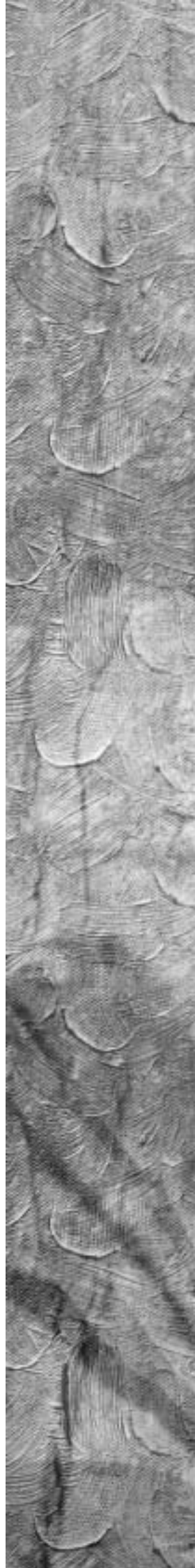
Using Your Senses... To Make Sense

Peter Thomsen



Cooperative Research Centre for ABORIGINAL & TROPICAL HEALTH

mshr menzies school of health research

CRC AUSTRALIA

The Multimedia Unit at the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin was set up in 1998 to produce videos to help improve communication between health researchers and Indigenous communities.
Four years on, it seems to me that the potential of the Multimedia Unit is not yet being fully realized. After a great deal of reflection, I've written this piece to try and focus my attention – and other people's too – on how that potential could become a reality.

Peter Thomsen

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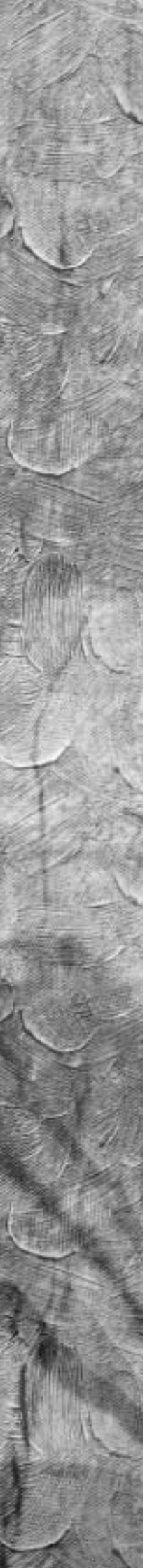


Telling our own stories our way

If video and other media are going to be useful tools in telling the story of research in Aboriginal communities, then I think they have to adopt an Indigenous perspective. By that I mean they have to incorporate our ways of passing on information and they have to involve our people at every level – learning as they work and combining video with research. It's important that our people have the knowledge and the skills to make technology and ideas work for them. If they can't do that, both the technology and the ideas stay locked into a Western perspective of story.

This means we have work with Western ideas and tools, but from our own perspective – treading our own path that is parallel to the one the researchers we work with are walking. We're not being disrespectful about the Western perspective: it's just that we need to develop our own explanations and maintain our identity in the process, otherwise we get swamped.

I'm exploring these ideas in a way that will be familiar to Aboriginal people and that I hope will become familiar for researchers. I'm starting this story at the beginning – with me and how I was grown up – to set the scene for what was in my mind when I developed the proposal for the Unit and how I see the Unit's story developing. It's been a learning process for me and I think there are lessons in it for MSHR, the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health and researchers who want to work with Aboriginal people.

Telling the story this way – as a whole story – is not the way Western-educated researchers might do it. They seem comfortable with the very focused short form: the direct answer to a direct question; or the prepared statement that sticks directly – and only – to the point. But it's one of our tools that we use as a vehicle for ideas. It might be harder work, but story-telling also involves time for reflection. And this story is about developing understanding of the need for us to walk our path and tell our own stories our way.

"You're a blackfella; you do it blackfella way"

All my life I have absorbed information through my eyes, ears, nose and mouth. When I say 'absorbed information', I mean things that were taught to me have stayed with me all my life until today. That information is what I call experience. My mother and father always let us experience things for our selves so that we would learn. They didn't just make it up: this way of learning is the Aboriginal way. We lived in the bush and I've lived most of my life since in the bush.

My uncles taught me how to make spears and live off the land and this information was passed onto me through my senses. Those lessons were taught to me many years ago; and even though I might now be a bit rusty, they are still with me today.

The way things got done back then (in the old days) - because we had to rely on ourselves and each other - was to learn from each other. But we also learnt very early on that we either did things together, collectively and collaboratively, or we didn't get things done. It was also a matter of survival, both of individuals and the group.

One day I went our riding on a horse called Minty and I told my dad where I was going to go hunting. The horse got spooked, bucked me off and I hit a tree. I was concussed and ended up under the tree for I don't know how long. My Dad found the horse riderless at home and traced its tracks back to where I was lying. I had just come to when he came across me. He asked me what happened and I didn't have a clue and we walked home together.

I tell the story to illustrate a very important lesson: that is, how important trust is in the bush - you need to rely on other people if things go wrong and out of your control, which means they need to be fully aware of what you're doing and where you're going. But it's also about having a go and finding limits for yourself. You need to learn responsibility because if you do a stupid thing in the bush, you could be seriously hurt or killed. I tell my son now that, if he wants to climb a tree in the bush, it's an hour of pain if he breaks a limb before anyone can do anything to help.

It's also about two stories – my story and the story of experience from other people – coming together. Nobody says 'don't do it'. They say 'if you do it, be aware that this is what could happen'. You try it out and you learn.

