Equity in a digital world: engaging Indigenous learners

Alison Reedy
Charles Darwin University
ascilite 2011
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

- 100km South of Darwin
- Dual sector VET/Higher Ed
- For Indigenous students
- 30% of NT population Indigenous
- Intensive workshop delivery model
- English language and literacy
Indigenous Education

• Nationally
  – 17 year olds at school: 36% Indigenous/66% non-Indigenous
  – Non-school quals: 25% Indigenous/47% non-Indigenous

• Northern Territory
  – At CDU 30% of VET students Indigenous
  – Clustered around Cert I & II Pre-vocational courses
  – Less than 5% of Higher Education students Indigenous
My observations

- Stated desire to improve English language and literacy skills
- Variable attendance – multiple complex reasons
- Slow progression through course
- No study/homework between workshops
- Students keen to use various technologies as a part of face to face classes (co-creating learning resources - video making, animation – Marvin, audio recording, as well as word processing, internet)
- How to enhance student engagement, participation and success?
Action Research project

- Exploration of whether students’ observed enthusiasm for new technologies could be harnessed to encourage participation in homework activities & thus increased opportunities to practice and develop English language and literacy skills between workshops.
- The ‘joining of practical action with the pursuit of theoretical understanding’ (McTaggart, 1991)
- Relevant to the field of educational research - complements and enhances planning and implementing a teaching sequence
- Ethical research- ‘If you’re conducting a survey of toilets, take a plumber with you to fix the broken ones’ (Nganampa Health Council in Miller & Rainow 1997)
Action research cycles & data collection

- 4 action research cycles – planning, implementation, observation and reflection
- Mixed methods
  - A background survey
  - 5 reflective surveys
  - 3 focus groups
  - Review of documents created by students (homework)
  - Access and usage of Learning Management System
  - 7 semi-structured interviews
The participants & the project

• 36 Indigenous students
• 30 female, 6 male
• 34 spoke an Indigenous language as their first language
• 31 lived in remote Indigenous communities
• 13 weeks of intensive face to face delivery over 1 academic year (400 hours including 75 hours individual study).
• Attendance – 2 students attended all workshops, 58% attended less than half of the workshops.
What I found

• No students had a computer at home
• All students said they had access to a computer and the internet
• Homework participation rates between 37-47%
• Time spent on homework—62% of incidences of computer based homework was less than 10 minutes, 8% more than 1 hour.
• Barriers to completing homework between workshops and on campus during workshops
• Making homework an assessable component of the course did not impact on homework participation rates
Access

• Lack of ownership/discretionary use of computers
• Limited access to computer and internet facilities in their communities
• Variable levels of communications service provision and infrastructure across remote communities
• Lack of technological and educational support for computer-based learning outside of the formal teaching
Lifestyle

• Juggling ‘lifestyle’ demands with family, work and cultural obligations

• Factors similar to those affecting course completion in the VET sector as a whole – but with additional factors of cultural demands, poor health and household overcrowding.

• Precedence over homework
Attitude

• An attempt to conceptualise and articulate differences in level of student participation in homework activities that can’t be explained by access and lifestyle.

• Espoused vs enacted beliefs (Argyris & Schon, 1974) - ‘Yes, I absolutely want to study between workshop and I’m ready and sure to do it’ (Reflective Survey 4)

• Learner identity (Wallace 2010)

• Personal traits such as positive attitude, motivation and perseverance appeared to be enabling factors.
In conclusion

• Use of computer technology enhances opportunities for homework participation
• Opportunities mitigated by factors linked to access to computer technology, lifestyle factors, and attitudes towards learning and homework
• Research into mobile technologies?
• Funding models for remote access – not just rollout of infrastructure, hardware, software but issues of community access, ongoing support and training.