



The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

A PRELIMINARY REPORT ON THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REMOTE AREA TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM (RATEP) AT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SITES IN NORTH QUEENSLAND

*Neil McGarvie

BACKGROUND

The Queensland Department of Education has instigated, planned and supported, over a significant period of time, various programs to enable Aboriginal and Islander entrants to become trained and qualified teachers. Such programs have included for example:

- teacher training which did not lead to a formal teacher qualification, such as the Aboriginal/Islander course provided at the then North Brisbane (Kedron Park) CAE;
- the Associate Diploma of Education at Cairns College of TAFE, which led to employment as an Aboriginal/Islander Community Teacher;
- the programs with enclave support, (such as those at Mt Gravatt CAE, Kelvin Grove CAE, James Cook University Aboriginal and Islander Teacher Education Program, AITEP), leading to a Diploma of Teaching or further awards, with full teacher registration.

However, for those Aborigines and Islanders living in remote areas, and having to re-locate to a centralised educational facility for long periods of study, the entrance rate and subsequent success rate to full teacher qualification has been extremely limited. The entrance and success rate for Aborigines from remote areas is extremely low. In the Associate Diploma of Education, which leads to non-registered employment as a Community Teacher, less than five Aborigines have graduated since the course commenced at Cairns TAFE in 1983. The on-campus nature of this course seems to have

*Neil McGarvie, Coordinator of RATEP, Cairns, Q'ld.

disadvantaged Torres Strait Islander students to a lesser extent, with over forty graduates in the same period.

Consideration of the above, and other factors, such as reluctance to spend a further two years away from home, spurred investigations of alternatives. This resulted in the adoption of an aim to provide teacher education at the remote locations, where none had previously been available. Such education would have to ensure that:

- there is no variation of the Associate Diploma or Diploma of Teaching graduating standards or course objectives, but a variation of the mode and location of their delivery only.
- culturally relevant content, structure, and strategies are included in the course ware to attain the course objectives.

The aim has been to provide appropriate education for suitable applicants at the remote area, who as teachers would have the most complete base for interaction with the remote area students. The provision of teacher education at remote locations has been accepted as a prime objective by both Aboriginal and Islander Consultative Groups and the Department of Education in Queensland.

The Inspectors, Aboriginal and Islander Education, in the Queensland Department of Education, first mooted the concept of on-site teacher education as early as 1979. Discussions were initiated with Townsville CAE (now part of James Cook University) at that time. The Cairns College of TAFE commenced the Associate Diploma of Education (Community Teacher) on-campus in 1983 with Department of Education support. The Regional Director, Peninsula Region, formed a committee in 1987 to review the future of the Associate Diploma course and other initiatives. Various developments needed to be addressed and a unified, agreed direction established. James Cook University, in late 1987, conducted research for a Remote Teacher-Education Program which originally was to be a remote campus program at Horn Island

a centralised location in Torres Strait. This program was to provide courses of study to Diploma of Teaching and it was to commence in 1989. Similar remote campuses were planned for Aboriginal Community students also.

During 1989 this concept of a central campus in the remote areas was reviewed and the concept of providing teacher education programs both on individual Torres Strait Islands and individual Aboriginal Communities was seen as the preferred option. This scheme also would result in smaller numbers of Community Teachers being released for study at any one time, which would have a less disruptive effect on the continuing program of education, especially in the Torres Strait schools.

During this period of rationalisation and development the Queensland Government accepted a report by the Working Party on Decentralised Delivery of Higher Education: 'Queensland Access to Higher Education: On the Road to Open Learning.' Funding was made available for the establishment of forty Open Learning Centres across the entire State. RATEP became one segment of the Queensland Open Learning Project and was funded by it. The Open Learning Project is an initiative to trial the use of information technology to create, and deliver, higher education courses to all Queenslanders, regardless of their location. Thus as part of this project, RATEP course delivery uses various aspects of information and interactive technology, with the vital addition of a tutor for the students at each site. The course writing equipment is focussed on an authoring language called Authorware Professional. Course writers were first introduced to this developmental technology in February 1990 and by July three subjects out of the twelve for the Diploma of Teaching had been produced in this format.

It is readily accepted by all concerned with RATEP that the on-site tutors and the course writers are the necessary human elements in the technological chain. The success of the program from now on rests with these dedicated individuals.

DEVELOPMENT OF RATEP STRUCTURE

The tertiary institutions which are cooperating in RATEP with the Queensland Department of Education, the Aboriginal and Islander Consultative Groups, and the Commonwealth Department of Employment, Education and Training, are James Cook University of North Queensland, the Cairns College of TAFE, and the Queensland University of Technology (Kelvin Grove Campus, School of Early Childhood Studies). Administration for RATEP is centred on the Department of Social and Cultural Studies in Education at James Cook University in Townsville. Course materials are being prepared by James Cook University, Queensland University of Technology, Cairns College of TAFE and the Peninsula Education Region.

The RATEP course ware and delivery methods in the multi-media format are designed to assist Aboriginal and Islander Students to:

- progress from experienced practitioner, but non-qualified Teacher Aides or Assistant Teachers, and others such as school leavers, through a minimum of two years full time study to the Associate Diploma of Education (Community Teacher qualification) through Cairns TAFE.
- progress from the Associate Diploma of Education, by credit transfer and a further minimum two years of study, to the Diploma of Teaching, through James Cook University.

There are now four RATEP/Open Learning Centres selected in Torres Strait at Yorke Island and Badu Island, and at the Aboriginal Communities of Hopevale and Aurukun on Cape York. Four qualified teachers who are coordinators/tutors with some school teaching load are now in place to work with the program. Room for the centres has also been provided by the Peninsula Education Region within the schools, together with furniture, facilities and upgraded power supplies where needed. The Open Learning Centre Network has supplied computer, VCR, telephones, modem and a fax machine for course delivery at all centres.

As noted previously, there are about forty Torres Strait Islanders with the Associate Diploma of Education, so there are more potential Diploma of Teaching entrants available in the Torres Strait area. Thus the Diploma of Teaching course through RATEP/James Cook University was commenced at Yorke Island and Badu Island in July 1990. There are now four students on study leave from the Department of Education at each site and they come from five different Torres Strait Islands.

The Associate Diploma of Education is being re-accredited through TAFE and the Cape York Centres are being established during semester two, 1990. Full courses will operate from January 1991 at Aurukun and Hopevale, and the student selection process is now well advanced. It is expected that when selection is finalised for Hopevale and Aurukun, student numbers for these centres could be around eight per centre.

THE FUTURE

With the anticipated success of RATEP, the Open Learning Centre model, wedded to the information technology course construction and delivery mode, may well be generalised for higher education in these and other areas. In the Aboriginal and Islander community development context, this could include; business studies, applied science, health/nursing, police, mechanics, law, tourism, corrective services, community welfare, and teacher related studies such as librarian, guidance, etc.. The RATEP initiative could provide the necessary investigation of skills in pedagogy and curriculum models, for teacher educations using the developing technology in the future.

In the planning, development and delivery of RATEP courses, cooperation among the collaborating institutions and agencies has been of a high order. This cooperation is likely to continue to be the key for future success in this innovative program for decentralised on-site delivery of teacher education.

Formative and continuing evaluation of RATEP has been established as an integral part of the project. This will be reported on, together with further developments, as the program proceeds.

RATEP

THE REMOTE AREA TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM

