



100 successes

A Queensland program is helping Indigenous teachers stay where they are needed—in their home communities. **CAMERON PEGG** reports.

More than 100 teachers have graduated from an award-winning Indigenous teacher training program in Queensland with Bachelor of Education degrees. Now in its 16th year of operation, the Queensland Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), enables Indigenous people to become teachers in their own communities.

A joint initiative of Education Queensland, James Cook University and Tropical North Queensland TAFE, the program allows students to study in their local communities, with centres stretching from Eromanga in western Queensland to tiny Coconut Island in the Torres Strait.

Using multimedia, online technology and the support of on-site tutors, RATEP participants are given the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in local schools as they study.

“Flexibility is the key to its

“**The program really taps into the passion that people in remote communities have...**”

success,” says AEU federal Aboriginal education officer Wayne Costelloe.

“The program really taps into the passion that people in remote communities have for education for themselves and their children. It means that students can be in their home community and still

access their tutors and academic support, as well as receive family support and encouragement.”

Peer support

RATEP students work towards certificate and diploma qualifications at TAFE, then move into second year Bachelor of Education studies at James Cook University.

The program’s structure allows students to ease into tertiary study while learning from and supporting one another, says Max Lenoy, RATEP’s academic coordinator at JCU.

“It’s that opportunity for them to see what their peers on site are experiencing. Those who are doing the certificates and diplomas at TAFE are working in the same environment as those students doing their final year (at university), so there’s that understanding of what they’re going to be in for.”

Staffed by a dedicated team of educators and support personnel, RATEP has been recognised at state and federal level.

➔ Briefly

- **Queensland's Remote Area Teacher Education Program has more than 100 Indigenous graduates.**
- **Students can study from home and work in their local communities.**
- **Increasing the number of Indigenous teachers must become a national priority.**

In 2004 the program won the Premier's Award for Excellence in Public Sector Management. Two years earlier it picked up the Outstanding Program Award at the DET Training Awards.

"Programs like RATEP assist local people in communities to consider their employment options," says state RATEP coordinator Gail Jose. "The RATEP model should be showcased on an international level."

Since its establishment in 1990, almost 500 qualifications have been conferred at certificate, diploma and bachelor level, with the program attracting an increasingly diverse student intake from a growing number of communities.

"RATEP can be rightly proud of its success... It's absolutely important that we have more qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers who come from remote areas and who will teach there," says Costelloe.

👂👂 The RATEP model should be showcased on an international level. 👂👂

"Besides having the cultural and local knowledge which greatly assists them in their teaching, RATEP graduates are excellent role models," he says. "They show others in their community that you can get professionally qualified and then work in your home community." ●

CAMERON PEGG is a freelance writer.

My hometown

RATEP Bachelor of Education graduate Yasmine Blanco caught the teaching bug early. The former school captain from Weipa North State School (now Western Cape College) enrolled in the program after completing her secondary studies.

"I got into the course, started doing it and loved it immediately...I kept saying to my tutor, 'I can't wait to get into the classroom'."

Having finished preliminary studies at TAFE, Blanco commenced her BEd through James Cook University in 2001. The flexible delivery of classes meant she could raise her two children without compromising her studies.

"Being able to study at home was a big benefit. Especially after I had my baby, it was fantastic that I was able to stay in my own community with my family.

"I was very heavily pregnant during my final prac, which was stressful. But in the end I said... 'if I can do this I can do anything'."

After graduating in May last year, Blanco began casual teaching at Western Cape College in Weipa, where she now works as part of the special needs department.

Blanco says a feature of RATEP



L-R: Marion Ball (Cairns), Tammy Gibson (Hopevale), Cindy Bowyer (Karumba) and Yasmine Blanco (Weipa).

is that it allows Indigenous teachers to use their cultural knowledge to complement their formal training.

"When you work in a community with children who you know, you understand things that are relevant to them and you can use that in your planning, your assessment and when gathering resources," she says. "When you go out into the professional field you're able to bring that knowledge in."

With a clear commitment to her students and plans to commence postgraduate studies in the near future, Blanco is just one RATEP graduate looking forward to a long and rewarding career in the classroom.

"I would like to teach elsewhere eventually, but for now I'm quite happy to be in my own community, in my home town making a difference."

SNAPSHOT

Indigenous teacher training

A resounding success in Queensland, RATEP is one of several Indigenous teacher training initiatives operating across the country. The Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education in the Northern Territory is one of the nation's peak Indigenous education bodies and has provided teacher training programs for 30 years. More than 200 Indigenous teachers have graduated in the last decade.

In NSW, the Department of Education and Training is offering scholarships to encourage Indigenous teacher training. Since 2004, 119 Indigenous teachers have been appointed in NSW public schools.

And in Western Australia, the Bachelor of Education Conversion Course (BECC) offers experienced Indigenous education officers the opportunity to accelerate their studies. Run by Curtin University, the BECC—the first of its type in Australia—allows students to complete their teacher training in two years instead of the usual four.