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# MAKING *it* POSSIBLE: *the* EVOLUTION of RATEP — a COMMUNITY-BASED TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM *for* INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

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## ■ Abstract

Since 1990, the School of Education at James Cook University has produced and delivered a successful off-campus Bachelor of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their home communities through the *Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP): A community-based teacher education program for Indigenous peoples*. This paper examines five key areas. One is the intersystemic management structure that has majority representation from Indigenous communities and peak education bodies as well as representation from the other three stakeholders: Education Queensland, the School of Education at James Cook University and the Tropical North Queensland Institute of Technical and Further Education (TAFE). A second area is RATEP's innovative use of information and communication technologies in teaching and learning. A third theme is its dynamic evolution from (a) two dedicated RATEP sites in the Torres Strait to 12 sites throughout Queensland; (b) geographically remote sites to a combination of remote, rural, and urban sites; (c) a principle where students gather at a dedicated site with its own teacher-coordinator to clusters where a number of students are living in different locations and the coordinator travels between these; (d) movement of sites from location to location depending on need and demand; and (e) a fixed program to a highly flexible one that allows multiple entry and exit points, including honours. A fourth area is the critical insights generated from research into the program by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers. The final theme is the retention of graduates from RATEP within the classroom and their promotion into the administrative and advisory teaching sectors.

## ■ Introduction

In 1977, James Cook University (JCU) (then the Townsville College of Advanced Education) introduced a special entry Aboriginal and Islander Teacher Education Program (AITEP). Most of the AITEP students were from mainland urban backgrounds. While successful, the program was criticised for not meeting the needs of the more traditional remote communities. Homesickness, family obligations, the expense of living in Townsville with large families and fear of losing their culture were the main reasons for the low participation and retention rates of students from the more remote areas (Henderson & Coombs, 1989). When evaluating AITEP, Loos and Miller (1989) concluded that a radically different program was needed to upgrade underqualified teachers' qualifications and produce Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal teachers whose unique cultural experience could be used to educate both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian children. From this, the concept of RATEP was born.

Given the isolation, dispersed nature and small size of remote Indigenous communities and the likelihood of low numbers of students seeking enrolment in the program, a unique model of access and delivery was developed and implemented in July 1990. An intersystemic collaborative model was negotiated between four major parties: Indigenous communities, Education Queensland, James Cook University, and the Tropical North Queensland Institute of TAFE (at that time, the Cairns College of TAFE). TAFE had been offering a two-year paraprofessional on-campus Associate Diploma in Community Teaching to Indigenous students in Cairns. Then, as now, Indigenous communities' aspirations were higher, calling for fully qualified Indigenous teachers.

After extensive consultation, particularly with Indigenous communities, and with seed funding for a pilot program from a Queensland Open Learning Project grant in 1990, RATEP commenced with Aboriginal students in the off-campus TAFE program in Hopevale and Aurukun; and with Torres Strait Islander students, who already had the TAFE Community Teaching qualification, into the Diploma of Teaching from JCU at Masig (Yorke Island) and Badu Island in the Torres Strait. Because of "the technologies and methodologies

developed in RATEP and the unique levels of cooperation that have been created ... RATEP is a model for teaching in this difficult field [of distance and Indigenous preservice teacher education]" (Willett, 1991, pp. i, 10). Out of seven distance education teaching programs funded, the Willett Report recommended that only RATEP receive continued funding (Willett, 1991). To this day, RATEP remains a nationally successful off-campus program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their home communities. In 2004 - 14 years after its inception - JCU will graduate its 100th primary teacher from 12 intakes through RATEP, representing over one quarter of the registered Indigenous teachers in Queensland.

Why has RATEP been successful and what lessons does it provide in the broader field of Indigenous education? This article examines five key areas that are pivotal in RATEP's history. These are intersystemic collaboration, its dynamic program structure, RATEP's innovative use of information communication technologies (ICTs), the use of critical insights from ongoing research into the program, and, lastly, the retention and graduation rates of the students in the program and in their chosen profession.