My working life has been about having a go in the great outdoors in some very remote areas. I started off doing things like fencing, labouring catching buffalo, Army Reserves and operating heavy machinery. Doing this type of work in these areas you would have to rely on your life skills and on each other, because if things went wrong people could get hurt or even die. My previous work was all hands on and that's how you would learn. Over time and practice you would be regarded as a good hand or handy at your job, which was shown to you by a pay rise or the way people talked about you.

The most important thing was people would respect you. If you weren't any good, then you had two choices: lift your game or pack your swag!!

In 1990, I joined the Army Reserves – NORFORCE - and here I saw the way I was taught by my family was being used again. The old way of participation, practice and repetition till you get it right is how the Army trains people from different backgrounds and different skill levels to get the job done together. It creates a formidable and disciplined force in which everyone understands what's expected of them in their various roles. A machine gunner is a machine gunner, and he's a specialist. But everyone else in the **group** has to learn how to use the machine gun as well, in case the specialist is taken out.

The people I worked with tolerated mistakes, as long as it was clear you were going to learn from them and not repeat them. I've learned a lot of lessons from getting it wrong and having the sense to admit I was wrong and I have the scars to prove it. I have applied myself to learning new skills in the work I do at the moment - multimedia officer for Menzies and the CRC. I have found the same tolerance here as I did in other places: space to learn, space to make mistakes and the expectation that I will get it right.

The result is:

- April 1993 — Appointed as a Health Education Officer at Menzies School of Health Research.
- 1994 - 1997 — Research assistant/Health Education Officer MSHR
- 1997 – 1998 — Research assistant/Health Education Officer MSHR
- 1998 — Certificate II in Film and Television, Prides Business College
- 1998 - 2003 — Culture and Media Officer MSHR; Chair of the Aboriginal sub committee of the Top End Human Research Ethics Committee.

"It's my project and I want to do it my way"

In Aboriginal terms, people belong to groups and they have to collaborate for survival or they die. This is still an expectation among Aboriginal people from all kinds of social and cultural environments today - remote, urban, rural. Individual action, without reference to others, was virtually unknown. People were only sent out by themselves to punish them for disrespect to family, clan or a wider group. Banishment usually meant a slow death and the punishment reinforced the lesson that survival needs collaboration and cooperation.

In Western terms, people who do research gather skills which they don't necessarily share. They have control over their domain – a wealth of knowledge and experience, kudos, the ability to attract funds for projects. These help them survive and prosper in the academic world. They don't always help them negotiate their way successfully through the Aboriginal worlds, though.

Aboriginal people's experience of research reflects these cultural differences. I've seen two ways of doing research. You can call them good and bad, positive and negative or whatever opposites you can think of. But they boil down to:

- on the one side, a collective, inclusive and collaborative approach that is directed and managed by the Aboriginal people involved in and affected by the research;
- and on the other the individual-centred, exclusive approach that is driven by the needs of the researcher.

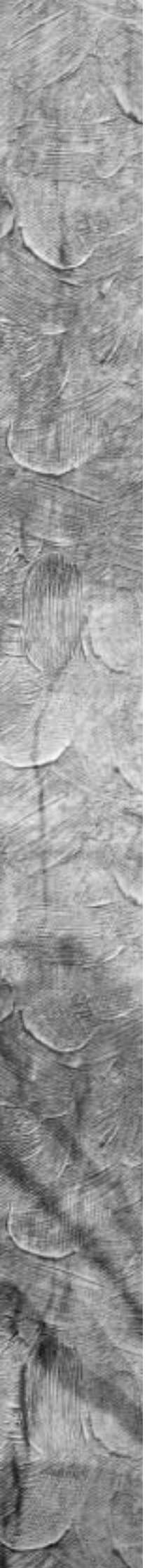
"I'm the researcher and I thought you would just provide a service", as one researcher said to me.

But 'research' isn't a value: it's an activity. And because it involves people, it needs to engage people and accommodate them. Research needs people to make sure it's on the right track – to make sure it is useful, it can give people knowledge and insights and generally add to the human story that we all share.

Good intentions aren't enough

From my perspective, there are key words that identify "good" and "bad" research approaches, and researchers who are inclusive and those who exclude others and keep control themselves. The table below lists these words, and while these are drawn from my experience, they may help researchers and others think about how they negotiate with Aboriginal people.

Inclusive behaviour	Individual centred behaviour
Collective effort, the "collaborate or die" approach; partnership	Individual effort; researcher and "researched", tokenism; avoidance
Community benefit	Personal prestige and more personal/ institutional dollars
Building relationships with Aboriginal people and communities to do research	Using research to determine the relationship with Aboriginal people and communities
Best practice	Good intentions
Country and connections	Visiting - as "friends"
Communication (listening and talking) before, during, after, with, open-ended	Telling, presenting to, only hearing what fits the research agenda
Open acknowledgment of intellectual contribution and intellectual property	Devalue Aboriginal intellectual contribution and creativity and misappropriate intellectual kudos.
Inclusive - all partners involved from planning through to dissemination	Exclusive - "control", "vision"
Respect, appreciation and acknowledgment	Take for granted
Shared learning - open-ended	"You don't have anything to teach me; look what I've done."
With	For
Negotiation	Consultation



In the process of thinking these things through, I began to think about how researchers approached people in communities and how they left them at the end of the research process. The researcher-oriented approach seems to have involved people coming in with their minds made up about what **they** want to do, and their objective is to talk Aboriginal people round to seeing things their way and agree to their agenda and their timeframe.

