Community Language Opportunities

Language in use in the community really means no less than the ongoing survival of the language. Using language words in everyday contexts as soon as possible and as much as possible helps to make the language relevant to ordinary daily life. There is no need to wait until something can be all in language. Even at the earliest stages, people need to see that it is easy to add a little language into ordinary daily life and things they already know.

An important and ongoing objective of community language opportunities is to get rid of the shame factor. Working on projects together helps people to get used to using the language in a relaxed environment. By constantly bringing new developments back to the community, you ensure that people feel ownership of what is happening. Keep everyone in your community up to date with what your language team has learned and developed. This makes it easier for people to accept and use the language as it is reclaimed.

In these ways, language can genuinely return to the assisted community and the community is assisted in reconnecting to their language and culture. Everyone will see benefits in terms of pride in their culture and identity as well as knowledge of the language.

The saying ‘use it or lose it’ is certainly true when talking about maintaining language revival. Just a few people in a focused language team will not keep your language alive in the community. Of course not everyone can dedicate huge amounts of time and energy to language. But everyone needs to use the language to make the language relevant to ordinary daily life.

Later we may consider CDs or other electronic resources. Peetyawan Weeyn – A Guide for Community Language Programs is about to be published as a book, complete with CD. A CD can contain smaller projects, such as lists of words. Consider a grammar in these places for use beyond the words in the list of their language.

Three kinds of resources may already exist: people’s knowledge, historical records and analyses of the language.

People & Planning

Reviving a language involves a lot of people. For example: people authorised to direct a program, people to research, analyse and prepare materials, people to teach language, people with technical skills and people to learn and use the language.

Resources & Analyses

This guide is a good time to start thinking about resources and analyses. You will need to think about any available resource and how to make it work.

Training & Support

Resources & Analyses

Some sets of words, forms or patterns (such as question words and pronouns) are possible to work on computer, using the old language day or camp – people, schools etc.

Peetyawan Weeyn

Peetyawan Weeyn (meaning “we are kindling fire” in the Koorawatha language) is a guide mainly for Aboriginal communities undertaking language revival in Victoria but can be applicable for any other language revival program. The Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages is the Peak Body for Aboriginal Languages in Victoria and supports community language programs to undertake specific language revival within their own language group. The guide fits in gap in planning and offers ways of tracking how all aspects of their projects are developing over years. Currently, projects tend to focus on specific areas without taking into consideration the range and time of what is actually involved. The guide outlines possible paths and aspects that should be considered when reviving a language so it is important to take time to regularly consider where your program is up to in each of the five areas identified, and where it is going. The five key consideration are:

Resources & Analyses

This is a good time to start thinking about resources and analyses. You will need to think about any available resource and how to make it work.

Training & Support

Peetyawan Weeyn – A Guide for Community Language Programs

Paul Paton & Dr Christina Eira

A Guide for Community Language Programs

Teaching is for adults as well as children. To teach and learn language you will need materials to use and opportunities for learning.

Educational Materials & Opportunities

A language needs a place to live. As your language comes back into common use, more and more ways of using it need to be created and developed.

People & Planning

Find as many ways as you can to bring language into everyday life – in speaking, singing, writing, art, on the radio.

Community Language Opportunities

Find as many ways as you can to bring language into everyday life – in speaking, singing, writing, art, on the radio.

Training & Support

Creating a spelling dictionary can lead to making new words as well as children. To teach and learn language you will need materials to use and opportunities for learning.

Community Language Opportunities

CONSOLIDATING

MAJOR RESOURCES

DEVELOPING THE LANGUAGE

SENTENCES & GRAMMAR

SOUNDS & WORDS

STARTING OUT

PEETYAWAN WEYEN RESOURCES

Peetyawan Weeyn – A Guide for Community Language Programs is about to be published as a book, complete with examples, exercises and checklists to assist your community on its journey through language revival and reclamation. Later we may consider CDs or other electronic resources.

Please fill out this form and give it to a VACL staff member or send it to us at the office.

Email: info@vaclang.org.au

Mail to: 295 King St, Melbourne Victoria, 3000, Australia

I am interested in the Peetyawan Weeyn resources when they are finalised. Please let me know when they become available and how much they cost.

