

Mununukunhamirr Rom: A Yolngu Approach to Healing and Solving Problems.

*Trevor Gurruwiwi, Anne Lowell, Joanne Wirrinwirrinny and Peter Yawunydjurr
Marthakal Homelands Resource Centre*

Introduction

The Mununukunhamirr Rom Project is based at Galiwin'ku in Northeast Arnhemland. The aim of the project is to support Yolngu (Indigenous people of Northeast Arnhemland) to achieve a safe, harmonious and healthy lifestyle through regenerating cultural knowledge and strategies and strengthening positive prevention, intervention and healing practices. The project team works with people in the community and homelands on education related to family violence, drug misuse, sexual assault, Western and traditional law, traditional medicine, financial literacy and other issues that Yolngu identify as important.

The team have developed an approach to information sharing which brings together Yolngu and Western knowledge using local languages, videotaping full explanations of key concepts, role-plays and interviews. As the majority of people in the region have access to DVD players these resources are made available on DVD. This process has been very successful. The Yolngu team members have developed the skills required for all stages of production and the resources have received very positive feedback from users. Copies of the resources are distributed to local organizations and homelands free of charge. As well, the resources are available for purchase and there has been a surprisingly high level of demand from individuals and families.

These are some of the key advantages of this approach:

- a high level of understanding of information is achieved due to the use of local languages and in-depth explanations
- use of the resources is not dependant on literacy or fluency in English
- users have a high level of control over access to information as the resources can be used independently at the time and place that suits the users
- resources can be viewed repeatedly to consolidate understanding and facilitate discussion about the content
- the process involves a high level of local participation and control, ensures local relevance and therefore generates a high level of local interest and credibility
- the process supports a Yolngu approach to production of knowledge
- production of resources is relatively inexpensive
- this approach facilitates wide dissemination of information

Based on what we have learned from this and other projects, the following guidelines have been developed which might be relevant for other contexts.

A (draft) model for intercultural resource production

- work with local registered interpreters as much as possible and / or other community members with relevant knowledge and skills (just because someone speaks the language this does not mean they necessarily have the skills for interpreting which is a highly specialised job)

- identify existing resources and evaluate these for relevance to the target group – avoid redoing what is already available.

- the most important consideration in resource development is how to ensure *effective communication* with the target group. There are many factors you will need to explore with your co-workers and potential users. The following points summarise just some practical aspects you need to consider in planning and producing a resource:

The format of the resource.

- Do the majority of people read this language or does it need to be spoken?

- What communication style is most appropriate. For example, should the content be directive or informative? A resource which lists ‘do’s and don’ts’ can be interpreted as ‘controlling’ or offensive to some people.

An ‘informative’ approach which provides a clear and detailed explanation might be more effective to enable people to make genuinely informed decisions based on a strong understanding of the information.

- Another useful option is to use a ‘narrative’ approach which is story-based. For example, use of case studies, interviews and role-play can provide a powerful means of contextualising information and strengthening understanding.

- What learning strategies are preferred in this group? For example, do people use a lot of repetition? Illustrations? Do people prefer audio only (eg. tapes, audio cd) or audio plus visual (video, DVD, computer CD).

If you use text based resources (book, pamphlet, flip chart) – will the users be sufficiently literate in the language you chose for the resource?

- Does this format suit learning preferences? (e.g. with a flipchart the previous page ‘disappears’ – review and repetition is therefore difficult unless each ‘page’ remains visible e.g. laid out one by one or concertina style which allows for a narrative or ‘storytelling’ structure, repetition and revision.)

- What delivery mechanisms are available? VCR? (in some communities DVD players are now more common in homes). Computers? CD players? Many communities now provide computer access to community members - schools, council, knowledge centres etc.

The resource content.

- What skills and knowledge is this resource intended to develop? It is crucial to recognise and build on existing knowledge and skills and not to make incorrect assumptions about the extent – or lack of – existing skills and knowledge. Identify and include relevant information/knowledge from the community perspective.
- Information from a non-local source (e.g. Western health or legal services) needs to be fully explained in a way that is meaningful. It is common practice in resource development to use ‘simple English’. However, Yolngu strongly state that they want the ‘full story’ not the ‘tip of the story’.
- Present the information in clear (not simple) English which is as ‘culturally neutral’ as possible to enable accurate interpretation. Culturally-specific metaphors, terms and concepts need to be avoided or fully explained.
- Working closely with one or more skilled interpreters throughout the planning and development of the resource is the most effective way to ensure effective communication will be achieved.
- Discuss each concept or idea to find out the best way to achieve a shared understanding – look closely at the cultural knowledge underlying each concept and ensure that prerequisite knowledge is fully explained.

Community participation.

- A clear explanation of unfamiliar concepts or information is necessary to enable people to make an *informed* choice. As well, concepts and cultural knowledge from the local perspective related to the aim and content of the resource must be recognised and integrated for the information to be credible and relevant.
- **Often it is the process of resource production, rather than the product itself, that has the most powerful educational effect.**
- **It is therefore crucial to achieve as high a level of community participation in, and control over, the resource production process.**