My journey of awakening...

I undertook Re-awakening Australian Languages in 2015. It was a fantastic unit - comprehensive, accessible, enlightening, important and well-taught by passionate, knowledgeable and experienced teachers. The unit involved a field trip to a community who are in the process of reawakening their ancestral language. This gave our class the opportunity to make important connections and observe the theoretical elements of the course in a concrete, community-grounded way. It not only provided a thorough and nuanced understanding of the work being done to revitalise the first languages of Australia, but conveyed the importance and deep significance of this worldwide movement, which is intimately connected to social justice and human rights. This unit affected me both in a personal sense and in an academic development sense. It significantly affected my outlook on the world, bringing my attention to a serious issue that faces too little attention at present. The course informed me about the activism of community members and the connection this has to indigenous people’s struggle for genuine self-determination.

I took this unit as it complemented my linguistics major, and had the effect of greatly broadening my linguistics skills and knowledge. I realised towards the end of my degree that there was little attention in the linguistics major on Australian languages from a social sciences perspective (there is often descriptive studies of Aboriginal languages in courses on syntax, phonology etc). We learnt very little about the health and status of the first languages of this country and very little about processes of language shift and 'death', which is surprising since Australia has one of the fastest rates of language 'death' in the world. This is an issue that demands linguists' (and other advocates) attention, support and expertise.

This unit of study aligned very well with my linguistics studies and filled in many gaps for me, as well as giving me a deeper understanding of the role and significance of ancestral language and their group identity functions. It also inspired my honours thesis which I recently completed. The issues the course raised regarding language in education in a revitalisation context and language ideology (what is language - its role and function in a community) sparked the idea for my thesis which I investigated by seeking first-hand accounts and perspectives from community language teachers.

Taking Re-awakening Australian Languages has supported my career outcomes by developing my interest and passion for social linguistics and language in education issues, which I am considering to pursue in a PhD further down the track. This unit has also shown me how academic linguistic work and research can support community-based outcomes. Finally, it gave me strong community research skills as it involved integrating real-world information obtained via visiting a language community with more technical information about, for instance, linguistic processes. I hope this unit can continue to be run and supported by the University and I encourage all students in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences to take it.

Kitty

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