The National Centre for Australian Studies, (NCAS), a key national centre at Monash University, established a collaborative relationship with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) in 1993 through the Open Learning initiative. During the following six years the NCAS - ABC relationship was extended through a series of joint initiatives encompassing both radio (Radio National and Radio Australia) and the new medium of the World Wide Web. In total, a series of five additional joint educational initiatives were produced and put to air between 1994-1999. Of these four were designed to accompany Monash sourced educational units offered via Open Learning Australia (OLA) sometimes associated with on-campus based units. The disciplinary (and interdisciplinary) nature of these units included the more traditional areas of History and Politics (including Civics), economics and the more recently the fields of Tourism and Communications studies.

Effectively, these individual projects encompassed the production of broadcast material, distributed via the ABC, together with related web resources jointly provided through the National Centre for Australian Studies and ABC Multimedia. These collaborative processes, through which this range of educational materials were produced and provided, will serve as a major theme of this paper. It should be noted that a number of other parties played various roles in the projects mentioned below.

Issues of Collaboration

An issue which will be addressed is that of audience: the WWW sites, together with the ABC networks, are produced to appeal to an audience wider than the enrolled student base, whether it be the more dispersed OLA group or the specific Monash on-campus cohort. Thus, the concern here was to design material which would appeal to both the specific pedagogical needs of the student groups as well as the broader ABC audience. A very obvious concern was whether both audiences could be effectively serviced given the specific charters of the two collaborating institutions and further, whether associated issues such as editorial control and intellectual property rights could also be practically resolved. An important aspect here was the amortising of development and production costs through the convergence of educational product with more general broadcast material.

A range of other fundamental issues emerged as the process of collaboration took shape. For example, the integration and melding a range of diverse technologies demanded the development of a project management process which would enable the rapid creation of complementary materials within the framework of rigid production timelines.

The Projects

The presentation will briefly explore a range of collaborative flexible learning initiatives developed in collaboration with a range of partners including the ABC, Queensland and Griffith universities, Open Learning Australia and the Monash faculty of Business and Economics. The resultant products have been interactive web sites, ABC radio and television series and a series of associated courses and units.

• ’Discovering Democracy’

As part of the national Discovering Democracy initiative the National Centre has been engaged in developing the tertiary level version of the program’s course and learning resources. The project framework has been heavily collaborative, drawing together a range of universities, OLA and the ABC in its role as the national broadcaster and multimedia provider. The Civics Education Group (CEG) and DETYA were also associated with this initiative in an consultative role. A feature of this initiative was the plethora of partners, each with its own negotiated role in the broader project.
• 'Money Markets'

*Money Markets* was the first of the specific Monash-ABC projects, initially conceived in 1997. The aim was to utilise both radio and the Web to deliver a range of informative programs on the subject of the broader economy, as well as investment and business issues. Academic content was developed within the Monash Faculty of Business and Economics. The project offers a comprehensive network of learning and teaching resources which are aimed at an adult and senior secondary school audiences interested in commerce and money markets. The on-line component contains teaching and learning notes to accompany the programs, the program transcripts, audio files, educational material for teachers and students, interviews, definitions, glossary and a bibliography from the National Centre for Australian Studies of major Australian economics-related books - which are part of its *Australia: A Reader's Guide On-line* (ARGO) project.

• *In the Pipeline: Converging Communications*

The latest NCAS venture into multimedia-oriented distance education is the second of the Monash-ABC collaborative projects, and is focused on the study of communications - one of the fastest growing subject areas nationally. The three-tiered project, entitled *In the Pipeline*, comprises a radio series, a substantial website, a collection of fee-for-service modules on e-commerce and a television series associated with these modules. The radio series forms the academic basis of all projects.

The academic profile focuses on the theme of converging communications, exploring the mass take-up of the internet in Australian households together with the emergence of a new era of screen culture associated with the imminent introduction of digital television. A key theme is an exploration of how enormously profitable industries have grown from an idea into multi-million dollar enterprises within the space of a few years. The project will also focus on how technology has made interactivity possible within an accessible price range. The power and immediacy of the internet makes global communications possible on an unparalleled scale: what are the likely implications of this for our population? The project also examines the issue of whether a loss of local identity will follow from the new communications revolution. It also examines whether there is a real threat to the human desire for interpersonal communication in these new developments. The dilemma is posed: is the new communications technology a dream or a nightmare?

More down to earth issues of intellectual property, personal privacy and security of transactions are set against a supposed need for ease of access, or in the words of science-fiction writer, David Brin, the necessity for "equity of exposure".

**Conclusion**

An increasingly crucial issue associated with the realm of student-centred flexible learning is the appropriate use of media and technologies. More flexible teaching and learning approaches, and in particular the use of technology, have the potential both to add to the costs of production and delivery of quality learning materials but they also provide ways to contain or reduce these costs. The case studies outlined above illustrate a variety of solutions developed to meet specific pedagogical and funding parameters. Further, they also illustrate the dividends of collaboration with partners capable of responding to the opportunities offered by new technology, whilst also recognising that this technology should serve our educational objectives, not exclusively drive them. It can be seen from these examples that technology may be used to increase flexibility in a multitude of ways as well as potentially increasing the global reach of our educational programs. The Monash experience with flexible learning has partially emerged from its association with both the OLA and the ABC. The emergence of an emphasis on the role of the new communication and learning technologies within the realm of the flexible learning paradigm has been one interesting outcome of this relationship. This working paper has explored only some aspects of this tripartite relationship; other elements will be the subject of further research and reporting.

This paper will be accompanied by illustrations drawn from the specific projects which form the subject of the paper.