Name

Organisation

Contact email

Postal address

POSTCODE/ZIP

COUNTRY

Phone 1

Phone 2

Fax
People and Planning

The diversity of views and knowledge in the community helps you get the fullest possible picture of your language, and your language workers will need direction from authorised people. Having people involved also helps to reduce the risk of having to redo everything because the community hasn’t had enough input. Get them involved now, to help with decisions in the early stages. Even people who are too old or too busy to be heavily involved can act as people to refer to at significant points in the process.

Who in your community –
– has the time and energy to do the focused work?
– can authorise decisions about language and its development?
– can teach or learn how to teach?
– has skills in research, computers, or recording?
– can gain access to resources such as working/storage space, funding, research sources?
– has good connections with Elders and other community members?
– is good at helping people get motivated and organised?
– can locate places to work and store materials?
– is prepared to participate in a Reference Group?

Revisit how your main team is working at regular intervals:
– Who is currently involved in what?
– Who wants to either pull back their involvement, or become more involved?
– Do you need more people on the team and/or reference group at this stage?
– Do you have all the skills you need for the directions you have chosen?
– Do team members want some training or other forms of support?
– Would it be good to get some things done by someone outside the team or community?

Resources and Analyses

Resources and analysis go hand in hand. When you first start out on your language revival journey, you will be focused mostly on collecting language – from people’s knowledge, from historical records, and from linguistic analysis which may have already been started.

Once you have collected most of the language from these sources, you will need to analyse what you have got, to produce resources for the community to relearn and use their language. The two main goals for this will continue for some time over several stages:

1) Making informed decisions about the best pronunciation for each word and the most accurate meanings.
   - The same word in your collections may have different spellings, different word-endings, and even different recorded meanings. By comparing all the spellings, it is usually possible to work out what was the actual sound the collectors heard. Different recorded meanings for the same word will have some sort of logical connection, such as ‘brother’ and ‘cousin’. This is because English does not connect up meanings in the same way as Aboriginal languages.

2) Setting out how words and word-endings go together in your language.
   - Language is more than words. Every language has its own patterns of speaking. Learning grammar just means using the patterns of your own language to put words and meanings together. Without thinking about these patterns, you will almost certainly use the patterns of English for your language instead.

Resources for learning and using language can be developed at every stage of the analysis. In this way, people can join in reclaiming their language at increasing levels of complexity and depth as you go.

Training and Support

More and more, communities are choosing to do their language work themselves, which is an important move towards greater independence and control over community business. However, many of the skills involved will not be at all familiar, and people can spend years training in some of the skills you will need. So it makes sense to acknowledge that the key people working on your language will need training and support of various kinds. Choices about this include one-off workshops, working in partnership with people who have particular skills, or formal study at various levels.

Training and support in...

Linguistics includes
   - interpreting historical spellings of your language
   - discovering the systems of sounds, meanings, word-endings and sentence patterns from your resources
   - explaining how these systems work in plain language

Technology includes
   - making soundfiles
   - databasing language
   - adding pictures and movies to your resources

Teaching includes
   - preparing educational materials
   - managing a class
   - designing a curriculum

Organisation includes
   - setting up filing systems for language data and resources.

The people in your community who undergo training now will later be able to train others in the community in the skills they have acquired. So this is time and effort well spent both for the language and for community development.

Educational Materials and Opportunities

Teaching and learning your language can take many forms and happen in many settings – schools, homes, workplaces, language camps and workshops, and so on. To keep the whole community interested, informed and involved, you will need to provide language learning opportunities at every stage of your language reclamation process.

Although nothing replaces interaction with skilled and knowledgeable people, you will also need a greater and greater range and number of resources for these and others to use as time goes on. Examples include –

- digital recordings of the words in your collection
- stories using simple, repeating sentence patterns
- language learning games
- a book showing how the language explains family relationships in your culture
- charts using sets of words (body parts, local plants etc.)
- a picture dictionary, perhaps without English
- a guide to using your spelling system and your dictionary.

Don’t forget that language learning must be for all ages, not just children. People will need lots of examples and lots of opportunity to practise. It can be spoken and written, as well as in songs and other media. You may also want to consider encouraging the broader community to start learning your language. This can be done through the formal education system, by releasing your resources to the public, or through open community classes. This can be invaluable for building relationships and understanding with people outside the community.