

# Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages VACL NEWS



September 2000

## WATHAWURRUNG LANGUAGE PROGRAM BRUCE PASCOE

Language Revival provides a positive focus for Victorian indigenous communities who get sick and tired of being told that their languages have died and disappeared along with the culture.

Since working on the Language Project it has been exciting to see how quickly the Aboriginal community have adapted language revival as a core component of their identity. Requests from the community are constant and diverse.

The non-indigenous community have been quick to see the importance of language revival. Individuals and councils are interested in place names while schools and public bodies want to incorporate real words into

their study of indigenous culture. This in turn alerts everyone to the fact that each language group was a nation unto itself and occupied a distinct geographical area. We've seen a greater understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal cultures develop as a result of this direct positive involvement with the community.

Recently the Colac-Otway Shire asked us to perform a language piece for the Olympic Torch Relay Festival and during NAIDOC week we talked to reconciliation groups and schools about the place of Indigenous languages in Australian culture. In all these activities the language officer worked with a broad range of community

members who recently negotiated wide ranging and crucial regulations regarding land excavations in the Geelong region, which alerts the whole community to the earlier occupation of the district, which comes as a surprise to far too many Australians. That is a factor of the wide culture and history education received by the nation.

To couple culture with something as pragmatic as archaeology is a vital educative procedure for the community, and by approaching schools and community groups with something as enriching as language can sugar what many see as the bitter pill of having to learn a new history of the country they thought they knew.

# GANAI LANGUAGE WORKERS

Lynne Dent

Ganai language workers are making a huge impact in Gippsland with approximately eleven workers teaching the Ganai language in various kindergartens, primary and secondary schools.

There are community language workers in the following areas:

- ◆ Warragul area [Laurie Moffatt],
- ◆ Morwell area [Dukie Harrison and Leonie Williams],
- ◆ Bairnsdale area [Dot Moffatt and Nicky Moffatt, Lynne Dent & Doris Paton]
- ◆ Lakes Entrance area [Leann Edwards]
- ◆ Nowa Nowa area [Susan Martin].
- ◆

The community language workers access from preschool, primary and



**Lynne Dent**

secondary schools. We also have a language worker based in the East Gippsland TAFE, Bairnsdale Koori unit and we hope to set up a culture and language program in the TAFE for the students.

The Woolum Bellum Dala Lidj preschool has around 20 children and Brenda Burney is the Teacher, Barry Springer the Koori Preschool Assistant.

Leann Edwards is teaching Ganai at the Lakes Entrance Kinder as well as Buchan and Bruthen. Leann a well known artist, started teaching the last two weeks of second term and already the kids are greeting me with 'wunman njinde' when I kids using language and being able to incorporate it into their daily activities at home. We are all very busy in our jobs, myself as the KECFO Koori Early Childhood Field Officer visit. One of the boys went home to his mum and said 'wunman njinde? Mum'. He told her this is how you say 'how are you'? In Ganai'. The children are learning the names of animals and fish.



**Tayarra  
Woolum Bellum Dala Lidj  
Preschool**

When the same boy heard that they were having fish and chips that night he replied to his mother it was 'tambo and chips'. It is fantastic to hear the making preschool more accessible to Koori kids and involving community in the kinder. Also Doris Paton who is the Coordinator of the Koori program at Midvalley Campus TAFE Morwell.

We look forward to having the Ganai Interactive Language CD Rom in our schools for fourth term for an introduction then focus on the first term 2001.



**Sidney, Dylan, Tracey &  
Lowana  
Woolum Bellum Dala Lidj  
Preschool**

# ALI LINGUISTIC CONFERENCE – JULY 2000

Nick Evans

From July 3rd to 6th, a conference for Indigenous Language Workers was staged at Trinity College, jointly hosted by the Australian Linguistics Institute, Nick Evans of the University of Melbourne Department of Linguistics & Applied Linguistics, Joel Wright of VACL, and Ian Green of Riawunna Centre for Aboriginal Studies, University of Tasmania. Around twenty-five delegates from most states of Australia participated.

