

## 2005 Issue No. 10 — Media Communities

### **A Thumbnail Dipped in Tar ... The resuscitation of a remote rural community newspaper using the *Distributed Newsroom* model.**

By Chris Capel and John Cokley

[1]

#### **Purpose and significance of this article**

This article has been prepared as a stage in the documentation process for a community capacity building exercise which has become known as the *Blackall Newspaper Project*. The authors and participants set out to identify key steps in the planning, preparation, publication and evaluation of a community newspaper using the 'distributed newsroom' model (Cokley & Eeles), since an essential part of community capacity building occurs when a community sets up communications, leadership and training ... makes decisions about policy, and establishes networks for exchange (McGinty). The 'distributed newsroom' model uses low-end, off-the-shelf components on economical local-area, wide-area and Internet networks, to allow journalists not necessarily co-located in place or time to produce news artefacts to a professional standard and to a deadline. Cokley planned to simplify and handover these steps to the community of Blackall – along with training and further evaluation – when *The Barcoo Independent* became a viable, community-owned and operated business sometime in 2004, following the 'build-operate-transfer' model identified during the 2000-2002 *East Timor Project* at the Queensland University of Technology, during which Cokley was a lead participant (Cokley et al *media, Democracy and Development*; Tickle) (see note in *Conclusion*).

This article also serves as a blueprint for small journalism schools such as the one at James Cook University to pursue vocational and community service projects in an educational framework while also pursuing meaningful academic research with medium-to-long-term goals. Journalism student newspapers have been published for many years both here in Australia and overseas, but rarely has one been driven by such a pressing need as demonstrated by this remote community, or from within a school as small or as young as the one at JCU, established as it was only in 1995. An understanding and application of network administration and efficient editorial file management between linked but geographically distributed computer servers is integral to the 'distributed newsroom' model, and in this project, that model was used by its developer, Cokley (Cokley & Eeles), to a greater extent than ever before.

#### **Literature study**

Harold Evans wrote, 'A newspaper is a vehicle for transmitting news and ideas' (1) and this is no less true in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. But whose news? Sally White points out that 'critics of the news media ... assert that journalists are often unaware of their audiences' real interests (and) sometimes they are right' (White 10). That standard criterion of newsworthiness, 'proximity'

(White 12), for example, is especially important in the context of a local newspaper for a remote town and was reflected in a community survey in Blackall leading up to publication of *The Barcoo Independent* (Capel & Roberts). And just as 'local interest' is important, so is sensitivity to 'local interests', alluded to by Conley when he writes: 'The media have a responsibility to help build positive images for people in a range of circumstances...' (275). This aspect, too, was reflected in the Blackall community survey:

People mentioned the value a local paper had towards 'building community confidence' and that a paper supported the 'social fabric' of the community. Several mentioned that not having a local paper had detrimental effects on town morale (Capel & Roberts 3).

O'Toole (87) supports this when he notes that the *Warrnambool Standard*, a small town newspaper in Victoria, is 'a fairly important cog in the local wheel', since 'the everyday life of the community is of interest to ... readers' (Kirkpatrick *Community Newspapers* 20).

Since 1987 Australia (not to mention the rest of the world) has experienced a dramatic withdrawal of media organisations from rural and regional communities, when Rupert Murdoch's News Ltd took over the Herald and Weekly Times network of papers. As Chadwick noted:

The fatality rate among newspapers has been more severe in the past 10 years than at any time since at least 1920. Since 1987, 14 metropolitan newspapers have been closed, eight dailies and six Sundays. This is contrary to the claim that concentration of media ownership actually assists free speech and diversity because the largest groups, if permitted to grow, will cross-subsidise weaker titles within their stables.

Some of the few remaining pockets of television media enterprise in far north Queensland, for instance – newsrooms run by Southern Cross Broadcasting – along with newspapers at Blackall (APN owned) and Barcaldine (independent), in the central west of that most decentralised State, disappeared in 2001–02. This withdrawal resulted in a decline in voices if not ultimately a decline in diversity of ownership. As Albert Moran has pointed out, 'a sense of ownership of its local media gives a community awareness and control over its members' stories and how they are presented' (seminar presentation).

