



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

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## THE ELECTRONIC WORKSHOP

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Courseware delivery for the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP) began in 1991, a year in which the Cairns College of TAFE successfully employed multimedia technology and interactive learning materials at both Aurukun and Hopevale communities.

Underpinned by the concept of cultural relevance, the delivery of each unit of the Associate Diploma of Education depended on which medium could best meet the learning objectives.

In 1991, for the Units *Photography and Processes of Communication*, the answer was a workshop. Resources were prepared (videos, audio tapes, polaroids, film, games, handouts) and the workshop was conducted consecutively on site at the two communities.

This method of delivery proved successful in that contact was made between the TAFE teachers, students and tutors, and a great exchange of ideas occurred. The students were able to focus their energy on specific tasks, and instant feedback was possible.

In 1992, RATEP expanded to 5 communities. Consequently, the transport, accommodation and freight costs involved in the two TAFE teachers visiting each site increased dramatically. The idea of organising a charter to pick up all students and conduct the workshops on one site was explored. Not surprisingly, the \$16,000 cost of such an option proved prohibitive.

All of these factors prompted the exploration of an alternative method of delivery in order to reduce costs, while at the same time ensuring the objectives of the two units were met. It was finally decided to make full use of the technology available - facsimile transmission, teleconference facilities and an underutilized electronic mail system.

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All communities and Cairns TAFE were linked each morning with a 30 - 40 minute teleconference. During the 1st session the aims, content overview, purposes of and assessment for, the *Purposes of Communication* workshop were introduced. Tutors had previously been sent a *Workshop Package* which contained lesson notes, ideas, suggestions and necessary resources. After the teleconference the tutors then ran the workshop, and carried out various action research activities in the community.

At the end of the day each site posted the results of its research to the other three sites and Cairns TAFE using Keylink, Telecom's electronic mail system. This sharing of ideas provided the basis for the following morning's teleconference during which students elaborated on their findings and answered questions from other students and tutors. The wide participation in the morning teleconferences also proved to be an ideal way to initiate a planning session for the day's work.

Initially the use of teleconferencing and electronic mail was seen as a way of overcoming the difficulties of having workshop facilitators fly around to the different communities. As the workshop progressed it became obvious that electronic workshop was clearly a better option on its own merit. Workshops work best when active learning experiences, research and knowledge are shared. The benefits of the different groups of students, working together and sharing ideas while still located in their own communities, were evident in the quality of the workshop findings.

On the third day the Photography section at the workshop was introduced during the morning teleconference. Activities included comparing the advantages and disadvantages of polaroid, SLR and compact cameras, their operation and troubleshooting techniques, and the ways photography can be used as a communication tool. The students then became involved in taking various polaroid photos around the community which illustrated the aspects of communication (purposes, non verbal, registers) which had been previously researched.

Again, the discoveries and problems were shared through Keylink in the afternoon and then discussed in more detail during the following morning's teleconference. Finally, each community produced a series of 5 charts containing photographs and captions which summarised the results of the Process of Communication and Photography sections of the workshop.

The students took photos of the charts produced and together with all of the Keylink messages received (including student and tutor feedback), these formed the basis of a workshop report which will be sent back to all the communities involved.

Four of the five Cairns TAFE RATEP sites were involved in the workshop and messages were posted using the normal procedure. As many of the students and tutors were new to Keylink (some came on line only a matter of days before the workshop commenced), it was decided to concentrate on sending and receiving mail rather than introduce bulletin boards. Microsoft Works communication software was used in conjunction with Macintosh LC's and various models of Netcomm modems. Congested telephone systems in some communities caused problems and did necessitate communication by fax on some days.

The participating sites were

- Kowanyama (RATEC.KOWANYAMA),
- Moringington Island (RATEC.MORNINGTON.IS),
- Bamaga (RATEC.BAMAGA),
- Hopevale (RATEC.HOPEVALE), and
- Cairns TAFE (TAFE.CAIRNS.SDEV)





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(Wodi Wodi)      (Arrearaic)      (Torres Strait)      (Pitjantjatjara)

The Answers Are Within Us

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