

Interview: Northern Territory Indigenous Networks - Cathie Curry, Alicia Boyle and Tania Beattie

Jo: Welcome to *The Knowledge Tree* Everyone. Today we're focusing on Australia's Northern Territory (NT) Indigenous Networks, set up with funding through the Australian Flexible Learning Framework. We're speaking with Cathy Curry, facilitator of The Top End Groove Network, Alicia Boyle, facilitator of the Central Australian Ed and Training Network (CAETN), and one of their network partners, Tania Beattie from Desart. Thanks for coming together to let us all hear about your recent networking activities.

Cathy: Hello. Cathy here from Darwin in the tropical north of Australia.

Alicia: Hi Alicia here... also from Darwin.

Tania: And Tania here from Alice Springs, Central Australia.

Jo: So Cathy could we start with you please, what's the main idea behind the Top End Groove Network and how do you facilitate it?

Cathy: Well the Top End Groove is a network of Indigenous tourism operators and training practitioners from across the Top End of Australia. The network has a shared interest in how the training system can work with Indigenous family groups to help develop cottage industries and tourism enterprises. We just love meeting face to face, but with over 3000 km of dusty roads, river systems and crocodiles between members, it isn't possible very often. This electronic network allows the members from all over Australia a way of feeling part of a community. We have an online space to share ideas, information, innovation and practices and we trial a whole lot of e-business and e-learning tools to see if they can help grow businesses or improve training practices.

Jo: Great thanks Cathy, that's an amazing picture you have created there for us of wide open spaces and lots of travelling. Alicia - you're next... what's the main idea behind the Central Australian Ed and Training Network (CAETN) and what does it involve you doing day to day?

Alicia: Thanks Jo. Look I'm fortunate enough to be able to facilitate this Central Australian Education and Training network with Tanya Spoehr, who's based in Alice Springs, and also with the assistance of our industry partner, Desart, who we're going to hear from later. We're connecting educators in Central Australia, who are interested in exploring e-tools, and using these to develop learning resources for, and with, Aboriginal people. And we're doing this through a series of hands-on workshops, they're primarily for the trainers, but there are also some other members in our network that are attending those workshops as well. And we're taking some of those resources that we're building and learning about, out to the art centres, to see what the Aboriginal learners there think of them.

Jo: OK. Thanks very much Alicia. So Tania let's here about what you're doing in Desart and how it interfaces with the network Alicia is facilitating.

Tania: Thanks Jo and Alicia and Cathy. My role in Desart which is an industry association of Aboriginal art centres across Central Australia, is as Resource Manager. So within that role I am often talking to art centres, which in terms of people means art centre managers and artists and art workers about training and employment opportunities within those workplaces, beyond just the making of art. In my role we service and support members in as many ways as we can and given the landscape that is currently happening in the NT and in other States the issues of training and employment for Indigenous people is paramount.

As a member of the Central Australian Education and Training Network I have become aware of other people's roles in training with Indigenous people and the importance of trying to progress both the desires of Indigenous people in remote communities to access training and employment in these workplaces and opportunities to look at this in different ways, for example, the e-tools that Alicia has talked about in her previous comments. We are learning as we go. We are also looking at people being involved in learning how to make those resources as well, for training and also contextualising so they work in language for people and that they also support more traditional ways that Aboriginal people learn, side by side, family groups etc. So we are really in kind of the throes of working through that project at the moment and visiting those art centres.

Jo: Thanks very much Tania. That sounds amazing. So let's hear a little bit more about the specifics of the networking activities that you are engaged in. Let's go back to Cathy. So Cathy what's been the most interesting and innovative part of the networking that you've been doing?

Cathy: Well I feel really lucky and privileged to be part of this network, because I've got to see some of the most amazing places in Australia and probably some of the best kept secrets in Australia, both in as far as the tourism businesses go and also some of the practice that is happening as far as training goes. So probably the easiest way to explain this is with a couple of stories about some of our network members.

So if I talk about Wanyubi Marika. He is the custodian of the Laynhapuy homelands just out of Gove in the top right of Australia, for those who don't know Australia. He manages the ranger program up there and is really interested in starting up a whole number of tourism businesses. He came along to a digital story workshop and ...just took off. He created digital stories for the ranger training about looking after country, making spears, controlled burning, plants, straightening bark, a whole host of things and he did this with some of the young men from the area.