### ■ Intersystemic Collaboration

Since its inception, RATEP has been an acclaimed model of inter-institutional and community collaboration (Logan & Sachs, 1991; Van Tiggelen, 1996; Willet, 1991; York & Henderson, 2001). This model has two facets: academic and management.

#### *Academic intersystemic collaboration*

An innovative continuum from TAFE through JCU was negotiated at RATEP's inception and is vigilantly sustained. A continuing dialogue is maintained regarding course subject content within the two institutions' programs. Although not without periodic difficulties, the partnership has been mutually rewarding. With each program revision, the partners consult on subject content and delivery. The consultation includes careful attention to the articulation between TAFE and university studies to minimise difficulties of transition for students. For instance, the amount and level of academic writing and reading is gradually increased during the TAFE program so that their first semester of university study is not so traumatic as it would have been. Another notable example is that key content and practicum experiences are judiciously distributed between JCU and TAFE. Consequently, the equivalent of one year's credit towards the Bachelor of Education is unconditionally granted for the two-year TAFE award. JCU was - and remains - at the forefront of Australian universities in recognising TAFE qualifications.

Students benefit significantly from the academic institutions' collaboration with Education Queensland. A crucial component in the academic process is the

secondment of practicing teachers from Education Queensland as on-site teacher-coordinators. Besides academic tutoring, the teacher-coordinators act as mentors, facilitators and mediators (Henderson & Fenwick, 1995). Through them, RATEP provides a conversation between the Indigenous, non-Indigenous and academic worlds (Henderson, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Henderson, York, Jose, & McGowan, 2000b) and creates a bridge to the future.

#### *Management intersystemic collaboration*

A particular strength of RATEP is its intersystemic management structure. The RATEP Management Committee has majority Indigenous representation, including delegates from peak Indigenous education bodies. Representatives from Education Queensland, the JCU School of Education, and TAFE are senior administrators and the coordinators of RATEP in their respective institutions.

Playing a pivotal role in financial and policy decisions, the RATEP Management Committee oversees a \$1.5 million budget in 2003 from State and Commonwealth governments; this does not include JCU's, TAFE's, and Education Queensland's institutional budgets to develop and deliver RATEP. For instance Education Queensland currently funds salaries (the Education Queensland coordinator and 15.5 teacher-coordinators), internet costs, and helps subsidise JCU's weekly teleconferences in most subjects across the three years. Although the RATEP Management Committee has no control over the academic content of the subjects, it funds the development of most subjects delivered through RATEP. Each of the 22 JCU subjects currently cost \$25,000-\$30,000 to develop, excluding consideration of the lecturer's time in developing that subject. As well, subjects are revised or discarded on a cyclic basis.

Over the years, Indigenous communities have provided significant assistance. Some provide housing for the on-site teacher-coordinator, which is a substantial commitment given the shortage of housing in remote and isolated communities. Other examples of their support include the provision of additional computers, refurbishing and maintaining a public building for RATEP when other facilities were unavailable, supplementing university student living allowances through the Community Development Employment Program (CDEP) and other programs, and on-site motor vehicle transport (car or four-wheel all-terrain motorcycle) when needed. Another important way is the moral support provided formally and informally by the communities to the students and their families.

Each RATEP site is approved by the Management Committee. These are preferably located in primary schools because of ease of access to practical teaching situations. If space is unavailable, sites are placed in secondary schools or other educational facilities. Site selection is a stringent process in which Indigenous

communities submit proposals for hosting a RATEP site. By no means are all submissions accepted by the RATEP Management Committee at the first submission, unless a community can provide sufficient resources, support structure, and match competition from numerous other applicants. The submission has to demonstrate community support for a minimum five-year commitment (two years at TAFE level and three years at JCU).

The Management Committee resources each RATEP site with telecommunication equipment (conference phones, fax machines, proprietary phone lines into schools and public buildings where RATEP sites are located), computers at the ratio of 1 to 1.5 students (with an annual buy-in to replace older models), printers, and other peripherals. One classroom or two smaller rooms with furnishings, such as tables, desks, fans, air conditioner, fridge, and a television, are provided within the school or local council premises, wherever RATEP is located.

