

Aboriginal Languages

Newsletter



INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES INSTITUTE
Spontaneous entertainment at the ILI dinner.
Top: Diane McNaboe sings in Wiradjuri with Lynette Riley on clapsticks.
Left: George Ignace, son of plenary speaker Dr Ron Ignace of the Secwepemc Nation in Canada. George used an improvised drum as the traditional one he brought was not allowed to enter the country.

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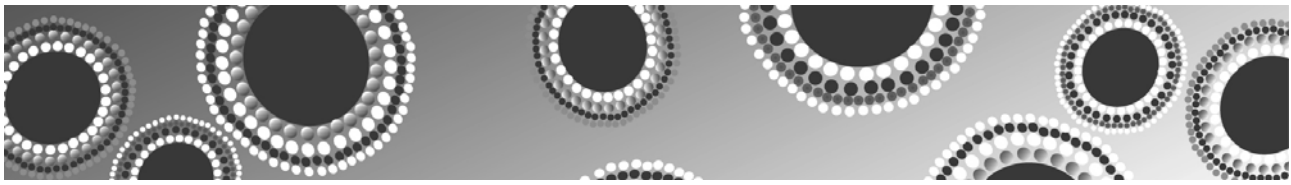
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Term 3, 2008



Aboriginal Languages newsletter

Dear colleagues,

At times, especially in the middle of the year when the days are short and cold, it is wonderful to experience an event that inspires energy and enthusiasm. Such an event was the Institute for Indigenous Languages (ILI) at the University of Sydney. This was part of Lingfest and was co-organised by the Department, along with the Office of the Board of Studies and the Koori Centre. For those of us who attended, this was a marvellous opportunity to find out what was happening with indigenous languages elsewhere in Australia and the world and to learn about different approaches to language revival, maintenance, pedagogy and planning. However the main benefit for me, and for many other participants who spoke to me about it, was the realisation that we are not alone.

As you will no doubt have discovered by now, many people remain unaware of the fact that there were many hundreds of languages spoken across the Australian continent prior to European settlement. Even if people are aware that some of these languages are still spoken in the most remote areas, most are oblivious to the fact that many of these languages are undergoing revival in the southern states. Many people cannot see any immediate economic benefit to be gained from speaking any language other than English and still do not realise how important ancestral languages are to the people who identify with them and what a crucial role they can play in enabling people to feel comfortable with who they are. This can be discouraging for those of us who work in the area of language revival, education and maintenance since it is necessary to explain and justify again and again what we do and why we are doing it.

ILI was a large gathering of people from around Australia and other places where indigenous languages are endangered who all understand these issues and who came together to share their particular expertise. In this context, where everyone knows how important language is, we did not have to waste time justifying or explaining why we were doing what we do, but could just get on with doing it. It was marvellous to see people demonstrating and discussing the work they have been doing and particularly inspiring to hear from people in NSW, in schools and communities, who are developing first class resources based on solid foundations where community members and linguists have worked together.

The previous week I had attended the launch of a film about Aboriginal foster parenting. At the end of it the filmmaker asked me jokingly, 'Do you feel inadequate enough?' I nodded and she expressed her own wonder at the generosity we had witnessed. The film was about a group of extraordinarily selfless people who take on the fulltime task of caring for children, often several children, with exceptionally severe behavioural and/or physical problems. What stuck in my mind was the urgent desire of the carers to ensure that children were encouraged to remain in school to prevent them from the compounding problems faced by students who were alienated from the school system. Evidence suggests that students who experience their culture and language being demonstrably valued in the school system as part of the regular curriculum, are more likely to engage with school. Working to develop and improve the extent and quality of school Aboriginal language programs is not some irrelevant pastime, but can be a significant part of a strategy to engage alienated students.



Since all of us probably wonder at times about the effectiveness of our efforts, it was good to go to the ILI to meet with so many others who also work in the area of indigenous languages and become inspired and re-energised to continue in this important work. I was particularly interested to learn more about the revival of Hebrew, famous for being a 'dead' language, which is now the mother tongue of most Israeli Jews. The most valuable lesson a study of this successful example of language revival teaches us is that a revived language will never be the same as the language that was initially lost. As Professor Ghil'ad Zuckermann persuasively argues, 'When one revives a language, even at best one should expect to end up with a hybrid.' While this might be disappointing to some, it comes as a relief to anyone involved in language revival since it helps us to set realistic goals.

