

Questacon

On the Right Wavelength



Centenary of Federation

Australians were the first to use School of the Air to educate isolated children.

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

Living in the large continent of Australia can mean isolation and loneliness. Children living in the vast Australian inland are often miles away from the nearest school.

A GREAT AUSSIE SOLUTION

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) began operation in 1928 and within a few years it had established a large radio network across the outback. The network depended largely on a pedal-powered radio invented by Alfred Traeger and he and the founder of the RFDS, Reverend John Flynn, discussed other services that could be made possible using the radio.



Adelaide Miethke, an influential Adelaide schoolteacher, made the proposal for a School of the Air to be set up through the radio network and in 1950 the first lesson was broadcast. By 1956 the program had spread to New South Wales and there are now twelve Schools of the Air around Australia.

Hannah Auld having a lesson via HF radio as part of the Alice Springs School of the Air

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Gone are the days of the pedal radio, but School of the Air teachers still use HF (high frequency) radio to provide lessons to their students. The majority of the school curriculum is covered through correspondence lessons that teachers prepare and mail to their students. Regular telephone conversations between teacher and student are used, along with newer technologies such as email, computer links, video and the Internet.

THE FUTURE

Schools of the Air continue to provide education to isolated people, and their role is extending into adult education. As technology continues to develop, access to information is improving for people in the outback.

FURTHER INFO, FACTS & FUN

- School of the Air has grown from a handful of students in 1951 to well over 1 000 students in twelve schools.
- For more info on Schools of the Air, check out:
 - School of the Air Port Augusta <http://oac.schools.sa.edu.au/sota/>
 - School of the Air Katherine <http://www.ksa.nt.edu.au>
 - School of the Air Alice Springs <http://www.assoa.nt.edu.au>
 - Royal Flying Doctor Service <http://www.rfds.org.au>

For more info on great Australian Science check out:

Questacon's Innovative Australians <http://www.questacon.edu.au/innovaus>

CSIRO's Australia Advances <http://www.csiro.au/promos/ozadvances>

The Australian Academy of Science's Nova <http://www.science.org.au/nova>

The Australian Science Archive Project <http://www.asap.unimelb.edu.au/>