This approach is called '***consultation***'. But consultation doesn't mean much to Aboriginal people. Because it means you, the researcher or government official or businessman, doing what you wanted to do in the first place. It means leaving little room for people to tell their stories. It's not about communicating in an appropriate way. And the appropriate way is ***negotiation***.

Posters & pamphlets have their place but we use our senses to absorb information

People 'consulting' might also bring printed material to support their argument - brochures, pamphlets, posters etc – which they're familiar with and which they might use to tell their story to a non-Indigenous audience. That audience is familiar with, and comfortable with, the idea that you absorb information through bits of paper.

There is a place for printed material, sure. But it's probably not at the first encounter where the ideas for a project come out. And it's probably a waste of time if people can't speak or read formal English, which is the way a lot of project information gets written. Even putting information in Aboriginal languages might not do much good, because not many people can read their own languages either.

Part of the blackfella way of doing things is to sit down and talk: people develop stories to identify problems, discuss courses of action and negotiate agreement on what needs to be done. Everyone gets heard, no matter how long it takes. Aboriginal people have is a rich oral tradition – a way of negotiating information by talking it through until everyone has had a say and everyone's satisfied.

What matters is not the demand or the request that comes from one side so much as the story – how you develop it, how you incorporate other people's stories into it (which is what negotiation is all about) and how you reach agreement over all the detail – what the problem is, what might be done about it, who does it and who gets involved, who runs it, what the outcome might be and how and when you let people know what's going on. You can't do any of this without having a real relationship that blurs the distinction between 'researchers' and the 'researched'.

Principle 1: Make sure you have the understanding and consent of the community and all participants.

Principle 2: Make sure everything you need to do is organized and agreed to by the appropriate decision makers. Video production is expensive and time-consuming – it takes detailed planning and preparation to make it work well. This means thinking about how video production might be used to improve the conduct or dissemination of a research project from the earliest planning stages of the project, not making it an add-on at the end of the project.

The research project involved testing of organ functions in a Top End community. At the time there was a very high level of non-compliance with research in Aboriginal communities – people just didn't want to get involved in research projects. One of my main ideas in setting up the multimedia unit was that instead of just telling people what the research would be about, we should show them – by using a video to paint a picture.

Principle 3: Involve the right people. Making sure the right person is involved can have a huge impact on the effectiveness of the video. This includes getting expertise in community liaison, research dissemination and video production – as well as ensuring the right people are involved at the community level. Like any project, video production involves high levels of expertise in planning, preparation and conduct.

Principle 4: Take time to make sure there is understanding. This includes spending time getting to know and trust each other, listening, and checking your own understandings and assumptions.

One way of making sure the story is relevant to everyone's needs is to tell it in a visual and narrative format. People have been leaving visual clues all over this country for many thousands of years – paintings, rock carvings, stone arrangements - that tell stories of place and the importance of place. They've also been telling each other stories that have built on knowledge and shared new knowledge. In doing so, they haven't taken on the role of 'teacher' in the way Western cultures often think of the teacher who transmits knowledge.. Story-telling has always been about shared experience.

Making stories

I noticed that some researchers had moved on from relying on the written word and were using posters, graphs and pictures to explain what they were doing. This kind of feedback was a step in the right direction, but it still wasn't about sharing stories: it was still about Aboriginal people **receiving** information. The issue though was the same: how to present information in way that was meaningful to Aboriginal people.

Principle 5: Work with participants' own ideas. Connect with local priorities and ways of thinking/doing. This doesn't mean doing exactly what the participants want without regard to what will work in the video production, but listening and taking advice respectfully and thoughtfully.

Principle 6: Demonstrate rather than rely on words

Principle 7: Look out for and maximise the opportunities for learning – on behalf of yourself as well as the participants.

Principle 8: Do whatever is needed to make the video work – to get the ideas across.

Setting up the multi-media unit

After a lot more thought and observation of how things were working, I developed a proposal for a multi-media unit for the Menzies School of Health Research. The first thing I wrote about it was that it should:

> *…feedback research information to Aboriginal people in remote communities about research, so that (they) can make informed decision about research and their own health…the Unit is important because it's an attempt to remedy the problems of communicating research results across cultures…*

My original aims for the Unit were that it should produce material that would primarily:

- **provide research feedback to Aboriginal communities, health professionals, and health service providers** in language that could be understood by communities (eg Aboriginal languages, including Aboriginal English) and by incorporating other ways of communicating; and
- **be an accessible information source for community-based health workers** that they could use when they were working with people on community health campaigns.

It would also be used:

- **to document projects** for archiving, for feedback to funding bodies, for material for conference presentations;
- **for public relations/education** to promote CRCATH/Menzies within the core partners, externally in communities (say via BRACS, at community Open Days, NAIDOC Week events), to other health research stakeholders, like universities in Australia and overseas, to schools;
- **to record conferences, seminars and workshops** for the historical record and for distribution locally, nationally and internationally; and

- **for staff training** in a variety of areas, including for example bush road travel, protocols for dealing with Aboriginal communities, communication strategies.

But I also wanted it to be a resource for people in communities to use and I saw that it wouldn't be effective unless they were an essential part of the process of making videos. So I also proposed that it would:

> *…empower Aboriginal people in communities to make decisions about both their own health problems and what they would like to see researched…better informed Aboriginal people would be able to have an input into changing health policy…*

The case studies below show some of the results that the multi-media unit has been able to achieve.

…but what's the story about the pictures? How the multimedia unit works

Perhaps the best way to illustrate what the multimedia unit does is with the stories of a couple of examples or case studies of some of the different types of video productions which can be used to help make health research more effective. These examples show both positive and negative aspects of how these videos were produced.

