

Dear Linguapax selection committee,

Please consider this letter as my nomination of The International and Heritage Languages Association (IHLA<sup>1</sup>) for the 2016 Linguapax award for outstanding contribution to mother language education. I have been studying heritage language education in Alberta for my doctoral degree. In order to build background knowledge for my dissertation, I have been investigating the history and the present organizational structure of IHLA. I feel that this volunteer organization needs to be recognized for its consistent efforts in mother language maintenance for almost 40 years, preservation of linguistic diversity in Canada, revitalization and reactivation of its immigrant and minority language communities and the promotion of multilingualism in a multicultural context.

Since the 1970s IHLA has been an outstanding leader in building not only a multicultural, but a multilingual Canada and in supporting at least 100,000 families in maintaining and developing oracy and literacy in their mother tongues. Mother tongue maintenance in the Canadian context is no small feat, with less than 10% maintaining a language beyond a third generation or beyond<sup>2</sup> and the unspoken public sentiment that English be used in public spaces, even for francophone communities in English-speaking parts of Canada (Lafontant and Martin, 2000; Landry and Allard, 1988; Moulun-Passek, 2000; Gaudet and Clément, 2009; Clément, Noels, Gauthier, 1993; Bilash, 2012). Furthermore, for most of its 40 years, IHLA and its member schools have been run on a volunteer basis. All par excellence should be recognized.

In reviewing the criteria for the Linguapax award I would like the adjudication committee to note how IHLA has contributed to preservation of linguistic diversity, revitalization and reactivation of linguistic communities and the promotion of multilingualism, and continues to do so. In particular, IHLA has fought for acknowledgement, accreditation and legitimacy of heritage language learners' skills in high school, development and recognition of HL teachers' backgrounds through credentialing and professionalization, the transmission of the value of plurilingualism to Canadian youth, and education of the public, politicians and decision makers (e.g. those in government, administrators, academics) by conducting and disseminating research not only to the wider world, but to local heritage language school teachers as well. In short, the organization has demonstrated unrelenting advocacy for Linguapax values and purposes.

### **Canadian context**

To best understand the significance of IHLA and its contributions one must also understand the Canadian context. The term multiculturalism is often associated with Canada, yet entrenching the concept as it is envisioned in the Canadian context was not easily "won" and comes from determined ethnic groups who refused to be marginalized or silenced in the 1960s and 70s. In response to the 1963-1969 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, aimed at creating a greater awareness of society's discriminatory practices towards French speakers, many

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<sup>1</sup> Although the organization has also changed its name over the years (1977-86 AELTA; 1986 – 2003 – NAHLA; 2003- present – IHLA), in this nomination I will only use the term IHLA.

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.immigration.ca/en/2011/135-canada-immigration-news-articles/2011/june/533-language-retention-increases-among-canadian-immigrants.html>

groups contested the vision and emerging legislation that Canada had only two founding groups: English and French. These groups wished to be acknowledged for their contributions and rights as well<sup>3</sup>. As an appeasement and an acknowledgement of the contributions of all Canadians, Canada was declared a bilingual country in a multicultural framework in 1971.

Although this act was a victory for ethnic groups whose ancestors had cleared land, built railways, created maps and developed the social, economic and democratic base of many parts of the country, especially in western Canada, this act did not immediately change Canadian sentiments. To exemplify the mood of mainstream Canadians at the time, recorded correspondence from Dr. Kandler, University professor and IHLA executive member, to Mrs. Forest, Chancellor of the University of Alberta states, "I am not advocating that every student in Alberta be obliged to learn French as of tomorrow. I do assert that it is high time to start correcting a typical national Canadian prejudice namely towards learning and speaking languages other than one's own." To help deliver this message, Dr. Kretzel and Mr. Briongos stood before the University of Alberta Senate Chambers in 1977 petitioning for university student language entrance and exit criteria. This passion for petitioning the provincial universities for increased graduation standards resurfaced in 1986 when IHLA created a special set of resolutions regarding heritage language education in the province, including a joint University-IHLA Multilingual Center.

