

RNLD/RUIL Internship Program Report:
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In late September 2014 I accompanied DRIL trainers Margaret Florey and Emma Murphy on their visit to Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre in Port Hedland, Western Australia. I observed the workshops they conducted between 30 September-2 October. This was the first time I had been involved with RNLD's work, although I have had an interest in linguistics and Aboriginal languages since early high school.

The workshops began on a social yet professional note. When I arrived at the language centre with the trainers it was clear that there was a strong link with the community there. The participants and linguists were relaxed and warm with each other, but were also keen to begin the workshops. One participant was working at a computer on a personal language project in the half hour before the workshops started. Several Aboriginal languages were represented among the participants.

Margaret and Emma had explained to me beforehand that there are a series of training 'modules', and that a particular workshop may be focussed on a combination of these dependent on the needs of the community. The Port Hedland workshop included linguistic discussions, language teaching skills, sound recording techniques and computer skills. In this particular workshop, two of the participants were in an avoidance relationship, which meant that they were not supposed to speak to or see each other. To navigate this situation, the DRIL trainers placed a whiteboard in the middle of the room with a participant on either side. This allowed the trainers to address both sides of the room while also accommodating the social and cultural needs of the participants.

I noticed that there was continuity between the sessions. For example, the dialogues that the participants prepared and filmed on the first day were used later as the foundation for an activity in which they planned and delivered a short language lesson. After noting down the words that they identified to be the most important in the dialogue, the participants acted as teachers, using techniques recommended by the DRIL trainers to teach the vocabulary from their languages to the linguists. The participants expressed pleasure and satisfaction that the activity provided them with a structured way to teach their languages. One participant was particularly enthusiastic about transferring these skills to her community, where she hoped to build the language skills of the children.

Running through the sessions was a shared understanding of the cultural and personal significance of the participants' languages. During a group discussion about Aboriginal languages more broadly there was a real focus on celebrating the variety and diversity of Australian languages, and of appreciating their interconnectedness. The participants compared words between their languages, noting with interest the similarities and differences. There were many opportunities for the participants to openly share their thoughts and feelings with regard to their languages. Participants spoke of their concern at the decline in speakers, but also of their optimism for the future and of the joy they feel in connecting with and strengthening their languages and cultures.

I understood the main role of the trainers to be as an open resource, as opposed to all-knowing educators. The trainers maintained a friendly and inclusive environment during the workshops. They invited contributions from the participants during group discussions without pressing them or making them uncomfortable. As some of the participants had higher competencies in certain areas, they were able to impart their skills to others during the workshops. This meant that the DRIL trainers were sometimes in a supporting role, and did not need to act as the experts. During an activity in which participants were editing sound files, one participant took the lead role in teaching the process in his own language to another participant. This highlighted for me how RNLD's workshops provide opportunities for leadership and relationship building, in addition to practical skill development.

At the conclusion of the workshop the participants expressed an interest in using the skills they had developed to further their language work, on both a personal and community level. Some participants were interested in the possibility of completing the DRIL Certificate 3 in the future. They were enthusiastic about continuing to build and share their skills at Wangka Maya independently of RNLD until the next workshop. It was my strong impression that the Port Hedland workshop was successful in providing the participants with the skills they wanted in order to revive or strengthen their languages. Through observing the activities, I felt that I also gained a lot from the week. I now understand how the DRIL trainers deliver the workshops and interact with the participants, and I was able to get to know the participants during the breaks. I hope that RNLD is able to provide many more people with the opportunity to become involved with their important work in the future.