Case study 1

The non-Indigenous researchers on this project decided they wanted to make a video, so we talked it through. I asked them to:

- Talk with the council and get their agreement
- Organize actors to take part in the video
- Organize authorization for filming at the necessary locations

The principal researcher told me, 'Yes, no worries, everything is ok.'

When I got there, with just one week to shoot the video, I found that no-one had been organised to take part as actors, and that it hadn't been made clear what was required from the council or other community members. No locations had been organized or authorized either.

So, we sat down and talked. We ended up spending three of the five days talking and working through things with the council president and the researcher. A lot of our conversations happened outside, in casual settings. It was essential that the council president was involved, because it meant he had a very thorough understanding of everything that was going to happen – not only in the filming but in the whole research project. This meant that if any community members wanted to ask about anything as a result of the video or out of the project as a whole, they could ask him. He could take on a role as a broker between the research project and the community.

We'd worked out through a lot of talking that the video would start with an address from the council president to the community in his own language. I'd asked him 'What do you want to say – this is your chance to talk freely about this project to your community?' It was up to him what he wanted to say. So I set the video up and he spoke in his own language, without any script. He spoke about what the project was, and told the story of one of his friends who had died not long ago from a heart attack. Then he talked in English.

My idea of how to show people what the research would involve included showing the actual tests that would be done. So we decided to film some of the tests being done in a mock-up clinic room. I wanted to make the video a bit humorous, so I suggested a scene in which the researchers asked the council president who would like to be tested first – and he replied with: "How about you show us how it's done first?" This also showed the council president taking control of the process.

So we filmed the researchers testing each other. The council president stayed with us throughout the whole process, and is shown in the video watching the tests (and having a laugh at some of the poor acting). His involvement throughout was vital. Not only did it mean that he understood the process of what was going on, but he was learning about the various medical tests going on. As the researchers did an ultrasound test to check the health of veins in the neck and the heart, he asked me what they were doing. No-one in the community had ever seen an ultrasound before. I got the researchers to show him what it was and how it worked. Soon everyone was in there - women, kids, everyone – looking at the researcher's heart on the ultrasound.

That example of the ultrasound was a good illustration of the potential for video production to be used for educational purposes even while you're making the video. When I make a video I learn all about the subject matter of the video too – and the more community people are involved in the making of the video the more they can learn too. And by being involved in the process alongside me as an Indigenous video producer, they feel confident to ask questions and test out how things work. It all goes towards building up the knowledge base in the community.

Despite the initial lack of preparation, this video turned out to be very successful. The project ended up with a 98 per cent compliance rate for the testing.

Case study 2

This video production was to document what had occurred in a research project in central Arnhem land and provide feedback to the community. The original research project had involved an exploration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous concepts of child growth, and had led to the establishment of a playgroup in the community. The video uses re-enactments, interviews and action to tell the story of the research project, some of the main issues covered in the research, and the story of the playgroup.

The idea for the video was initiated from the community members who had been involved in the project, and who wanted to find the best way to communicate the story of the project and its outcomes back to the whole community. The video production could be broadcast on the local community television service, shown to the community council and at the health clinic, and also used to help convince funding bodies as part of a campaign for additional resources. (One of the outcomes of this research project was a plan to build a family centre in the community, which needed funding.)

One member of the research team, Paul Wunungmurra, had some previous experience with film production as an actor, and was keen to learn more about the production side of the process. He had been employed as an advisor to the research team, and we employed him to work on the video production too. Paul's role was central to the production process, as he acted as a connection point of understanding between the community, the research project, and the video production.

That meant he could drive the production process: identifying and organizing who would appear in the video, painting up and leading children in a traditional dance, and translating and identifying key pieces of content. My role could be to concentrate on making sure these things would come together to tell the story effectively in a video. At the same time I was helping Paul build up his skills in production, camerawork and editing.

The pre-production phase for this video stretched over several months. We had an initial meeting with community people and the researcher to talk about what would be needed for the production. We asked them to:

- Identify all the key people involved in the research process and make sure they would be there for filming.
- Make sure everyone had a clear idea of what they would be saying in the video.
- Make sure consent forms were signed for locations and participants

Our original plan was for myself, the researcher, and Communications Officer Michael Duffy to visit the community once before the shoot, to complete the preparations. Unfortunately, because of many events at the community, this visit wasn't able to take place, and the preparations we'd asked the community members and researchers to do hadn't been done either. This meant a lot of the preparation of the story line went on during our four days in the community.

One of the challenges in making a video when you want to allow the community and researcher to have a strong involvement in setting the agenda for the project is that they also need to know about what's needed to make the video work – to make sure the story is told effectively through the video. We spent a lot of time explaining how to build a story through a video: how images can be used with voice overlaid to tell a story, how ideas need to be put across as concisely as possible, and that the story needs to build from a starting point through to an end. Basically it comes down to knowing exactly what the story is, how the community would like to see the story told, and then my role is to make sure that story is told well in the video.

The principal researcher in this project had spent quite a while in that community. She had a good working relationship with the community, knew what was going on and who were the best people to talk to about things. Her way of working and relating with people helped a lot.

The preparation for this project was good – but could still have been better. Making a video about health issues in an Indigenous context is a complicated business. You are trying to juggle community involvement and cultural appropriateness, translating languages and cultural understandings, making sense of complicated medical concepts across cultural and language barriers, and bringing all of these together with the demands and restrictions of the video production process. Plus trying to do it in a short time frame and without going over budget. That means that you need to try to plan as much as possible, so that you can focus on the presentation and the purpose. You also know things are going to go wrong, and that you will need to deal with that. So having as much preparation as possible is very important.