Indeed, a community comes to recognise and hence know itself through its representation in local media (Ewart 1), but part of what it comes to 'know' is actually 'imagined' by journalists working for those local media (3). Hence the local newspaper acts as a key cultural institution within a community (Ewart 11), facilitating the social imagining which authenticates local identity (Mules 255). However, clearly the blade cuts both ways, since Kirkpatrick (*Mirror of Local Life* 234) notes that community values inevitably impact more heavily on the content of (regional or country) newspapers than on the capital-city daily.

The withdrawal of media from local regions has had a tearing effect on rural communities like Blackall, identified by Cheers and Luloff: 'The social fabric of many rural communities has been weakened by a number of global, national and regional changes over the last few decades.' (129) Some of those 'global, national and regional changes' have been industrial as well as cultural. Another small Queensland town, Monto, which has a population slightly higher than Blackall's (2,728 in Monto in 1999) has suffered 'a general, long-term trend of rural industry decline' in the same way as Blackall (Herbert-Cheshire & Lawrence 5). While the culprit in Blackall has been drought and the 1990s failure of wool prices, in Monto it was the 'unexpected fall in milk prices of almost 20 cents per litre which has occurred in the months following deregulation (of the dairy industry in July 2000)' (Herbert-Cheshire & Lawrence 5). The butter factory closed, an important nail in the coffin following the closure of two major banks and other businesses including a local restaurant (Herbert-Cheshire & Lawrence 7).

In Monto, as well as in Blackall and no doubt many other rural and regional towns across Australia, part of the antidote is 'community development' which Cheers & Luloff define as 'people trying to enhance community' (133) and Herbert-Cheshire & Lawrence define as a process 'which enhances the skills and confidence of a community so that it is better able to articulate and act upon its own needs' (21). This can take the form of a specific project, in the 'form of maintaining a local business (for example, keeping a bank open)' (Cheers & Luloff 133). In Blackall, residents have managed, with a little help, to start the process of reviving a long-standing community business which had fallen by the wayside: the newspaper.

While the Blackall community has linked the newspaper project closely with improving the employment potential in the town (Capel & Roberts), Cheers & Luloff caution against this strategy:

Local elites in many rural communities also frequently exploit the widespread confusion between economic development and community development. But the difference is clear. Economic development ... focuses on securing economic opportunities and jobs for the community. In contrast, community development focuses on enhancing the quality of life of the whole community – socially, economically, culturally, spiritually and ecologically (135).

## **Rationale**

The objective of the *Blackall Newspaper Project* was to start (or more precisely, resuscitate) a community newspaper in Blackall. *The Barcoo Independent* was first published in 1889 as *The Barcoo Independent and Blackall, Tambo and Isisford Observer* (Cripps), having replaced the town's first newspaper, *The Western Champion* (launched in 1879, see *Coats Students Help*). However, the offices of *The Barcoo Independent* were destroyed by fire in 1983 and the business closed (Coats). The town's other newspaper, *The Blackall Leader*, was owned by Australian Provincial Newspapers Ltd but closed in 2001, locals putting the closure down to a poorly performing bottom line (Cripps).

## **Background**

The Association for Blackall Community Development approached then-Senior DPI Rural Partnership Development Officer Chris Capel to assist them to progress an idea – to re-establish a local newspaper. Some of the ABCD members felt strongly about losing their local paper and wished to work on re-establishing a local paper. Since the demise of the *Blackall Leader* in March 2001, locals had increasingly felt disgruntled about the lack of local news. They did (and do currently) receive papers based in Longreach (*Longreach Leader*) and Charleville (*Western Times*) both of which have some Blackall content but many felt this was a lesser option than a local paper.

The ABCD group asked Capel if the DPI could assess whether the Blackall community did indeed want to re-establish a local paper before they worked on progressing the idea. Capel invited Dr Gerry Roberts (DPI Extension Specialist) to lead the research. A baseline survey of community expectations was then conducted.

## **Newspaper fact-finding mission**

Coinciding with the research was a trip to south-east Queensland organised by Capel after obtaining DPI funding. Two people from Barcaldine (a town 100km north-west of Blackall) and two from Blackall – Kirstie Davison and Max Seymour – participated. Barcaldine had also lost its local paper and was looking to re-establish a local paper there. Members of the Barcaldine group later decided to proceed with their own newspaper project.