With legal acknowledgement of status, the government was now obliged to create policies that accommodated all cultures in Canada. In turn, community language groups that had previously been entirely self-funded, often meeting in people's homes or the basements of community halls, were now able to apply for federal and provincial funding for their community schools. In 1977 the Canadian Consultative Council on Multiculturalism proposed a workshop for heritage language teachers as an opportunity to bring together schools that had long been established but never recognized, to learn from and with one another. As a result of this gathering of previously unrecognized professionals, the IHLA collective was formed. It operated through some government funds, but remained largely volunteer. Its aims were to support heritage language teachers who had previously been unsupported and isolated in their work so that they could improve the quality of instruction for children who were studying their mother tongues in after school and Saturday programs across the province. It continues to promote a greater understanding of the importance of language learning and helps others understand why plurilingualism is not only of personal benefit, but also enhances one's ability to be an accepting and tolerant Canadian and a global citizen.

### **Building a multilingual Canada**

In 1982 The Charter of Rights and Freedoms declared that multiculturalism is a Canadian value and in 1988 The Multiculturalism Act declared that Canadians had the right to preserve their cultures. While both of these pieces of legislation appear to celebrate multiculturalism in the

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<sup>3</sup> Note that in the formative years of multiculturalism Canada's first nations peoples also opposed the notion of only two founding fathers. However, it took many more decades before they were able to legally make the case to have their appropriate status in Canada. Note also that in those early years, ethnic leaders invited leaders of first nations' groups to join their ranks.

Canadian context, they leave the responsibility of this task to the groups themselves and offer no constitutional support to multiculturalism. This is in contrast to the rights of French-English bilingualism.

As already stated, defining Canada as multicultural was not automatically accepted by mainstream Canadians who interpreted it as an unnecessary burden on taxpayers (see on CV: Janigan, McKenzie, & Gammal; Bolslad; Hume; Elliot; Pelech; and Zolf). Throughout its history, IHLA has pushed against mainstream resistance for language learning at all levels, but in recent years the push was especially strong to build the infrastructure so that youth with a HL education had the skills for university language courses. To do so, IHLA worked with government to establish a process for HL schools to be able to offer high school credit courses to their students. This entailed being registered with Alberta Education, having at least one Alberta-certified teacher on staff of the HL school, and having an accredited curriculum. For many community schools, meeting these expectations without the support of an organization like IHLA is completely out of reach. As a result, IHLA worked relentlessly to offer workshops about the process and teach community groups how to register, raise funds to offer scholarships to IHLA members so that they could receive credentials and certification in the province, including the offering of special TOEFL courses for immigrant and refugee teachers so that they would be able to meet university requirements if needed, and offer workshops to help each interested community develop a program of studies (POS) or approved curriculum. As a result, 20 teachers completed their degrees, and five language groups received approval by the province for their curriculum: Pilipino (2004), Korean (2004), Russian (2005), Punjabi (2005), and Tigrinya (2007). IHLA is currently supporting the writing of a Vietnamese POS. Some of the POS were even later adopted by public school boards so that they could be taught during the school day. As a direct result of IHLA's hard work more languages were brought into mainstream schools and other language groups grew sufficient numbers of students with higher language skills that the local university could now offer advanced classes in those languages. In addition to languages which have existed in Canada for longer periods of time such as French, Chinese, German, Italian, Spanish, and Ukrainian, students are now able to study languages such as Punjabi and Korean at University. Building a foundation for students to take these courses is not about simply promoting plurilingualism in students, but also about preserving and legitimizing linguistic diversity in society.

