

Resources and Materials for Remote Learners

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BACKGROUND

The Kimberley region of Western Australia covers one fifth of the land area of the state and one tenth of Australia, an area larger than the whole state of Victoria. Despite the large area of land, the population struggles to exceed thirty thousand. Most of the population centres around the regions 6 major centres, however a greater proportion of the population (mostly Indigenous) increasingly live in communities of fewer than 500, often 100's of kilometers from the major centres.¹

In the Kimberley, Indigenous people make up 35% of the population² and are often over represented when it comes to those disadvantaged by lack of education. A 1996 report from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows that Aboriginal people have lower levels of educational access, participation and attainment than non indigenous people. The report further highlights that an Indigenous person is more likely to have never attended school. In 1994, 3% of Aboriginal people Australia wide had never attended school, a figure considered to be much higher in areas of Northern Australia. Taking into account the isolation and the higher percentage of Indigenous people in the Kimberley the figure could be 3 to 4 times the national average.³

The Australian Bureau of statistics in 1996 concluded that 46% of Indigenous people who left school and were not currently studying, indicated that they would like to do further study or training. However 70% of these reported that they have difficulty in doing so. Reasons given for why Indigenous people could not take part in further study include lack of access to educational facilities and lack of culturally appropriate courses.⁴

In 1985 the House of Representative Select Committee on Aboriginal Education identified that the education of Aboriginal people is more effective when it includes some indigenous content.⁵ Further the number one pretext of Adult teaching practices that learning is student centered based on their experiences and interest.

The Resources and Materials for Remote Learners Project aimed to make Adult Basic Education more relevant and accessible to remote and isolated persons. Funded by a grant of \$42000 from the Australian national Training Authority (ANTA) the project looked at identifying resources that met the needs of remote and isolated learners.

THE PROJECT

Through consultation with education practitioners across northern Australia, including the Northern Territory, north Queensland and Western Australia. The project team developed the following definition of a remote learner

*A remote learner refers to a person that lacks access to a formal training institution and support from mentors and that such people have a range of experiences and purposes for study compared to those from urban and regional settings.*⁶

The project then aimed to find resources that were suitable for use with remote learners based on the following criteria.

- The context of material is relevant to remote learners. This includes, but is not limited to, health, law, finance, writing, government agencies, vocational training and work.
- The materials empower learners through the development of communication skills.
- The materials consider a variety of communication methods.
- The materials identify the different aspects of numeracy.
- The assumed experiences of the material are relevant to remote learners.
- The assumed access to technology is relevant to remote learners.
- The materials are appropriate for Indigenous including content, language emphasis and learning style.

- The materials are user friendly and are adaptable to flexible delivery.
- The materials have an adult context.

EVALUATION

In total the project identified over 100 suitable resources that reflected the above criteria. In the Bibliography the resources are cross referenced against elements of the Certificate of General Education for Adults and contain reference to the National Reporting System. All the resources identified consider:

- aspects of everyday life in a non urban, remote or isolated setting;
- adaptation for use in different geographic or cultural regions;
- ease of flexible delivery.

The project determined that material not written specifically for use with Indigenous people did not make those materials unsuitable for use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, providing the context did not discriminate against any particular person on the grounds of race or life experiences.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The Project Officer, Jo Camilirri is now pursuing, with the assistance of a further ANTA grant creating an electronic database for use on the Internet. With the constant development of new resources the web based database should provide a valuable resource for education practitioners in remote and isolated areas.

Whilst the project covered all the learning outcomes of the Certificate of General Education for Adults (Foundation), the project identified several areas of literacy and numeracy as being significantly lacking. Areas within numeracy of great concern include *shape and design* and *space and location*. Most suitable resources in numeracy relied on repetition to promote skills and did not extend the learner by incorporating numeracy and literacy. The lack of development in this area creates difficulty to develop problem solving skills and identifying real life situations where numeracy is applicable.

Finally the project noticed that a number of the resources related to oracy failed to identify different language styles used by Indigenous people. Oracy exercises dealt solely with Standard Australian English and did not consider Indigenous English, including the various forms of Kriol and other derivative forms. The project argued strongly that derivative forms of English were acceptable in particular contexts with low level literacy and oracy needing emphasis on the transfer of meaning rather than correct speech and style.

CONCLUSION

The Resources and Materials for Remote Learners Project identified over 100 resources that were suitable for use with remote or isolated students. The resources identified give practitioners in these areas the opportunity to provide quality adult education to students that have experiences vastly different to those of their urban counterparts. Further project encouraged practitioners to pursue means to overcome the disadvantage of remote living, where many suffer from poor educational access and inadequate resources.

¹ 1996 Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics.

² 1996 Census of Population and Housing, Australian Bureau of Statistics

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- ³ The Education of Indigenous People, Issues in Society (Volume 87), The Spinney Press 1998
- ⁴ The Education of Indigenous People, Issues in Society (Volume 87), The Spinney Press 1998
- ⁵ The Education of Indigenous People, Issues in Society (Volume 87), The Spinney Press 1998
- ⁶ Resources and Materials for Remote Learners, Final Report. ANTA 1999