

## INTRODUCTION

The Wanpa-rda<sup>1</sup> Matilda Project is a joint initiative of the Australian Workers Heritage Centre (AWHC) and Education Queensland.

The project included the development of a CD-ROM based interactive multimedia resource. Multimedia was chosen because of its unique capacity to present information in ways that engage and educate school children and other people about Queensland's Central West region. The CD-ROM supports the goals of Education Queensland, the AWHC and the people and communities of the Central West.

There are two major components of the project.

Firstly, the establishment of a residential and educational facility for students at the Australian Workers Heritage Centre, in Barcaldine, which was funded and developed by the AWHC. This is known as the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre. The centre's mission is to:

*endeavour to share with students, teachers, schools and local communities the uniqueness of Central Western Queensland by promoting quality life and educational experiences.*

Staffed with an Education Queensland officer, the Centre organises school groups to participate in a range of programs that can be designed to meet their specific needs. For example, they can visit properties, talk with drovers and visit sites of historical significance to discover the rich story of Central Western Queensland and its people.

Secondly, to further enhance these experiences, Education Queensland has produced an interactive multimedia CD-ROM package. This cross-curriculum resource focuses on several key learning areas.

The package is being used in the mainstream classroom setting to enhance learning about Queensland west of the Great Dividing Range, and to encourage and complement visits to the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre.

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<sup>1</sup> *Wanpa-rda* (pronounced waarn-pra-da) is a Wangkangurru word from the Birdsville district which means "to carry". Hence Wanpa-rda Matilda means "to carry your swag".

The development of the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre and the CD-ROM package has brought together the people of the Central Western Queensland region and contributed greatly to a growing sense of community pride.

In addition to its obvious educational value for school children, the CD-ROM is also being used to promote the region to the "educational tourism" market for adults and families who wish to experience the Australian outback.

This has spin-off benefits to local businesses and communities, at a time when tourism is becoming crucial to the future of the outback.

## THE PARTIES INVOLVED

The following parties are involved in the Wanpa-rda Matilda project:

- the Australian Workers Heritage Centre;
- Education Queensland; and
- Queensland's Central West region and local communities.

The Australian Workers Heritage Centre is set in more than two hectares of beautifully landscaped gardens in Barcaldine, in Queensland's Central West. The Centre captures the spirit of our nation's workers and tells of their struggles to shape the quality of life and working conditions that we take for granted today.

The Centre reveals the story of Australia's working history through film and video, artifacts and artwork, interactive displays, photographs, memorabilia and cartoons. Many displays are housed in recreated historical working settings which include a railway station, a one teacher school, police watchhouse and a country hospital.

The idea of establishing and operating a field study centre, in conjunction with the AWHC on their site at Barcaldine, drew support from the Longreach Area School Support Centre (the regional office of Education Queensland).

A framework for the educational resource, which includes the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre and the CD-ROM package, was developed and the project got underway as a joint venture between the AWHC and Education Queensland.

The development of the CD-ROM package involved extensive consultation with a wide range of people and organisations to provide access to the rich history, culture and geography of the shires in the Central West.

These shires include:

Aramac	Barcaldine	Barcoo
Blackall	Boulia	Diamantina
Ilfracombe	Isisford	Jericho
Longreach	Tambo	Winton

Over a period of more than 12 months, a large number of sites and materials of special interest were identified and considered for inclusion in the CD-ROM package. A reference committee helped with this process and also provided significant ongoing guidance to the project. The reference committee comprised:

- local shire representatives;
- the aboriginal custodians of the area; and
- educational key learning area specialists.

Special mention should be made of the significant contribution of the aboriginal people of the area in the development of the resource. They provided a range of cultural information, access to key sites and interviews, which appear on the CD-ROM. It is worth noting that the custodians of the area plan to nominate the project for a National Reconciliation Award.

The actual production of the CD-ROM package was performed by the Open Access Unit (OAU) of Education Queensland. The OAU designs and develops exemplary open learning curriculum programs, quality support materials, and information services and systems for all Queensland schools.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

This project, like all successful projects, has developed an approach that achieves the objectives of each of the key stakeholders.

Over time, as commitment, ownership and results were achieved, the boundaries of the objectives faded and became largely shared amongst all the participants. The overall objectives of the project being:

- to have young people get more involved in Australia's working history and for them to

experience the rich culture, geography and environment of Queensland's Central West;

- to provide an educational experience for school children that is effective in the classroom environment, and enhanced with a visit to the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre; and
- to recognise and support the people and communities of the Central West through their active involvement and guidance of a project that records their history and promotes their region to the world.

The development of the CD-ROM package is an integral element of the overall strategy to address the above objectives. The objectives specifically of the CD-ROM are:

- to provide an interactive multimedia cross-curriculum resource which supports the upper primary and secondary area;
- to enhance learning about the Central West region and to encourage and complement visits by students to the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre and the AWHC at Barcaldine; and
- to build an understanding of the historical, social and geographical features of the sites through the selected key learning themes.

The learning themes that are covered by the Centre and supported by the CD-ROM are:

- *aboriginal people and culture* - art, history, bushcraft, food, reconciliation;
- *pioneers and explorers* - explorers, settlers, squatters, ethnic groups, bushrangers;
- *workers* - shearers, drovers, unions, labourers, government employees;
- *transport and communication* - air, rail, river, School of the Air, telephone, HF radio;
- *heritage* - Australian language and literature, visual and performing arts, architecture; and
- *physical environment* - flora, fauna, energy, impact of pastoral industry, geology.