In this case, it took a lot of time to work through just what the story was the community members wanted to tell, what the researcher wanted to tell, and then how we could tell it. It's very hard to develop a shared understanding of the outline of a story, but it needs to be done as early as possible in the process.

Ideally, for a project like this to document a research process, the multimedia unit would be involved from the start of the research. That way we could document the project as it goes along. Research projects also need to build in a budget for dissemination, whether it's for video production or other forms of dissemination.

There were also some very practical challenges particularly around how people do and don't want to be filmed. Some of the old ladies who appeared in the video were not keen about being filmed at all. I knew this could be an issue, and so could talk with them about it and work out ways of positioning them or framing the image so that they felt more comfortable with the filming. Similarly, when we first started filming the participants were primarily using traditional Aboriginal story-telling to get across the message. But that wasn't going to work for the video – it was too long. I was able to explain that while I understood the use and value of storytelling in that way, we needed a different approach to make the story work in the video, we needed to get the main idea across and shorten the story right down.

What worked really well in this project was the involvement of Paul Wunungmurra. After the initial stage of talking and trying to work out how the video might be made, Paul got everyone organized and we managed to get most of the filming done in one long day. Later he came to Darwin to work with me on the editing. As he began to understand the editing process better he was able to bring his local cultural understandings into the construction of the video, and that was vital, especially in working with material which was largely in the local language. At the same time he was building up his own skills.

The completed video ends with a song recorded by a local band, which Paul suggested as a most appropriate song for the subject of the video. With that I edited a series of images of children in the community: doing somersaults up a tree trunk, playing basketball, families with children. This might look like just a series of nice images, but it's a very important part of making the video work. People will watch the video over and over to see those images of the kids, and every time they watch it there's another chance for the message to get through.

Case Study 3: Presentations

There are two different ways that the multimedia unit has used video in relation to presentations such as seminars and conferences. One way is to record the event, as archival material or for distribution or other uses. The second way is to use video within the presentation – to bring Indigenous perspectives and 'real life' into the often dry world of academic presentations.

The recording of presentations can have a range of different uses. The ideas presented at a seminar in one location can be shared to other audiences at other times or places. The video makes a record of what has been done, and this is particularly useful for documenting the thinking of strong oral communicators who prefer to speak rather than write their presentations. I've also used videos of presentations to help researchers develop their presentation skills. This gives the researcher the opportunity to see themselves as they appear to others: they can see themselves fidgeting or not looking up at the audience, and then try to improve the way they present.

We used this strategy to great effect in preparing for the CRCATH's presentation for refunding in 2002. Initially I filmed each person who was going to present, giving them the opportunity to look at and improve their presentation style and skills. Then we filmed a practice run through of the entire presentation, including a session of feedback from a panel. CRCATH Director Tony Barnes then went through the whole presentation, giving individual presenters further feedback about content and style, and identifying where changes suggested by the panel could be most usefully made.

Tony Barnes used the video to assess his own performance too: he gave himself a rating of about 4 out of 10.

I also used video in a creative way to bring a theatrical effect into the refunding presentation. To break up the formal presentations, we produced a short video featuring all the Indigenous trainees and staff introducing themselves and talking about where they worked. The video ended by asking the review team – as the audience – to stand up and turn around. In the row of seats behind them sat all the people who'd appeared on the video, and they could talk and ask questions, drawing on what they'd already seen on the screen.

This was a simple way of getting more Indigenous voices and faces into the presentation, but it can also be used to great effect to bring community voices into places where they might not normally get the chance – or have the time – to speak.

Case study 4: Training videos

This project involved using video to communicate the findings of research about a common infection to community based health practitioners. The video shows examples of each of the common types of infection, so that health practitioners can identify and manage them easily.

The audience for this video was quite general. When you make a video which is going to be seen by a lot of different people it needs to be quite non-specific, unlike a video produced for a particular community or language group. For this reason, we chose Jacko Angeles to present on camera and narrate the video, as he is well-known across Australia for his appearances on the ABC's Messagestick program.

The purpose of this video production was very clear – it had a clear training purpose to improve the skills and knowledge of health practitioners. The idea was that this would allow community

clinic staff to manage examples of the infection locally rather than relying only on specialist help which is very difficult to get. Unfortunately, it was left to the very end of the research project before the decision was taken to make a video. By then, there was no money left for it, and the images of examples of the infection that the research team had already gathered were – while being 'classical' medical examples - of poor visual quality. This lack of planning meant we had to work within restraints that are frustrating because you end up with a product of lower quality.

The researchers produced a first draft script, which typically for researchers was very long-winded. Michael Duffy rewrote it to be workable, and Jacko added his own touches as we filmed it.

The video was a straightforward illustration of about 30 different examples of the infection. Ideally, these images would have had animation added to them to help make the learning easier – to make it very clear what the practitioners were looking for. But as yet the multi-media unit doesn't have the capability for producing animations.

The video is accompanied by two workbooks, one for a workplace trainer and one for health workers. The initial plan was to distribute the video just to health clinics with which the researchers had worked. However the interest in the video package is quite huge, and it may end up being distributed much more widely.

Reflection

Looking back at my impressions of an early effort in the bush developing a video about a research project, I now understand that presenting a story in visual form is not the end of it. I can see that I thought at the time that, at the very least, any research project needed more community involvement, that the community should approve draft scripts, that the project involve the employment and training of local people and that there should be plenty of time for meetings to thrash all the issues out.

Having the techniques and technology is probably the easiest part. But if you don't have the process and the protocols right, they're not going to do you much good. If the end result is to be really meaningful to Aboriginal people, researchers have to get serious about being willing to share stories instead of just telling them.