One highlight of the conference was a focus on the state of Aboriginal languages in Victoria. On the first day, Joel Wright and Brendan Loizou from VACL welcomed the interstate delegates and presented a paper Censoring Indigenous Aspirations: when only assimilation will do; on the last day this was balanced with a visit to the Northcote office and a demonstration of the Nambur-Ganai language CD Rom (developed primarily by Doris Paton & Lynette Dent), which impressed many visitors with the fun way it allows the younger generation to hear, learn and revitalize the Nambur-Ganai language of Eastern Victoria. A number of other people from VACL discussed their work in a range of Victorian communities: Antoinette

plenary 'Strategies for language maintenance and revival an Australian perspective' on the Tuesday night, and Pat McConvell of AIATSIS discussed the various types of language endangerment situation that communities can find themselves in, as well as some of the difficulties in describing and assessing the language situation in accurate terms. Brother John Giacon, Tracy Dodd and John (J.B.) Brown talked about the programs they have been using in schools in the Walgett area to revive Gamilaraay and Yuwaalaraay and Peter Austin of Melbourne University talked about the process of putting Gamilaraay on the Web <http://coombs.anu.edu.au>.

Other presentations focussed on educational issues in speech communities where an indigenous language is still the main medium of everyday communication. A large contingent from Yipirinya school in Alice Springs, including Rhonda Inkamala, Shirley Turner, Julie Clyne, Cecily Palmer, and Fiona Gibson, discussed their Teaching Two Ways Philosophy and the way in which teaching is carried out in several languages of Central Australia, including Central and Eastern Arrernte, Pintupi and Warlpiri, and the very positive effects this has on school-children's

community members and outside researchers in developing and archiving language documentation. During the visit to VACL the issue of orthography was discussed, including who should make decisions about the best way for languages to be represented in writing, and whether this issue is becoming less important at a time when there is easier direct access to recorded speech through CD-Roms and multimedia. Another presentation, by Arrernte speaker Veronica Dobson of Institute for Aboriginal Development in Alice Springs and linguist John Henderson, presented the advantages of 'two ways research' and the way in which long term cooperation between a number of different parties - older and younger members of speech communities as well as language speakers and outside linguists - had led to some very positive outcomes including the outstanding Eastern and Central Arrernte to English Dictionary. Veronica made a further presentation on the last day about her research on traditional medicines - Arelhe-kenhe Awelye - soon to appear as a bilingual book in Arrernte and English. In a further session on this theme, the conference joined up with a course being taught concurrently at the

Smith, Lisa Arnold, Bruce Pascoe, Bill Nicholson and Janie Walsh. On the second day, Margaret Wirrpanda welcomed everyone with a traditional Yorta-Yorta song and Aretha Briggs, Shanika Briggs and Kimberley Ebsworth from Worawa College talked about the program of teaching Victorian languages there, and gave a moving demonstration of how Victorian languages are making a comeback by reciting the school poem.

Another Victorian highlight was a course presented through the week by Dr Luise Hercus, of the Australian National University, on the Languages of Victoria. Luise worked with many senior speakers of Victorian languages, now deceased, during the late 1950s and 1960s, and her course gave many people the chance to hear tapes she made in that period and to learn something of the grammatical structures and vocabulary of Wembawemba and Wergaia.

Approaches to language revitalization were a major focus of the conference. Jeanie Bell gave an overview of the field, with a particular emphasis on the Queensland languages Gubbi-gubbi and Butchulla that are part of her heritage, in her

confidence and self esteem. One difficulty they are encountering is the need to constantly develop new curriculum materials, something for which they currently lack personnel, and this theme came up again in presentations later the same day by people from the Warlpiri-speaking communities to the north - Helen Morton, Sarah Wayne, Bianca Long and Philippa Stansell from Willowra, and Elizabeth Ross, Stella Dixon, Valeri Patterson, and Belinda Baker from Lajamanu. These speakers talked about some of the approaches they are trying out in getting schoolkids to learn to read and write their language, at a time when schools in the Territory are no longer receiving support for Bilingual Education. Sandra Edwards from Kalkaringi (Wave Hill) and Erika Charola from the Katherine Language Centre showed how they are trying to incorporate traditional approaches to teaching language into the school program, illustrating with a video they made where senior Gurindji speakers talk about bush medicines. They also talked about some of the problems of what language to teach in, in a community where children speak a mixture of Kriol and Gurindji.