He used this as cultural knowledge of the area for training the young boys that are coming up. He also used those photo stories to send to a training provider to look at RPL or skills recognition against a tourism qualification. Now previously they hadn't used any electronic forms, it was all paper based for their skills recognition and this, because he actually submitted these digital stories and said "Look I would like to be assessed against, you know, what I am doing in these stories", which was talking through a whole lot of different processes, the training provider actually had to rethink the whole way that they were doing their skills recognition, which was fantastic. It led to an improvement in practice of the training provider, but also led to Wanyubi gaining a Certificate in Tourism.

Jo: Thanks Cathy. So the whole idea of digital story telling as a form of recognition of current competence, what benefits do you think that brings and to whom?

Cathy: I think the most important thing about this project is it has really brought the training providers closer together to the Indigenous tourism operators, so that when they are actually developing their training plans, thinking about assessment, actually delivering the training, it is far more client focused and completely tailored. Family groups and Indigenous people are able to say exactly what they want from the training provider. They are able to be far more critical consumers of what they want in training and assessment and how they want to be trained and assessed and that using all the multi-media tools they are actually able to do assessment and training in a whole lot of different ways that perhaps hadn't been considered before.

For the Indigenous business owners, they are getting access to a whole host of knowledge and we know that there is almost an infinite amount of knowledge and

information on the Web and being able to talk about accessing that and where you are getting information from, trying a whole lot of e-business tools. We have found that some of the businesses, because they generally are all remote, spend an absolute fortune on phone calls, so simply by introducing something like Skype or Elluminate and then trialling it and seeing how people like it, has made a huge difference to their actual business operational costs as well.

Jo: Yes, some really important benefits there that you outlined for us, Cathy. Thanks very much. How do you think it could work or transfer to other similar groups?

Cathy: Well it is interesting. This e-network started with quite a small group, probably about ten people: five training providers, five business owners and it just grows and grows. Every time we put something else up on the Internet, every time we talk to a different group, more people are wanting to know because it is very much about sharing good practice and improving practice across the board, so improving partnerships with government providers and being able to do this electronically means you can just get access to a huge number of people. So I think it transfers extremely well. Anyone who is interested in setting up businesses, the ideas, the practice, the learning all relate directly to that and anyone who works with Indigenous groups as well.

Jo: Where do you think it is headed, Cathy?

Cathy: I guess where it is headed is we would really love to, the whole group, would love to see training practice improved to the point that it is almost seamless with industry or business, so that it is not training seen on one hand and industry or business seen on the other hand, but it is completely seamless. So we think there are just so many ways you can enhance that using electronic methods and obviously using that to share the word and increase the communication.

There are also so many really good tools that can be used and sharing those tools to actually improve practice too, so people are incorporating the use of multimedia with assessment or they're using Survey Monkeys to do surveys or to get better feedback from students. So I think it is all about sharing information and really, hopefully... will take off.

Jo: Great, well thanks very much for telling us about that, Cathy. We have a digital story from one of your business group members that is displayed with the interview, so hopefully people who are listening can take a look at that and see it for real. So let's move back now to Alicia and Tania and let's hear from you about what is the most interesting and innovative part of the networking that you are doing. Alicia would you like to go first please?

Alicia: There are two parts to our network project. The first one is developing up skills within our predominantly, trainers, in the network, and that's been really exciting just seeing people in the hands-on workshop building skills and building tools that they can actually use in their own practice. So we have had some amazing workshops with people like Marcus Ragus and Bill Wade on m-learning, on using your own MP3 player. People brought their own tools in and we learned how to use Audacity and using and uploading our podcasts using Blogger. We have been on some site visits in Alice Springs to some of our members. We have had a Web 2.0 professional development day and people have got their own accounts and we have hooked up to Cathy's Top End Groove network in one of our face to face meetings.

Next week Tanya Spoehr and I are running a full day digital story telling workshop with both introductory and advanced training on a day next week, so just seeing people realising what is out there and seeing how they can perhaps use these tools in practice

has been really exciting. And of course the other really exciting part of the project is working with Tania and Desart.

That came about because a few years ago there was a WELL (Workplace English Language and Literacy) funded resource that in fact Cathy Curry's industry training group was involved in producing which was a CD resource called 'Our Art, Our Place, our way' and it is there to assist with the delivery of a Certificate III in Arts Centre Administration, and I guess from Tania's perspective her feedback from her art centres was that it wasn't a very accessible resource and I guess through this project we are using, in the first instance, some digital stories, but the potential for perhaps putting not only the stories we develop, but as Tania mentioned, learners develop themselves and put them on a blog space where they can be shared with other art centres, is really quite exciting.

The potential to use something like Elluminate or actually link up a number of remote art centres who can share their own learning and share their own stories and learn from each other to me is very exciting.

Jo: So Tania would you like to comment on what benefits you can see some of these e-learning tools bringing to the Desart associate members?