After doing some research on locally owned and managed newspapers, Capel took the group to visit the following:

- Boonah – session presented by the *Fassifern Guardian* owner/ editor Wendy Creighton
- *Beaudesert Times* (Mark Hodges) – also prints a number of papers for locals including *Tamborine Times*
- Mt Tamborine – met with group of retired professionals, including Eve Curtis, who voluntarily write and produce the *Tamborine Mountain News*, reputedly the oldest voluntary paper in Australia. It has been in production for 50 years.
- DPI publishing unit staff, DPI Brisbane
- Neil Curtis, at Crows Nest – owner/ editor who produces two local papers from Crows Nest (outside Toowoomba) and is also a lecturer at the University of Southern Queensland.
- Cokley – then journalist-in-residence and lecturer at Griffith University in Brisbane. By 2003, Cokley had taken up a new lecturing position at James Cook University in Townsville, and the fact-finding group had exhausted all other options. The group re-established contact with Cokley, with a view to a collaboration during 2003 on a community news service for Blackall.

The results of the feasibility study (Capel and Roberts) included personal responses from Blackall residents. People mentioned the value a local paper had towards 'building community confidence' and that a paper supported the 'social fabric' of the community. Several mentioned that not having a local paper had detrimental effects on town morale. This was also during a time of ongoing and debilitating drought that was negatively impacting on Blackall in several ways. Capel and Roberts also arranged to hold a public meeting of residents in Blackall and note that 'At the public meeting, held on Thursday September 5, 2002, there was 100 percent support for re-establishing a local paper.' As a result of the meeting and their ongoing research, Capel and Roberts concluded that a locally-controlled newspaper (1) would enhance the sharing and spreading of information in the community and that "there was value in a local newspaper for community networking"; (2) could provide training opportunities; (3) could build on existing community resources; (4) could provide an advertising source. Several interviewees mentioned that having a newspaper would benefit local business, as they would be able to advertise through the local paper. One interviewee mentioned that in the past, local businesses had been reluctant to use the paper for advertising.

Capel and Roberts also reported that the residents thought a professional approach to editorial responsibility was essential 'so the paper is without bias and no one is defamed', and that a business plan was needed. It would need long-term sustainability, should involve the town's youth, and should be published fortnightly. Community involvement in all aspects of the development and management of the new paper was essential. These objectives were to be measured with several related outputs shown in Table 1:

| Outcome   | Achieved |
|---|----------|
| Actual production and sale of a recognisable newspaper on the streets of Blackall                         | 24/10/03 |
| Meaningful operational control of content (in pilot) by representative citizens of Blackall.              | ü        |
| Meaningful operational control of content (in ongoing production) by representative citizens of Blackall. | ü        |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| Meaningful participation by JCU Journalism students in as many editorial roles as possible, given time and resource constraints  | ü   |
| Devolution of roles away from journalism lecturer Cokley, to increase the level of participants' confidence in the process and reduce dependence on one individual   | ü   |
| Documentation of reproducible processes in preparation for training of Blackall staff to take over production of the newspaper   | ü   |
| Evaluation of the project using available survey means to obtain feedback from Blackall citizens not necessarily involved in the project at an operational level. Survey also contained demographic questions and questions about respondents' use of news and other informational technologies. | Survey administered;<br>6.2 percent response. |
| Preparation of a business plan by Blackall citizens which would indicate continued viability (or otherwise) of <i>The Barcoo Independent</i>   | In progress                                   |
| Application of that business plan to attract a medium-to-long term funding source, either through government assistance, advertising revenue or corporate sponsorship  | In progress                                   |
| Regular editions to be published collaboratively during the first half of 2004.  | ü   |

ABCD then had some setbacks. Some of the main drivers of the initial paper idea left town, including the ABCD president and the vice president. At this time, the start of 2003, the Blackall newspaper trip participants Max Seymour and Kirstie Davison became the steering committee, which they planned to expand. In March 2003 they decided to expand the group to include local journalist and USQ journalism graduate Sally Cripps. This was also during a time of ongoing and debilitating drought that was negatively impacting on Blackall in several ways.

Cokley repeated his offer to involve JCU students to interview, typeset and produce a paper for Blackall. Checking, editorial control and printing would be performed in Blackall by locals and eventually, when the community was ready, the entire management would be handed over to Blackall.

