



CARLA: A Very Brief History

The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota was founded in 1993 with a visionary mission: to enhance the nation's capacity for language teaching, learning, and assessment. Born from a powerful collaboration between the College of Liberal Arts (CLA) and the College of Education and Human Development (CEHD), and bolstered by the Office of International Programs, CARLA spent over three decades at the forefront of applied linguistics and teacher education. Below are some highlights of the center's history.

The Foundation: Establishing a National Presence (1993–1999)

Upon its inception, CARLA immediately secured its status as a national Title VI Language Resource Center (LRC), funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Simultaneously, the center oversaw the Minnesota Articulation Project—funded by FIPSE and NEH—which focused on creating seamless, coherent language curricula from K-12 through college. These formative years established the foundational themes that remain central to the field today: proficiency assessment, immersion education, Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTL), culture in language learning, and technology integration.

- **Articulation of Language Instruction:** The development of the [Minnesota Language Proficiency Assessments \(MLPA\)](#) provided critical testing tools for French, German, and Spanish at the ACTFL Intermediate-Low and Intermediate-Mid levels. This era also saw the creation of the [Proficiency-Oriented Language Instruction and Assessment Handbook](#), facilitating nationwide teacher training on improving students' language proficiency.
- **Immersion Leadership:** CARLA founded the [International Immersion and Dual Language Education Conference](#) in 1995 and spearheaded [research into the unique challenges of immersion pedagogy](#). In 1997, the [American Council on Immersion Education \(ACIE\)](#) was established to foster a national network and [newsletter](#) for practitioners.
- **CARLA Summer Institute Program:** Launched in 1996, this became CARLA's signature outreach initiative, providing intensive professional development for K–16 teachers and serving as a global conduit for the center's research and teaching materials development.

Innovation and Technological Expansion (1999–2010)

During its third and fourth LRC funding cycles, CARLA expanded upon its foundational work with the following initiatives:

- **[Content-Based Language Teaching with Technology \(CoBaLTT\)](#)**: Launched in 1999, the CoBaLTT project became a cornerstone of CARLA's support of language teachers, providing [web-based modules](#) to help teachers integrate subject matter with language learning.
- **[Study Abroad Materials and Research](#)**: Between 1999 and 2002, the *[Maximizing Study Abroad](#)* series was developed, providing essential guidebooks for students and professionals to enhance linguistic and cultural growth during international sojourns. The team then conducted [research](#) on the impact of these supportive materials on student learning in study abroad programs.
- **[Second Language Assessment](#)**: CARLA expanded its assessment work by creating the [Virtual Assessment Center](#), an online hub where teachers could access templates and tools to build their own proficiency-based quizzes and exams. The team further augmented these resources through the [Virtual Item Bank](#).
- **[Pragmatics and Speech Acts](#)**: From 2002 to 2006, the center created materials to support the teaching and learning of the social nuances of language (pragmatics). [Research](#) was conducted around specialized materials developed for [Japanese](#) and [Spanish](#) teachers and learners.
- **[LCTL Project](#)**: This initiative supported teachers of Less Commonly Taught Languages by developing urgently needed [instructional materials](#) and providing community-building opportunities.
- **[International Language Teacher Education Conference](#)**: Established in 1999, this unique conference initiated meaningful professional dialogue across languages and settings to advance language teacher education.

CARLA continued to provide professional development for language teachers on all of its initiatives through presentations, workshops, summer institutes, and publications, reaching educators around the world.

National Influence and Global Networking (2010–2018)

As it entered its sixth and seventh cycles of federal funding, CARLA solidified its reputation as the premier resource for language teacher educators worldwide.

- **[Language Teacher Education \(LTE\) Conference](#)**: CARLA hosted this international conference in 2011, 2015, and 2019, while supporting sister LRCs in offering the conference in 2013, 2015, and 2017.
- **[Immersion Education](#)**: CARLA hosted the International Conference on Immersion and Dual Language Education in [2012](#) and again in [2016](#), with nearly 1,000 attendees. CARLA offered three popular summer institutes for immersion educators and administrators, one of which had rotating themes on “Meeting the Challenges of Immersion Education.” The immersion team also conducted [multi-year research](#) on student learning outcomes in early Mandarin immersion programs.
- **[Cultures and Languages Across the Curriculum \(CLAC\)](#)**: CARLA hosted the [2012 CLAC](#)

[Conference](#) and supported the "[Green German](#)" project, which pioneered the teaching of sustainability through high-level language courses.