While the initial focus of the CD-ROM project has been on creating an enhanced educational resource for school children, the project has also created a resource that will be used to promote the Central West region to the world.

The CD-ROM package has been skilfully crafted so that it addresses both the educational requirements and also provides an effective promotional resource to support tourism and community development goals.

**COLLABORATION**

Achieving a set of well balanced goals for this project has been instrumental in its success. The highly collaborative approach is unique and provides an excellent example to others of how a multimedia resource can complement and add value to a developing program.

It is important to appreciate that this is not a “multimedia project”, and that the production of the CD-ROM is an important element of an overall collaborative program.

To achieve the program’s goals, the key stakeholders contributed the following:

- The AWHC provided the physical infrastructure for the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre, ie. the 50-bed residence for students and teachers, and assists with promotion and continuing development of the centre. This represents a significant investment in the future of Australia’s youth.
- Education Queensland provides a staff member located at the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre to organise and coordinate tours, and to develop materials to support the educational goals of the centre.
- In addition, Education Queensland provided the production and educational input to the CD-ROM resource, through its OAU. This included the sourcing and scripting of content, and coordination of all aspects of the production.
- The reference committee, local communities and aboriginal custodians provided access to materials, stories, sites and local characters that add to the richness of the CD-ROM and also to the experiences that can be provided by the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre. These people are key supporters of the program.

A strategy of seeking equality in the partners and identifying the “matching value” through the skills, expertise, resources, etc. that each bring has been a key feature of the collaboration. In addition, constraints of each party are also taken account of, for example, the ability to make up-front capital investments or one-off contributions and the capacity or otherwise to handle recurrent costs.

Getting the formula right has been a key element of this project’s success.

In keeping with the pioneering spirit that shaped Australia’s outback, it is interesting to see that this same spirit is now being used to shape a new frontier, namely multimedia and the emerging information age.

**BENEFITS AND OUTCOMES**

The benefits from the development and use of the CD-ROM package are quite diverse.

The process that was undertaken to develop the CD-ROM pulled together a large group of people from many communities and organisations over a long period of time. This process has created a very beneficial outcome for the local people and communities involved.

The people of Queensland’s Central West have a strong sense of pride and ownership of the project, which, due to the nature of the overall program, is sustained through continued involvement.

For example, many local people at towns and areas that the school tours may visit are now “ambassadors” for the project, and will speak to the children and act as guides. These people also provide input to the educational materials developed at the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre.

The educational benefits for the children themselves are quite evident. The CD-ROM is an outstanding resource that supports the curriculum and is being distributed to schools throughout Queensland. It will also be available to other Australian states for their school-based educational programs.

The children use the CD-ROM as a source of information and to support research projects related to the key themes covered in the resource. The expectation is that the children will become so interested in the special aspects of the Central West, that they’ll encourage the school and their families and friends to visit the area and experience these aspects first-hand.

This gentle form of promotion is another key characteristic of this project. The outcomes of which not only enhance the educational experiences of the children involved, but also

importantly have a beneficial effect on the local communities and businesses in the area.

In summary, the CD-ROM package is used:

- as a learning resource for school children;
- a key element of the strategy to attract school groups to visit the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre to enhance their learning experience; and
- to support programs that promote the AWHC and the Central West to a broader constituency.

## KEY LESSONS & IMPLICATIONS

The CD-ROM package is a key part of the educational framework developed to support the partnership between the AWHC and Education Queensland for the development, promotion and operation of the Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre.

As such, the key lessons for the project relate not only to the development of the CD-ROM, but also importantly to how the broader context successfully created the motivation and ability to develop the resource.

In this regard, the following points are pertinent for other people and organisations, including government agencies, who are contemplating enhancing their services with multimedia:

- persistence and vision, with a matching commitment to the long-term, are required;
- respect other people's positions;
- don't expect government to simply hand-over money;
- find the "matching value" that partners can bring to a project and the corresponding range of benefits;
- if they can't or won't participate equally, find other ways to involve organisations that don't appear to be receptive to innovation; and
- involve people who have talent, commitment and can turn ideas into reality.

In terms of the lessons related specifically to the development of the CD-ROM:

- be patient when dealing with communities and local people - respect and acknowledge their special contributions;

- developing large complex multimedia resources can be expensive and time consuming - if it is possible, find ways to share the costs, eg. through partnering; and
- appreciate the role of multimedia in the overall program's goals and strategies.

This last point is probably the most relevant concerning the actual use of multimedia. A clear understanding of the business drivers and environment is required in order to find an appropriate use of multimedia. Without this, there is the danger that the initiative will be technology-driven instead of business-driven.

The Wanpa-rda Matilda project is an excellent example of how multimedia can be used to enhance an existing or developing service delivery program, and how partnering can be very effective as a means of achieving the objectives of key stakeholders.

## CONTACT DETAILS

- ***Education Queensland***

Open Access Unit (OAU)  
(07) 3406 2521  
<http://curriculum.qed.qld.gov.au/oasc>

- ***Australian Workers' Heritage Centre***

(07) 3224 4838 Brisbane  
(076) 51 2422 Barcaldine

- ***Wanpa-rda Matilda Centre***

(076) 51 2530 Barcaldine

- ***Information Planning Branch (IPB)***

Department of Premier and Cabinet  
Queensland Government  
(07) 3224 6433  
<http://www.ipb.qld.gov.au>

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