### **Important Features of this project**

It is of significance that Blackall as a town was doing it tough. Residents were in their third year of long-term and crippling drought, which had resulted in many of the local properties being destocked, partially or fully. Unlike neighbouring towns, Blackall is more dependent on its agricultural base and this had affected the town significantly. School numbers had dropped, with the state school losing 71 students in 2002 alone. Blackall State School (P-12) enrolments dropped from 271 in February 2000 to 195 in February 2003. A number of local businesses had closed and proprietors had reported a 25 percent (minimum) downturn in business. The youth hostel closed and some long-term residents had left or were planning to leave the district. It was felt quite strongly by some ABCD members that restoring a local paper would really assist to raise town morale.

The DPI officers involved in this project deliberately assisted but did not 'drive' the *Blackall Newspaper Project*. DPI Partnership officers work with groups to assist them to achieve their aims – community or industry projects – but do not drive the projects. In order for the project to be 'owned' and directed by locals, government staff must take a relatively hands-off role. Partnership officers work with communities when the energy and *capacity* is there by providing resources, access to training, information, contacts. It is preferable for long-term sustainability that community projects should be owned and driven by the community and developed in a way that the community feels ownership of, and has shaped and indeed managed. In this case the committee, led by the emerging young community leader Kirstie Davison, then an administration officer at the state school, developed the project when energy was flagging and potentially negative issues loomed larger than the positives.

## Methodology and discussion

Reporting and production took place in a manner most newspaper (and probably other) journalists would recognise. This is especially true with the more traditionally 'distributed' newsrooms such as national newspapers with state and/or regional bureaux (e.g. *The Australian*, *USA Today*, *LA Times* and, on a smaller scale, around the News Ltd companies such as Queensland Newspapers (Cokley *Editorial Technology*) and Mirror and Telegraph Publications) and wire-service newsrooms which, while they don't operate paper-output publications, maintain reporting and subbing operations away from their organisational hub. The key difference on this occasion was that the seat of editorial control was not in the major city in the same office as the production crews; in the case of *The Barcoo Independent*, editorial control (as well as the check-sub role) resided on the rim of the production wheel, with the committee in Blackall, members of which passed instructions back to the reporting and production journalists in Townsville.

## Reporting

Cokley requested that members of his 'Newsgathering Techniques' class (a first-year level at JCU with 39 students) participate. *The Barcoo Independent* was offered as one of several alternative reporting projects around the middle of Semester 2, 2003, and there was no compulsion to work on this project. Alternatives were (a) self-initiated reporting on any news item, pitched to lecturer for approval, and (b) report on a theatre production being staged by JCU performance students at the nearby Vincent campus.

Students who opted for the Blackall project were Sue Greenleaf, Casey-Ann Seaniger, Louise Hore, Martin Elms, Amanda Batt, Scott Lang, Rebecca Giliberto, Tianna Martin, Clare Robinson, Julia Stokes, Kerry McGee, Nicky Harvey, Yannick Rose, Renee Marsterson, and Jessica Bindley. Third-year JCU Journalism student Patricia Coats (at the time in Cokley's advanced feature-writing class) was approached to fill the position of chief-of-staff and she agreed.

Copy flow mimicked that of a recognisable newsroom, without the four walls. Students were allocated names and phone numbers from the list of 48 contacts supplied by the Blackall committee. Chief-of-staff Coats followed up with students to ensure coverage was as complete as possible. Email feedback from Kirstie Davison in Blackall after publication included this comment:

The process undertaken by JCU was professional and efficient. There were a few minor hiccups – i.e. two students ringing the same person for the same story, as well as two students ringing two different sources regarding the same story – but as students become familiar with the process, the town and the people involved, that will be ironed out. (Davison)

Coats also pre-subbed all copy submitted by reporters. This turned out to be a valuable learning ground for the third-year student:

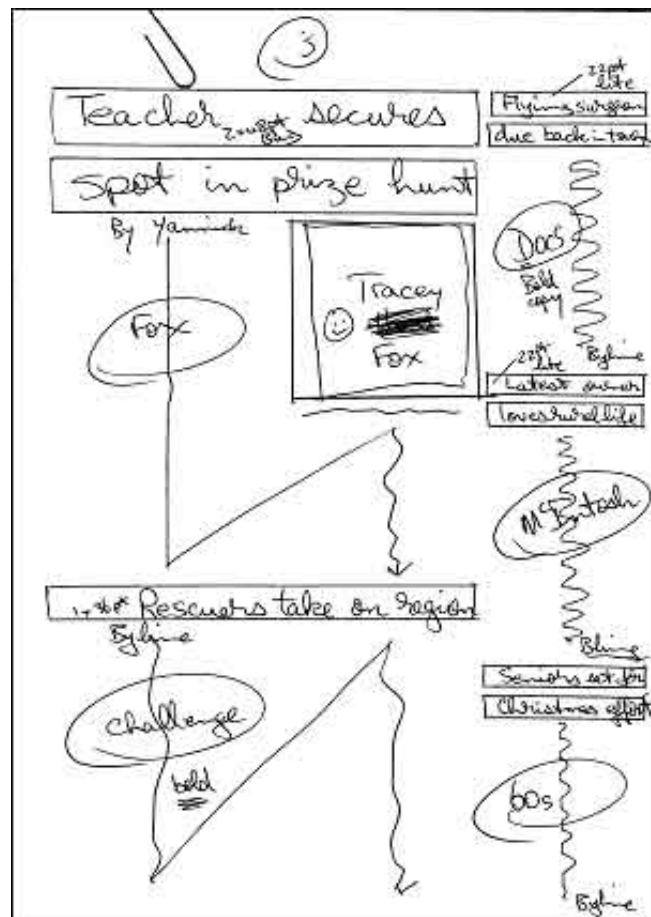
Here is the copy I have looked through. I'm a little nervous about editing something that is actually going to print, but hopefully it's ok (Coats personal communication).

All stories were then emailed to Davison and Cripps in Blackall, who jointly filled the role of check-sub. Cripps and Davison combined to identify some misspelt names in reports, as well as to provide some local knowledge in other articles which allowed *The Barcoo Independent* to achieve the community flavour and accuracy which is vital to small-town newspapers. These corrections were emailed and telephoned to Townsville for inclusion in final copy. After stories were laid into pages in Brisbane (see below), proofs were exported as PDFs and both read in Townsville and emailed by Cokley to Blackall for final reading. *The Barcoo Independent* went through four 'extra proofs' before Davison and Cripps telephoned that everything was ready for output, about 3pm on Wednesday, October 22.

## Production

Brisbane part-time academic Raylee Coleman (QUT) had moved to Townsville early in 2003 and approached Cokley for some involvement in the Townsville journalism program, with a view to further employment; she agreed to build the initial layout template using a desktop pagination program called Adobe *InDesign*, Ver. 1. The first proposal was for her to receive copy and illustrations by email to her house just north of Townsville but by the time production began she had actually returned to live in Brisbane so email moved from a nicety to a necessity. Cokley obtained an evaluation copy of Adobe *InDesign*, Ver. 1 and carried on editing after Coleman delivered the first layouts. (James Cook University has since purchased a full *InDesign* licence as a result of this project.) Cokley delivered hand-drawn layouts to Coleman as scanned images prepared on a CanoScan N122OU then compressed and emailed. Coleman reported that these worked well enough for her to prepare layouts accordingly (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Cokley's hand-drawn layout for the pilot edition in October 2003



When Coleman's *InDesign* layouts returned by email to James Cook University, Cokley transferred the publication file across the university server network using the *in situ* 10-100Mbps wide-area network (WAN) from his administrative office into the journalism 'newsroom' (a 10-PC JCU student Local Area Network, LAN) on another floor of the building and on another computer server, where he could launch his own evaluation copy of *InDesign* for the duration of the project. He was also able to access and edit this file, and associated others, using a 256kbps AD SL connection, a secure Virtual Private Network (VPN) connection and the Remote Desktop facility in Windows XP from his home office in Kirwan, 20 minutes drive to the north-west.