Shared intersystemic responsibilities are one of the reasons for the program's success, and signal a lesson for the future of Indigenous education. In his 1991 evaluation of RATEP, Willett commented, "the degree of cooperation ... [and] level of mutual recognition and trust [in RATEP] is rare; it may be unique" (Willett, 1991, p. 11). This still holds true today.

#### ■ Dynamic Evolution

RATEP has not just simply grown in student numbers or changed program structure in a process of cyclic reviews of education degrees. RATEP has upheld the original principle of access and equity on which it was founded, yet systematically evolved to meet the changing educational needs of Indigenous peoples throughout Queensland.

From four remote dedicated sites at its inception, RATEP expanded to up to 15 concurrent designated sites and, if the satellite centres are counted, 23 active sites throughout Queensland. Unlike the first two intakes, most RATEP sites now offer both JCU and TAFE courses. In this process, the stipulation that RATEP serve only remote areas has been redefined and renegotiated to accommodate the understanding that Indigenous people can be just as isolated in small towns or other urban locations as elsewhere. Seven sites have been or currently are located in urban areas. Among these, the Cairns site has had a particularly important role, not only as a study site for local Indigenous students but also for those from remote areas where no dedicated site has been established. It has also been pivotal as a temporary site for students who need specialist health and social services for themselves or family members. Because RATEP now caters for rural and urban as well as remote Indigenous communities but remains widely known by its acronym, the acronym has been retained as an element in a more accurate, revised title: *RATEP - A community-based teacher education program for Indigenous peoples*.

The number of sites changes annually as no site is regarded as permanent. Indeed, since 1990, 40 sites (including satellite centres) have been established. Each designated site must have a full-time minimum of four JCU or eight TAFE students or a proportional mix of the two to commence. A designated site is disbanded when the minimum time for a student to graduate occurs, or when the pool of candidates has been exhausted. Some sites (such as Hopevale and Cherbourg) have reopened to cater for revived community interest. This unchanged policy ensures that all Indigenous communities throughout the state have a periodic opportunity to sponsor a RATEP site.

Since 1990 RATEP has established 28 sites with resident teacher-coordinators. If from a different community (one without a site), students were originally required to move to a designated RATEP location. Increasingly, smaller communities unable to sustain a site argued for their needs to be met even though this sometimes involved only one or two students. Consequently, some teacher-coordinators were appointed to travel periodically to a second or even third location. In more remote locations, most notably in southwest Queensland, the students were so few and so scattered geographically that even this kind of arrangement was not feasible. Therefore, to facilitate more equitable access to higher education, some districts extended the argument to establish an itinerant teacher-coordinator to permanently travel from location to location to mentor the students. Although its long-term success is yet to be fully tested, this "cluster principle" is an increasingly popular model within RATEP. Another less frequent model occurs in situations where individual students travel to meet the teacher-coordinator. One student west of Mt Isa involved in a land rights claim maintained residence on her property and made a weekly journey to consult with the teacher-coordinator. Another student travelled daily by dinghy from Hammond Island to neighbouring Thursday Island to study. Instead of rigidly conforming to institutional frameworks, RATEP has adapted itself to meet Indigenous needs.

The original academic configuration for RATEP was a four-year continuum comprising two years TAFE study followed by two years at JCU. Under this arrangement, students acquired an Associate Diploma at TAFE for which students were granted the equivalent of one year's credit towards the three-year Diploma of Teaching at JCU. When the Queensland Board of Teacher Registration required a four-year degree for teachers, TAFE upgraded its qualification to full Diploma status and JCU to a four-year Bachelor of Education, but the one-year's credit still applies. With a changing clientele, the need for multiple entry as well as multiple exit points has been recognised. Those who have been away from study for some time or do not have a secondary qualification take up the five-year program (two years at TAFE plus three years at JCU). Since 2000, Indigenous students who have completed



Year 12 with a suitable tertiary entrance score (OP) are granted direct entry into the four-year JCU degree program through RATEP. While difficult to undertake at a distance, Honours is possible through RATEP and one student has already graduated at distinction level. RATEP has also been a pathway for students with prior qualifications in nursing, the humanities and the arts. These students are given credit for prior study and can complete their Bachelor of Education in a minimum of two years. Because they are multi-skilled, such graduates are valuable assets to the schools and communities. All graduates through RATEP are qualified to teach anywhere in Australia and overseas.