IHLA has lobbied diligently for multicultural and multilingual policies, sometimes with greater success than others. For example,

- 1984: IHLA called for a city-wide multiculturalism policy
- 1996: IHLA called for the reinstatement of per-student funds once issued to Saturday programs from the provincial and federal governments
- 2004-2006: IHLA contributed to a proposal for a federally funded multicultural centre, and a call for mandatory language instruction in grades 4-9
- 2009: IHLA participated in a national letter writing campaign to The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) to expand the services for heritage language teachers

These changes were often the result of legislation and lobbying from IHLA which pushed against the mainstream tide of English monolingualism and ghettoization of cultural groups. While IHLA did not succeed in having each of these pieces of legislation passed, it did prove that multicultural groups could not be silenced and paved the way for a more supportive municipal mindset. For example, while the city enacted and later revoked its multicultural policy, it does offer grants to support emerging communities to this day. Similarly, although the federal government did not establish a multilingual center, IHLA developed language resource packages and a language resource centre. And while it is not mandatory for schools to offer language instruction in grades 4-9, many more jurisdictions across the province now do. Furthermore, IHLA has continued its efforts to professionalize community schools and teachers by writing and adopting its professional standards (2012). As a result of these many initiatives and national leadership IHLA's work was acknowledged by Alberta Culture in 1990, and as its most current victory, in 2015 the City of Edmonton declared Feb 21 "International Mother Language Day", this the result of the decades and generations of people who never lost sight of a greater and more inclusive vision for Canada's many languages and cultures. (See Photo #1)

### **Revitalization and reactivation of linguistic communities**

With multiculturalism IHLA developed a new status and was regularly approached to help build a broader infrastructure in the country that revitalized and reactivated linguistic communities and promoted languages and cultures. For example, meetings were held and relationships established to acknowledge the need for:

- authentic language materials from the National Film Board of Canada (1979),
- a Multilingual Biblioservice (1980), now available at all local libraries in the province,
- workshops on teaching strategies and curriculum development with the Alberta teachers Association and local school boards (1980-to present), Edmonton Regional Learning Consortium, and ILEA (2007-2009) (See photo #6),
- language teaching kits (1981- with Alberta Cultural Heritage Foundation; 2006-2008)- development of community infrastructure and good community relations (1980, 1981; 2004- present).

Heritage language teachers still continue to have regular workshops available to them. (See Photo # 5) Since the beginning of the organization over 150 workshops have appealed to over 3,000 HL teachers, including new immigrants, on topics such as practical ideas for HL classrooms, theme and unit planning, using technology, using the Common European Frame of Reference's can-do statements, understanding and integrating global citizenship, literacy and oracy development and curriculum writing. As has already been stated, many of these classes and programs have targeted teacher-licencing so that schools have teachers to offer high school credits. Especially significant have been the support for acquiring accreditation in the form of cost-covering for foreign credential recognition, English classes for university entrance and academic upgrading, and scholarships for attending university classes. In the past IHLA had even collaborated with a local college to create its own certification program, but after graduating two groups of HL teachers as outcomes of a financially supported pilot project, the program ended due to lack of funding.

### **Helping youth to see the value of plurilingualism**

As was shown previously, IHLA has shown Albertan students that learning one's heritage language can have concrete personal benefits, including high school credit. However, it has also enabled youth to interact with one another in a variety of ways:

- by helping a local radio station secure more "ethnic" content in and since 1983.
- by organizing events so that students are welcomed, not only into their respective linguistic communities, but into a wider embracing multicultural and multilingual community.
- by offering Annual Alberta Cultural and Linguistic Awards (1978-1985) for youth in speech, debate and writing (including on the role of language learning) and more recently essay contests (2003) and school matching events (2015).
- by sponsoring Sporting events designed for students from different communities to get to know one another (1982-1983). The latter corresponded to the 1983 Universiade held in Edmonton, Alberta.
- by promoting meetings between schools, such as the visits between the Japanese and German schools and the Ukrainian and Hindi schools (1970s) and the Vietnamese and Iranian schools (2015). (see photo #4)
- by organizing a city-wide Mother Language Day event (with 500-750 attendees) (2004-present). (See Photo #3)
- by featuring a Linguapax representative as a keynote speaker at its annual Mother Language Day gatherings.
- by publishing students' work in an annual Mother Language Book and giving each published contributor a copy (2004-present).
- by publishing free on-line newsletters that are sent to elected officials at national, provincial and municipal levels, all HL schools, teachers and families (2003-present).
- by promoting HL learning and its benefits to both ethnic communities and the mainstream in local newspapers (2008 - present).
- By participating in annual heritage day festivals with culture displays, food tasting, music and dance presentations and information about language classes in the community (1980-present)

