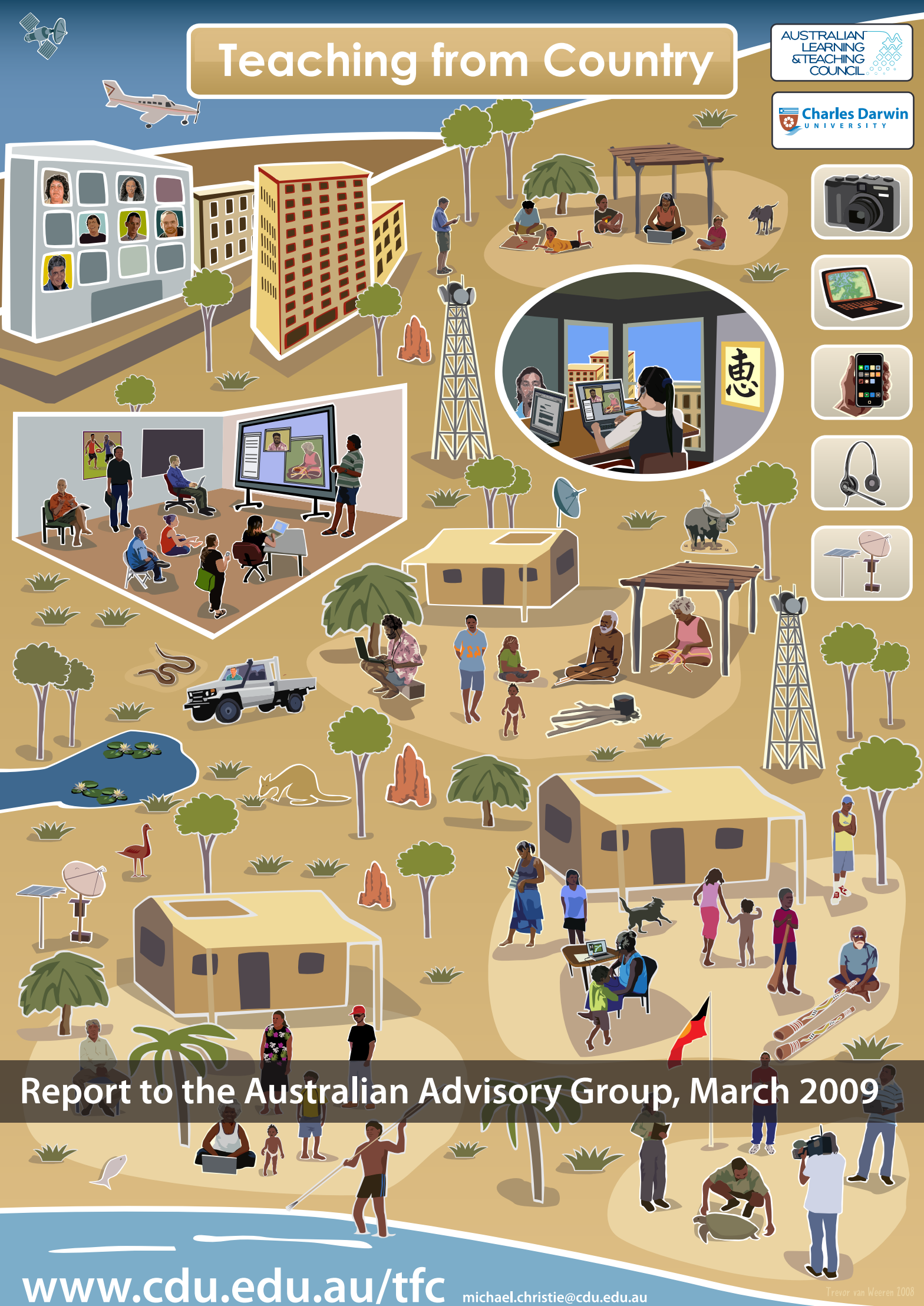


# Teaching from Country

AUSTRALIAN  
LEARNING  
& TEACHING  
COUNCIL

Charles Darwin  
UNIVERSITY



Report to the Australian Advisory Group, March 2009

## Teaching from Country

The Teaching from Country program, funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, is seeking to develop and promote workable practices for the authentic participation of Australian Indigenous knowledge authorities located in very remote places, in the teaching work of Australian universities.

We have set up some systems to enable Yolŋu elders in very remote places, to take an active part in teaching Indigenous studies at Charles Darwin University. This is 'remote delivery' of tertiary education in reverse: the teachers are out on country and the students are (mostly) on campus.

We are also working with a team of Australian and International advisers who are helping us think through some of the key issues.