To date, the program has only graduated students with a Bachelor of Education (Primary) teaching qualification. An early childhood teacher education program has long been on the agenda and is currently in its planning stages. Secondary teacher education has not been possible due to the cost of developing specialist discipline studies in addition to the new secondary education curriculum subjects. However, the increasing number of web-based discipline subjects available flexibly from JCU and other institutions is making a secondary program more feasible.

### Innovative use of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs)

RATEP is a mirror of its on-campus program, differing only in modes of delivery. RATEP students study the same subjects, are taught by the same lecturers, complete assessment tasks at the same standard as their on-campus counterparts, and receive exactly the same award as other students who undertake preservice teacher education at JCU (Henderson, et al., 2000b). RATEP is the first teacher education course fully delivered off-campus in Australia. Apart from periodic teaching practica, students undertake all course requirements at RATEP sites. While it uses many of the same distance education technologies, materials and delivery strategies as other programs, RATEP uses them in unique ways.

### *Teleconferencing*

Teleconferences used in other distance education programs are mainly for troubleshooting or as mini-lectures. Based on research data (Henderson & Putt, 1993, 1999b; Lang, 1993; Macindoe & Henderson, 1991), RATEP teleconferencing has been carefully refined as an educational tool and is integral to every subject. Depending on the subject, teleconferences are used as tutorials that have pre-advised agendas, student-led seminars, problem-solving discussions, and other group activities common in face-to-face sessions on campus. They also allow for guest speakers and students' use of their own languages when they communicate across various campuses. In a survey of all Bachelor of Education students at JCU, RATEP students listed

teleconferences among the three most satisfying aspects of their program (York & Henderson, 2001). Despite the many advantages of the internet, teleconferencing will not disappear. It provides regular experiences that cannot currently be obtained as effectively via email or the world wide web: for instance, synchronous verbal contact with lecturers and other students; hearing a native English speaker's intonation and pausing pattern, particularly when using academic genres; and becoming comfortable and versatile with the Western tradition of posing and answering questions. These benefits will be amplified by the presence of body language with the implementation of videoconferencing.

### *Interactive multimedia*

Interactive multimedia (IMM) software was a major delivery innovation in 1990. Many distance education programs use IMM for various units, modules, or specific subjects, but rely on residential schools, printed text, and video or audiotapes for the bulk of subject presentation. IMM permeates RATEP and has proven particularly successful and culturally appropriate for Indigenous students (Henderson, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Henderson & Putt, 1993, 1999a, 1999b). It is the principal information delivery mechanism in RATEP. Lang's (1993) discussion of student evaluation interviews revealed that the two highest rating features of RATEP respectively were: (1) satisfaction from working through the IMM programs; and, (2) being able to proceed at one's own pace. Henderson and Putt (1993) maintained that a favoured Torres Strait Islander (if not Indigenous) way of learning is through observation, practice, demonstration with immediate feedback and, if not successful, immediate repetition of all or some of these elements. Interactive multimedia accommodates this style of learning. Indeed, "doing coursework on [IMM] CD-ROMs is compatible with cultural styles of learning through hands-on and visual stimulus", argued Yarrabah Honours graduate Bernadine Yeatman (cited in York & Henderson, 2001, p. 139). Interactive multimedia coursework was also the highest rated feature in a recent Bachelor of Education review questionnaire, where students studying through RATEP mode identified IMM study as the most satisfying aspect of the program (York & Henderson, 2001). IMM has been increasingly supplemented by the use of email and the web in the internet-based delivery in most of the Bachelor of Education subjects.