### **Conducting and disseminating research**

IHLA has always promoted professional training and research in the area of heritage languages. The organization has been active in hosting (1977, 1979, 1980, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1988) and attending conferences of local organizations (ATESL, 1980; ISLC, 2003-2006; SLIC, 2008, 2011-2012), federal organizations (CASLT NCMIE, 1987) and international organizations (ICRN, 2004-2008; ACTFL, 2008, 2010, 1011; LESLLA, 2015; WCoML, 2015; WWRECA, 2015). IHLA has also brought in guest speakers for special workshops for its members. These have included annual pedagogy workshops with Dr. Olenka Bilash (1990-present), a special Chinese workshop presented by Dr. Joe Wu (2005), a multiliteracies workshop by Dr. Jim Cummins (2005) and a CEFR workshop by Maria Makrakis and Constantine Ioannou in 2012 that was co-sponsored by ILEA and BCHLA, groups in other provinces. Furthermore, several publications from its newsletters have been reprinted by regional and national organizations.

Publishing has also been a priority for the organization. Early peer-reviewed publications concerned the status of heritage languages in Alberta (see attached CV). Later publications targeted community revitalization and sustainability (2005). IHLA has also worked to produce conference proceedings, annual Mother Language Day books, and newsletters (45 to date). In more recent years, IHLA has also published accessible research papers for its members in the newsletters and began to offer two scholarships for heritage language school leadership. IHLA also learned about the Ethnolinguistic Vitality project which led to two teachers completing Masters of Education research projects about intergenerational language use (in the Italian (2005)- and Greek-Canadian (2008) communities). Two doctoral students have also conducted research: Doughty (1995) on establishing the certificate program for teachers and I (Aberdeen- to be completed in 2016) on understanding the current organizational structure of heritage language schools in the province. All of these publications share a common theme: understanding who we are as multicultural citizens so that we can remain linguistically diverse in Canada.

### **Conclusion**

As one can see through this nomination, IHLA has been prolific in its services to its heritage language schools for almost 40 years. (See Photo #2) In fact, it has been repeatedly acknowledged by its sister organizations across the country for its leadership and sustainability initiatives. Through its unrelenting advocacy, IHLA has contributed toward the revitalization of linguistic communities, the legitimacy and accreditation of languages for youth in public schools, the professionalization of the heritage language field and increased acknowledgement of its teachers (often women and often refugees or immigrants from countries where it was difficult to obtain documentation of credentials), the promotion of plurilingualism in a multicultural Canada and to the professional literature of heritage language teaching much of which cannot be quantified. They can; however, be rightly acknowledged by an organization as prestigious as yours.

Thank you for your consideration,

Trudie Aberdeen



1. Alderman Armajeet Sohi and Mayor Don Iveson presenting IHLA President Olga Prokhorova with a municipal plaque declaring February 21 Mother Language Day in Edmonton (2015).



2. IHLA President Josephine Pallard receiving a commemorative plaque from Honorable Provincial Minister Gene Zwosdesky (2003).



3. Students and teachers learning about one another at International Mother Language Day (2014).



4. Ukrainian-Hindi School visits (Late 1970s)



5. An impromptu photo of the IHLA executive and workshop attendees (2006)



6. IHLA Heritage Language Saturday School teachers taking in a professional development workshop. (2004).