Another theme of the conference was the relationship between

Linguistics Institute on 'Field methods for working with endangered languages'. Here Nikolaus Himmelmann, Nick Thieberger and Margaret Florey discussed issues of how to make sure you really document the full range of a language's use, new software to assist in the documentation process, and some of the difficult issues surrounding ownership of language material on the one hand, and making sure of proper long-term archiving on the other.

A final theme focussed on interpreting and translation. Barbara Raymond (Kriol) and Faye Gibson (Warlpiri), both from the Katherine Language Centre, talked about the gradual process of getting proper recognition and training in this area, and of raising consciousness in courts and the medical system about the need for professional interpreters rather than just whoever happens to be at hand. Veronica Dobson and Jenny Green, both of IAD, rounded off this session by talking about errors that found their way into the court transcript of a recent Native Title case, and the process of going back over the language parts of the transcript so as to make corrections available to the legal process.

## WARLPIRI WOMEN

As part of the At Winter's End Festival, the Arts & Cultural Planning Branch at the City of Darebin hosted a community education and performance tour of 10 women from Willowra, which is 350 kilometres North West of Alice Springs.

A lunch and welcome for the women was organised for Tuesday 22 August 2000 at the Preston Municipal Offices. The women were given a traditional Wurundjeri welcome by elder spokesperson Ms Joy Murphy. Ms Murphy presented the women with gum leaves, and this welcomed the visitors to Wurundjeri land and gave them *Freedom of the bush from the tops of the trees to the roots of the earth.*

Mr Phillip Shannahan *Executive Officer of the City of Darebin* who was standing in for the Mayor Councillor Tim Laurence also welcomed the women to the City of Darebin. Mr Shannahan presented the visitors with a pin of the Rainbow Lorikeet, which is the Emblem of the City of Darebin.

Elders from the Warlpiri community came to the City of Darebin to talk about the land, the dreaming and a unique project they are undertaking to pass on their knowledge to the children. The project is to compile traditional Warlpiri stories and knowledge to form the basis of a school curriculum program to be taught by Warlpiri teachers in Warlpiri schools. The project was presented at a public meeting held on Wednesday 23 August 2000 at the Preston Council Chambers, Preston Municipal Offices. The Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages was invited to participate at this meeting and gave an oral presentation on the status of Victorian Indigenous Languages.

The Warlpiri Women also performed traditional dancing at the Great Darebin Music Feast, Northcote Town Hall.

***The tour was assisted by the generous support of La Trobe University, the Lance Reichstein Foundation & the Myer Foundation.***



***Warlpiri Elders receiving gift from Mr Phillip Shannahan***

---

## **VACL is currently undergoing an Information Technology upgrade.**

New computers have been purchased and existing ones have been upgraded to cope with the expansion of the Corporation.

VACL is now networked and all Community Language Programs will soon be networked. This will allow Language Officers to communicate more effectively with VACL and with each other and it will also allow them access to the enormous amount of information on the Internet. VACL is also developing a suitable database to store the diverse range of archival material, which includes oral histories, historical journals, rare books, microfilm, manuscripts, maps and photographs.

The VACL web site is now on line but is still in the early stages of development. The web site is a great achievement and will assist in the promotion of VACL and most importantly Victorian Indigenous languages. VACL plans to hold an official launch of the site in the near future.

You can find us at:

[www.vaclang.org.au](http://www.vaclang.org.au)

---