

Twenty Years of Achievement: A Brief Historical Sketch of CILS

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For the academic year 2013-2014, the UBC Centre for Intercultural Language Studies decided to mark its 20th year of research and service to the UBC community and beyond with a public recognition of that anniversary. The year would be marked with specially-themed events, including the 20th Anniversary Lecture by Dr. Jörg Roche on February 25, 2014 (now available on the CILS web site), and on the following day, the 20th Anniversary Roundtable, chaired by UBC's Alden Habacon, Director of the UBC initiative on intercultural engagement on "The Future of Intercultural Engagement in Canadian Higher Education." All of the year's events including its successful Tenth Annual Research Symposium reflected the year's theme: "Intercultural Language Studies, Looking Back, Looking Forward."

Many amongst our constantly-renewing membership have asked "Why 2014? What happened in 1994 that led to the creation of this thriving, inter-faculty centre with its impressive contributions to language teaching and learning over the years?" Behind the beginnings of so many good things, there lies a story.

1994 was chosen as the nominal "starting date" for CILS because on New Year's Day 1994, Dr. Jörg Roche, Associate Professor in Germanic Studies at UBC, and Dr. Ken Reeder, Associate Professor in Language Education with their young families were walking in the snowy foothills of the Bavarian Alps, and Jörg shared his dream with Ken that UBC ought to have a forum in which the various researchers across the UBC campus could exchange ideas, work together in research and development initiatives, and generally reduce the isolation many scholars felt, particularly between the faculties of Arts and Education, that the institution placed between us. Jörg and Ken were both enjoying productive sabbatical years in Europe in 93-94.

With Ken's encouragement, Jörg took that January conversation back to his close colleagues in the Faculty of Arts in the following academic year, 94-95, , and particularly, Norma Wieland in Germanic Studies, but reached out to others in allied language departments, including Carlo Testa and Daniela Bocassini of the Italian Studies program, Judith Plessis of Continuing Studies, Patsy Duff in Language Education together with its Head at that time, Victor Froese. This group and very quickly, many other kindred spirits, began meeting four or five times a year informally. Once this informal steering group had a general idea of the feasibility of creating a continuing organization – that took a couple of years of informal meetings over lunch, often taking place in what is now the Digital Literacy Centre in Language & Literacy Education – the group eventually formalized the UBC proposal that was sent to Senate in 1998. It was not all proposal talk, however: those three years saw plenty of informal exchange of projects, grants, shared grad student activity, and talks by one another and visitors. That was when the joint UBC-industry multimedia language learning simulation project *Edubba* was completed, for example. But it also now seems obvious in hindsight that, as is often the case with energetic new organizations, it was the clear vision and hard work of one individual, Jörg Roche in our case, that was responsible for the record of achievement that we celebrate today and build upon for tomorrow.

After a long stretch of consideration of this novel creation by a Senate committee, the founding motion for CILS was passed at its January, 1999 meeting, as shown at:

http://senate.ubc.ca/sites/senate.ubc.ca/files/downloads/va_minutes_january1999.pdf (page 12030).

The UBC Board of Governors in turn approved that motion at its March, 1999 meeting, whose minutes are found at http://senate.ubc.ca/sites/senate.ubc.ca/files/downloads/va_minutes_march1999.pdf

It took time and hard political work with our supporting Deans and Associate Deans in Arts and Education to establish the notion that an R&D centre could cut boldly across faculty lines and didn't have to be administered from one place or another, but could float in between units because of its members' dedication to the central theme, language teaching and learning in intercultural contexts.

The inclusion of what was then called UBC's Centre for Continuing Studies emerged from a strong (and funded) research collaboration with Mackie Chase, then Director of Continuing Studies' Centre for Intercultural Communication, and this addition to CILS' constitutional makeup was soon after approved officially by Senate and the Board of Governors. Continuing Studies began to contribute one member annually to our advisory committee, while the two faculties continued to contribute \$7500 annually each. That contribution was reduced to \$5000 once it became evident that CILS was capable of funding many of its R&D projects independently, particularly thanks to Patsy Duff's successful fundraising for CILS projects for many years. And so the base funding has stayed at that modest level for the ensuing years. We have in addition received significant infrastructure support from the Faculty of Education because, in the later 2000s, CILS was taken on for administrative support by that faculty's Office of Graduate Programs and Research as a working centre in the Faculty of Education. CILS however happened to have a unique constitution, the only Faculty of Education Centre that had a mandate stemming from the UBC Senate and that was constituted as a Centre equally supported by the Faculties of Education, Arts, and by UBC Continuing Studies.

A landmark self-study review was carried out by Sandra Zappa-Hollman and Ken Reeder in 2006, in which a serious look was taken at the current mandate of CILS as well as its future prospects and directions. That report appears on the CILS web site at: <http://www.cils.educ.ubc.ca/documents/CILS%20Review%20June%202006.pdf> and constitutes an important part of CILS' historical documentation along with its Annual Reports. There is a short historical section in that review report, but the report's conclusions mainly focused on a sharpened vision for CILS and its cross-faculty work as of 2006, for the coming five or so years. In particular, research was a clear priority that emerged from that report's deliberations.

The 2006 report's mandate to promote research more heavily in relation to CILS' continuing work in the areas of professional development, knowledge translation and outreach to the professional field has been well realized in the ten years of successful annual Research Symposia that highlight innovative research and its translation into best practices in language education. Those annual forums, along with a series of externally funded research projects have led to increased visibility of CILS scholars and contributors not only in the language teaching and learning community at UBC and in the immediate community, but also in the national and international research literature. But a balanced assessment of that scholarly contribution must remain the subject of another report. That research impact is well attested in the Annual Reports, but perhaps more importantly, in the everyday informed practice and vision of the UBC language teaching and learning community that CILS serves as its primary membership. Over the years, CILS has remained a Centre that consists of its people, retaining much of its early flavour of "movement" rather than "organization," reflecting its simple beginnings in a quiet conversation between two language educators who worked in quite different ends of the university.

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