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**LEARNING FROM THE RHETORIC OF THE MOMENT:  
A STUDY OF RURAL AND REMOTE USES OF  
TELECOMMUNICATIONS.**

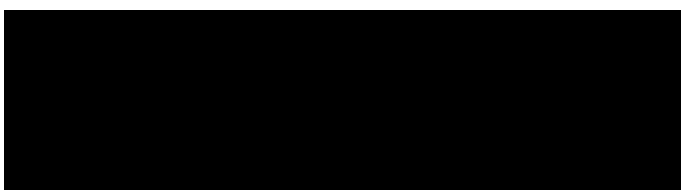
Jens Jeppe Hansen

A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
of the University of New England,  
July 1995

## **CERTIFICATE**

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in the thesis.



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## ABSTRACT

Telecommunications are a vital learning medium for rural and remote dwellers but are largely neglected by communications and adult education researchers. The uses of telecommunications in rural and remote Australia were examined by gathering qualitative and quantitative data from 135 rural and remote subjects. The emphasis was upon interpreting data in order to heighten awareness of those variables which impact upon rural and remote people when they use telecommunications to learn from each other. Respondents were invited to make contact via a free-call telephone number after the research had been widely advertised through the media. Subjects completed a questionnaire and kept a diary of telecommunications interactions over two days. In addition 40 in-depth semi-structured interviews were completed as were two site studies and a number of focus group discussions. Both qualitative and quantitative data analysis procedures were employed with each approach being used to inform the research about the potential of the other. The data were also examined with reference to the thesis that telecommunications are a medium for informal and incidental learning. It is suggested, therefore, that Jarvis' model of adult learning in the social context can usefully be extended to incorporate telecommunications mediated learning and that the taxonomy of communications activities developed by Pye can be applied to the analysis of telecommunications episodes. It was discovered that UHF is an important technology but that its use is confined to functional information exchange because it is a public medium. Facsimile transmissions are also predominantly used for functional transmissions and it became apparent that public versus private, and real time versus asynchronous time are each important determinants of communications strategies. The research showed that although rural and remote subjects did not differ markedly with respect to the frequency and duration of their calls, remote people paid significantly more for their telephone services. In addition, it was found that telecommunication about personal matters tend to be nested in homogenous groups with newcomers mainly talking to, and learning from, other newcomers while locals mainly interact with and learn from other locals. It is suggested researchers should appraise the social context of telecommunications and the dynamics of telecommunications episodes in order to understand the complex telecommunications process.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Proposing, researching, analysing and finally preparing a thesis is never entirely due to the work of the person whose name appears on the spine of the thesis. Rather, a thesis is produced because of the efforts of many people and it is perhaps apt to liken such a co-operative venture to the staging of an extended production. And as with the mounting of any such event, there are star performers, unobtrusive support workers, those who would commandeer the limelight and those who contentedly, but quietly, encourage natural development whilst remaining in the background. These words are written in acknowledgement of all of those kinds of people because they were all participants to the generation of this thesis.

The late Associate Professor Grant Noble engendered the research and was, while his health prevailed, an inspirational mentor. His recognition of my enthusiasm for country life triggered our decision to seek funding from Telecom for a study of Rural and Remote telecommunications. That we were successful in attracting funds is now history but funding from the Telecom Fund for Social and Policy Research was undoubtedly essential for the completion of this study. Telecom Australia, therefore, warrant special thanks not only for the funding they initially made available to Grant Noble, but also for the postgraduate scholarship which they offered to me and which I very gratefully accepted.

Regrettably, Grant lost a long battle with cancer at the end of 1994 and hence was not privy to these research findings. Had he been able to view them, Grant, no doubt, would have advanced suggestions about further research undertakings into that ubiquitous instrument which he regarded with such ambivalence. Thanks are also due to Grant's widow, Elizabeth, and to Dr Curtis Samuels. Each proofread an early version of the work and offered suggestions for improvement.

With Grant Noble's untimely death, I was very fortunate that Dr Ken Vine was able to assist with the quantitative data analysis. Ken is an especially gifted but modest teacher and I am very grateful to him for his careful and patient help with the statistical analyses. He provided invaluable encouragement on how best to interpret and present the intentional interactions which were generated between the quantitative and qualitative data. Sundran Rajendra also advised and assisted with the data analysis and my son Nicholas not only

wrote a sophisticated computer program which enabled the fusion of two disparate data bases, but also helped to complete the onerous task of data entry.

Barrie Brennan showed an appreciation of the qualitative research approach employed in this study. Early in my candidature, the Department of Administrative, Higher and Adult Education Studies appointed (for a short time only) a supervisor, who had very specific views on how postgraduate research must proceed. By contrast, Barrie Brennan's concern was with the student's development. His willingness to facilitate student focused learning therefore deserves special mention as does his constant interest in the field of adult learning for rural and remote people.

In the background was my wife Jenny. Her support was central to this work being completed and this thesis is dedicated to her with love. Finally, my thanks are offered to the many rural and remote people who were willing to become the subjects of this study. This, as the cliché extol, truly is one of their stories.

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## FOREWORD

It is apposite at the outset to enter a note about the preservation of anonymity. A widespread feature of rural and remote landscapes is the manner in which almost everyone knows everyone else. This means that *name dropping* within a small community typically causes almost instantaneous and virtually universal recognition. Thus, except for the teachers who were interviewed, the names of all subjects who have been quoted within this study have been changed. This was achieved by assigning pseudonyms to each subject with the first female name to be encountered within the text being given a name that began with an *A*; the second was assigned a name commencing with *B* and so on. The same strategy was adopted for male subjects with the assigned names once again remaining with the subjects for the duration of the thesis.

However, in the case of teachers who were interviewed, this procedure was not adopted because their names were already identifiable on account of their linkage to the institution for which they worked. However, it should be clearly noted that prior approval was given by all teachers for the author to use the names of the teachers within this manuscript. Moreover, approval was also given for interview details to be published as necessary.

Jens J. Hansen

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