



## Social and Emotional Outcomes in Indigenous Education Keeping safe, Anangu way

by Michael Winkler

There is a tree in the desert on the road to Ernabella, the largest in a collection of small remote communities in South Australia's Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands. The tree has two branches. They both point in the same direction – upwards – but they follow their own paths.

As a metaphor for the work being undertaken by *Anangu Education Services* in Ernabella, it has considerable validity. Local people, led by Katrina Tjitayi (Improvement Coordinator for the Aboriginal Lands District and former Director of the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee [PYEC]) are using traditional methods to communicate child safety messages.

There are nine schools on the APY Lands. Each school has a Principal and an Anangu Coordinator who work side by side. There is a concerted effort to give local people a genuine say in school governance. "PYEC meets every term," Ms Tjitayi says. "The Anangu Coordinator who works alongside the Principal in each school comes to that meeting, plus one Aboriginal education worker, and three other people from the community come together. They come from each of the schools in our district for this meeting.

"One of the big areas we have been working on is Anangu culture, as well as attendance and student wellbeing. I have been working to get education and culture together, so the children can grow strong in the spirit."

Piranpa (non-Indigenous) school leaders are strong advocates for child protection and student wellbeing. However, it is

easy to recognise that having similar messages delivered by respected community members in culturally appropriate forms greatly increase the likelihood of messages being absorbed. This was the thinking behind the *Keeping Safe* project.

"It is very important that we keep our children safe," Ms Tjitayi says. "For this reason, a group of us went to Port Augusta to have meetings about protective behaviours for our children. I had an idea that to make it more understandable we would do some posters with Aboriginal designs to tell the story more easily for our children to understand. I did not do this on my own. It was a group effort; we worked together, we came up with ideas for the posters and then I did the paintings.

"We were really concerned about our children. It is really difficult for the white teachers in the schools to use the curriculum we had for protective behaviours so the children understood. We wrote down stories they could understand for *Keeping Safe*."

The curriculum has been developed around Anangu understandings and is delivered in Pitjantjatjara language. Anangu people are taking the lead in teaching this in APY

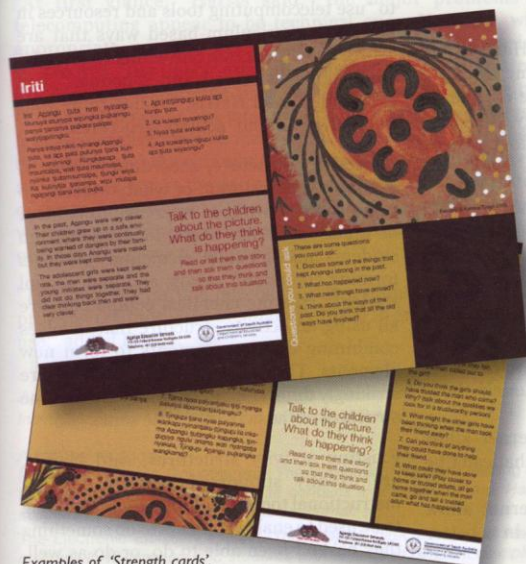
Lands schools. Each painting is accompanied by text (also translated into English), and a range of questions for students to explore.

"Keeping Safe is helping children to have a strong spirit and wellbeing, helping children to look after their body, and teaching feelings. Without that there is no hope and no future. We have to teach our children how people lived a long time ago. They need to know the rules and the law. Teach the kids what they did a long time ago when there was strong law and strong culture. Kids have to learn how to live in Anangu way and also Piranpa way.

"In the past Anangu were very clever. Their children grew up in a safe environment where they were continually being warned of dangers by their family. In those days Anangu were kept strong."

Ms Tjitayi and other Anangu leaders teach children about Uwankara Atunyitja Nyinanytjaku (The right to be safe) and help them learn Walytjanku Atunymananyi (Protective strategies). 'Strength cards' are written in the language, as well as examples of different types of abuse.

Far from being threatened by input from the community, Ernabella Anangu School principal, Sam Osborne, believes it is the only avenue to creating genuine change. "I think as a principal there is a real art to allowing time and room for the Anangu voice and leadership in the school," Mr Osborne says. "You have to watch body language, you have to allow silences, you have to be aware that sometimes people want to say something but it is hard because of who is in the room. If you can read that situation as a principal, that is really important.



Examples of 'Strength cards'.

"The guiding principles are: the school and its leadership must value the Anangu voice and demonstrate commitment to informed and responsible decision making; leaders have to




Ms Katrina Tjitayi addresses a meeting of the Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Education Committee (PYEC).

know when to listen and when to be assertive; communication must be built on mutual trust and sound information; and acknowledging that lasting change is in the hands of the community."

Workshops are held to train Aboriginal education workers to take a leading role in delivering the program. While it is important that Anangu educators lead the delivery, there is a need for strong support from other educators to prepare them for the task. Workshops are held each term where good practice is shared, and understandings are arrived at step-by-step. It is not just a matter of providing the Anangu educators with the materials and saying 'this is your business, you do it'. It can be a slow process but time needs to be allowed to help and support the Indigenous people to do the work.

*Dare to Lead*, the national Indigenous education leadership project, is working in conjunction with *Dusseldorp Skills Forum* to deliver the *Building Leaders Building Community* program. Workshops are being held in Ernabella to develop leadership concepts via Anangu metaphors and thus enhance local delivery of *Keeping Safe*. A recent meeting determined that *Keeping Safe* "is best if it is taught by Aboriginal education workers and Anangu staff supported by teachers rather than the other way around". Discussions are also taking place about extending the teaching to include social workers.

Just like the tree on the road to Ernabella, this is a different branch that points in the same direction. "We need to work together, Anangu and Piranpa, so that the children are happy and safe in the school," Ms Tjitayi says. "When Anangu come together and do this together it opens the spirit so the kids can learn, even if they don't understand English." 

Michael Winkler is communications officer for the *Dare to Lead* project and has written for numerous newspapers including *The Age*, *The Sunday Age*, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, *The Australian*, *The Herald Sun* and *The Koori Mail*. His stories have appeared in more than 50 magazines, ranging from *Education Horizons* to *Who* magazine, and from *Australian Women's Forum* to *Rugby League World*.

