

**RNLD/RUIL Internship Report:
Peter Nyhuis**

Intern: Peter Nyhuis

Trainer: Emma Murphy

Location: Mt Gambier (Boandik country)

Dates: 26-27 October 2015

The training model developed by RNLD is completely unlike what I was exposed to in my academic linguistic training, and I feel privileged to have participated in it. Rather than pairing an academic “expert” with a “native informant” and letting the outsider walk away from the community taking their knowledge without offering anything back, RNLD puts linguists at the service of communities, to disseminate what they know and provide assistance in a project where the community sets the agenda. The RNLD model builds on the existing knowledge and strengths of the community, empowering them to be confident custodians of their language.

I believe a large part of the success of this model is owed to the trainer, Emma Murphy, whose skill, dedication and sensitivity never failed to impress me; it was not surprising that the Boandik community showed such affection for her. Rather than simply giving a lecture on allative, ablative and locative cases, for example, Emma guided the participants through a variety of fun activities where everyone had to get up and moving around and talking to each other about what they were doing and where they were going. Once the group brainstormed some new vocabulary for everyday, domestic settings (spoon, toilet, bedroom, etc.), Emma encouraged everyone to leave the books alone for a while and just get talking in language, asking questions and giving answers about objects in magazines and around the room. This appeared to be a milestone for the group, since it was the first time they had even tried to communicate without worrying over whether they were “getting it right”; the experience left everyone brimming with confidence, and keen to try out the sentences with their kids. She also discussed with the group several ways they might take their language development further between DRIL sessions, such as recording conversation CDs with Uncle Des and Aunty Penny, so they can keep practising Bunganditj while they're alone in the car. The CDs could ask things such as, “Where are you going?” and “Where are you coming from?”

I am extremely grateful for being so warmly welcomed into the group, for witnessing a genuinely participatory and community-controlled approach to language development, and for getting a taste of the incredibly wide-ranging knowledge of culture and country being passed on by Aunty Penny, Uncle Des and Uncle Ken, persisting despite decades of language decline. I will come away from this experience having a much more hopeful view of the possibilities for linguistic work in Indigenous communities, and look forward to all linguists in Australia putting Indigenous self-determination and linguistic sovereignty before academic curiosity.