WAAPA lecturer wins national award for excellence in indigenous education

On November 25 at a ceremony held at Parliament House in Canberra, Rick Brayford, the Coordinator for Aboriginal Theatre at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts at Edith Cowan University, was awarded the Neville Bonner Award for Indigenous Education.

The award, which includes $25,000 in prize money for professional development, was presented by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) as part of the 2008 Australian Awards for University Teaching Excellence.

Brayford is the first non-indigenous person to win this award.

“I feel very honoured to receive such a prestigious award,” said Brayford after the ceremony. “Indigenous education in Australia is an extremely rewarding and dynamic area in which to be working.”

Brayford’s extensive experience as a theatre practitioner includes a number of years spent in WA’s Pilbara region devising and directing performances ranging from pantomime to youth and community theatre projects. He has also worked in many diverse educational setting, with particularly rich experience teaching in rural and remote areas, and in Indigenous communities.

In 2000 Brayford re-established WAAPA’s Aboriginal Music Theatre program in Broome. In 2003 Brayford returned to the Academy’s Perth campus, where he currently lectures and coordinates the Aboriginal Theatre Certificate IV course and the Performing Arts Minor programs.

The Neville Bonner Award recognises Brayford’s ongoing commitment to and achievements in supporting talented but under-developed students to gain the high-level skills, knowledge and work ethic appropriate to careers in the notoriously difficult world of the performing arts.

That consistent numbers of Brayford’s graduating students move straight from the course into employment as actors demonstrates the strength of his teaching. In addition, each year several students take up further study opportunities at WAAPA or the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA), winning their places in open and fierce competition with aspiring performers from around the country.

“Rick’s influence goes well beyond the usual definitions of excellence,” said Professor Brenda Cherednichenko, Pro-Vice Chancellor (Equity and Indigenous) of Edith Cowan University. “Rick’s students, their families and communities are deeply grateful for an educational experience that is positive, enriching, that builds bridges and opens doors.”

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The ALTC promotes excellence in higher education by recognising, rewarding and supporting teachers and professional staff through a suite of award, fellowship and grant schemes.

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