Two days before cover date, Kirstie Davison received the final PDF document of the 8-page newspaper and output it to A-3 paper, eventually producing a folded, A4-sized mono publication, which she photocopied on to 80gsm white bond stock and stapled once in the centre. The cover price was set at 80¢. Davison made 400 copies and distributed them as shown in Table 2:

Table 2: Distribution of the pilot edition of *The Barcoo Independent*

| Selling point   | Copies delivered for sale | Copies sold |
|---|---------------------------|-------------|
| Blackall Newsagency & Toyland   | 200                       | 190         |
| Acacia Motor Inn  | 40                        | 13          |
| Seymour 's Department Store   | 30                        | 18          |
| Universal Garden Centre   | 10                        | 10          |
| Schluter's Bakery   | 10                        | 10          |
| Caltex service station  | 40                        | 18          |
| BP service station  | 30                        | 21          |
| Bauer's corner store  | 30                        | 30          |
| Promotional copies  | 10                        | 10          |
| Late sales (returns collected from other sellers and delivered to newsagency for sale until November 7) |                           | 67          |
| <b>Total sales by November 7, 2003</b>  | <b>400</b>                | <b>387</b>  |

### Evaluative research

On Page 4 of the pilot *Barcoo Independent*, the editors included a survey form which readers were encouraged to complete and return to Kirstie Davison by November 7, 2003, with the incentive of a \$1 donation to the Blackall Hospital, funded from Cokley's research account, for every valid return. By the survey returns deadline of November 7, 2003, 24 responses had been handed in to Davison at the state school (6.2% response). Concurrently, Davison noted other comments relayed



verbally:

- 'Great for Blackall to have its own newspaper'
- 'Great job. When is the next edition?'
- 'Will it be weekly or fortnightly'
- 'Thank you'
- 'Excellent first publication. Keep up the good work!'

She noted that other comments on the production included requests by citizens for: improved reproduction quality of photos (this was implemented using photo-enhancing software) more photos / social information; options for advertising / classifieds.

Most of the respondents to this survey lived within the town boundaries of Blackall, and most were female with younger children, were older than 40 and had never attended a university. Almost all the respondents had bought another newspaper during the month leading up to publication of *The Barcoo Independent* and nearly as many had bought a printed trade or specialist magazine as well. Most had used (and many owned) a mobile phone in that period. Information technologies widely and recently used by respondents – indicating a clear capacity for publishers to use these technologies for news and information distribution to remote communities, just as they already do to many larger city markets – were (from most to least used) VHS videotapes, fax machines, automatic teller machines at banks or building societies, free-to-air radio, free-to-air television, email, CD-ROMs, UHF radio, cable or satellite television, cinema screenings, voice mail on a mobile phone, World Wide Web browsers and hyperlinks, PowerPoint presentations, and intranets run by governments or schools. Not as frequently used, but still of interest, were the next 18 technologies used by respondents in Blackall during September-October 2003. Online databases (such as library catalogues) rated highest in this group, followed by digital television, VHF radio, news tickers on billboards, TV programs or websites, Keno gambling screens in hotels and clubs, PDF documents, SMS text messaging, digital video discs for hire (DVDs), personal entertainment/games equipment such as PlayStation, X-Box, Game Boy and Game Cube, discussion lists and forums on the Internet, email to SMS (e.g. bulletins to handheld devices), short audio messaging facility on handheld devices, web casts, and teletext. At the same time respondents indicated at least some ability to use significant entry-level digital news and imaging devices such as digital, still, or video cameras and digital audio minidisk recorders. Last but not least, especially in the light of the heavy emphasis placed on newspaper, television and online tipping and betting during the 2003 Rugby World Cup, a couple of respondents in the Blackall survey also reported having placed bets on at least one sporting event using the Internet and/or a mobile phone during the survey period.

## **Conclusions**

Two sets of conclusions have clearly emerged from the *Blackall Newspaper Project* described in this article. The first deals with the question of the ongoing viability of a newspaper to service this small outback town. The second, given that there is to be a continuing newspaper, deals with potential spin-offs from that newspaper, by way of electronic news delivery and the townspeople's capacity to receive and effectively use that electronic delivery.

## **The question of continued viability**

Long-term sustainability is one of the key factors in whether *The Barcoo Independent* is a success for the Blackall community. The pilot published and sold on October 24, 2003, proved that under certain circumstances, and with the unpaid help of a large organisation such as James Cook University and its journalism lecturer John Cokley, a newspaper for the Blackall community was

feasible. Viability will only be ensured, if possible, with proper business planning and long-term sponsors. The formative research highlighted the community concern that this be a long-term initiative and that if the project collapsed, the resulting downturn could do more damage than good to town morale.

