

Helmut Rainer KUSSLER

Highlights of my Career

Because I realize that CVs tend to describe as singular personal achievements what, in most instances, has been achieved by many, I am including this document in which I present some of the developments, activities and accomplishments which, I believe, distinguished my tenure, in the wider context of the human environment which fostered it.

- Throughout my career¹, I was privileged to be able to rely on the backing, cooperation, critical support and encouragement of many remarkable people². They share in whatever I may have achieved.
 - Among them, my departmental colleagues stand out, especially those in the former German Department. By the mid 1980s we had grown into a dynamic and innovative team which made its mark in our region. Its longest serving members were the late Arnold Blumer, Walter Köppe, Ruth Bodenstern and Rolf Annas, supported by secretaries Barbara Stindt and later Gudrun Lück.
 - In 1978, Alois Wierlacher invited me to the first “Internationale Sommerkonferenz Deutsch als Fremdsprache” in Heidelberg. I also attended most of the follow-up conferences in the ensuing years. They were the most fruitful events of my career. The discourse about intercultural German Studies at the conferences coincided with and had a strong formative influence on my own thinking on how German Studies should be approached in a foreign context. I was fortunate to meet most of the colleagues who shaped the subject in the ensuing years: e.g. Willy and Edith Michel who became very dear friends, Bernd Kast, Rolf Ehnert, Dietrich Krusche, Oskar Reichmann, Götz Großklaus and prominent older scholars like Harald Weinrich, Hugo Steger, René Girard and Hikaru Tsuji.
 - There are numerous other colleagues to whom I am indebted; e.g. Horst Arndt for teaching me how to conduct empirical surveys, Lynn Dhority and Charles Schmid for introducing me to Suggestopedia, Graham Davies to programming in Basic, Jeff Mellor and Keith Anderson to website design. I am particularly grateful to my colleagues in the Department of Modern Foreign Languages who ensured that the transition to the new Department went smoothly: Nathalie Heynderickx, Catherine du Toit, Walter Köppe, Rolf Annas, Renate du Toit and Amy Yu.
 - Without the support of the German Academic Exchange Service [DAAD], the Goethe Institute and Inter Nationes over many years I could have achieved very little. The DAAD furthered my career with study, research and conference bursaries. It was the main sponsor of my DAAD-Come-

¹ The following remarks refer to my term as professor of German from 1973 – 2004.

² Only very few of them can be mentioned by name here.

nius-professorship in Kassel. It facilitated visits to Stellenbosch by numerous colleagues from abroad, and it was instrumental in helping us, from the early 1990s, to lay the foundation for an Inter-African network of scholars of German. The Goethe Institute and Inter Nationes greatly contributed to my endeavours at software development.

- In the 1980s, the close cooperation with the erstwhile Institute for Language Teaching at Stellenbosch University (INTUS), led by Dawid van der Vyver, also bore fruit in significant ways. The 'SAA Project', which resulted in "Jumbo German", an intensive course for SAA's cabin staff, provided comprehensive training in suggestopedic approaches to foreign language instruction as well as access to state-of-the-art computer equipment and authoring software.
- Also in the 1980s, I was fortunate to be part of the initial team which authored *Deutsch ZA*, a new German course for South African schools. I benefited enormously from the didactic expertise of my co-authors, notably Silvia Skorge and Rudolf Rode.
- During my 35 years as a lecturer, I taught several thousand students. I was rewarded, in different ways, by many of them.
- In some way, directly or indirectly and to a greater or lesser extent, the persons, institutions, projects, events and experiences mentioned or alluded to above, contributed to the following³:
 - In 1981, the German Department underwent a radical transformation from conventional 'Germanistik' to a concept of 'Deutsch als Fremdphilologie' (foreign philology). The assumedly neutral focus on German language, literature and culture was replaced by a decidedly South African perspective, and intercultural communication competence became the overriding goal. The new curricula extended the concept of literature to include pragmatic types of text and dealt with literature thematically and in reverse chronological order. They followed a learner centered approach, based on the results of years of extensive empirical research regarding i.a. the attitudes, beliefs, reading preferences and levels of proficiency in German of our students.
 - In 1984, a new German beginners' course was launched. It employed the principles of Suggestopedia, and included, from 1985, an integrated computer module of one lesson per week (30 units of about 1 contact hour each). Both the suggestopedic course and the computer module were developed in the Department under my supervision and with my active participation.
 - Also in 1984, a new syllabus for German (3rd Language) was introduced in South African schools. It was based on a communicative and intercultural concept. Lecturers from all three universities at the Cape as well as officials and many teachers from both Education Departments of the Cape Province at that time put in a concerted effort to formulate the new syllabus and to bring the teaching of German as a Foreign Language in South Africa up to date.

³ For details please see the other documents available on this website.

- Around 1990 I started developing "HyperDeutsch", which grew into an elaborate hypertext information system on (predominantly) 20th century German literature, language and culture (± 50 contact hours). It was made available to our students to assist them with their preparation of texts for discussion in class.
- In 1992, the German Department became the Goethe Institute's examination centre for the Western Cape region and introduced special intensive courses to prepare candidates for the examinations "Zertifikat Deutsch als Fremdsprache" [later "Zertifikat Deutsch"] and "Deutsch Mittelstufenprüfung". The success rate of our students in these examinations in the ensuing years was nearly 100%.
- In 1994, the Department of German underwent external evaluation and was judged 'outstanding'.
- In 1995, "Landeskunde PC", a hypertext information system on German 'Landeskunde' (± 30 contact hours), developed by myself, was made available to students to facilitate area studies on the German speaking countries. It was published on diskettes by Inter Nationes in 1997. A revised and greatly enhanced version (± 50 contact hours) was transferred into a website and published by Goethe Institute Inter Nationes in 2000 under the title *Landeskunde PC Web*.
- In 1997, the two-year MPhil. programme in Technology Enhanced Language Learning [later: Hypermedia for Language Learning] was launched. A distance option was added in 1998. The programme was devised, developed and offered mainly by myself until 2001, ably assisted by i.a. Antoinette van der Merwe and Jeanne Fehrsen.
- From 2002 until my retirement in 2004, I was seconded to the 'Fachgebiet Deutsch als Fremdsprache' at the University of Kassel, a postgraduate department drawing students from all over the world, as 'DAAD-Comenius-Stiftungsprofessor in Deutsch als Fremdsprache'. I gladly accepted this appointment after a stint as visiting lecturer in the same department in 2000 had turned out to be the most rewarding teaching experience of my career. Having been able to work with brilliant students like Noraseth Kaewwipat (Thailand), Polyxeni Lentziou (Greece) and Diana Gagyan (Armenia) - to name just three of many - was an absolute privilege.
- Shortly after my retirement, I was presented with a 'Festschrift' in my honour, edited by Rolf Annas, one of my former students and colleagues.