### *Email*

Email is used not only for personal communication, administrative purposes, and assignment exchange within RATEP, but also in the conduct of tutorials. Students commented that email tutorials assisted them to take ownership of their learning (Henderson, et al., 2000b). Taking ownership of one's learning is a significant ingredient in personal empowerment. In the

Indigenous Australian context, too many government policies and projects have had the words, "self-determination", "self-autonomy", "self-management" and yet have failed to implement conditions that promoted, what Page and Czuba (1999) call, relational empowerment. However, many Indigenous people prefer the concept of ownership to empowerment, as it is ownership that they have been denied (Page & Miller, 1999). RATEP students claim ownership occurs because lecturers deliberately "took a back seat" thereby "displaying confidence in us to conduct the email tutorials" (Henderson, York, Jose, & McGowan, 2000a, p. 9). Another reason involves cooperative learning: "It was good that the emails are mostly between the students as we learn from each other" (Henderson et al., 2000a, p. 9). The speed of the email interchange for students in remote areas and the asynchronous nature of the weekly tutorial interaction was a third reason that helped maintain student involvement: "It's ... frustrating waiting for the replies to your tutorial questions or comments"; "It's exciting finding the emails waiting to be read"; and, "anticipating, that's what keeps me interested" (Henderson et al., 2000a, p. 9).

#### *The world wide web*

The swing to web content and contact in RATEP was encouraged by an international web conference, "Indigenous Perspectives of Students Learning Online", initiated by the authors (who are both past RATEP coordinators) and supported by Telstra. Prompted by student comments that accessing the internet is "a tool of empowerment" and "allows me to hold the whole world in my hands" (York & Henderson, 2001, p. 142), students participated in the conference as an integral component of a subject in their Bachelor of Education program. The conference attracted over 300 worldwide subscribers. In their postings, students reiterated the significance of having the opportunity to discuss relevant issues with other Indigenous Australian, Maori, and North American students and scholars. A feature of the conference was the blend of anecdotes, personal narratives, and academic content (cf. Nakata, 1995). Participating in such virtual experiences allowed students to go outside their remote communities, "Wow! All that information you can access" (cited in Henderson et al., 2000b, p. 707) in ways that the other modes of teaching and learning in RATEP do not sufficiently provide. An unexpected outcome for a few students was an academic visit to New Zealand organised by their teacher-coordinator to share and learn with the Maori lecturers and students who participated in the online conference.

Notwithstanding the excitement and learning outcomes fostered by the online conference, web-based delivery has not been without its problems. Learning with the WWW was not initially a comfortable learning experience for many students due to problems of novice information literacy skills, fear of encountering

pornographic and hate material, and slow and often unreliable access (Henderson, et al., 2000b). Since 2000, the first two problems have been largely negated because of the students' greater proficiency with, and understanding of, the web. Because no-one in RATEP is under any illusion about the reliability of internet connections to RATEP's remote locations, hybrid CD-ROM versions of web-based subjects are invariably provided as a backup. "You have to keep up with the technology. It's never-ending learning" (cited in Henderson et al., 2000b, p. 705) - this dynamic mixture of ICTs continues to provide students with the means to be information-rich.

#### ■ Insights Generated from Research and Evaluation

A research culture is embedded into RATEP. Those involved in RATEP - managers, lecturers, students, teacher-coordinators, government funding bodies, JCU and TAFE, and Indigenous communities - have recognised the need to research and evaluate the program on a number of levels. This has involved both internal and external examination.

In its pilot years, when funding was annual and based on short-term demonstrable outcomes, there was a fundamental need to test the process, materials, media, teaching, and learning outcomes. Outside evaluators (Lang, 1993; Logan & Sachs, 1991; Willett, 1991) reported most favourably. Subsequent external program evaluations (Catts, Fredericks, Hornagold, Maher, & Smith, 1998; Moyle, 1995) recognised not only strengths and achievements but also areas for improvement. Significantly, RATEP students rated their satisfaction with the program considerably more positively than did on-campus students (Ritchie, 1997).

Because RATEP has been at the cutting-edge in its use of ICTs in teaching and learning, the different media have always been a focus for research. Areas investigated included students' ways of using IMM and online courseware (Henderson, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; Henderson & Putt, 1993; M. Henderson, 1996), student thinking strategies (M. Henderson, 1996; Patching, Henderson, & Putt, 1994a) with respect to concept mapping (Henderson, Patching, & Putt, 1994) and metacognitive activities in the IMM courseware (Henderson, 1996; Henderson, Patching, & Putt, 1994b), the role of teleconferences (Henderson & Putt, 1999a), the internet as a teaching and learning tool (Henderson et al., 2000a, 2000b), the cultural contextualisation of academic content and courseware design (Henderson, 1993a, 1993b, 1996; M. Henderson, 1996; Henderson & Putt, 1999a, 1999b; Henderson et al., 2000a), and the teacher-coordinators' perceptions of their role (Henderson & Fenwick, 1995). Only selected findings from this wealth of research are discussed below.