Another section of the formative research highlighted the community's desire for young people in Blackall to take a central role in any newspaper production (Capel & Roberts). This was a key element discussed between the James Cook University team and the Blackall team during preparations for the pilot edition, and the driving force behind Page 6 in the newspaper, which focussed on school news. Then, as publication was under way, a young first-year teacher at Blackall State School, Rowena Morrison, was recruited to the project steering committee as educational liaison officer, with the aim of inviting and collecting news reports from school students (including those at the town's Catholic primary school) for editions in 2004. Since the project as a whole was conducted as a 'community capacity building' exercise, this is appropriate because, as McGinty points out, 'schools are central to a community's learning and development' and have '...the potential to build the capacity of the whole community'.

It is worth concluding with a point of realism, identified by Cheers & Luloff, which will no doubt arise in Blackall, if it hasn't already:

Community development is not harmonious, but embedded, as with all interactions, with social power which manifests itself in countless ways, including conflict, challenges for leadership and marginalisation (135).

### **Electronic delivery of news to Blackall residents**

The small technology survey conducted as part of the evaluation of *The Barcoo Independent* indicates a relatively high level of digital capacity among readers of the fledgling newspaper. Certainly the major technologies employed to service big-city markets could also be used with a high expectation of market penetration in Blackall: news and advertising on automatic teller screens (not to mention free-standing kiosks); conventional radio and television; cable or satellite television; cinema; email and the World Wide Web. Less conventional but emerging vectors for news including CD-ROMs, UHF radio, voicemail, PowerPoint presentations, and intranets run by governments or schools are also possible.

Remote communities and innovative news providers already employ fax, online databases and news tickers on websites, PDF documents, SMS text messaging, and discussion lists and forums on the internet to deliver and receive news when other channels are not available.

If the Association for Blackall Community Development decided to continue the *Blackall Newspaper Project*, then further technology research projects would be developed to capitalise on the above survey results.

### **Not the end, but the beginning**

In fact, the handover from James Cook University to the Blackall community, and production training, took place in time for the June 11, 2004, edition, with production by Kirstie Davison and editorial contributions from 13 Blackall residents as well as Davison and Sally Cripps. Editions, with more local copy and advertisements, have continued to be produced since.

**Chris Capel** was until recently the Longreach-based, Queensland DPI Senior Rural Partnership Development Officer and is currently a Principal Project Officer with the DPI. She is a grazier and sits on the Board of the Foundation for Australian

Agricultural Women (FAAW) and also on the executive committee of the Australian Rural Leadership Network (ARLN). She has worked for the Queensland State Government in different roles with project management, community development and policy advice components. She teleworks her role from her home 90km north-west of Longreach. She instigated and then chaired the \$3.3 million home internet training project known as BridgIT for the Queensland Rural Women's Network for four years. She is a graduate of the Australian Rural Leadership Program.

**John Cokley** (who has visited Blackall several times since 1989) lectures in journalism at James Cook University.

## Endnotes

[1] **Quotation:** Cokley used the phrase 'a newspaper is the community talking to itself' during the production of *The Barcoo Independent* and during an ABC Radio National interview about the Blackall Project. This phrase and variations are apparently now in common use among media researchers and publishers, but someone somewhere must have said or written it first. In this case, the authors' original source has long disappeared from their memory but Conley (*ix*) writes that it was United States playwright Arthur Miller who said:

*A good newspaper is a nation talking to itself (as quoted in Hough 187)*

The mission statement of the Palo Alto Weekly has given the same phrase a more local focus:

The mission of our newspaper is to provide an accessible vehicle for getting the community talking to itself. ([www.embarcaderopublishing.com/mission.inc](http://www.embarcaderopublishing.com/mission.inc))

And British MP Austin Mitchell employed the same words in 2001 when addressing the Newspaper Society, 'the voice of Britain's regional and local press, represents around 1300 daily and weekly, paid-for and free, newspaper titles in the UK' ([www.newspapersoc.org.uk/news-reports/pr2001/salesconf-roundup.inc](http://www.newspapersoc.org.uk/news-reports/pr2001/salesconf-roundup.inc))

*A local newspaper is a community talking to itself: without that the community would be deaf and dumb.*

[\[return\]](#)

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