Breen-Donaldson project

In April, RNLD was pleased to announce that it had been awarded an ILS Strategic Initiatives grant to digitise Gavan Breen’s and Tamsin Donaldson’s extensive collections of field notes for approximately fifty Australian Aboriginal languages. All materials from this project will be deposited with AIATSIS and PARADISEC and provided to regional language centres. This will ensure that these important materials will be more widely accessible to community members and linguists around Australia for language reclamation and revitalisation activities, and further linguistic research.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Gavan Breen built an extraordinary database of materials for some 50 languages across western Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory. This database has formed the basis of many publications, including grammatical descriptions and dictionaries or wordlists for languages such as Alyawarra, Bidyara, Gugadj, Gungabula, Gunya, Kaytetye, Margany, Waluwarra, Yalarnga, and Yandruwandha. Gavan still continues his research and publication work from his office at the IAD in Alice Springs. He is actively supporting community language revitalisation activities in a number of locations, including Woorabinda, in central Queensland. The digitisation of Gavan’s extensive collection of written materials about these languages was recently completed. This task was undertaken in three stages by volunteer Clare Manning, RNLD’s Outreach Officer Felicity Houwen, and RNLD Consultant Shamini Joseph.

Tamsin Donaldson documented the Ngiyampaa language of western New South Wales in the 1970s. Over the past several decades, Tamsin has published extensively on her research. This body of work continues to provide an invaluable resource for community members involved in the reclamation and teaching of Ngiyampaa. Linguist Lesley Woods, a Ngiyampaa woman, went to Canberra in April to digitise and build metadata for 46 field notebooks with support from Tamsin and her family members.
DRIL training activities
Mount Gambier, South Australia

RNLD ran two DRIL training workshops in Mt Gambier, South Australia in the last three months. At the first workshop, held in March, the Boandik team dived into their training on the first day, having fun with several immersion sets and then recording the new language they learned to practice in the following weeks. On the second day, the language team began to settle into the various roles that best suit their interests and skills - as language hunters, teachers, and recording editors. They did some great strategic planning in the afternoon ensuring they were ready to continue their language group sessions.

At the second workshop, held in May, there were some new participants, which allowed those that had attended previous workshops to pass on their skills. They worked on Master-Apprentice skills, as well as language hunting for immersion sets, which they then went through together.
Jabiru, Northern Territory

In Jabiru, Northern Territory, Emma Murphy is running monthly workshops in partnership with Children’s Ground. These are going strong, with participants continuing to learn and practice Master-Apprentice skills. They have been trying out immersion sets using colours and body parts, as well as sequencing exercises.

Batchelor, Northern Territory

Emma is also continuing monthly workshops with the three generation family group in Batchelor, Northern Territory. In the latest workshop, the group learnt to dance using the Marithiel language, as well working through a damper making immersion set together.
Shepparton, Victoria

In March, Senior Linguist Margaret Florey ran RNLD’s first workshop in Shepparton, Victoria with assistance from Training Support Officer Paola Fischer. On the first day, Yorta Yorta participants began learning a range of activities to use in language sessions with their families and in primary schools, youth programs and community language programs for adults.

On the second day, they took a bold leap into decoding linguistic terminology using their new skills in language hunting and preparing immersion sets.
Swan Hill, Victoria

From Shepparton, Margaret and Paola drove to Swan Hill to kick off RNLD’s first workshop there on the banks of the Murray River. They looked at the Miromaa database that is being built for Madhi Madhi and Wadi Wadi, and talked about bringing art and cultural artifacts into Master-Apprentice sessions.

On the second day, the Madhi Madhi and Wadi Wadi family group had a very exciting day of language hunting and beginning to speak Wadi Wadi. Jason Kirby’s painting of river life formed the basis for an extended immersion set around fish names, and catching, cooking and eating fish, platypus and long-necked turtle. Rick Kirby’s collection of the cultural artifacts he has made will be the basis of future language sessions, and photos of the artifacts will go into the Miromaa database.
In April, KLRC Operations Manager Carolyn McAdam and RNLD trainers Emma Murphy and Margaret Florey ran the second DRIL workshop at the Kimberley Language Resource Centre in Halls Creek, Western Australia. The first day included a session using the online Aboriginal languages map, and discussing the relationships between languages. The group explored the World Atlas of Language Structures (WALS) to look at language subgroups. It was fascinating to talk about these topics in Halls Creek, which includes both Pama Nyungan (Jaru) and non-Pama Nyungan (Kija) languages.

On the second day, the participants made recordings, digitised heritage recordings, and mapped out immersion sessions for the language nest that has been established at the centre.
Port Augusta, South Australia

Later in April, Margaret Florey and RNLD Outreach Officer Felicity Houwen went to Port Augusta, South Australia to run RNLD’s first workshop with the Dieri language group. We were fortunate to also have three Barngarla women - Patricia Dare, Linda Dare, and Jeanne Miller - join us for the workshop.

The first day of the workshop was spent introducing Master-Apprentice methods and learning to make digital recordings. On the second day, participants practiced some of the Master-Apprentice methods they learned the day before, and also learnt how to edit their recordings.

