Ralph Clark, a prominent figure in higher education who died on March 19 will be remembered for his contribution across education sectors and particularly for his enduring contribution to Aboriginal education.

He was born in Germany on the on July 14, 1948 where his father, who had served in the Canadian Army in World War Two was stationed. Ralph grew up in Canada and worked at Noranda Mines and the Steel Company of Canada to save money to pay for university study.

After gaining an honours degree in Sociology at McMaster University in 1970, he worked for nine years as a Research Fellow at the Ontario Alcohol and Drug Addiction Research Foundation and as a vocational and academic Counsellor at McMaster University and York University.

He completed a Master of Education (Higher Education Policies and Systems) at the University of Toronto and then started a PhD in Adult Education (Cross-cultural Education, Comparative Systems of Adult Education, Adult Literacy and Basic Education).

In 1981 Ralph moved to Australia to take up a position as lecturer in Adult Education at the University of New England. He engaged extensively in non-credit course provision through the Department of Continuing Education and served for a number of years as sub-dean of the Faculty of Education and Chair of the Research Program.
In the course of teaching and research supervision of masters and doctoral students he found that many, mostly mature-age students, were indigenous or worked with indigenous people. Others from the Asia-Pacific region were involved in development work. His own interest in indigenous education and development work grew so he moved to the Northern Territory to take up the position of assistant director at the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education.

At Batchelor Institute, he was responsible for all academic matters including program delivery, course development and assessment, quality assurance, staff training and development, strategic planning and consultation with industry. These three years were a period of growth for the Institute with some eighteen courses developed or re-developed and quality assurance systems introduced.

In 1994 the West Australian government established a new TAFE college in the Kimberley and Ralph was given the task of developing the new organisation. Over the next nine years he supervised the construction, staffing and management of five campuses, including a world class aquaculture facility. Annual enrolments of full-time and part-time students reached 3,000, half of which were indigenous, and the college received numerous awards for the quality of its work.

He also helped establish co-operative in-site training programs with local industries. He also demonstrated outstanding leadership to state VET policy development and strategic direction especially in rural and remote communities.

In 2003, Ralph left the Kimberley College of TAFE and moved to Toogoom, where he became co-director of Whistling Kite Consultancy. The company specialise in corporate governance and the development of community sector organisations as well as social research.

In 2008 he became the program director for professional studies - a masters and doctorate program at USQ - based at the Fraser Coast. He made an enormous difference to the program in terms of quality and output and numbers of students overall and completions.

On the March, 13, 2011 Ralph retired from USQ and on Friday night the March 18, staff farewelled him at a special dinner accompanied with a great deal of love and respect for this wonderful charismatic man.

Ralph was an intelligent, energetic, passionate, determined, committed man whose professionalism, friendship, and willingness to help has left an indelible mark on those he has touched and helped throughout his life. His loss creates a huge void.

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