- **[Teaching Languages Online](#)**: To improve language teachers' understanding of new online teaching methods and effective technology integration in developing online proficiency-based language courses, CARLA offered an experiential online course on teaching language online and a series of annual local/remote audience workshops for teachers on effective integration of online tools in language instruction.
- **[Learner Language](#)**: To help teachers better understand their students' second language acquisition processes, CARLA created [materials](#) to help teachers nurture the development of learner language. Language-specific multimedia materials were developed for teachers of [Chinese](#), [Japanese](#), [Korean](#), [Persian](#), and [Spanish](#).

Resilience and New Directions (2018–2022)

In 2018, CARLA faced a pivotal moment when its Title VI LRC grant was not renewed for the first time. Demonstrating remarkable resilience, the center continued to operate using reserve funding and University support.

- **Flagship Projects**: During this time, many flagship projects, such as the CARLA Fellow Program for graduate students, were maintained. The CARLA Summer Institute program grew during this period of time, pivoting to fully online instruction during the pandemic.
- **New Initiatives**: In addition, CARLA launched several exciting new initiatives under the direction of CARLA Director Kate Paesani. [Literacies in Language Education](#) developed resources for teachers to engage their learners with meaningful and enriching cultural content and conducted research designed to create targeted professional development support for teachers to implement multiliteracies pedagogy. The [Language Program Direction](#) initiative began the creation of interactive modules to support the professional training of postsecondary language program directors.
- **[Social SCILS—Social Justice in Language Education: Strengthening Career Competencies, Intercultural Understanding, and Language Proficiency through Specialized Materials](#)**: Funded by the International Research and Studies Program, this project developed materials addressing critical social justice topics—such as racism, global health, and environmental sustainability—across eight different languages.

The Strategic Era: Social Justice and Advocacy (2022–2026)

In 2022, CARLA successfully regained its status as a Title VI LRC, with a set of initiatives focused in two focal areas: *Language-Content Integration* and *Teacher Education and Advocacy*.

- **[Social Justice in Language Education](#)**: This initiative continued to add to the Social SCILS resources, and conducted research into how "critical pedagogies" can be applied in language classrooms to address systemic inequities.
- **[Equity and Access to State Seals of Bilingualism](#)**: In partnership with the Minnesota

Department of Education, a wide range of practical resources have been created to ensure that the Seal of Biliteracy (state-level recognition of language proficiency for graduating seniors) is accessible to students of all backgrounds, including those speaking LCTLs and indigenous languages

- **[Secondary Dual Language Immersion Education](#)**: CARLA developed specific materials and professional development opportunities to help dual language immersion teachers implement content-and-language integrated curriculum and instruction in the secondary classroom.
- **[Practical Program Evaluation](#)**: In collaboration with ACTFL, CARLA empowered educators to measure the true effectiveness of their language programs.

There is, of course, much more to CARLA's story. For additional details about the work of the center, see [CARLA's Funding History](#) and [CARLA's Language Center Funding](#).

Carrying the Work Forward: 2026 and Beyond

In September 2025, federal funding for the Title VI LRC Program was terminated nationwide. Consequently, CARLA and 15 other centers lost their anticipated fourth year of funding. At the same time, due to shifting funding priorities, the GPS Alliance eliminated its administrative support of the center. CARLA utilized its reserves to complete the 2025–2026 academic year, concluding its storied programming with a final Summer Institute Program in June 2026. The center permanently closed its doors on July 2, 2026.

The CARLA website remains available in an archived format, and the center's vital work has transitioned to dedicated partners:

- **[Social Justice in Language Education](#) and [Literacies in Language Education](#)**: Continuing with the CLA Language Center.
- **The Seal of Biliteracy**: The [National Seals Toolkit](#) and the [Minnesota Bilingual Seals Toolkit](#) are sustained by the Multilingual Education program in CEHD and the MN Department of Education.
- **Secondary Dual Language Immersion**: Key resources for secondary teachers transitioned to the newly established [Secondary DLI Hub](#) at Western Washington University.
- **[Practical Program Evaluation](#)**: Available under the auspices of ACTFL.

The collective work of the LRCs and CARLA's three-decade legacy will continue to shape the field of language teaching and learning for many years to come.

Points of Pride

After 33 years of excellence, we take pride that CARLA:

- Conducted rigorous research and integrated research-based practice into curriculum,

instruction, assessment, and professional development

- Provided a uniquely strong focus on the professional development of language educators and language teacher educators.
- Developed tools to foster proficiency and persistence in language learning, promote content-based instruction, and support immersion language education.
- Championed Less Commonly Taught Languages and advocated for equity in language teaching and learning.
- Created partnerships between university scholars and K-16 language educators, and with key organizations such as ACTFL, AAUSC, sister LRCs, and the Minnesota Department of Education.
- Worked with faculty and graduate students in both the College of Education and Human Development and the College of Liberal Arts with the support of the Global Programs and Strategy Alliance/Office of International Programs.
- Achieved a global impact on language education through the dedication of a modest, highly efficient staff.

