

Warlpiri Triangle pointing to a brighter future

More than 80 Aboriginal people involved in education got together again this year for the Warlpiri Triangle which unites the Lajamanu, Nyirripi, Wirliyajarrayi (Willowra) and Yumtumu (Yuendumu) schools.

The Warlpiri Triangle is traditionally one of the most powerful Aboriginal education forums in the Northern Territory.

Its mission statement reads (in Warlpiri): Nganimpa-rlalu jintangu yapa Warlpiri manu wangkami jinta jaru. Warlpiri-patu kurlangu Jaru. Nganimpa yungurnalu waja-waja mardarni maninja wangurlu nganimpanyangu jaru manu culture. Nganimparlu yungu-rnalu tarngangkujuku mardarni pirrjirdinyayirni tarngangkujuku.

Or (in English): We are one Warlpiri peo-

ple and speak one language. We don't want to lose our language and culture. We want to keep it going and we want to keep it strong.

The Triangle began as an annual meeting of Warlpiri people involved in education, which grew out of kinship links between people working in Warlpiri schools and professional links that began to develop between educators – Warlpiri and non-Warlpiri – working in these schools.

The Triangle has now been incorporated as the Warlpiri-patu-kurlangu Jaru.

Warlpiri participants in this year's annual meeting discussed their hopes and dreams for the triangle. Many were particularly concerned about the lack of young Aboriginal teachers coming through the system and the deterioration of the Warlpiri language in young people.



The views of some teachers at the Warlpiri Triangle...

BARBARA MARTIN (YUENDUMU)

Barbara recalled her personal education journey through the stages, from the 1980s when she was a literacy worker at Lajamanu to her becoming a teacher and working in various capacities at Yuendumu School.

She is concerned that young people are not coming through.

They used to have a tutor based in the community at Yuendumu. She recalls how five other older women and one man at Yuendumu came through a similar system to her, and got trained.

This enabled them to keep strong connections with country, language and people through a two-way system.

They became real teachers in the classroom through the bilingual program. But she now feels that the program is not strongly supported.

"We want a strong bilingual Warlpiri program to continue. We want to talk strong, we want action for our young people to get training and become teachers. We are worried about no young people coming behind. We are all getting old now," Ms Martin said.

NANCY OLDFIELD (YUENDUMU)

Nancy started working in the school at Yuendumu in 1979. She has worked as a literacy worker and teacher and has done training through BIITE, along with Barbara. She, also, is worried about the future as now there are not many Yapa staff in the schools and fewer coming through as teachers and doing training.

"They need to help the next generation to come through so the older ones can retire," she said.

FIONA GIBSON (NYIRRPI)

Fiona started working in an Outstation School in 1984. They had no buildings. She was helped by Wendy Baarda, a teacher from Yuen-

dumu, to prepare programs. In 1985 they went into the Education Department Office in town to request a school at Nyirripi.

Eventually the Education Department put in a caravan school there, and later proper school buildings. They had a bilingual programme going at Nyirripi and still want one.

Fiona did a lot of study with BIITE. She spoke about how it had been really hard doing the study to become a four-year trained, proper teacher through RATE.

She can see the need to mentor young people as teachers.

However she says there needs to be more support to get young people working.

JERRY JANGALA PATRICK (LAJAMANU)

"I want to talk about the Warlpiri Triangle that started in 1983. Now 2008 and it's changing now the two way program and in every community school. How long is the Teacher training course in Batchelor? Three or four years.

"This Warlpiri Triangle has been going for a long time but our own people no-one has come into a proper principal, for all that training, in all that time, why?

"Still wasting all that time. Government now says you got to stop your language and teach only English.

"But we want our own language – what are we, England? We want our own language in our own school.

"We got the teachers but only under name assistant teacher, not principal, all that training wasted for our people.

"That's why we can't teach our kids because the government says stop your language.

"But our language is our life.

"We want to teach that language, we know that language we sing that language, we dance that language in the ceremony time.

TALKING TOUGH FOR EDUCATION

Top: Martin Johnson and Jerry Jangala Patrick

Middle: Elizabeth Ross

Bottom foreground: Nancy Oldfield and Barbara Martin at the Warlpiri Triangle in Lajamanu recently

"That's our teaching time, we got to keep all that story strong. Yitakimani we want that teaching our language and showing our kids.

"We like that English but can we take responsibility now to teach our language in the school and out bush too.

"What about us, how come the government lets the kardiya take those jobs first? I'm a pastor and I learn all the hard words for translation, we're doing it in the church anyway, we already using it, doing it in church - how come government can say we can't do it in school? We got two languages in church. We got Warlpiri Bible and we're reading it but government school says no, they keep putting their foot on top of us.

Everybody should learn. Good that we can learn English, but what about our language? "