Students have consistently reported that IMM and the web courseware allow privacy when learning (Henderson, 1993a; Henderson & Putt, 1993; Henderson

et al., 2000a; Logan & Sachs, 1991). Students could avoid shame because they could revise the content as many times as they wished without the lecturer, their peers, or their teacher-coordinator knowing. Two interesting findings appear to contradict beliefs that posit Indigenous students prefer group to individual learning. First, students reported that in subjects when they and their peers had little prior knowledge, group study would be a waste of time until after they had all individually worked through the IMM material. Only after this could they effectively collaborate (Henderson, 1993a, 1993b, 1996). Second, inclusion of pictures that reflect Indigenous contexts is prescribed for content relevance. However, it was found that students would stop, call out to other students to come look at a photograph and discuss who was in the image, consider what the occasion was, recall what had happened to any of the people in it, note what they knew about that Indigenous person, and other such matters rather than concentrating on the concepts that the photo was clarifying. The research concluded that such material should not be excluded because of this, but recommended that IMM "prompts" to refocus students on the content be embedded in the courseware (Henderson, 1993b, 1996).

In Indigenous academic programs, it is insufficient to focus solely on content to judge its cultural relevance. Modes of delivery and how these have been designed and structured also provide evidence of cultural appropriateness. As one student commented: "RATEP is done in a non-threatening way. It's not there to set you up then cut you down" (cited in Ritchie, 1997, p. 11). With respect to teleconferencing (Henderson & Putt, 1999b), lecturer-led tutorials were viewed less favourably than those in which the lecturer nominated specific students to conduct a seminar or all students at a particular RATEP site to be responsible for answering predetermined questions on the weekly topic. As the semester progressed, groups, then pairs and finally individual students were designated to answer the predetermined questions. Students recognised that these strategies allowed time to become confident in an open forum. They reflected that this was similar to how they were increasingly made responsible for community tasks, such as organising the dancing or food for significant cultural events, and how, in the university environment, the similar process helped ensure ownership of their learning.

RATEP is a three-way conversation between the Indigenous, non-Indigenous, and Western academic cultures (Henderson, 1993a, 1993b). The courseware content and delivery modes contain features that provide students with the means to control the matching of academic learning tasks with their cultural and individual ways of learning. This interplay of multiple cultural contextualisation has been seen as particularly powerful, as the following comments from students indicate: "[L]ecturers learned from the students about traditional matters and cultural protocol" (Van Tiggelen, 1996, p. 1) thereby sharing the cross-cultural process of teaching.

Indeed, lecturers no longer only take Western "cultural capital" into consideration when preparing content to be taught through various delivery modes. Nye (in Henderson, 1993a, p. 179) commented that "for the first time since the imposition of white education, RATEP is catering for our learning style". Learning and teaching has become a two-way exchange benefiting student and lecturer (Lang, 1993; York & Henderson, 2001). However, the impact extends even further. Most lecturers, the majority of whom are non-Indigenous, have transferred the insights gained through courseware development and their continuing dialogue with RATEP students into their on-campus teaching and content.

### ■ Retention

The combination of elements discussed above contributed significantly to the outstanding student retention rate of 82% in the program in its first nine years (York & Henderson, 2001). It is the interaction of all these support systems and policies that provided a more secure pathway through academia for the students. There is no better endorsement than 1998 RATEP Bachelor of Education Honours student, Bernadene Yeatman's comment:

Years ago, when doing a degree on-campus and living in an urban setting, I dropped out because of alienation, social isolation, and cultural estrangement. In studying for a Bachelor of Education (Honours) at James Cook University RATEP campus at the Yarrabah Aboriginal Community, I have been able to experience success. It eliminated any feelings of alienation that I may have experienced if I were doing this course in a non-Indigenous setting.