Coordinator Michelle Warren worked with a team of young girls who made a recording and learnt how to edit. Meanwhile two of the young women were learning to make videos and filmed sections of the workshop.

Aunty Marjorie Warren leads the group in a Total Physical Response (TPR) exercise

The Barngarla team practice making digital audio recordings watched by Dieri coordinator Michelle Warren

Michelle Warren (right) with her team of young sound recordists. From left, Dakota Warren-Carlton, Meme Brady, and Lani Stephson

Reggie Warren and Jaima Warren learning to edit audio recordings using Audacity
Port Hedland, Western Australia

In May, RNLD ran its sixth workshop at Wangka Maya Aboriginal Language Centre in Port Hedland, Western Australia. It started with a fantastic day of DRIL training and language sharing, with 7 languages amongst 19 participants - Ngarla, Nyamal, Nyiyaparli, Nyangumarta, Yinhawangka, Kariyarra and Yindjibarndi. There was a lot of laughter and the great sound of people noisily speaking their languages.

On the second day, again there was some wonderful teamwork happening, including some people beginning to speak and develop resources for their language for the first time. A short linguistic session introduced the group to morphology before the workshop finished up with a show and tell of the resources. Wangka Maya linguists Jason Lee, Peter Hill, and Annie Edwards-Cameron provided great support during the workshop.
Broome, Western Australia

After Port Hedland, Margaret went north to Broome to run RNLD’s first workshop at the Yawuru Language Centre. Participants spent the first morning learning Master-Apprentice methods including non-verbal communication, and Total Physical Response (TPR) exercises. That afternoon they began learning to make digital recordings.

On the second day, the skills they had learnt on the previous day were put into practice as participants made recordings of the language they had learnt in their Master-Apprentice sessions, then edited those recordings to use in the future.
New volunteers at RNLD

Katerina Forrester

Katerina began volunteering with RNLD in March 2014. She is currently completing her Bachelor of Arts at the University of Melbourne with a double major in Linguistics and French, and a concurrent diploma in Italian. Katerina also completed a Bachelor of Human Biology with RMIT in 2010.

Katerina is working at RNLD on Wednesdays and will be helping to maintain participant databases and create resources for the Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages (DRIL) training program.

Erin Barnes

Erin began volunteering with RNLD in March 2014. She completed her Bachelor of Arts in Linguistics and Politics with a Diploma in French at University of Melbourne in 2013. She is now undertaking Honours in Linguistics at Melbourne. She is looking at the ways in which NAPLAN tests may be assessing linguistic and cultural knowledge that Indigenous children in remote communities cannot be expected to have.

Erin is working at RNLD on Thursdays and is creating digital media resources for the Documenting and Revitalising Indigenous Languages (DRIL) online Resource Room.
Advisory Panel focus - Joy Bonner

Joy Bonner is a descendant of the Butchulla people from K’gari (Fraser Island). She has a Diploma of Education and currently works as a Community Linguist at Korrawinga Aboriginal Corporation.

How did you first become involved with language work?
My first experience was when I heard my mother singing ‘K’garinyin narmi’ around the camp fire. I was blown away and asked her what the song was, and she said it was our welcome and farewell song. She was dancing and doing the moves, and we were all learning it around the campfire. That’s when I got the taste for it and never looked back.

What are you currently working on?
We have applied for a multimedia grant. The elders tend to be unsure of technology, so we thought by involving them in this as much as we can, they can become more comfortable, because it’s their oral history and stories. Korrawinga recognises that to keep the next generation interested, we need to think about the learning styles of this century. Talking to community, many people still don’t want written materials, they prefer the learning form of story telling, and the experience of visual means. We’re hoping that by using multimedia we can involve all of these forms of learning. We can use the technology to collect and create the visual collection of resources.

It will be a touch screen learning resource that includes a ‘Welcome to Country’, Preschool to Year 6 teaching resources and programs to begin with, then Years 7-12, traditional games, traditional art and craft in language, men and women resources, maps, family trees, and songs and dances.

Upcoming workshops

June 4-5 — Palawa Kani Workshop 1, Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, Launceston, Tasmania (trainer Emma Murphy)

June 13 — Gundjeihmi and Kunwinjku Workshop 7, Children’s Ground, Jabiru, Northern Territory (trainer Emma Murphy)

June 14 — Mak Mak Marranunggu and Marithiel Workshop 7, Batchelor, Northern Territory (trainer Emma Murphy)

June 16-27 — Grant writing workshop, CoLang 2014: Institute on Collaborative Language Research, University of Texas at Arlington, Dallas, USA (trainers Margaret Florey and Susan Penfield)

June 23-24 — Miriwoong Workshop 6, Mirima Dawang Woorlab-gerring, Kununurra, Western Australia (trainers Emma Murphy and Carolyn McAdam)

June 26-27 — Kija and Jaru Workshop 3, Kimberley Language Resource Centre, Halls Creek, Western Australia (trainers Carolyn McAdam and Emma Murphy with RNLD-RUIL intern Erin Barnes)

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