Starting in March 2009, we are now trialing these systems in CDU's coursework.

### What have we achieved so far?

- We have built a website which makes our journey clear. Our website, [www.cdu.edu.au/tfc](http://www.cdu.edu.au/tfc) is regularly updated, and gives full details of what has happened so far.
- We have experimented with a complex array of hardware, software, and connectivity arrangements. These are reported in the 'trials' section of the website.
- We have begun to work with Indigenous and nonIndigenous scholars who are interested in our work, and in helping us to think through some of the complex issues we are addressing. This work is reported in the 'Writings and Reflections' section of the website.
- We are beginning, week by week, to have community elders in remote places, using their computers and their internet connections, take part in the teaching programs at CDU. Details, videos, transcriptions and other notes are found in the 'trials' section of the website.



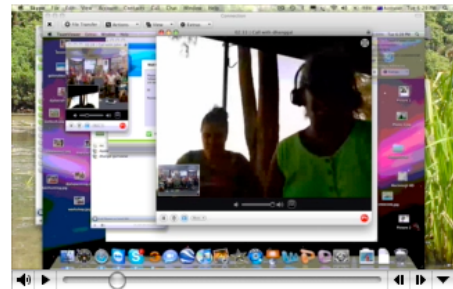
Dhängal teaching from Wallaby Beach, Gove.

## Addressing the Challenges:

We started by identifying five key challenges.

### 1. What is a helpful conceptual framing of issues involved in our work that is valid in Yolŋu terms and supports translation into academic contexts?

We started by asking some of the key Yolŋu elders involved in the program to give their ideas about knowledge, teaching, technology and country. We heard stories of the way in which the land itself takes part in making knowledge, we heard about the way in which particular ancestral identities lead different people to understand themselves and their contributions to knowledge work in quite different ways. These stories are on the website. The other partners in the project, mostly nonIndigenous, have also contributed their framing questions – for example, to do with challenging the assumptions about time and space and knowledge which form the background to conventional university teaching.



### 2. How do we support an authentic Indigenous pedagogy in a university, using digital technologies?

We have worked with the Yolŋu lecturers, to look carefully at the joys and frustrations of Teaching from Country. In this work, some of the key aspects of traditional knowledge work have been foregrounded – who can speak about what, what can you say when you're not on your own land, how do we introduce students to the variety of knowledge authorities on country and still observe the strict protocols of kinship and accountability?

### 3. What are the best socio-technical arrangements (hardware, software, connectivity, spaces, images, voices, organizations)?

Each place is different. Some homeland centres have 'Next G', some have satellite connections, sometimes Skype is useful, sometimes we're not allowed to use it, sometimes people are asked to speak about things they have no right to talk about in traditional law. The social-political and the technical come together in different ways in different places. We are working through a number of configurations, often quite specific to their place, and trying to keep things simple and help the remote teachers feel comfortable with the technology, while still exploring the vast array of options.

### 4. How do we ensure that Yolŋu intellectual property is safeguarded through both the traditional and the Australian legal systems?

There are two sides to this question: protections for Intellectual Property at work under Australian law, and those at work under traditional law. We need to find a way of dealing with these issues which remains faithful to both systems. We have begun with looking at the ways in which our website is used as a resource



for the project, and at the ways in which Yolŋu knowledge, presented on the website, may be at risk from misuse. We will continue to report on this work on the website, and in the seminar in July.

**5. How do we situate Aboriginal teaching in the academic institution to ensure that Yolŋu are fully recognised and paid properly for their contributions?**



This work leads us into mostly uncharted waters. It raises questions of the value of Indigenous knowledge, the ways of helping the university to recognize and be accountable for recognizing those values, the ways of paying people for their work which are consistent with the ways in which money takes part in everyday Yolŋu life, and ways for formally recognizing the contribution of Indigenous knowledge authorities to academic life. This work is complex and occasionally controversial. We have already tried a number of systems which seem to be working okay. Our project will report on the practices we develop and the fates they encounter.

**Where to from here?**

- We will continue to work throughout the first teaching semester of 2009, and continue to report on our progress and findings through the website.
- At the end of July 2009, we will hold a seminar which will take place over a few days, to bring together people who have been working with us, to discuss celebrate, and critique our work, and to think about ways forward for Australian Indigenous participation in tertiary education.
- We will use the website to report on our progress.

People interested in the outcomes of this project, and the July seminar, should continue to watch the development of the Teaching from Country website and make contact through the contacts page, [www.cdu.edu.au/tfc](http://www.cdu.edu.au/tfc).



Gotha teaching the Yolŋu Studies class from Gäwa.