...and to put this in context, there's also a bigger story going on

Things have begun to move a bit since I first got the idea for the Unit, but that doesn't mean everyone has moved as well. I've been working through the Human Research Ethics Committee to make sure that research proposals recognise that Aboriginal people are not just objects of research, but people who have our own approach, our own ideas and our own strengths. Aboriginal people across Australia have been thinking and talking about making research work for us, about turning the research culture away from its focus on the person doing the research and towards the needs of our people.

As a result we've had a shift in the CRCATH towards greater Aboriginal control: since it got going there's been a lot of thinking about reforming the approach to research – through the Indigenous Research Reform Agenda - and developing Aboriginal people's capacity to steer it in the right direction. Many of us all took part in the 'Yarning' workshop – putting on the table our ideas of how research operates and getting reaction from the researchers. I think we got across the message that we feel very strongly about the way –blackfella way - research *should* be done!

All of this is already making a big difference to the way things get done, particularly since the plans for a proposed new CRC are focusing on all the things that affect Aboriginal health – from systems of government right through housing, education to the way health services get delivered – and recognizing Aboriginal control and including Aboriginal perspectives. But the message still doesn't always get through.

…new tricks for old dogs…

My experience of working with researchers has had its share of ups and downs. The really basic questions still keep cropping up, like:

- Who gets empowered?
- Whose skills get developed?
- Who owns and manages the process?
- Who recognises the need for true process?
- What happens to the information – does it get taken away for good or does it come back?
- Who gets the accolades?

Which boils down to the three Es: Empowerment; Education; and Employment

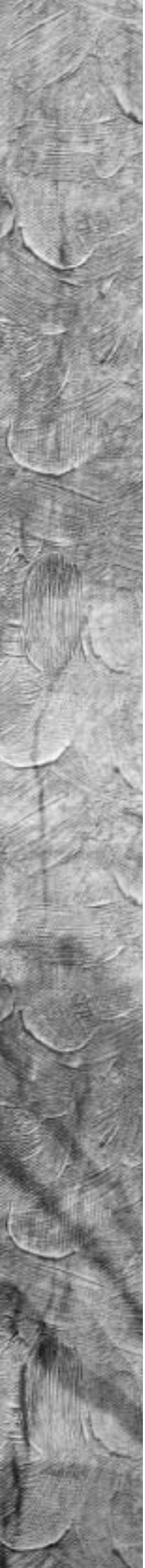
And they crop up constantly because I see researchers coming in all eager to make their mark and convinced that they've got it right. But often they're trying to re-invent the wheel, and in the process they manage to step on a few toes – with the best intentions, of course.

As an example of this, I worked hard to get the multi-media unit as a collaborative resource for researchers and for people in communities. I always felt the unit was there to offer advice, support the development of audio-visual reports, train the community partners of the research teams and then work with all parties to create a good finished product. Unfortunately it doesn't always work out that way. Too often the unit is overlooked, which means the skills base and the experience I've built up is wasted. People put up research proposals and they include the cost of video equipment, without any investigation of whether it's compatible with what we've already got. They don't necessarily have video training – or the skills you need to train people in communities to use video effectively - but they think they've got a new idea and they're the ones to carry it off. And of course they might think coming up with a 'new' idea like that helps make them look good.

If the training element isn't there, you're not going to get much out of giving people the equipment. It's like giving them a bazooka to go goose shooting: it looks good and makes plenty of show, but it makes a hell of a mess when it goes off. And then they come to the video unit at the end of the project and expect me to fix up a botched job and make their attempts look good, *after* they've ignored what the unit has to offer in planning, shooting and delivering the product. I end up fixing things up, but it seems to me that the amateurish attempts – which they claim to be a community collaborative effort – end up making Aboriginal people look stupid. So I'm honour bound to try my best to make it look better than it really is.

The internal protocols are bad enough, but my experiences have shown me that researchers often don't let external protocols get in the way either. One field trip report I wrote on a project recommends really elementary steps that should have been taken, like: meeting the community to ask permission *before* doing anything; writing to the community council for formal permission; negotiating the content before doing any shooting; employing local people as advisers/ interpreters and so on. It was this trip that produced the quote I used earlier: 'I'm the researcher and I thought you would just provide a service'.

There's not much point having a multimedia unit if you don't support it and use it. The investment in equipment, training and the development of expertise in practice just goes down the drain.



Further action

I'd like to see a couple of things happen that will help the Unit function properly, that will help develop good stories about research and that will reinforce the need for all research projects in Aboriginal country to empower, educate and employ Aboriginal people.

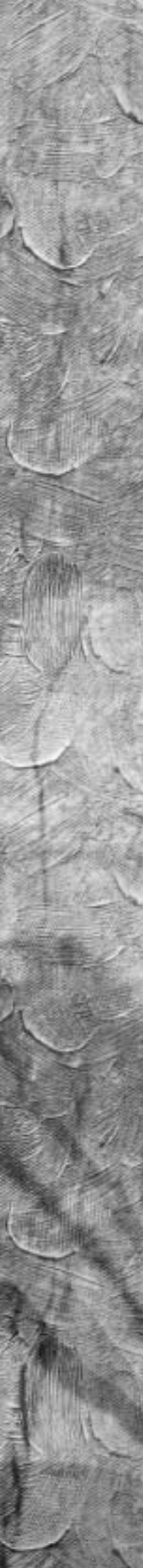
The first thing that will help is the creation of a committee to support, promote and monitor the work of the unit. This could either be a new committee or an offshoot of one of the CRCATH's committees**)**. The committee should oversee the second step, which would be the development of appropriate process through guidelines for researchers both documenting their projects for community and archival use and communicating the shared community-researcher story. **A draft proposal to set up such a committee is included in Appendix B.**

These guidelines should include procedures and process for at least the following (but probably more):

- a preference for using the unit to negotiate the development of video records of research projects with communities;
- what the unit will and won't do;
- training and employment of community people wherever appropriate;
- negotiation to develop a shared story;
- culturally appropriate practices and how to behave in a community (yes, we need these guidelines to be that simple);
- developing and nurturing relationships with communities; and
- acknowledging intellectual and cultural property.

