. Canada is admired around the world for its approach to multiculturalism.

The CLA believes it is time for the Government of Canada to invest in this policy. Our goal is to continue to urge the federal government to return to sustainable and predictable funding for the development and promotion of linguistic and cultural learning in order to enable organizations like the Canadian Languages Association, provincial and regional language umbrella associations and community-based language schools. Sustainable financial support will help these organizations address important linguistic and cultural community needs on a planned and ongoing basis.

Let's examine a few of the specific issues that a viable CLA will take the lead in managing:

Issue: *Revitalization of a national organization promoting international / heritage language education.*

CLA Role: Revisit and clearly articulate the CLA's vision, mission, goals and operation Develop a new Action Plan and National Strategy for CLA.

Issue: *The promotion of international language education varies greatly throughout the country with provinces having various degrees of commitment or understanding of the importance of this skill to the general public.*

CLA Role: Provinces need to be attentive to language education and give it more priority as a building block for future Canadian society. Research (e.g. Cummins) has continuously indicated that languages contribute to personal growth, educational success and career enrichment whether the target language be new or of one's heritage. CLA will act as lead advocate in this regard.

Issue: *Promoting international language education at the national level.*

CLA Role: The CLA concerns itself with the survival, promotion and cross-sharing of international / heritage language programs across Canada. The CLA has also acted as a well-informed voice for the promotion of multilingualism at the federal level and informs the public and policy-makers of the benefits of multilingualism to all aspects of Canadian society.

Issue: *Communications Strategy: Connecting all of the independent organizations, bodies, etc. connected with international / heritage language education.*

CLA role: The CLA is fortunate to have various provincial associations, district school boards and University faculties as its members, all of which are affiliated with language programs in their own respective regions. The CLA therefore will voluntarily act as advisors, resources and facilitators in the ongoing tasks associated with this proposal.

CLA representatives will be able to activate further work within their own regions. Community organizations will take an active role during the process and will be encouraged to influence change as needed within their own regions.

CLA will design and implement a new website to have a national presence. The proposed website will share background on CLA and its role, the various HL organizations and affiliated language schools, and act as a central clearinghouse of information and resources related to language education.

Issue: *A Federal government commitment to a Canadian Languages Strategy*

A coordinated Canadian Languages Strategy is an imperative against a background of profound national and international change. We envision this Canadian Languages Strategy as vital in

fostering public acceptance of language competence and intercultural understanding as essential components in the make up of an informed international citizen.

CLA role: The Canadian Languages Strategy would clearly communicate the Federal Government's commitment to increasing Canada's languages capability, and a vision of languages as "a life long skill – to be used in business and for pleasure, to open up avenues of communication and exploration, and to promote, encourage and instill a broader cultural understanding."

Implicit in our primary objective is the demonstration of a clear understanding of how international language education produces social cohesion, intercultural learning and understanding while benefiting Canadian society with the evolution and availability of a multilingual workforce. CLA's role will be that of the agent for change / public education and the unifying body for the progression and advancement of international language education as a concrete promotional tool and vehicle for multiculturalism both within the various levels of government, the public education system, the business sector, and at the community level across Canada.

This will include coordination and implementation of the following components: advocacy at the political level (i.e. preparation of a Statement to the Senate, preparation for a Notice for an Enquiry to the Senate, the eventual introduction of the Bill - promotion and advancement of Canadian languages), which is currently in draft form; and, advocacy at the grass-roots / community level (CLA's proposed Speak Up Canada campaign).

Action:

- Coordinate regional Speak Up for Languages activities, including regional information meetings.

Specific action items include: Speak Up Canada communications objectives: build awareness of a project among a wide but defined group of audiences and user groups; secure the commitment of a defined group of stakeholders to the project aims; influence specific policies or policymakers around key aspects; and, encourage participation among researchers or partner bodies.

- Develop a research document outlining both the current status and potential for languages education in/across Canada.

Summary

Canada's identity is one made up of a mosaic of languages and cultures, all combining to form a unique multicultural country. International / Heritage language instructors play an important role in the strengthening of Canada's identity by providing a cross-cultural perspective on our country through language education. In other words, language education reinforces the Canadian identity and strengthens its unique multicultural make-up.

The CLA's mandate is to enhance the preservation, growth, teaching and promotion of international/heritage languages and cultures at the public school and community level across Canada. The CLA represents a wide range of provincial, regional and local community-based language and cultural organizations. It plays an essential role in networking, communications, sharing of best practices and is supported by community volunteers and parents.

It is important to realize how far that CLA can take the issue of international / heritage language education and promotion on a small budget. The CLA will succeed on the commitment and expertise of the invaluable volunteers who make up the Management Committee.

The unique CLA team is made up of dedicated and committed volunteers who are experts in the field of international / heritage language education. They bring a thorough understanding of the issues with a thoughtfulness and long-range vision that motivates others to become involved. The CLA is the vehicle which these individuals have committed their time and energy.

Ultimately, the new CLA will have many benefits: increased public awareness that is well-informed; enhanced contribution and interest by educational institutions; further cooperation and increased participation by provincial educational bodies; improved language education policies within various regions that commit to the delivery of international language programs.