Stan Grant Senior, the prominent NSW Elder widely known for his work on Wiradjuri was the opening plenary speaker and, among other issues, he spoke of the need to work with linguists in order to recreate languages. Ron Ignace from Canada's Secwepemc Nation and Dana Ober from Saibai Island in the Torres Straits were the other plenary speakers. They each spoke about their own work with their endangered languages.

As well as presenters from overseas and interstate, several people involved in teaching Aboriginal languages in NSW schools attended and some of them presented papers and workshops which were very well-received by fellow educators, community members and linguists from around Australia. It is good to see teachers from NSW public schools, including Jenni Tillett from Shoalhaven High School and Heather Templeman from Wilcannia Central School, presenting papers at national academic fora.

Warm regards,
Mari

To the best of my knowledge, the websites and books listed on the following pages contain no controversial materials or links. However, it is always best to check these for yourself before recommending them to students. Permission for all images and works included in this document has been given.

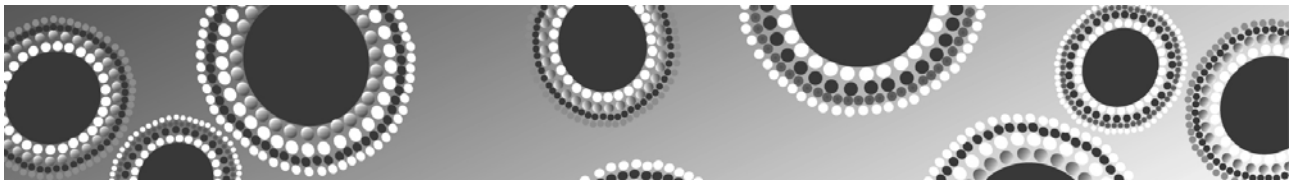


Keeping the record straight

Towards the end of Term two, your school principal would have received a letter and a printout from the database we keep on Aboriginal language programs in NSW asking for updated details. In 2006 we published a report on Language Programs in NSW. The report, which was jointly authored by staff at the Department of Education and the Office of the Board of Studies, can be read online or downloaded from:

http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/primary/languages/aboriginal/assets/pdf/report_2006.pdf

It is vitally important that we continue to document details about the Aboriginal language programs currently operating in the state. This allows everyone involved in supporting programs to plan appropriate strategies. When we have received and collated the results from the last two years, we will be producing another report. More details will follow in a subsequent issue of this bulletin.



Learning the sounds of NSW Aboriginal languages through a phonemic writing system

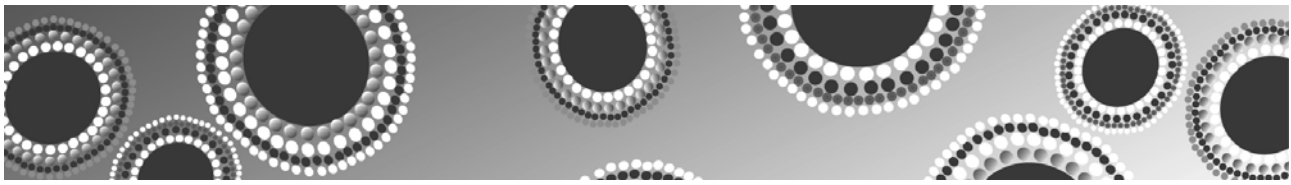
Jennifer Munro, NSW Office of the Board of Studies

Whenever we learn a new language the first things we encounter and have to figure out is the sound of the language, which leads us to find where words begin and end and the rhythm of the language. Sometimes I like tuning into news broadcasts on SBS that are delivered in another language just to listen to the sounds. Polish is my favourite. This is what Dr Nick Reid (from the University of New England) would describe as replacing my English ‘ear mask’ with a Polish ‘ear mask’. To go on to learn a second language in this way is what is referred to as ‘immersion’, or in other words being immersed in the sea of sounds and words of that language. In order to do this, however, we need fully fluent speakers of a language and lots of them!

Language reclamation is very different to immersion in a number of ways but mostly because we generally don’t have enough speakers to immerse us in the language. So without fluent speakers of a language we don’t have ready access to an Aboriginal language ‘ear mask’ and therefore it is a very tricky thing to accurately learn the sounds of the language and pronounce them with the right rhythm. Yet we need to get the sounds and pronunciation right in order to maintain the integrity of the language. Because all the Aboriginal languages of NSW are in various stages of language reclamation, they are all tackling this issue of how to learn and then produce the sounds accurately. This is essential in order to develop a writing system that most adequately represents these sounds.