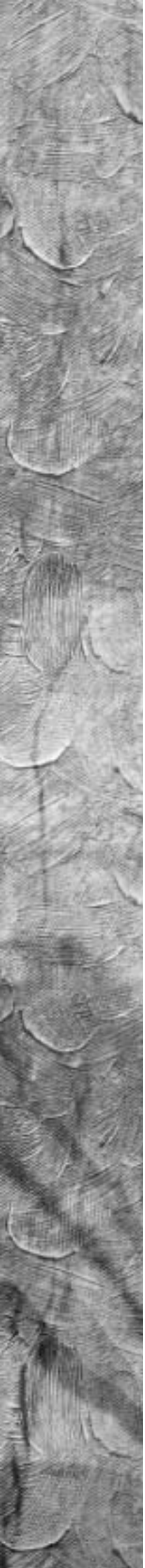
If we can put that together, we're off to a good start. If there isn't an effective process for helping people articulate and explore what research projects mean for them, then the Indigenous Research reform Agenda is compromised.

I've also included as **Appendix C** a draft of trhe kind of processes we need to follow to make sure everyone understands what's involved in making a video and what all parties - the AV Unit as well as the researchers - need to do to complete each stage of the process.



Appendix A: MSHR Multimedia unit projects

Year	Organization	Project Working Title	Description
1998	MSHR CRCATH	Purchased the Equipment	Sony Es-7 Editing system DSR-200 Digital Camera Microphones Millar Tripod
	MSHR	Angela Melder	Presentation -
		Amanda Leach	Presentation -
		Peter Morris	Presentation -
1999			
	MSHR	Ear Health Video	Presentation/Research feedback -
	MSHR CRCATH	Angurugu Adult Heart & Lung Study	Information/Research Collection -
	MSHR	Ear Training Video 1	Training -
2000			
	CRCATH	Cooperate video	Presentation -
	CRCATH	Learning Conference 2000	Archiving Information -
	CRCATH	Emotional & Social Wellbeing	Research Collection -
	CRCATH	Yalu Women – Wild honey Dance	Research Collection & Feedback
2001			
	CRCATH	Ian Anderson's Excerpts 2001	Discussion Information -
	MSHR	Frank Maliroski	Seminar -
	THS	Milikapiti – World No Tobacco Day 2001	Research Feedback -
	MSHR	Diabetes video	Information & Education -
2002			
	MSHR	Archival Footage	Collection of images to use as backgrounds, textures, fades etc
	CRCATH	CRCATH, Seminar Series 2002	Inequality and Health: A North Australian perspective – Seminar Series. This Series was run over 3 months with 10 seminars with a total of 20 hours of presentations and discussions.
	MSHR/ CRCATH	Dr Ray Reid	Seminar-
	NTU	Early Childhood	Seminar-
	CRCATH	5th Year Review	Personal development – Presenters were Filmed as they did rehearsals of their presentations to the 5th year review board. This was to give feedback to the presenters about their presentation, so the presenters could see themselves and make improvements or adjustments to the content or the way it was presented. Presentation -
	CRCATH	Yalu women	Feedback-
	MSHR	Emma Kowal	Research collection -
	MSHR	Ear Training video 2	Education/Training
	MSHR	The mental health of asylum seekers in Australia	Seminar



Appendix B

AUDIO-VISUAL/MULTIMEDIA UNIT

Introduction

The Unit was established with joint MSHR-CRCATH funding to produce AV materials which will:

- Document research projects
- Provide a vehicle for community feedback of projects
- Present projects at conferences
- Record conferences, workshops and presentations.

These materials have a number of potential uses, including:

- Archiving
- Promotion and public relations
- AV education.

All of these uses clearly have relevance for MSHR.

From the CRCAH perspective, the unit is clearly important to both Research and Development arms.

As well as recording research projects, it is a major factor in a comprehensive dissemination strategy, which aims for research transfer.

It also complements the Education and Training strategy because it potentially provides an avenue for specialist on-the-job training for young Indigenous people of aptitude and interest.

And it is consistent with the CRCAH incorporation of community development and capacity enhancement in many research projects because it has the scope to employ and train community-based Indigenous people with or without a partly-developed skills base.

Demand for the AV Unit's services is high but here is no clear oversight of the Unit's functions and little in the way of policy governing its use, although this is in development.

Increasingly, the AV Unit is working in close collaboration with the Research Transfer and Dissemination team in the CRC..

The AV Unit coordinator and the A/Coordinator RT and D are collaborating on a number of projects, including the development of procedures and draft policies as well as scripting of videos.

The coordinator was a member of the Research Transfer Committee and is currently a member of the Development Working Group, which has taken over from the RTC and is preparing the way for the CRCAH's new structure.

It is an appropriate time to develop a structure to advise and support the coordinator so the Unit can operate to the greatest level of effectiveness and efficiency.

Proposal

We propose that the CRCAH and MSHR jointly establish a committee for this purpose.