A decline in the retention rate to nearer 50% has been precipitated by the introduction of the Bachelor of Education, the extra year of study, subsequent higher academic expectations, the Board of Teacher Registration and Indigenous communities' focus on Standard Australian English competency (the majority of RATEP students have Australian English as their second, third or even fourth language), the disappointing performance of a few teacher-coordinators (Henderson et al., 2000a), and the tendency of some lecturers to disregard the three-way conversation (see above) and instead offer culturally undifferentiated subjects to RATEP and on-campus students.

The majority of RATEP graduates (85%) are still teaching in the classroom. Some of these act in various specialist capacities, such as Advisory Teachers to Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers. Those who are not teaching are accounted for by sickness, death, retirement, or leave-of-absence for various reasons, such as being Community Council Chairperson. As well, three graduates have been promoted to Principal and two are currently School Administrative Officers.

The importance of RATEP graduates cannot be

underestimated. Indigenous teachers have changed the face of teaching, particularly in the northern parts of Queensland, and RATEP has contributed to this change. Graduate Lizzie Lui described RATEP as "a far-sighted seeding program, whereby Indigenous students end up as teachers in their own [and urban] communities to serve as educators and role models to the generation to come" (Van Tiggelen, 1996, p. 1). Recognising this, celebrations are held by communities when graduates are presented to community members and JCU lecturers. Dressing in academic gowns is now a tradition instigated on the request of the Indigenous communities in the first RATEP sites, as communities believed this provided formal recognition of student achievement and highlighted graduates as role models. At her 1996 community celebration at Cherbourg, 50 year old graduate Beryl Langton proudly declared: "This is the start of what I wanted to do all my life!"

### ■ Conclusion

RATEP's reputation has spread to the point that the model has been adopted in other states. Papua New Guinea (Niugini) principals and administrators have scrutinised RATEP as one possible model to implement in their country. RATEP has historically led the way in distance and flexible learning. Its focus is primarily learner-centred rather than teacher-centred. The RATEP experience offers a number of lessons to Indigenous education, particularly through its strengths in intersystemic cooperation and management, and its flexible and adaptable support structures. While complex, RATEP commenced modestly and evolved slowly and methodically with its core principles intact. Thus, RATEP is well-poised to successfully continue not only as a teacher education program, but also contribute substantially to contemporary initiatives for a whole-of-government approach to education incorporating health, police affairs, and other sectors.

Another important lesson is that success depends as much on open formal relationships between academic institutions, Education Queensland and communities as it does on any individual lecturer's, student's, and institution's ongoing commitment. In part, RATEP has succeeded because JCU, TAFE, and Education Queensland have appointed coordinators to oversee their institution's responsibilities within the partnership. Encouraged by Indigenous students, coordinators also act as mediators between students and lecturers. RATEP has shown that the dedicated focus of coordinators is an essential ingredient in the program's success.

Too often, when programs such as RATEP mature, funding bodies and other stakeholders forget that current students do not necessarily have experience in non-Indigenous academic environments. As students bring their Indigenous contexts with them into their studies, programs therefore need to guard against being, as Koiki Mabo expressed it, "white-aliased" (Loos & Miller, 1989),

but must systematically respond to the entry backgrounds and needs of each new cohort. Perhaps this is the greatest lesson RATEP brings to Indigenous Australian education.

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Lyn Henderson is a senior lecturer in education at James Cook University in Townsville. Her research interests include: student and teacher thinking and mental models while learning and teaching with interactive multimedia and the internet; instructional design and evaluation of educational information communication technologies and teaching materials; evaluation of information technology diffusion in schools; effects of gender and cultural differences in learning and teaching with e-learning; distance education; and, most recently, the educational, gender and cultural implications of recreational computer/video games. She continues her involvement in international research with the University of Georgia examining the mental models and thinking processes of teacher librarians/media specialists and students as they employ research skills accessing electronic data bases; the Open University of Israel with the investigation of Year 2/3 students learning outcomes using IMM in Texas, USA; evaluation of the implementation of information communication technologies in England schools; and various aspects of recreational computer/video/internet games with colleagues in England and Israel.