Stan Grant Snr provided the opening plenary address at the recent Indigenous Languages Institute, in which he described how necessary this first stage of language reclamation is and provided strong advice for communities across NSW to work with linguists to figure out the sounds of the language and develop a phonemic writing system, such as he and Dr John Rudder have done for Wiradjuri. It is only once this has happened that other more rigorous language work can take place. It is also important for an agreed writing system to be approved and endorsed, such as the Wiradjuri Council of Elders has done for Wiradjuri, so that everyone can use the same writing system and as such everyone can then be assured of learning the correct sounds for the language through it. Stan Grant Snr went on to describe the sounds and writing system for Wiradjuri (which follows) and Gary Williams (from Many Rivers Aboriginal Languages Centre) also described the agreed upon sounds and writing system for Gumbaynggirr that Murrumbidgee Aboriginal Culture Co-op developed with the help of linguist, Brother Steve Morelli.

But what’s a phonemic writing system I hear you ask?! That’s what Dr Nick Reid helped explain in our course on this topic at ILI. Roughly speaking a ‘phoneme’ is a ‘sound’. A phonemic writing system is one where there is generally only one phoneme, or sound, per letter. So, in reading Wiradjuri, for example, we don’t have to worry about whether the ‘y’ in *yurung* is the sound of ‘ee’ as in ‘pony’ or ‘ai’ as in ‘eye’ because it is always ‘y’ as in ‘yellow’. That’s the one sound for that letter. Linguists can help figure out the range of sounds in a language, based on combining community knowledge with research into what is possible and what’s not and what other Aboriginal languages allow. They also use the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and of course search for Minimal Pairs. For those of you who attended the course we put on-you’ll know what I’m talking about and if not you’ll have to wait until our next conference or workshop. Ultimately the decisions of which letters to use to represent which sounds rest with the community, but once this very important task has been completed then you can really take off your English ‘ear mask’ and replace it with your Aboriginal language ‘ear mask’ to swim around in the sounds of your language with confidence.



WIRADJURI sounds and writing system

VOWELS

	<i>front</i>		<i>back</i>
<i>high</i>	i/ii		u/uu
<i>low</i>	a/aa		

DIPHTHONGS

ay
aay
uy

CONSONANTS

	Place				
Manner	<i>bilabial</i>	<i>dental</i>	<i>alveolar</i>	<i>laminal</i>	<i>velar</i>
<i>stop</i>	b	dh	d	dy	g
<i>nasal</i>	m	nh	n	ny	ng
<i>lateral</i>			l		
<i>rhotic</i>			rr		
<i>glides</i>	w		r	y	

SOUNDS IN WORDS

a	as in	'above'	<i>gadhi</i>	(snake)
aa	as in	'father'	<i>munyaa</i>	(fish)
ay	as in	'play'	<i>wilay</i>	(possum)
aay	as in	'eye'/'sky'	<i>gulaay</i>	(net)
b	as in	'book'	<i>bagan</i>	(boomerang)
d	as in	'dog'	<i>dinawan</i>	(emu)
dh	as in	'd+th'	<i>dhabal</i>	(bone)
dy	as in	'd'ya reckon'	<i>dyinang</i>	(foot)
g	as in	'good'	<i>garru</i>	(magpie)
i	as in	'bit'	<i>gulambali</i>	(pelican)
ii	as in	'beat'	<i>dyiimalung</i>	(platypus)
l	as in	'look'	<i>ngulung</i>	(face)
m	as in	'many'	<i>mirri</i>	(dog)
n	as in	'no'	<i>naagun</i>	(koala)
ng	as in	'sing'	<i>ngarradan</i>	(bat)
nh	as in	'tenth'	<i>gunhi</i>	(mother)
ny	as in	'onion'	<i>nyimirr</i>	(blossom)
rr	as in	'butter/better' said very quickly	<i>garru</i>	(magpie)
r	as in	'red'	<i>bari</i>	(tall)
u	as in	'put'	<i>yugay</i>	(dingo)
uu	as in	'boot'	<i>guumil</i>	(belt)
uy	as in	'boy'	<i>guya</i>	(fish)
w	as in	'well'	<i>wilay</i>	(possum)
y	as in	'yellow'	<i>yurung</i>	(clouds)



Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate (AETD) Renette Townsend

The Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate provides funds to schools to enable Aboriginal communities to preserve, teach and utilise traditional language and to provide opportunities for Aboriginal students from Kindergarten to Year 12 to learn an Aboriginal language. Up until 2006, 25 schools had implemented an Aboriginal Languages program, but by 2008 this number had increased by 50% to 36. The total number of students studying NSW Aboriginal languages in 2008 is 5298. Languages being taught include: Bundjalung, Wiradjuri, Dhurga, Dharug, Gumbaynggirr, Yuwaalaraay/Gamilaraay, Ngiyampaa, Thunghutti/Dunghutti and Paakantji.