Tania: Thanks Jo. I am one of the learners that Alicia is talking about. I am learning about these e-tools, but then when I am visiting art centres and these places might be 9 hours from Alice Springs, they might be no access to trainers or training facilities or computers within that remote community. However in the art centre there is a wealth of learning to be done and one example is I recently travelled to Warakurna and Tjukurla, two communities in Western Australia, and I worked with an artist in each centre, and in each of those centres we created a digital story around preparing canvas ready for painting.

On both those digital stories, those people were able to narrate the steps to that task or skill in their own language. I find this really exciting, in my own role, but fantastic when you see learners really excited about both what they are learning, technology wise and the fact that they like to show other people, and this is another way of supporting learning and I can see how the trainers and assessment can really benefit from that process. Small steps but for people who really don't have much access to any other learning, it is pretty exciting.

Jo: Where do you plan to take the project from here, Alicia or Tania. I am happy to hear from either of you?

Tania: I think the next part that I would like to talk about is the fact that Alicia, the other Tanya Spoehr, who is fantastic and myself will be visiting another couple of centres closer to Alice Springs and we will be doing some work in terms of evaluating the CD resource that has already been created, and we will be able to look at developing some ideas around how to make that resource more accessible. We will also hopefully be able to look at more digital story telling and we will also just be able to talk to people about learning needs, what is happening in their communities, and really looking at what skills people already have. I think that is very important in this process... and looking at innovative ways to assess and use these tools to support learning within the arts centre context.

Jo: Okay have you got anything to add, Alicia?

Alicia: I think from my perspective the opportunities that the e-tools will be able to bring to their learning are in terms of being able to use both their local language and English, to be able to use a graphical context for learning rather than text, the fact that they can share with other learners and the fact that they can actually build their own learning resources.

So we are wanting to help workers to develop their own digital stories and to create their own learning resources.

I mean I can see that, you know, some time down the track there is a whole raft of opportunities for Aboriginal learners to be in the business of assisting the non-Aboriginal people to develop culturally appropriate resources. There is a whole industry out there that we could really use the help in.

Jo: So tell us a little bit more about that...

Alicia: You know...the issues that arise in the delivery of vocational education and training to Aboriginal students. One of the things that often comes up is this need for more culturally appropriate resources. Now if through this project we might be able to work with the Aboriginal people to help us to develop more culturally appropriate resources and if they have the simple skills of using their digital cameras, which are part of the skills that they need in cataloguing, digitally cataloguing their arts anyway, they can just extend the use of those pieces of equipment to actually creating digital stories.

We already have a resource that we know has got the content that they need to cover and there is a real opportunity I think for people to be engaged in developing their own culturally appropriate resources that can be used for learning. I think there is a whole industry there, where non-Indigenous trainers can be working with Indigenous learners to develop culturally appropriate resources.

Jo: That's great. Thanks very much. That gives us a really clear picture of where it can head.

Tania: I will just make a comment there just about what Alicia was saying. I think there are certain challenges in terms of literacy, spoken English, in terms of being able to deliver training, learning and teaching, effectively and I think people love photos and I think a lot of the people are starting to be more aware of using computers, and I think it is also blending the oral tradition that people have, in terms of the way their culture works, and using those foundations that, like Alicia was saying, that culturally work for people into a training environment, that will help them to achieve some training outcomes and employment outcomes and economic benefits.

Jo: Yeah, okay, that sounds good. How do people join your networks, Cathy and Alicia. What is the best way for people to get in contact and become part of your networks?

Cathy: If anyone is interested in tourism training and Indigenous enterprise development then they can join by just simply looking at our website. It is an open website and people can join at any time and just join into the conversations. It is a moderated network, but it doesn't have a password, so it is open to anyone interested. The URL is just: www.topendgroove.com.au.

Jo: Thanks Cathy. Alicia, what about you?

Alicia: I think probably the best way, ours is not a closed forum either. Anyone is welcome to join, and is actually part of a wider Central Australian education and training network that is trying to look at a whole raft of issues about improving demand responsive education and training for Aboriginal people, but I think the best way in the immediate term is to just contact me on my email address and we can get them logged into our network webspace, which is basically a big information repository and my email address is alicia dot boyle at cdu dot edu dot au

Jo: Okay well thanks very much to all of you for spending the time speaking with *The Knowledge Tree*.

Others: Thank you. Thank you very much, Jo. Bye all.

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[CHARTTES Training Advisory Council](#) The principal advisor to the [Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training](#) on Vocational Education and Training (VET) matters, in the Cultural, Recreation and Tourism industries and community sectors.

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