The Committee could be a sub-committee of the Development Working group, which has representation from all core partners, including MSHR, or it could be separately constituted.

Its membership should include:

- CRC and MSHR executive-level staff, at least at divisional director/program leader level
- Other interested and/or appropriately-skilled core partner representatives
- Education and Training coordinators from both CRCAH and MSHR
- AVU Coordinator
- Research Transfer and Communications coordinator.

It would be responsible for:

- Overseeing the development of appropriate polices and procedures for the AVU, which includes:
  - Determining lines of reporting and responsibility
  - Use of the AVU resources
  - Any other matters
- Advising and supporting the AVU coordinator
- Coordinating the integration of the AVU with relevant CRC and MSHR functions
- Approving video and multimedia project proposals.

Once policy and procedure have been determined, the committee should meet after each DWG meeting unless there are matters requiring urgent attention.

Appendix C

MAKING VIDEO COUNT

Print is not the only medium for disseminating research results, as many researchers are becoming increasingly aware.

Video and multimedia presentations can make your work more accessible to more people and they're particularly useful for feeding back your findings to Aboriginal communities.

A finished multimedia work is, literally, the tip of the iceberg. A few minutes of footage or a CD-ROM comes at the end of a three-phase process: pre-production; production; and post-production. It can mean weeks and even months of work.

Knowing what you need to think about to present your story in video format will help you negotiate the process successfully and allocate time and resources effectively.

Pre-production

When you bring a concept for a video, CD-ROM or multimedia presentation to the Audiovisual Unit to initiate the pre-production phase, you should be able to answer these questions:

- Which project does the proposal come from and who is the contact person/people?
  Project name and number need to be clearly identified and lines of responsibility need to be clarified.
- What's the story?
  If you're not clear about what you want, talk to the Communications team first. Once you've decided on a video or other multimedia format, you'll need a script outline. The AV Unit can't begin to think about how to do the job for you unless you're clear about what you want.
- What's your video for – feedback, training, presentation, advertising or archiving?
  This will help determine content and style, as well as budget.
- Who's it aimed at – community, trainees and other students, wider community or funding body?
  This will also help determine style, give you some idea of how many copies you might need and determine your mailing list.
- If it's for community feedback and some of it is in language, have you thought about your interpreting/translating needs?
  You might need subtitling in English if you shoot in language and if the video is for wide distribution.
- What's the budget and who's paying for it?
  Is the full cost of the video (including travel and travel allowance for unit staff and any payments to the other people or the community involved) within the project budget? If not, where is the money coming from? Who authorises payments?
- Are you considering alternative formats for the story and how do they fit into your overall dissemination strategy?
  CD-Rom and video streaming for a website will all have an impact on your budget, as well as your scripting and presentation. Are you also considering a hard copy or website print report? Posters?
- What location(s) are you considering?
  If you're using a community location(s), you will need to factor in the possibility of conflicting community activities into your planning and production timeframe and travel budget.
- Do you have all the authorisations you need to film in a community?
  Your overall project will have ethical clearance, but have you got permission to shoot the video and, where appropriate, approval of content and use of images from the community and the individuals involved? And if you're going to use locations outside the community, do you have the permission from the relevant traditional owner(s) You have to get these ***separately*** *from your project consent agreements. The AV Unit can give you a consent form.*
- Is the community and your project committee clear about the distribution of the video?
  If it's a feedback video only, this might not be an issue. But have you negotiated approval for other uses for the material – eg support for submissions, training, conference or workshop presentations etc?

- What equipment will you need?
  Don't get to a remote community and find you've forgotten something. You won't be able to afford to go back and get it.
- Who needs to be in the video?
  Do you want people from the community concerned be in the video? Do they need to be available for planning and scripting? Will they be available for shooting? Are they to be paid? Do any of them already have video skills that we can help upgrade during the filming? Will you have a narrator? Will they be paid? Have you budgeted for their food and transport?
- And finally, what's the strategy for disseminating it?
  You need to have a clear idea of who's on your mailing lists to get copies or to receive basic information and an order form for the video. You should also decide whether you want the video to be formally launched, in which case there are other things to think about – who does the launch, venue and appropriate facilities, guest list, catering and any media releases.

It's important to get these things clear *right at the start* of the process: that way everyone knows what's expected of them.

Once you've answered all these questions, the AV Unit will develop a project brief and return it to you for your approval.

Then you can go on to the final stage of pre-production, which is writing the script.

This is often a collaborative effort between the AV Unit, the Communications team and the researcher.

You can't make the story up as you go along and you can expect to go through six versions of the script before you hit the right note.

Once your script is ready, the director and camera person can start thinking about the images they need to fit the words; in other words making a story board for you to approve.

Production

Production involves the actual shooting of the video to script and story board and you need to make sure you've done everything you needed to before the crew gets to the shoot.

It's too late to change things without blowing out your budget and timeframe, but if you've planned it properly, everything should go smoothly.

If things don't quite go as planned, because you can always expect something to go wrong, good planning minimises disruption.

If your director and/or camera person need any clarification on any matter, they'll ask you; otherwise leave them alone to get on with it.

Post-production

The AV Unit's director will now start editing the footage and, working from the script and the story board, he'll probably do as many as four edits before he calls you in to look at the final draft edit of the video.

You can still suggest changes at this stage to make sure the product has the right emphasis.

But if you've done your preparation properly, this means minor changes at the most

You'll probably need another two edits – where you'll sit with the editor - to get to final stage and at this point you and your team will be asked to watch the video in full and approve it once and for all.

Then everyone concerned – your team, the AV Unit and the Communications team – signs off on the project and dissemination gets under way.