There will be a roll-out of 10 sponsorships to train Aboriginal teachers, from both schools and TAFE, over the next 3 years, as qualified language teachers. The Department has collaborated with the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney and sponsored eligible teachers of Aboriginal descent in NSW to participate in the *Masters of Indigenous Languages Education* program. The aim of the program is to provide specialist language training to teach NSW Aboriginal languages in NSW public schools. To date, two teachers have been successful recipients and are currently enrolled in the course.

TAFE NSW is continuing to deliver local programs in Aboriginal languages and initially developed and offered a Certificate I course in Aboriginal Languages. The Certificates II and III in Aboriginal Language/s qualifications became available for enrolment in Semester 1 2008. The higher level qualifications provide a pathway for the existing Certificate I in Aboriginal Language/s. There are advanced standing arrangements for the TAFE NSW suite of Aboriginal Language/s qualifications and the University of Sydney.

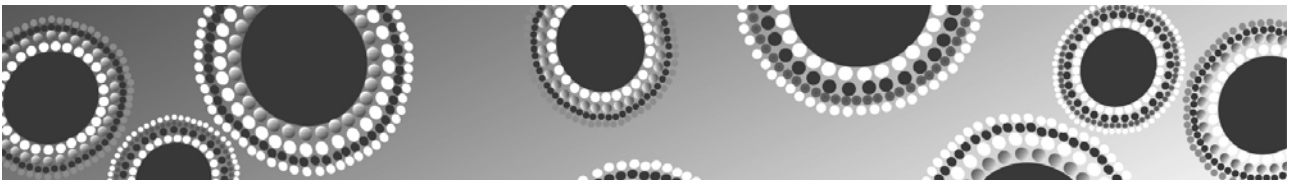
For more information about funding for school language programs or sponsorship opportunities please contact Renette Townsend by phone on 9244 5565 or fax 9244 5365 or email renette.townsend@det.nsw.edu.au. For information about TAFE course contact Merv Donovan by phone on 9244 5638 or email merv.donovan@det.nsw.edu.au

Funding opportunities

Jenny Brown who has just started up a Prescribed Private Funds (PPF) foundation is looking for people to give funding to. The foundation is particularly interested in projects to do with Australian Indigenous Languages. Please note that they do not fund schools, but may, for example, fund community and/or individual projects for which schools act as the auspicing body. Jenny asked anyone interested to contact her on jb@wild.net.au or 0423 631 848.

Gumbaynggirr sharing workshop

In late June we held a Gumbaynggirr sharing workshop in Nambucca Heads in conjunction with the Office of the Board of Studies, Muurrbay Aboriginal Culture Co-op and the Catholic Education Commission. As with the series of other sharing workshops, this was designed to help encourage schools working in the same area and on the same, or closely related languages, to cooperate and



share knowledge and resources through a local language network. Schools from both the government and non-government sector attended.



Teaching circle at the workshop



A language class in the teaching circle

Following the pattern of previous workshops, some schools that have been running language programs for some time acted as mentor schools, passing on valuable tips about how to get a program started to others who are just embarking on the process. The mentor schools in this instance were Bowraville Central School, Nambucca Heads High School and St Mary's Primary School, Bowraville. In response to feedback from previous sharing workshops in which participants

nominated teaching strategies as an area they would like to focus on in future workshops, there was a session on appropriate teaching strategies for students at different stages. Brad Laurie, a languages teacher from Tenterfield, gave everyone Spanish lessons. One lesson was taught as if participants were high school students, the other as though participants were early primary students. This led to interesting analyses and discussion of the appropriate strategies to use different contexts.



Rochell Mooney and Michael Gibbs

Staff from the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language and Culture Centre demonstrated how to use some resources they have developed and delivered Gumbaynggirr lessons. At the end of the second day, after a feedback session at which Pauline Hooler and David Prosser from Muurrbay offered to facilitate the first school language network meeting, Muurrbay staff ended the day with some songs.



Christine Halpin and Michael Jarrett



Muurrbay staff sing a closing song